

**Oral History Interview**  
**Joseph Jasper and Marianne Rizzo Jasper**  
**WH114**

(Written transcript and digital audio)

On Thursday, November 7, 2013 Marianne Rizzo Jasper and Joseph Jasper were interviewed by Brenda Velasco at 11:00 A.M. at her home on 749 Barron Avenue, Woodbridge.

*Brenda Velasco:* I'm going to ask each person to identify themselves because I have not only Marianne Jasper and her husband Joseph Jasper but I also have her daughter Lisa Jasper Molis. Before we begin, the focus of this interview is going to be about Port Reading where Marianne grew up. Marianne also worked in the township for many years and I'll ask her to relate about that but we're going to start off right now.

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

*Brenda Velasco:* Marianne could you identify yourself your full name, maiden name included, as well as your date of birth or the year.

*Marianne Jasper:* My full name is Marianne Elizabeth Rizzo Jasper. I was born on April 17, 1932.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay and you were born right in Port Reading then.

*Marianne Jasper:* I was born in the house in Port Reading which I'll show you a portion of it.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay Lisa, identify yourself.

*Lisa Jasper Molis:* My name is Lisa Jasper Molis and I was born on April 14, 1955. I've lived in Woodbridge all my life.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay and Joe where were you born?

*Joseph Jasper:* I was born in South Amboy.

*Brenda Velasco:* And what year.

*Joseph Jasper:* 1929.

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

*Brenda Velasco:* When did you move to Woodbridge?

*Joseph Jasper:* 1936.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, thank you. Now getting back to Marianne how long did you live in Port Reading then and where did you live in Port Reading?

*Marianne Jasper:* I lived on West Avenue right next door to the firehouse and for the life of me I can't remember the number of the house which I should know but I can't remember it. Port Reading was divided by the **Reading Railroad Company**. It was divided into uptown and downtown. Uptown is the area that I lived which was a diversified neighborhood that had all the amenities that a person could need at that time. We had the firehouse, we had the church, we had the school, we had a little gas station, we had a bar.....

*Brenda Velasco:* That's important.

*Marianne Jasper:* And most importantly we had the post office and we had a train station which allowed us to go into New York. Well actually it left you off in Jersey City where you needed to take a ferry to get to downtown New York. We had a whole grocery store, **Gurka's Grocery Store**, and we had **McGettagin's Paper Store** which was right next to the railroad and near the train station so everything we

needed was within walking distance. Most of the activities in the town at that time were generated from these places. We also had a bakery, it was a commercial baker, but we were allowed to go in and get fresh bread. It was the **Dorsi/D'Angelo Bakery**. I think both families owned it at that time.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, it was also D'Angelo also included.

*Marianne Jasper:* I think so, yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Marianne Jasper:* Either he worked for him or.....I don't know the association exactly, all I know is that my grandmother sent me for bread. (Interview of Hank D'Angelo #

*Brenda Velasco:* And it was fresh bread just baked.

*Marianne Jasper:* Oh, yes.

*Joseph Jasper:* Fresh Italian bread.

*Brenda Velasco:* Thank you Joe, fresh Italian bread.

*Marianne Jasper:* Right.

*Brenda Velasco:* Now was **D'Orsi's Bakery** located where it is today?

*Marianne Jasper:* No.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, where was it located then, Marianne?

*Marianne Jasper:* This is Port Reading Avenue here.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, right now we're looking at a map that Marianne drew.

*Marianne Jasper:* This is Port Reading Avenue and this is Lee Street. There was another street here and this was.....I would say this bakery should have been back here because the Martino family lived here.

*Brenda Velasco:* On Port Reading Avenue?

*Marianne Jasper:* On Port Reading Avenue.

*Brenda Velasco:* And that's where Vinnie still has his house?

*Marianne Jasper:* I think so. I haven't been in Port Reading for a while.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, boy you really took her out didn't you.

*Marianne Jasper:* And the bakery was back in here somewhere.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Marianne Jasper:* But we frequented it. My grandmother baked her own bread but occasionally we would go there for a loaf of bread and as kids we would be there all the time begging for whatever they would give us because we were always hungry.

*Brenda Velasco:* When did you finally move out of Port Reading, Marianne?

*Marianne Jasper:* I moved out of Port Reading I think it was 1952, the end of 1952. I moved out a year plus months before I got married. I got married in 1954 but my childhood was here and I have the most pleasant memories. We were bound by economic situations. We were all poor. There were a few families that were a little more affluent and one was the Zullo family which lived across from the church. I don't remember the man's first name but he was the tax collector in Woodbridge at that time so he was a little bit more affluent. But most of us were in the same boat, we were poor. That was right after the Depression and we just....we didn't have many toys but we had the greatest imagination. I played from morning till night and of course there were so many functions that went on in this particular neighborhood. The church would have functions. Once a year we had a huge festival honoring St. Blaze. St. Blaze was the patron saint of the throats and we all went to church and had the two candles crossed on our throat and our throat was blessed but then there was a

big festival with all kinds of good food and music and balloons and all kinds of trinkets.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, we're talking about St. Anthony's Church.

*Marianne Jasper:* Right, the original St. Anthony's Church.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay the original and where was the original located?

*Marianne Jasper:* It was on Port Reading Avenue.

*Lisa Jasper Molis:* Pretty much in the same spot.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Marianne Jasper:* The new church was built right next door to it and I'm so happy that they kept the stained glass windows that are in the entrance of the new St. Anthony's because they were magnificent windows.

*Brenda Velasco:* And the money that was raised was from the parishioners probably for those windows.

*Marianne Jasper:* And I'll tell you there was a lot of controversy with that because everyone loved that church so much that they wanted it repaired, they didn't want a new church. But of course there were probably good reasons for the new church which is beautiful.

*Brenda Velasco:* It is.

*Marianne Jasper:* It is; it's a lovely church. But I was baptized, confirmed and had my first communion there. And of course when Father Milos came to the area as our pastor he organized many, many activities for the children. He started the Boy Scouts of which my father was the Boy Scout master and then later on he started the Girl Scouts and I was part of that. Much later when my sister was about oh I'd say ten years old, she's eight years younger than I, Father Milos started the Fife and Drum Corp. My father was the leader to teach them how to march. I remember my sister standing in front of my father, she was very shy and she was little, and she said father I really don't want to play the flute. My father said to her, oh Nina you're going to do just fine with the flute and she said, but father I don't want to play the flute.

*Brenda Velasco:* I guess he was rather persuasive.

*Marianne Jasper:* He was very persuasive and because she was so tiny she was the first one in line to march so that really distressed her. We were talking about it the other day and I said to her did you really.....she says I never learned how to play the flute I was scared to death but I made believe.

*Brenda Velasco:* The truth comes out.

*Marianne Jasper:* But the church had a lot of activities for the children. There was always something going on whether it was church related or something that Father Milos.....Father Milos was wonderful. I mean he walked from house to house blessing the houses and talking to the people. It was a very community based neighborhood. I think I was in every house in that neighborhood. We helped each other. If one of the neighbors got sick, my grandmother put on a pot of soup and sent it over. And that's the way it was; we were very close. It was a very safe environment. Compared to today we didn't lock anything. If someone needed something they just walked into your home and yelled out for you and it was just a safe environment. I remember walking with my friends to Sewaren, walking to Carteret, and nobody ever bothered us. Another interesting thing was Mr.....

*Brenda Velasco:* Wait a minute, I want to go back.

### 3. Why did you or your family move to Port Reading?

*Marianne Jasper:* My mother wanted to own her own house and at that particular time in my mother and father's lives they had the resources to do so.

*Brenda Velasco:* And where did they move from?

*Marianne Jasper:* They moved from West Avenue, Port Reading to Main Street, Woodbridge, upper Main Street near **Venezia**. You know where **Venezia** has his...(law office at 306 Main Street)

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes.

*Marianne Jasper:* They were the second house in from Metuchen Avenue.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, now your grandmother lived in Port Reading.

*Marianne Jasper:* Yes, but my grandmother passed away when I was seventeen.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay but why did they settle in Port Reading, your grandmother?

*Marianne Jasper:* My grandmother and grandfather came from Sicily and established themselves in New York City.

*Brenda Velasco:* With many other Italians and Sicilians.

*Marianne Jasper:* Yeah, and things were very difficult for them. My grandfather was an entrepreneur and made his living by taking used clothing and coming to New Jersey to sell it to the farmers. That's how he made his money and he amassed a sum of twenty-five thousand dollars which at that time was a lot of money. He put it in the bank as he was told for safekeeping and then in 1929 lost every penny of it. In the meantime, I don't know exactly why but they moved to Avenel when my mother was still in school. I can't give you the year and my uncle was also in Avenel. He was a farmer. My grandfather became a dairy farmer and delivered milk. Why he came to Port Reading I don't know but he purchased the house in Port Reading. Everyday he would travel to New York City and try to recoup the business that he had at one time; it didn't work. I mean he would go everyday because he was accustomed to it. He would bring something to New York, because my grandmother had a lot of old silver, and he would take a piece of silver, wrap it, bring it to New York and sell it because he knew all the merchants in New York. All he wanted was his train fare home and to pick up a few groceries to bring home and he did this every day. He would barter or sell whatever he had and that's how he survived. There was no real income at the time-that was it.

*Brenda Velasco:* That was The Depression.

*Marianne Jasper:* Yes, it was.

*Brenda Velasco:* So he had a tough time of it.

*Marianne Jasper:* Yes he did; we all did. Of course we had a huge garden and my grandmother did a lot of canning. We had chickens and we had a goat for milk.

*Brenda Velasco:* So then when your mother grew up.....

*Marianne Jasper:* When my mother got married she and my father had a small apartment in Elizabeth near the train station. I remained with my grandmother and grandfather in Port Reading because they both had to work. My mother worked in Long Island. She worked for the **Bulova Company** and made watches. From Port Reading it was a two hour trip there and a two hour trip back. So they would come and visit on weekends. That's when I saw my mother and father.

*Brenda Velasco:* And you were the first born child.

*Marianne Jasper:* I was the first born, yes, and of course the school was there and my grandmother and grandfather were like mother and father to me. It was convenient at that time to do it that way. I loved being in Port Reading. I loved

everything about it at the time. My memories of Port Reading are so happy and carefree. I was given free range to do what I wanted.

*Brenda Velasco:* And grandparents are a little bit different than parents.

*Marianne Jasper:* Oh, absolutely. I was queen of the hill let me tell you.

*Brenda Velasco:* Because grandparents have a unique relationship with their grandchildren.

*Marianne Jasper:* And my grandmother spoke absolutely no English.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh wow!

*Marianne Jasper:* My grandfather did because he had to in order to take care of the business at the time. I went to school speaking no English.

*Brenda Velasco:* Wow! So Sicilian was your first language.

*Marianne Jasper:* Sicilian was my first language. My husband also went to school speaking.....he wasn't Sicilian but.....

*Brenda Velasco:* He was dobladon.

*Marianne Jasper:* Dobladon, it's a dialect, it's a different dialect. My kindergarten teacher's name was Garthway. For an Italian speaking child Garthway was impossible to pronounce. She was a sweet wonderful lady but I could not say her name. I called her teachada because I could not pronounce her name. I remember every one of the teachers that I had in School No. 9.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so you went to School No. 9.

*Marianne Jasper:* I had a half a block to walk. We all came home for lunch. My dog Nelly would walk me to school and stay on this corner until I got out the door to walk me home.

*Brenda Velasco:* Well trained dog.

*Marianne Jasper:* Well she just loved me and I loved her. Also the school had activities for the children and special things so we always had something to look forward to. The firehouse had a lot of activities.

*Brenda Velasco:* You lived in the uptown, upper, Port Reading.

*Marianne Jasper:* This was uptown, that's what we called it, and there were many railroad tracks here. This was the **Reading Railroad** which was commercial. This was the Sewaren Bay here so this was water and what came by ship was loaded here and went out this way. During the war the troop trains used to come through here and one of the projects that we had in the school - I had to be maybe ten years old I don't remember exactly - was to make scrapbooks. We would scan all the newspapers, the magazines, whatever we could get our hands on, cut out all the crossword puzzles and glue them on, cut out pictures of girls anything that we felt that was interesting to them and as many cartoons as we could find so that they would have something to smile about. We would wrap them up and we were told, I don't remember by whom, when the troop trains would come by. We would hand them to the soldiers and they would have the windows opened. It would have been nice to give them a box of cookies but remember we were rationed at that time.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, your sugar was rationed.....

*Marianne Jasper:* And butter.

*Brenda Velasco:* And butter.

*Marianne Jasper:* We had no butter. I remember the first glob of margarine that we bought with the orange pill. Today they say it was poison. That's what we ate for butter; it was horrible.

*Brenda Velasco:* When did your mom and dad come back to live permanently in Port Reading?

*Marianne Jasper:* Right after my sister was born, I'd say two years maybe after my sister was born. I was born in '32 and she was born in '40. In the early '40s my mother and father decided to come back to Port Reading. My grandfather had an empty lot next to the house which was in between the firehouse and his house and he went downtown and bought a two room store, it was a small store two rooms, but the structure was intact. He built the foundation in Port Reading and added on a kitchen and a bathroom so it was a living room, a bedroom in the middle, a kitchen and the bathroom at the end of the house and a brand new cellar that I thought was great because it was so clean. It had no dust and no anything in it.

*Brenda Velasco:* No coal dust.

*Marianne Jasper:* No coal dust.

*Brenda Velasco:* Because Lisa may not remember we had coal at one time.

*Marianne Jasper:* We choked on it because I remember in the, well we called it the big house my grandfather's house, we had coal and when he would start that coal furnace up if the draft or whatever you call it wasn't absolutely open, it was a big monstrosity of a thing full of asbestos, but it kept us warm. In my mother's house, this three room house, they had a combination store which was half gas and the other half was kerosene. That's what warmed up the three rooms. The living room was always ice cold. If we were having company my mother would take out a fan and put it in the doorway in the living room to draw the heat from the kitchen. My job was to go down and fill the can with kerosene which I hated. I hated the smell of it. It got all over you.

*Brenda Velasco:* And it gave off an odor, too.

*Marianne Jasper:* Yes it did and you know when I went to high school I didn't realize it that other you know other people had different kinds of living arrangements and would smell the kerosene on other people and I would go home and say to my mother do I smell of kerosene? She said absolutely not. Because I would spend most of the time at my grandmother's house because that's where my bedroom was. There wasn't room here.

*Brenda Velasco:* So you would stay at your grandmother's house when your parents moved back.

*Marianne Jasper:* Yes, there just wasn't room for the children but we the children stayed with my grandmother. When my brother was born he stayed with my mom. The only time she was out of work was for a few years until he was a little older and then she went back to work.

*Brenda Velasco:* But you had like an extended family right there which was quite an advantage to have.

*Marianne Jasper:* Yes, I was very fortunate.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, and that's what Port Reading was about extended families.

*Marianne Jasper:* Yes it was. But all the families were like that. The grandparents.....we lived together.

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

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, we went over Question 1, 2 and 3 indirectly now physical changes. We mentioned about the house and you gave the location of the streets.

You mentioned that it was a self-contained community you had all the amenities there.

*Marianne Jasper:* This part of Port Reading yes. What we call downtown at that particular time when I was growing up everything was in this area. The only thing that I remember was **D'Alessio's Italian Food Store**.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, Albina D'Alessio.

*Marianne Jasper:* Right.

*Brenda Velasco:* Because I interviewed her too at an earlier date. So she lived in downtown.

*Marianne Jasper:* Right, on Port Reading Avenue. And of course we frequented the store when we wanted Italian stuff and had the resources to buy it. My mother would send me to **Gorka's Grocery Store** which was right across the street and they had everything before she went to work. When she went to work I was in school but I was in charge of my brother and sister and my mother would give me a little note and tell me exactly what to buy whatever she had money for and in the corner she would put one, two or a zero. They had the most wonderful jelly donuts delivered from Carteret a name something similar to Ulman's. They had the best rye bread and the best jelly donuts and they were delivered to **Gorka's Grocery Store**. I just loved them so much so this told me how many I could buy that day that my mother had money for. I was very dismayed when it was zero.

*Brenda Velasco:* Of course. Now how old were you because your mom is working and you're going to the store.

*Marianne Jasper:* I was about twelve years old because my brother was born and I had to take care of him and my grandmother was still alive. My grandmother died when I was seventeen.

*Brenda Velasco:* But she played a major role in your life.

*Marianne Jasper:* Absolutely. She was very instrumental in the way that I think today. My grandmother was an orphan in Sicily. She was raised by one of the monasteries for nuns. When my grandmother and grandfather came to this country she was a widow. She had married a landowner but she was poor and had no dowry so when the landowner died she had a son, Albert, who never came to this country and everything went to him. So she was left penniless because her background, she was an orphan, so she was not.....so she and my grandfather married and then came to New York.

*Brenda Velasco:* So she married your grandfather in Sicily then?

*Marianne Jasper:* No, she married him either on the boat or in New York City. They met on the boat.

*Brenda Velasco:* And so opens a chapter for you eventually.

*Marianne Jasper:* Right. They had one child which was my mother.

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

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

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

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, the post office. Where was the post office located?

*Marianne Jasper:* This was the train station and the post office was here on Port Reading Avenue.

*Brenda Velasco:* Was it a separate building?

*Marianne Jasper:* Yes, it was a separate building and the Zullo family lived upstairs. Now Cesar Zullo was a high school bookkeeping teacher and I think but I'm not absolutely sure that his sister on the first floor operated the post office at that time. I was so intrigued as a child with the workings of the post office. We each had our own little cubicle and it was a glass door with like metal, pretty metal, around it. I don't ever remember having a key you just opened it up and took your mail out. I would go home and play post office. I would cut up paper and put all the neighbors' names on it and make little boxes. This is what I wanted to be when I grew up to work in the post office. I just thought it was magnificent. The organization of it all just intrigued me.

*Brenda Velasco:* And then eventually you got involved with the township with economic planning development or something.

*Marianne Jasper:* Yes, I was with the HUD program. But when I came to the town it was 1968. Remember in the 1960s the town received a huge grant from the federal government to rehab or refurbish whatever they wanted to do a resurrection of Port Reading.

*Brenda Velasco:* And Bowtie was a part of it.

*Marianne Jasper:* The reason they called it Bowtie if you look at the map it looks like a bowtie. It still does because I checked my Woodbridge map. So I came in in the last three or four years. We were just doing the follow up on all of it. My mother's house and my grandfather's house was taken, the firehouse was torn down and they built the firehouse that's there today and School No. 9 was related to downtown I don't know what street.

*Brenda Velasco:* Off Tappen somewhere.

*Marianne Jasper:* The post office we had a new post office. A man that I went to high school with, Charlie Santoro, was the postmaster for a while. I don't know exactly when but he was the postmaster.

*Brenda Velasco:* At the new post office?

*Marianne Jasper:* Yes. Bowtie did not affect the church at that time. I'm trying to think what other changes could have occurred. The train station eventually was.....this whole line was dismantled but I don't know when.

*Brenda Velasco:* But that's the passenger train station.

*Marianne Jasper:* Right. The **Reading Railroad Company** still functioned. I don't know that they do know and I don't know when that changed.

*Brenda Velasco:* Because I remember I interviewed Iacovone and he worked for the **Reading Railroad** and I think it was in the early 1980s. I'm not positive.

*Marianne Jasper:* One man by the name of Simeone lived on our block. I remember he would be walking home from work at the **Reading Railroad** every night.

*Brenda Velasco:* And that gets us to the **Port Reading Railroad**. Did that impact you at all? Your grandfather didn't work for it.

*Marianne Jasper:* No, my grandfather did not but it gave a lot of employment to Port Reading people. I was never bothered by it. I loved the train station because when I was twelve or thirteen years old, my mother permitted me to travel to New York by myself.

*Brenda Velasco:* Wow!

*Marianne Jasper:* See in those days everything was so friendly. The conductor that was on the train was on the train every day. He knew us by our first name. My mother used the train every day. I would get to Jersey City to the ferry and the man



that took the tickets I knew him like he was my uncle and he would look out for me. When I would get to downtown New York I was on my own but my mother instructed me very carefully because she knew New York that I would get on the 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue Express travel to the Bronx which took about an hour and my uncle would meet me at the 107<sup>th</sup> Street station. Now you couldn't do that today. I wouldn't go on the 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue Express today if you paid me by the minute.

*Brenda Velasco:* You had quite a different upbringing than most people.

*Marianne Jasper:* My mother taught me to be responsible and independent and I loved it. Like every weekend I would go to visit with my uncle in New York and I loved New York and she lived near the Bronx Zoo. There was so much to do there. There were theatres.....it was just a wonderful place to be. I love New York.

*Brenda Velasco:* Did you go every weekend you said?

*Marianne Jasper:* Not every weekend but mostly, depending on resources. If my mother had the money for the ticket etc. or if she didn't need me at home, I would go into New York and be with my cousin Millie. We explored New York. That's where I learned about life.

*Brenda Velasco:* Well Port Reading was different.

*Marianne Jasper:* We were so ignorant, not ignorant.

*Brenda Velasco:* Naïve?

*Marianne Jasper:* Naïve; innocent.

*Brenda Velasco:* Protected? Sheltered?

*Marianne Jasper:* Right. I have to tell you one little story about **McGettigan Paper Store**. Mr. McGettigan was the maintenance man at School No. 9. A wonderful man and he looked out for every child. If we had a problem or broke something he was just wonderful. Once a week he would invite us to his store and he would show us silent films. His wife would play the piano for the background music. Of course we all brought a couple of pennies. Pennies bought a lot of candy in those days. But that was another activity that was unique to the area and how much we enjoyed it.

*Brenda Velasco:* No, that was a community and he provided it at his store. Did you have any parks around there?

*Marianne Jasper:* We had a lot of woods. We had the Port Reading creek where we fished and swam. We had Sewaren so the summertime most of the time we were in Sewaren swimming. We would walk the tracks, a group of us would walk the railroad tracks, jump off one of the back streets there on Cliff Road and go to the beach and swim all day and about 4:30 P.M. or 5:00 P.M. my grandfather would come in his Model A Ford, blow the horn twice and that meant out of the water we're going home. That happened every day. I loved Sewaren.

*Brenda Velasco:* During the winter did you go to Sewaren too?

*Marianne Jasper:* No, winter we had Eckee's Pond which was a good sized pond and deep in one end because I fell in once up to my neck. That's located now where the Turnpike is. We would ice skate. There was also a big hill off of Patruski's property and there was another railroad track back in there. That was good for sleigh riding. One day Vinnie Martino and I decided we wanted to ski so we got two pieces of wood and we cut off the tips, soaked them in hot water and then with ropes we kept pulling and pulling on this until we got a little flip in the front. We let it dry and we took it down to Petruski's hill, put it on the cold snow to ski and whatever little curve there was went bump. We fell over on our heads.

*Brenda Velasco:* It was an experiment.

*Marianne Jasper:* Yes it was but at least we tried. We also had a little park here. This was all wooded area and we used to play cowboys and Indians.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, that was by the firehouse?

*Marianne Jasper:* No, that was West Avenue. Right next to the firehouse there was a wooded area. You can see it here. This is a different angle. We would play cowboy and Indians in here and one day I got to be the cowboy and I tied Vinnie Martino and Billy Westcott to a tree. Then my grandfather called me for dinner and I took off and just as we're finishing dinner I get a knock on the back door and it's Johanna Martino. She says Francis have you seen my Vinnie and it dawned on my I never untied him so I ran down to the park and I untied him and Billy. They chased me for about a mile. They were going to kill me.

*Brenda Velasco:* But at least you had eaten your dinner. They hadn't. Oh, wow!

*Marianne Jasper:* See this picture doesn't show you the woods. This shows you from a different angle.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay and they're playing bocce here.

*Marianne Jasper:* They're playing bocce here. This was by the firehouse and also by the firehouse they had a wooden area, square wooden area, because they would have functions at the firehouse and the people would dance if they had music etc. Also my father and my uncle were identical twins and also were professional boxers before they got married. They would do an exhibition of two belts, maybe two rounds, and Shobby Martino, which is Vinnie's father, was the referee. At the end of the second round they would knock him down. Of course everybody laughed; they thought that was so funny. We had a big festival once a year, I remember we had donkey rides, a lot of good food, music and my father and my uncle doing what they were doing.

*Brenda Velasco:* Was this sponsored by the firehouse then?

*Marianne Jasper:* Yes, the firehouse was another amenity which provided entertainment and activities. The Ladies Auxiliary they initiated some of these activities. We had a hall upstairs in the firehouse. People would have big parties or wedding showers there. I had my wedding shower there. They also put together minstrels every year.

*Brenda Velasco:* So it was quite busy.

*Marianne Jasper:* Yes, they would have all kinds of things going on and of course we looked forward to it. I remember the minstrels and they were held at the school, this was the only place we had a stage.

*Brenda Velasco:* At School No. 9.

*Marianne Jasper:* School No. 9, yes. My mother was in it every year so it made me very proud. I have one picture here; this was before I was born when my mother and father were dating. That was the original fire bell.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh, wow!

*Marianne Jasper:* They would clunk that thing before they had.....

*Brenda Velasco:* There were no sirens or anything that was it.

*Marianne Jasper:* When I was growing up next to the firehouse they had a siren but we didn't have paid firemen it was all volunteer. When the phone would ring on the outside whoever was in the neighborhood would take the fire call and then press a button to sound whatever kind of alarm we had at that particular time. I remember when my brother was little we had just gotten a telephone, it was one of those tall black ones with the mouth piece and the ear thing, and it was a party line. My brother's first words were fire and he would get on the phone and go fire, fire. Until

we caught him doing it we couldn't figure out who was sending in these phony fire calls.

*Brenda Velasco:* But that's the word he knew.

*Marianne Jasper:* That's the word he knew.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, alright, so we've gone over recreation that was Question 6. We've done the focal point of your community that was the church, the firehouse and family.

*Marianne Jasper:* And the school.

*Brenda Velasco:* And the school, School No. 9. Did you have a library there?

*Marianne Jasper:* Not then. The library Father Milos was doing and that was later on. I don't remember the year.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, he established it. Should we go to Question 8?

### **8. What did you like about living in your section of Woodbridge/Port Reading?**

*Brenda Velasco:* Because Lisa grew up in Woodbridge so it was totally different.

*Lisa Jasper Molis:* I went to church in Port Reading.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh, St. Anthony's then.

*Lisa Jasper Molis:* St. Anthony's and I got to know Father Milos. I just remember going to church there. Sometimes we would go there and sometimes we would go to the old St. James Church.

*Marianne Jasper:* I was very comfortable in the Port Reading church. As you know I practically lived there and.....

*Lisa Jasper Molis:* They had the cleanest benches.

*Marianne Jasper:* When Father Milos was there I said to him, Father I have to earn some money can you help me out. I was twelve or thirteen years old. So I had to take care of his dog, once a week I'd have to clean the dog and brush him down and I had to wash his car. He had a big beautiful black car, I don't remember what make it was, but nobody else in town had one like it. Occasionally I would scrub the basement floor in the church for two quarters.

*Brenda Velasco:* For fifty cents, you got a bargain. But you got your money.

*Marianne Jasper:* Yes and fifty cents was a lot of money then.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, we have to remember times were different then. How old were you, then do you remember?

*Marianne Jasper:* I had to be like twelve or thirteen. It was before I went to high school. I was still in grammar school. I was very young and I remember I said Father this one week had to earn seventy-five cents because I saw this blouse in.....remember **Mae Moon's**?

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh yes, yes.

*Marianne Jasper:* I saw this blouse in **Mae Moon's** and it was a Swiss, you could almost see through it and it had a little black bow up here and I needed seventy-five cents more to buy it. He said seventy-five cents that's a lot of money and I said I know Father but I'm going to a party. I made a skirt and I need this blouse. He worked me so hard I was so tired I dragged myself to the party stayed ten minutes and came home and went to bed.

*Brenda Velasco:* There was another motive for him probably with that too.

*Lisa Jasper Molis:* Yeah.

*Brenda Velasco:* He kept you safe.

*Marianne Jasper:* Good experience.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh yeah he gave you a lot of good experiences that way. Let's go down to Question 9.

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

*Marianne Jasper:* During that time yes we had an explosion where the Hungarian Church is. But it was **Middlesex Water** at that time I think.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, **Middlesex Water**.

*Marianne Jasper:* Right next to it was a building that they made munitions.

*Brenda Velasco:* What was the year? You had mentioned it before.

*Marianne Jasper:* 1940.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so this is just before World War II that American gets involved in. World War II had already been going on in Europe though.

*Marianne Jasper:* Right.

*Brenda Velasco:* Did you hear it or....

*Marianne Jasper:* It blew out our windows.

*Brenda Velasco:* And you were in Port Reading.

*Marianne Jasper:* Yes, Port Reading. I was in the kitchen with my grandmother, she was making bread, and the chimney cracked and it blew out the windows in the porch where our dining room was. She immediately sat down with the rosary beads and started praying. She was very religious that way and very superstitious too. I remember my father came home from being called from work because he was a volunteer fireman. I don't remember the day. He was home. It may have been on a weekend I don't remember. I remember my father going there with the other volunteer men and when he came home he was so ill and he started vomiting violently. My mother didn't know what to do and he couldn't talk about what he saw. It wasn't until a day or two later that he started to recall that he was picking up body parts. There was a stream right next to the building and the body parts were floating in the stream.

*Brenda Velasco:* That was the Woodbridge Creek.

*Marianne Jasper:* The Hungarian Club is there now.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yeah, and Frank LaPenta's father was killed then.

*Marianne Jasper:* Was he?

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, he was killed there. He was working at **Middlesex Water Company**.

*Marianne Jasper:* There was another explosion in South Amboy but that was way after the war. In fact my husband was in the *National Guard*. I had just graduated high school, it was 1950. I think it was the Kiwanis Club in Carteret that was giving me a scholarship to go to college. I don't remember whether it was Kiwanis or if it was.....I think it was Kiwanis but I'm not absolutely sure. That went off and we heard it in Carteret. It scared the daylight out of us. We thought the war was back. Those are the only two bad things that I remember. They were years apart.

*Brenda Velasco:* How about construction because you've seen the Turnpike. Did that impact you at all?

*Marianne Jasper:* Not really, it just took away our ice skating pond. I think I was out of Woodbridge by the time the Turnpike was being built. Project Bowtie

bothered me because it was taking away everything that I knew and was comfortable with. Some of it I saw as improvement and the other I felt sad about.

*Brenda Velasco:* What did you see as improvement and what made you sad? And that was the redevelopment area.

*Marianne Jasper:* That was redevelopment. The roads were much better. There was a bridge that's there now. It built a bridge over Port Reading Avenue over the **Reading Railroad** which made it easier to access because once those trains were going through you could be held up for an hour on Port Reading Avenue.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yeah, because you had long trains and short trains with the freight. So that improved traffic.

*Marianne Jasper:* They put in the Bowtie pool that was a good thing. In fact we belonged to it. It was either build a pool in the backyard which I didn't have the money to do and it was easier to just put the kids in the car and go to the Bowtie pool.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, so that opened it up as a recreation facility for a long number of people.

*Marianne Jasper:* Yes it did.

*Lisa Jasper Molis:* For Woodbridge and Port Reading. Other parts of the township came over there.

*Brenda Velasco:* And it's still operating today.

*Marianne Jasper:* Yes it is. Of course they had a library and I don't remember the year that the library was but I think Father Milos was instrumental in that.

*Brenda Velasco:* Did that start part of Project Bowtie?

*Marianne Jasper:* I don't know. That I really don't know. We got a new firehouse.

*Brenda Velasco:* And that was part of Project Bowtie.

*Marianne Jasper:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* You have a first aid squad in Port Reading.

*Marianne Jasper:* I don't remember it.

*Brenda Velasco:* Or maybe that was just part of the fire department because the fire department did everything.

*Marianne Jasper:* Yes. We did not have a first aid squad. When I was living there as a child the new firehouse they have.....I really don't know.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Marianne Jasper:* And I know that some point in time they built a big supermarket in downtown Port Reading on the way to Carteret which was good. See what happened this area here, the uptown, was established and there was nowhere to expand housing wise. But downtown the expansion was quite large.

*Brenda Velasco:* And that's where they built new homes.

*Marianne Jasper:* Right, so they put the nice post office there. They had the supermarket but I don't remember what else put there. I haven't gone through Port Reading in a while. I'll have to do that.

*Brenda Velasco:* And that's where School No. 9 is located?

*Marianne Jasper:* And School No. 9 was relocated, right. In fact I think Carol worked in School No. 9, Carol Hila.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh, okay.

*Marianne Jasper:* I think she taught there.

*Lisa Jasper Molis:* I think she did.

*Brenda Velasco:* And I know she also taught at Colonia High School.

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

*Brenda Velasco:* You're in Woodbridge now you're not in Port Reading. Why did you want to settle here and not Port Reading?

*Marianne Jasper:* Availability of the home and I was already in Woodbridge and I liked the area up here. It still had some open space and some wooded areas which have rapidly disappeared.

*Brenda Velasco:* Well this is a nice area too.

*Marianne Jasper:* It is a beautiful area but before those houses that was all woods.

*Lisa Jasper Molis:* I spent my childhood in the woods over there.

*Marianne Jasper:* There were blackberry bushes. I miss the open space, it was beautiful. Of course I'm glad to have the neighbors too but this is all over. It has diminished.

*Brenda Velasco:* We're pretty populous right now. We're close to a hundred thousand or in that area.

*Marianne Jasper:* I know. The traffic on Main Street tells you that.

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

*Marianne Jasper:* Yes, I have my daughter and her family, I have my son and his family they're in Fords, my niece lives in Colonia and my sister lives in Colonia.

*Brenda Velasco:* So people stayed.

*Marianne Jasper:* Yes and my daughter is a half a block away from me which is great.

*Brenda Velasco:* Of course.

*Lisa Jasper Molis:* And I work in Iselin.

*Brenda Velasco:* I know. Lisa works at one of our blue star schools, Kennedy School right?

*Lisa Jasper Molis:* Yes, Kennedy Park School No. 24. That's an outstanding school.

*Marianne Jasper:* I love Woodbridge. Woodbridge is home. It's familiar to me. It's family. The neighborhoods aren't as close as we were in Port Reading but I think it was the economic times. We were all struggling. We lived differently.

*Brenda Velasco:* And you didn't have the TV or the computer or the internet.

*Marianne Jasper:* You have it. There was no electronic anything.

*Brenda Velasco:* So you got out.

*Marianne Jasper:* Right.

*Lisa Jasper Molis:* I did too. I spent my whole childhood outside. We never were inside except for part of the winter. If there was snow outside we were outside.

*Marianne Jasper:* And we were very close to our neighbors here, our immediate neighbors, you know two or three houses away. We knew each other. In Port Reading we knew everybody and we knew all about them because we had the party line. But people cared, they really did. If you heard something and it was three streets away you went to that person and said what can I do how can I help you? It was just a very close.....like family.

*Brenda Velasco:* And that's what I wanted to capture because not everybody had this throughout Woodbridge. It was a unique growing up experience for you.

*Marianne Jasper:* It was.

*Brenda Velasco:* Even more so, I mean Lisa you had a nice area but Port Reading.....

*Lisa Jasper Molis:* No, not like what my mom had. Not that at all.

*Marianne Jasper:* We were different. We were naïve, we were protected and we were respectful. If I was reprimanded by one of my teachers...the teachers were held in high, high regard. I mean they were like kings and queens and if I was reprimanded at school which I was a lot because I liked to talk I didn't go home and tell my mother because she would punish me twice as much. The teacher was always right and that's the way it was. We spoke to everyone with great respect. We never talked back to an adult.

*Brenda Velasco:* It's different today.

*Lisa Jasper Molis:* Yes, I do not have that experience today.

*Brenda Velasco:* No, it was different.

*Marianne Jasper:* That was different.

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

*Brenda Velasco:* Do you have any family in Port Reading anymore?

*Marianne Jasper:* No.

*Brenda Velasco:* So the whole Russo family moved out but scattered.

*Marianne Jasper:* One of my close friends her mother who was also a close friend of mine, Elsie Hall, she just passed away at 101.

*Brenda Velasco:* Wow!

*Marianne Jasper:* And her daughter is Virginia Hall Konick. She lives in Avenel. We were buddies since she was born. We played together on her front porch in paper boxes.

*Brenda Velasco:* But that's creative.

*Marianne Jasper:* Yeah, we played house and her mother was always so kind to me especially because she made Tollhouse cookies. Now in an Italian family you did not have Tollhouse cookies you had biscotti. It was different. There was no mayonnaise, there was no peanut butter and jelly and there was no white bread.

*Joseph Jasper:* Just Italian bread.

*Brenda Velasco:* Well Italian bread is the best, Joe.

*Marianne Jasper:* And the Italian bread I would give my right arm for it today because my grandmother made it every week and I craved all this other stuff so Mrs. Hall.....

*Brenda Velasco:* Was your supplier.

*Marianne Jasper:* And she was a family that was in Port Reading also a long time but she was a Limepeter. Her father was a Limepeter. Her married name was Hall.

*Joseph Jasper:* Some of her family lived on Main Street in Woodbridge.

*Marianne Jasper:* That was later on.

*Joseph Jasper:* Up the street from Dr. Zullo, the dentist.

*Marianne Jasper:* Yeah, but they lived here on West Avenue. And also her family was related to the Lloyd's of Sewaren.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh, Lenny Lloyd.

*Marianne Jasper:* In fact, I was just at a function for Mrs. Konick's daughter this week and I met Betty Lloyd who lived on Cliff Road. They had a dock on the creek because they had a boat and her cocker spaniel bit my leg.

*Brenda Velasco:* And that's what you remember.

*Marianne Jasper:* I still have the scar because we used to swim off the dock. I loved their house and I dreamed of owning a house on Cliff Road so that I could see the

water. I loved the water; I still do. In fact it was one of the young ladies of one of the wealthy families, I do not know her name, she was handicapped and she saved my life.

*Brenda Velasco:* Wow!

*Marianne Jasper:* I fell off the dock because there was a hole in one of the planks and I couldn't swim.

*Lisa Jasper Molis:* You must have been very young.

*Marianne Jasper:* I was very young. She went down the ladder, picked me up, brought me up the ladder and threw me back in. She said now learn to swim but she was right next to me.

*Brenda Velasco:* And she was handicapped?

*Marianne Jasper:* Yes, she was handicapped. I don't remember the family name but she lived in one of those big houses. She stayed with me all day long until I learned how to swim.

*Brenda Velasco:* Well it stayed with you didn't it.

*Marianne Jasper:* Yes it did.

*Brenda Velasco:* That was a good lesson. Okay I thank you, the whole family, for giving me the time for the interview.

.....

After the formal interview concluded, Marianne remembered that her father was one of the Port Reading volunteers that responded to the 1951 Woodbridge Train Wreck.