

Oral History Interview
Lorraine Van Pelt Germek
WH045

(written transcript and digital audio)

On May 27, 2009, Lorraine Van Pelt Germek was interviewed at Evergreen by Brenda Velasco at 11:15 A.M. Also interviewing were students from the Avenel Middle School and Iselin Middle School: Humza Farrukh of Avenel (AMS), Sandra Souied of Port Reading (AMS), Regina Poerio of Port Reading (AMS), Kaitlin Murphy of Port Reading (AMS), Deanna Della Torre of Colonia (IMS), Julienne Viuya of Iselin (IMS), Ayushi Pathak of Iselin (IMS). Also in the audience was Nancy Paul from the Woodbridge Board of Education and Dan D'Arcy, Colonia historian.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, we'll start with Humza with the first question.

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

Lorraine Germek: My name is Lorraine Germek. I live in Iselin, New Jersey. My date of birth is November 30, 1930.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, Sandra, question two.

2. How long have you lived in Woodbridge?

Lorraine Germek: Since 1952.

Brenda Velasco: Regina, you're next with question three.

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

Lorraine Germek: We were getting married and we were looking for a place to live and we were coming down the Parkway and we saw the houses. We stopped and bought one in 1951 but we didn't get into it until 1952.

Brenda Velasco: Where were you coming from?

Lorraine Germek: I lived in Linden and my husband lived in Elizabeth.

Brenda Velasco: But why did you pick Iselin?

Lorraine Germek: As I said, we were coming down the Parkway and we saw they were building the houses right along the Parkway and we decided to go and see. We liked the houses so we put a deposit down and we were married in November of 1951; but we didn't get in until April of 1952 before they were finished.

Brenda Velasco: Do you recall the deposit?

Lorraine Germek: Oh, no, but it was nothing like now.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, so we're talking a couple of hundred of dollars?

Lorraine Germek: Yes, possibly.

Brenda Velasco: Do you recall the price of the house?

Lorraine Germek: Ten thousand four hundred or five hundred something like that, you can't even touch anything anymore.

Brenda Velasco: No, that was great. Was it necessary to be by the Parkway?

Lorraine Germek: No, it was convenient because we both had jobs in Elizabeth. So going down the Parkway was easy.

Brenda Velasco: So location played a role?

Lorraine Germek: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Plus you could afford the house.

Lorraine Germek: Yes, that was really it.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, Kaitlin you're next.

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

Lorraine Germek: When we moved in the house we had no roads and no bushes; it was all just mud. That came later. There were a few stores on Oak Tree Road. There was a nice bakery in town. There was a movie and then St. Cecelia's Church was a white, just board, church. Not the big one they have now but a little one.

Brenda Velasco: When were the streets paved then for you?

Lorraine Germek: I don't know how long we went that way. As I said the houses were finished so they let us move in; but all the other stuff wasn't there but they did get to it within, I guess, six months or so.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, because you came from communities that had paved streets.

Lorraine Germek: Oh, yes.

Brenda Velasco: So this was quite a contrast for you in the beginning.

Lorraine Germek: Yes. You have to take something to get something.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, you could afford the house.

Lorraine Germek: That's it.

Brenda Velasco: And this is the post-World War II boom, 1952. This is when everything was being built up in Woodbridge.

Lorraine Germek: Right.

Brenda Velasco: And throughout.

Lorraine Germek: There was Oak Tree Road and Wood Avenue, I don't know if you know where that is, there was a turkey farm. I used to take my kids over and watch the turkeys.

Brenda Velasco: No more.

Lorraine Germek: No more. Now there are gas stations.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, next. This is Deanna.

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

Lorraine Germek: That I couldn't remember what was there other than the church which was a white wooden little building with creaky steps.

Brenda Velasco: Did you have the firehouse on New Dover Road yet?

Lorraine Germek: I don't know. I don't remember. I'm sorry.

Brenda Velasco: And you didn't have a library then either, right, in Iselin?

Lorraine Germek: I don't think so.

Brenda Velasco: Alright. Where did your children attend school?

Lorraine Germek: There was a school, I don't know if you remember where the movie was on the corner of Oak Tree Road and.....

Brenda Velasco: Correja?

Lorraine Germek: No right after you come over the Parkway now, the first traffic light.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Lorraine Germek: We went in there, about five blocks in, and there was a school; it's no longer there. They also went to Kennedy when they got older. They were active in the Little League because I had boys.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, Julienne.

6. What did you do for recreation?

Lorraine Germek: Not much because we didn't have money. Most of us were in the same situation, you know, we were all young couples so like for the holidays and all we'd have picnics or things like that.

Brenda Velasco: Alright and where were these picnics then?

Lorraine Germek: In our yards.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Lorraine Germek: We needed a tree, we didn't have any money, so we went to the woods nearby and dug up a tree and put it in our yard. That's how you had to get along back then.

Brenda Velasco: Then your kids had Little League.

Lorraine Germek: Yes, they had Little League. I used to work in the ice house at the ballgames and we had candy and ice cream and all that and we took turns working the store.

Brenda Velasco: Which Little League did they belong to, Merrill Park?

Lorraine Germek: No, Iselin I guess.

Brenda Velasco: Iselin, by Cooper Avenue?

Lorraine Germek: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, Ayushi.

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

Lorraine Germek: Just to live and be friends because we all came from different areas and as I said we were all young couples with their families. That's why like on holidays we used to like have a party at one person's house and then another person.

Brenda Velasco: It was mostly young family oriented then?

Lorraine Germek: Yes it was.

Brenda Velasco: Everybody brought their children.

Lorraine Germek: Right.

Brenda Velasco: You had a lot of children then in that area.

Lorraine Germek: Yes, well let me see. I had two, I lost one, the Singers there were five and the next house had two and there are so many people that had left the area. I'm one of the original.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Lorraine Germek: There are very, very few of them. The houses have been sold some two or three times already.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, Humza.

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

Lorraine Germek: Because we were all young people starting out. It wasn't that somebody had so much more than you.

Brenda Velasco: You were all in the same boat.

Lorraine Germek: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: And the people were friendly?

Lorraine Germek: Yes, because we were all new to the area so we got friendly.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, Sandra.

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

Lorraine Germek: No riots. With the Parkway right next to us we used to get accidents along the Parkway. You'd hear the sirens and the ambulance going down there, still do. There used to be a movie in town too on the corner of Oak Tree Road and the first traffic light. There's a store there now. That was something we could go to. We could afford to go to the movies there.

Brenda Velasco: Do you remember how much that movie cost?

Lorraine Germek: No, but it wasn't much because we didn't have much.

Brenda Velasco: And you could bring your children.

Lorraine Germek: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: So this was not far from your house either?

Lorraine Germek: No, I could walk to it; I can still walk to it.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, very good.

Lorraine Germek: But it's not there. It's a store now.

Brenda Velasco: Oak Tree Road has changed tremendously.

Lorraine Germek: Oh, yes, tremendously.

Brenda Velasco: The bakery isn't there.

Lorraine Germek: And the church is a big brick church and it has a school and everything, St. Cecelia's, which was a little thing.

Brenda Velasco: There were quite a few changes that you saw happen in Iselin. Alright, Regina, we're up to you.

10. What do you like about Woodbridge today?

Lorraine Germek: Woodbridge, per say, where the Town Hall is or.....

Regina: Woodbridge Township like where you live.

Lorraine Germek: Oh, where I live, okay. I don't know as many of the people now. The houses keep getting sold and new people come in but it's still a nice area to live in.

Brenda Velasco: Why do you consider it a nice area?

Lorraine Germek: Well it's not noisy generally but now we got more kids of course. It's the only place I lived since I got married. I didn't move any place. That's why I'm saying I'm still one of the originals. I lost my husband there. I lost one son there. I don't want to move. My boys are after me to move out but, because they don't live near me anymore.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, then that gets us to Kaitlin's question I think.

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

Lorraine Germek: No, my two sons, one lives in Keyport and one lives in Middletown.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, and then Deanna.

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

Lorraine Germek: I used to go to the Little League parades with each team going down Oak Tree Road. I used to like that. Even when my boys were big I used to like to see all the little kids.

Brenda Velasco: And you're here at Evergreen today for the luncheon.

Lorraine Germek: Oh, yes, I've been coming to Evergreen; let me see, for maybe twelve years.

Brenda Velasco: So you see friends here?

Lorraine Germek: Yes, I've made friends here. I lead exercises, I come to the luncheons and I used to come to the dancing too but I haven't been doing that lately. The people here are nice too because we're all getting older and some of them have moved to several areas but I think it's really nice.

Brenda Velasco: Does anybody else have any questions? Kaitlin.

Kaitlin: Did you ever attend the Woodbridge Speedway?

Lorraine Germek: No. I wasn't into that. Baseball yes. I used to go to all the baseball games because of my children down Merrill Park or at Cooper.

Brenda Velasco: Katelyn again.

Kaitlyn: What do you remember about the Woodbridge train wreck?

Brenda Velasco: She moved here after the train wreck.

Lorraine Germek: Yes, I moved here in 1952.

Brenda Velasco: And the train wreck occurred in 1951.

Lorraine Germek: Oh, that's why I didn't know about it.

Brenda Velasco: That's why you didn't know about it. You knew about airplane crashes perhaps in Elizabeth because you were more into Union County.

Lorraine Germek: Yes, I was born in Elizabeth and then my parents moved to Linden before I got married.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, now we also have in the audience Dan D'Arcy who is our historian for Colonia and we're interviewing, Dan - Lorraine Germek. Do you want to ask her any questions?

Dan D'Arcy: Sure. You live in Iselin now?

Lorraine Germek: Yes.

Dan D'Arcy: Were you living in Iselin at the time when Richard Nixon gave his speech on Oak Tree Road out in front of the pharmacy?

Lorraine Germek: Do you know the date?

Dan D'Arcy: It was 1955.

Lorraine Germek: Yes I was living here but I don't remember it.

Dan D'Arcy: You don't remember it.

Lorraine Germek: I moved here in 1952.

Dan D'Arcy: 1952, okay. At that time was there any remnants of the airport on Oak Tree Road that you remember? Anyone ever said anything to you about that?

Lorraine Germek: No.

Dan D'Arcy: No, okay.

Lorraine Germek: I only remember the turkey farm.
Dan D'Arcy: The turkey farm, where was that?
Lorraine Germek: On Oak Tree Road and Wood Avenue.
Dan D'Arcy: Wood Avenue?
Lorraine Germek: I used to take my children in the carriage and they got a kick out of watching the turkeys.
Dan D'Arcy: Was that on the Iselin side or the Edison side?
Lorraine Germek: The Iselin side.
Dan D'Arcy: The Iselin side?
Brenda Velasco: Okay and Sandra has a question.
Lorraine Germek: Yes.
Sandra: Do you know anything about the clay industry?
Lorraine Germek: No, I didn't.
Brenda Velasco: Okay and that about sums it and I thank you very much.
Lorraine Germek: Thank you.
Brenda Velasco: And we got you finished in time for your luncheon.
Lorraine Germek: Oh, yes.
Brenda Velasco: You got plenty of time. Thank you very much for your time.
Lorraine Germek: I enjoy the luncheons in here. They've got music and dancing.
Brenda Velasco: Well you enjoy it and you look lovely.
Lorraine Germek: Thank you.