

**Oral History Interview**  
**Karen Alma Neary**  
**WH107**

(Written transcript and digital audio)

On September 14, 2012, Karen Alma Neary was interviewed by Brenda Velasco at the Fords Library at 10:00 A.M.

*Brenda Velasco:* Today I have Karen Neary, a native of Fords and also a former educator; currently she is working with CERT and in her spare time also the American Legion. Am I correct?

*Karen Neary:* And VFW in Avenel and Marine Corps League in Toms River.

*Brenda Velasco:* I don't know where she found the time before she retired from teaching; but Karen is a very busy person and I am lucky to interview her.

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

*Karen Neary:* My name is Karen Alma Neary, middle named after my mother, from the Fords section of Woodbridge. My date of birth is January 7<sup>th</sup>, 1947.

*Brenda Velasco:* So you were born after World War II concluded; you're one of the baby boomers.

*Karen Neary:* One of the baby boomers.

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

*Brenda Velasco:* How long have you lived in Woodbridge? And I'm going to say Woodbridge but it's really Fords. I don't think you ever moved out did you?

*Karen Neary:* No, I lived there my entire life. I was born in the house next door of the one I live in now and when I was eight years old, my father and mother built the house we live in now. When I was eight years old, I was banging floor boards with him up in the attic.

*Brenda Velasco:* What is the address?

*Karen Neary:* 55 Gordon Avenue.

*Brenda Velasco:* And then you were born right next door you said.

*Karen Neary:* 53.

*Brenda Velasco:* Wow, you didn't move very far did you?

*Karen Neary:* No, I always used to tell the kids in school I came home from school one day and my parents moved.

*Brenda Velasco:* Right next door.

**3. Why did you or your family move to the Fords section of Woodbridge?**

*Karen Neary:* To tell you the truth I really don't know. My mom was born in Perth Amboy. Back in those times most people rented houses and they rented a house. My dad, I believe, was born in Perth Amboy also but when they were very young they moved to Fords. And as far as I know about them they both lived in Fords, they went to high school together, even though my mother claims they didn't like each other, but.....

*Brenda Velasco:* Something happened along the way then.

*Karen Neary:* She always used to tell the story my father would trip her with his hockey stick when she would roller skate. And my question was then why did you go where he was with his hockey stick.

*Brenda Velasco:* Good question. There was some attraction from the beginning then. Okay, so you're second generation Woodbridge.

*Karen Neary:* Correct.

*Brenda Velasco:* Did your grandparents live in Perth Amboy then?

*Karen Neary:* Well, my grandpop came here from Italy at 14 years old, he lived up around Milan-Torino; the dialect is actually French. And I guess when he first came he lived in New York and met my grandmother who was from New York. She was born here and they eventually moved to Fords. How and when I don't know and that's where my mom was born. On Popular Street in that area, there were a lot of Italians. As far as my father's mom and dad, I guess they lived in Perth Amboy. My grandpa on my dad's side was born in California. They had a ranch and he worked in construction and came out here for work and that's how he met my grandmother who was a native Dane, well full blooded Dane. My grandpa was a whole blooded Dane, my great grandmother was Mexican, Chavez was their name, and my Grandpa Neary could speak fluent Spanish.

*Brenda Velasco:* My gosh what a combination!

*Karen Neary:* My grandma Neary decided that the name was spelled wrong and that it would be *Neri* if we're Spanish. And my grandpa just looked over his glasses and said, (her name was Matilda but they called her Tilly): "Tilly, I spelled my name this way for fifty years and I'm going to spell it for another fifty." As far as we know it's Irish. And my mom was a full blooded Italian. Cavallito was her maiden name. My grandma died when I was three, grandma Cavallito, and grandpa lived with us my entire life. He died in 1972.

*Brenda Velasco:* Wow, you had three generations in one house.

*Karen Neary:* My grandma and grandpa Neary actually lived just two houses away from me.

*Brenda Velasco:* You had an unusual upbringing.

*Karen Neary:* On Gordon Avenue I had an uncle named Gordon, my father's youngest brother, who claimed the street was named after him.

*Brenda Velasco:* I don't know about that.

*Karen Neary:* Of course, it was not.

*Brenda Velasco:* He had a sense of humor. What a great family you had then and they were all nearby.

*Karen Neary:* Mom was an only child. My father was one of five brothers during World War II. Gordon was too young, he was 10, 11 or 12 years old, the oldest brother, Walt, was married and worked for **Western Electric**. But my dad thinks he might have had something to do with the atomic bomb because he always had security with him, they would never take pictures of him only his hands; but he never said and we never asked him. We don't know. My next oldest uncle, Uncle Bill/Willard, he was in the China/Burma Theater with the Army Air Corps, not a pilot. My Uncle Chick was the next youngest from my dad and he was in the Pacific. In fact, he was at Hickam Field on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941 but he survived. My Uncle Chick was always at the wrong place at the right time and for that it happened to

work out in his favor. Then my dad was in the Third Infantry Division as combat medic in North Africa and Europe. He landed in Morocco and he was wounded in Anzio where he lost a kidney. But he never got a purple heart because evidently it was from a concussion and they said it didn't draw blood; but they had to remove the kidney anyway.

*Brenda Velasco:* One of our bureaucratic technicalities, too bad. So you had three uncles then that were all in the services, all in World War II. Two were in the Pacific or Burma would be the Pacific campaign as well and then Anzio in North Africa and Europe.

*Karen Neary:* Well my grandma had three sons, one in each theater of the war. I remember my mom telling me that when they heard the news about Pearl Harbor how scary and frightening it was. They were worried about Uncle Chick, Charles was his name; and it took days for him to be able to get word out that he was okay. In growing up as a kid I remember thinking, my gosh how did people live through World War II or live through Pearl Harbor and be able to go to sleep at night.

*Brenda Velasco:* And there were no cell phones. We're talking a totally different time.

*Karen Neary:* And being scared and then 9-11 came. I don't mean to minimize it but when I got home that day and I thought about it. The first thing that popped into my mind was my parents with Pearl Harbor and living through World War II and not knowing if your loved one was safe or not and how did they do it. Before I fell asleep that night or as I was thinking in bed I said well now I know how they did it; they just did it. You just do it the same way we have to do it today, tonight, tomorrow and the next day.

*Brenda Velasco:* Then after we had 9-11 we had the bomb scares and the airplane that crashed going to the Dominican Republic out on Long Island. Everything, it was just a traumatic period for all of us.

*Karen Neary:* Being in high school, the Cuban missile crisis was pretty much the same thing.

*Brenda Velasco:* That was about 1963 I think.

*Karen Neary:* I graduated in '64 and going to Woodbridge High School we would have drills and I remember as a student they would walk us to the auditorium and of course we had to go through that front lobby with all the glass doors and me thinking to myself; how smart is this? This does not strike me as a good idea. I think we should have gone in through the hallway doors.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, you were questioning back then.

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

*Brenda Velasco:* You grew up in Fords and looking at the physical changes in 1947 right after World War II, did you note any physical changes as you grew up with houses?

*Karen Neary:* Well really Fords and the street and the area that I live on is usually referred to as "old Fords". It hasn't really changed that much. It was the other end of Main Street down there by where Menlo Park Terrace and Lafayette Estates are. There was a picnic grove there at one time.

*Brenda Velasco:* You mean Varady's?

*Karen Neary:* Varady's Grove.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so this was at the newer part of Fords, Varady's Grove.

*Karen Neary:* It was between Main Street and Route 1 on that side.

*Brenda Velasco:* We know there's the Lafayette Estates there and then on the other side Fords Middle School came about.

*Karen Neary:* I was the first class in Fords Middle School (1960) because I went to school in junior high.....School 7 was my elementary school which is now an office building on King Georges Road and School 14 was there. We went to Barron Avenue as junior high. We went split sessions. The whole township went to Barron Avenue and I believe it was January when we were told to bring all our books home because Monday morning we would be going to Fords Middle School, those kids from Fords. We bought everything home, went to the same bus stop and the next Monday morning we were standing outside Fords Middle School.

*Brenda Velasco:* At a new school.

*Karen Neary:* And as a teacher I said could you see doing this today-the chaos and the confusion and the complaints and the phone calls that we would have because somebody has to carry all their books home. But from a Friday to a Monday, we just changed schools and I believe we changed schedules and started going all day.

*Brenda Velasco:* Right, if you had been in split session. So this was around the early 1960s?

*Karen Neary:* Yes, like I said I was the first graduating class out of Fords Middle. We picked the colors and the emblem.

*Brenda Velasco:* So we can blame it all on you.

*Karen Neary:* Right, blue and white, the falcons.....well not on me in particular. We might have gone a half day that last six months and then started full days the following year. So I went there for half of eighth and all of ninth. The seventh grade wing wasn't finished. When I went to school we never even really went to that part of the building. I spent my entire time at Fords Middle in the ninth grade wing which I don't know what wing it is now. It was the one closest to the cafeteria, that end of the building.

*Brenda Velasco:* So seventh grade wasn't completed but they had the kids going there because we were so pressed for space at that time in Woodbridge.

*Karen Neary:* I mean the building was there. It was probably the interior that needed to be finished. And other than that-stores. Well, my dad was a paid fireman in Fords and the firehouse, when I was growing up, was on Corielle Street. It's now **Miss Ruth's School of Dance**. Right behind that on the corner of New Brunswick Avenue and Corielle Street, there was an **A&P**.

*Brenda Velasco:* So that's where the **A&P** was on New Brunswick and Corielle.

*Karen Neary:* And across the street from the **A&P** was the Fords Movies; and on the opposite corner was **Katz's Drug Store**. That's on New Brunswick Avenue on the corner of Corielle and New Brunswick across from the senior building. Next door or a couple of stores down from them was the post office.

*Brenda Velasco:* So that's moved around a couple of times, the post office.

*Karen Neary:* Well, just once I guess. In between the post office and **Katz's** there was **Dambach's Grocery Store**.

*Brenda Velasco:* And what did they sell in the grocery store?

*Karen Neary:* It had a butcher area and they had groceries and growing up that's where we would shop. And my mom would call up on the phone, order her groceries and her meats and some teenage kid would come to the house with a couple of boxes and drop off your groceries. Wouldn't that be nice if we had that today?

*Brenda Velasco:* Terrific.

*Karen Neary:* And then down further, going on the same side of the **A&P** now across from the movies was **Metzger's** which used to be like a small **5&10** type place and of course the family lived upstairs. I can remember creaky wooden floors.

*Brenda Velasco:* What did they sell?

*Karen Neary:* Some fabric and toys and general.....all kinds of stuff.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, dry goods stuff.

*Karen Neary:* Like a **5&10**.

*Brenda Velasco:* Where did you go food shopping?

*Karen Neary:* Down further by Our Lady of Peace there was **Fords Bakery** and by the new post office **Fords Jewelers** was actually next door to the new post office across from the new **Fords Jewelers**. It was run by Lenny Mason and Barry Berman used to work for Lenny. Then Lenny turned it over to him and of course Barry built it up and moved across the street. I've known Barry since he was a young kid, I guess.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, well he's part of Fords.

*Karen Neary:* Right.

*Brenda Velasco:* And when you think of stores it's **Fords Jewelers** and Barry made it.

*Karen Neary:* Down on that end also there was a Danish deli. My dad being Danish sometimes on a Sunday we would get they would call it *rolerpous, liver pousta*, black bread and we would have that for dinner because we would have our big meal at lunchtime after church. There was also a deli down by **Ford's Bakery** down by Our Lady of Peace. Where **Siperstein's** is that was an **Acme** but other than that most of the things have not changed. The buildings have remained the same. What's been in and out of them has changed.

*Brenda Velasco:* But New Brunswick Avenue was the main thoroughfare for your business.

*Karen Neary:* Well King Georges Road, too, because on King Georges Road across from the firehouse or the **Gulf Station** there is a little store on the corner of Liberty Street and King Georges Road. I don't know what it's called now but that was another little grocery type store with the butcher store and groceries. It was **Cracky's/Kracky** at one time and then it was sold to **Heinz's**. The same spelling as 57 Varieties and I went to school with Margie Heinz one of the Heinz girls and I believe Gail Cracky/Kracky, I don't know what her married name is, still lives on Liberty Street in the old family house. She was older than me though. Then in between there was a parking lot and then just before you get to Crows Mill Road where there are a little group of stores and that should be **Straub's Confectionery Store**. They had a soda fountain and we'd stop and get our candy on the way to school. Next door to that his mother had another little grocery store with a butcher shop and groceries and things like.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so **Yakubik's**.....

*Karen Neary:* **Yakubik's** was always there.

*Brenda Velasco:* That's on Mary Avenue and that's part of the.....

*Karen Neary:* Yes, and whatever that transmission place is across from the firehouse on King Georges Road that was a **Sunoco Station** owned by Izso. And then Izso (Clum and King Georges) built that building across the street there, what is **Roosevelt's Café** now; it was always a luncheonette from the time it was built but that was when I was just about ready to leave No. 7 School. The Presbyterian Church on Hoy Avenue was always there. Being Presbyterian when I got old enough (we still had a girls' and boys' side to No. 7 School) we had to line up on the girls' side which was on Hoy Avenue side. When I got a little bit older and I could read the word Presbyterian, I asked my mother why we didn't go to that church instead of going all the way to Perth Amboy (because we went to the one on the corner there by High Street by the circle by Town Hall)? And she said, because they do the service in Czechoslovakian and you wouldn't understand it. My answer was well I don't understand those (in English) half the time so, what's the difference.

*Brenda Velasco:* That was a good response.

*Karen Neary:* But interestingly enough family and friends went to that church. After my parents died, being an only child, it's just not fun going to church by yourself so I started going to church with my friend Janet Misak and her family, because our family were friends. They went to that church because they were Czech; her grandpa had built that church. It took me about two years to make the decision but I transferred my membership over to that church. We go to that church every Sunday. When the minister is not there, I'm the minister.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh, wow!

*Karen Neary:* Because we have a part-time minister. It's a small congregation.

*Brenda Velasco:* So they're lucky.

*Karen Neary:* He is actually an administrator of a home in Queens, a senior place.

*Brenda Velasco:* So he's busy. He's between New York and New Jersey.

*Karen Neary:* But he's always here for us so it's nothing for him to drive down here. He lives in Franklin Lakes.

*Brenda Velasco:* He's all over the place.

*Karen Neary:* Yes, he's a busy guy. Other than that, most things haven't changed. The park was there, we used to go to Fords Park. I'm jumping to this one.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, Question #5.

.....  
*After the formal interview, Karen recalled other points of interest along New Brunswick Avenue which follows:*

*Karen Neary:* On New Brunswick Avenue at the end of Egan Avenue was **Fords Hardware** and across the street was **Bond Cleaners. Etzold's Cleaners and Tailoring** was next to the **Fords Movies**. I remember the movies giving out dishes on certain nights. A few buildings up New Brunswick Avenue traveling toward Perth Amboy was **Grauman's Gift Shop**, a white building. The family lived upstairs and the store sold fine gifts, lamps, china, etc. My mom bought coffee cake Bavarian china sets there by putting so much money into "a club" (layaway club). When enough money was set aside, she picked a set. I think I have twelve sets of china in the china closet. Fords Library moved from the current Fords Women's Club

building to the middle of New Brunswick Avenue on the right side traveling toward Edison. From there they moved to their current location on Ford Avenue.

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

*Karen Neary:* The library was across from the firehouse on Corielle Street where the Women's Club meets. That used to be the Fords library and the firehouse like I said was **Miss Ruth**. The schools were there. Fords Park was always there but next to the tennis courts where, I'm not sure what it is now it's a skate park or a hockey park.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, hockey.

*Karen Neary:* That used to be a little mini racetrack.

*Brenda Velasco:* What do you mean a mini racetrack?

*Karen Neary:* Kids used to go there. We used to go over on a Sunday afternoon and watch these young kids, kids my age as I was growing up, race little small stock car kind of cars.

*Brenda Velasco:* Like the Pinewood Derby?

*Karen Neary:* No, no, no.

*Brenda Velasco:* Bigger than that?

*Karen Neary:* Driving and this was always my dream. I always loved cars and I was going to get a race car and race over there. Of course they probably went 20 or 25 miles an hour, who knows, but to me it was like watching the Indy. Where **Johnnie's Garage** is on King Georges Road that was an **Esso Station**, my father knew everybody because he was a paid fireman, he was a fire marshal and grew up in town. So everybody knew him and they sold those little cars there so he bought me one. It was going to be *No. 7 Karen's Special*. It was black and red and then we went home and told my mother. She was a nurse at Perth Amboy General, that's where she graduated from, and she went back to work when I was eight. So my father came home and told my mom I had a race car and she told my father he was crazy if..... and that was the end of the racing car.

*Because of technical difficulties, the response to Questions 6, 7 and 8 are based on notes.*

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

A lot of our recreation was unorganized. We played whiffle ball outside and invented things to do. Two blocks from Gordon Avenue, we built a clubhouse. I would also go with my grandfather Cavallito to pick mushrooms which we dried on a metal screen. In fact, we grew peaches, strawberries, corn and tomatoes. Where **Home Depot** is today, there was a horse stable and horse auctions. In Roosevelt Park, there were pony rides which were cheaper. My father held part time jobs in the stable. He also built houses in the Lafayette Estates and Menlo Park Terrace. Who started work at 16 years old? My mom was a nurse and went back to school nights studying at Rutgers, Kean and Jersey City. She received a teaching degree in Special Education and taught with Albina D'Alessio in Keasbey after seven years teaching as a fulltime sub. My mom and I made a deal that she would finish her degree which she did in

1967. Karen graduated from college in 1969 and took a job as a teacher making \$6,200/year.

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

Family and commitment. My parents were the role models and helped their community; you were expected to help others. Dad was a tool and die maker in Nutley after WWII and before I was born. He saw there were problems with the company on the part of the owners. A job opened at the fire department with a salary of \$3,200 a year. This was a big cut in pay but he was guaranteed a job. He remembered that during the Depression the police, firemen and teachers always got paid. This was his fear, I guess; another Depression. My father was a paid fireman and volunteered with St. John's First Aid, taught first aid and helped organize Iselin First Aid. My mom, an RN at Perth Amboy General Hospital, and he went to the 1951 Train Wreck in Woodbridge. My mother had to park by the **Brass Bucket** even though she had the Red Cross flag on her car. They were gone from home for a couple of days. During 9-11, I volunteered to serve food and thought of my dad.

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

I like Fords because its home and everybody watches out for the other; you know what's normal. For example, during a blizzard I noticed a strange car parked on the street that did not belong to any of the neighbors. I called my neighbor across the street, Brian Henry, and he checked the suspicious car. He hollered at the occupants and told them to get out of Fords; they were cooking coke in the car.

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

*Brenda Velasco:* We're resuming the interview. We had a little break down since the batteries ran out of power unfortunately but we left off with Question #9 and in the course of inserting the batteries Karen and I started talking about 9-11; I just want to recapture that part of the interview. Karen, what was your reaction to 9-11 and this also bears out this whole community service that was instilled by your parents and that you've continued until this day.

*Karen Neary:* Well just to digress a little I remember growing up and hearing about the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941 and having an uncle who was stationed in Hickman Field and my mother telling me how upset everybody was and it took days for my grandma to hear and then my dad being overseas for four years of their marriage. They got married and about two weeks later he was sent overseas. They got married in Fort Meade down in Maryland. My mom said they never knew every time the doorbell rang if it was good news or not. I remember thinking how did people live through that. How do you go to sleep every night? How do you get up and go about your daily activities with that thought always in the back of your mind? How do you do that? After 9-11 that night as I was lying in bed reflecting on the day, it came to me well now I know how they did it. You just do it and you just have to. I was in school that day, I taught in (Woodbridge) Middle School for forty years mostly seventh grade, it was a Tuesday and the principal came over the PA system and said may I have your attention please. Of course we all rolled our eyes like what

now? Don't walk on the grass? And his announcement was that they just received word that a plane had crashed into the World Trade Center and that if any kids who had parents who worked in the building that they were to come to the office now. Of course, the students looked at me and I looked at them and we were perplexed. The first thought that popped into my head was a small plane, because a lot of thoughts go through your head in a few seconds. Then I thought well a small plane wouldn't make news but it had to be a larger plane. So I said to my class I don't know what happened anymore than you do. But I would assume that for us to be told about this, it had to be a large plane and, you know, they hold a couple of hundred people plus the folks in the building so I think we should take a moment to reflect (because God forbid you would say the word pray in school). You pray in the parking lot but don't let them do it in the building. So that was it and I went on with my class because I taught the first two periods of the day; we were on periods then not blocks.

*Brenda Velasco:* And also the planes hit 8:47 A.M. and then a little after 9.

*Karen Neary:* But I didn't know that so I was still in class. When my class was after at about 10:20 A.M., I had my free period at that time, my prep period. I went down the back hallway where our teacher's room was and I saw one of the younger teachers out there. I said what's going on with this plane crash? He was as white as a ghost and he said its terrorism and I said what??? I remember saying yeah, come on; okay, I saw *War of the Worlds* too like he was pulling my leg. He said no; it's on television. He said there's no World Trade Center, it collapsed. They hit the Pentagon and there's another plane out there headed for the capital building or the White House. I remember saying to him then why don't we shoot it down. At that point I went down to the computer room because I was on the top floor and this was on the first floor to see the television and couldn't believe my eyes. Then I went down to the office because I knew that was a chaotic place with the phone ringing and parents coming in and kids going home. I tried to help out the best I could then and I remember a parent coming in to me. Now you've got to remember that I taught there for forty-one years, a lot of the parents were former students. They would come in and I remember I had one parent saying to me how do you do it? And I said, how do I do what? And she said how do you keep yourself together? I said, do I have a choice? I mean we have to keep it together for the kids. I remember the next class came and I put on the radio when I was by myself. I got some more news and then I wouldn't put it on when the kids were there and then we talked for the rest of the day. We could hear the fighters flying over. Traveling teachers were coming in saying that the bridges and tunnels and some of the roads were closed. I remember the kids saying, some of them were a little afraid. And I said well if there was anything to worry about do you think I would be sitting here right now? You know we just talked. I remember one of the things we discussed probably the next day was the Japanese internment camps because we had a story in our books that we weren't up to yet but it was called Executive Order 9066 and it was about Franklin Roosevelt's order that ordered all Americans of Japanese descent to be put in internment camps and we discussed that. I said the key word here is *all Americans of Japanese descent*. They were unfamiliar with that and what it meant and why it was so easy to put the Japanese in these camps. We could identify them from their physical appearance and that we should remember that and not paint everyone with the same brush. Now two-

thirds of these people in the camps were actually American citizens and many of them volunteered and enlisted into the armed services. Most Japanese divisions far outshined as far as performance of some of the other divisions in the military. Sort of the Tuskegee airmen did as well. So we talked about that and discrimination and not painting everybody with the same brush and remembering that the people responsible, the nineteen people responsible, were all dead and that we need to judge people as individuals and not by the actions of the field and that if we don't learn from history we're going to be forced to repeat it. There are so many things that we should not repeat as a society and certainly as a civilization. So that's what we discussed. Then on Friday, we had Pride in America Day. I know my dad that day if he was alive, and my mom, they would have been there. It would have been no question. They would have been in the car and they would have been to Jersey City or down to Ground Zero or wherever they could serve and they would have been there as long as they needed to be. So a month later when we had a day off from school I volunteered, we had to get security clearance and things, and we went down and a few of us, a couple of friends from school and a friend from home, we went down and served food. We did a four hour shift and every one of these people who came through said thank you and I said, no, thank you. I'm not doing anything but handing out ziti. We even made buttons to wear that said: *This Jersey Girl Thanks You*. When our shift was done, we were allowed to go down to the site with all the dust and the debris and construction and the guards. It was something to see. We see it on TV but to see it in reality the first thing you think is how in God's name are we ever going to clean all this up? Where do you begin? Ever since then, every year, at least once a year and certainly close to 9-11 we go down to Ground Zero and the tower lights and ever anniversary the ceremony in town because we need to remember those people. We should never forget. If we forget, it will happen again.

*Brenda Velasco:* Thank you for sharing your memories which are still painful for all of us; your parents taught you well.

*Karen Neary:* I've also been to New York, as I said, when the thing was off. I've been to New York more in the past eleven years than I have been probably in my whole life because New York was not one of my favorite places. Watching events is a..... very place.

*Brenda Velasco:* You're a history teacher.

*Karen Neary:* My idea is they are not going to win. The year of 9-11 also we volunteered to go down to DC and work at the parade for July 4<sup>th</sup>. I went to the concert on the Capitol grounds and I remember friends saying aren't you afraid? I said, if I'm afraid then they win and they're not going to win! I didn't know anyone in the attacks personally, thank goodness. I had friends who lost loved ones. Commander Patrick Dunn was from Fords. I don't know him but hey he's from my town so he's part of my extended family.

*Brenda Velasco:* Tonyell McDay.

*Karen Neary:* Tonyell McDay was the daughter of my school nurse. Lisa Beatini taught the autistic class in my school; she lost her cousin, Paul. A friend of ours worked, he used to get out of the Trade Center every day, called his wife and couldn't get through. No phone calls got out from schools, cell phones or nothing. I finally got my girlfriend's mother on the phone and told her to keep trying to get her

daughter and tell Jane to call Ann and see if Al was okay. Around lunchtime, about 1:00 P.M. was my lunch, something told me to call home and I did and there was a message on my tape from Ann that she had spoken to Al and he had just gotten out of the building and he was safe. But he didn't know how he was going to get home because he had to work his way up to Upper Manhattan so we were touched. But all of us should be touched by that day.

*Brenda Velasco:* We were.

#### ***10. What do you like about Fords today?***

*Brenda Velasco:* You're still in Fords you have not moved out, what do you still like about it?

*Karen Neary:* It's sort of like a close knit community. We're sort of still like a typical American town that you always see on television. I'm always proud of my town of Woodbridge. I probably shouldn't say this but I kind of snicker at our neighboring town of Edison that tries so hard to have a *main street* or a main part of town and have all of the things that Woodbridge has and haven't really succeeded yet.

*Brenda Velasco:* But we have people like you and the Henrys and so many others committed to making this a better community and I'm not going to mention anything about Edison so we're going to Question #11. I'm not getting into political trouble.

*Karen Neary:* I'm not saying anything bad about Edison but I know they try to make the Clara Barton like their *main street*. Unfortunately they don't have a central area of Edison because Metuchen was once the middle of Edison I guess back a long time ago. Then Metuchen broke away; it's sort of like the hole in the middle of the donut.

*Brenda Velasco:* And doesn't want to get back there either.

*Karen Neary:* You know the center of town as a gathering place is important. I mean it's been around since the Revolution and certainly in our country and certainly way before that. You know we kind of have that in Woodbridge. We have the fireworks and we see people from all over the town and our street fair and all of the different things that we have. I thought about moving to an adult community down in Toms River where my aunt lives. I would like to go but it's kind of hard to leave here.

*Brenda Velasco:* We're not going to let you go.

*Karen Neary:* It's hard to make that break, this is home. It's hard to go and yeah I'd like to have a pool in my backyard and a golf course in the backyard. None of which I'd have to take care of and have somebody come and cut the grass and rake the leaves and shovel the snow, but this is home.

*Brenda Velasco:* And I'm glad you like it home. It benefits the whole community.

#### ***11. Do you have any family members still living in Woodbridge Township today?***

*Karen Neary:* Well, like I said I have no siblings. I have my aunt who is 93 years old who lives on Hansen Avenue in Fords and that's it. My two cousins: one lives in North Carolina and the other one lives up in Bound Brook.

*Brenda Velasco:* They're scattered.

*Karen Neary:* And that's about it. All my uncles are gone.

**12. Are there any other stories or events that you would like to discuss that we haven't covered that pertains to Woodbridge?**

*Karen Neary:* I don't think so, nothing that I could think of. Of course something will pop into my head tonight.

*Brenda Velasco:* Then you just e-mail me. You did a great job with the interview and I want to thank you. Thank you for giving the time because you told the American Legion you weren't going to stuff envelopes today and come for this interview so thank you for your time.

*Karen Neary:* You're welcome.