

**Oral History Interview**  
**Michael Salvatore**  
**WH004**

(written transcript and digital audio)

Originally Michael Salvatore was interviewed on May 7, 2008 at the Evergreen Center by Brenda Velasco and students Nazar Bedi (Fords Middle School) and Samantha Mocciaro (Iselin Middle School). Because of technical difficulties, he had to be interviewed a second time. Additional information from the first interview will be indicated by italics

The second interview was conducted on May 27, 2009 at Evergreen by Brenda Velasco at 12 Noon. Also interviewing were some students from the Avenel Middle School and Iselin Middle School. They were Humza Farrukh from Avenel (Avenel Middle School), Sandra Souied from Port Reading (Avenel Middle School), Regina Poerio from Port Reading (Avenel Middle School), Kaitlin Murphy from Port Reading (Avenel Middle School), Deanna Della Torre from Colonia (Iselin Middle School), Julienne Viuya from Iselin (Iselin Middle School), Ayushi Pathak from Iselin (Iselin Middle School). Also in the audience were Nancy Paugh from the Woodbridge Board of Education and Dan D'Archi, the Colonia historian.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, Humza, we're going to start off with you with the first question.

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

*Michael Salvatore:* My name is Michael John Salvatore Sr. I was born on August 30, 1935; a long time ago.

*Brenda Velasco:* And what section do you live in Michael?

*Michael Salvatore:* I live off Green Street.

*Brenda Velasco:* In Iselin?

*Michael Salvatore:* Oh I live in Iselin, yes, sorry.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, Sandra, question two.

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

*Michael Salvatore:* Sixty-three years.

*Brenda Velasco:* When did you move here then Michael?

*Michael Salvatore:* Sixty-three years ago.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Michael Salvatore:* There was nothing there: all woods. In fact, St. Cecelia's had the three churches there, St. John Vianney and the one up the hill. (First Presbyterian Church of Iselin)

*Brenda Velasco:* In other words there was no St. John Vianney at that time?

*Michael Salvatore:* Yes, there was none.

*Brenda Velasco:* And it broke off of St. Cecelia's.

*Michael Salvatore:* It broke off, yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* St. Helena's in Edison also broke off of St. Cecelia's.

*Michael Salvatore:* Yes, well I have a lot to tell you.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh, yes. Okay, let's get to question three. So you moved in around 1946 then right?

*Michael Salvatore:* '46, right.

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

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

*Michael Salvatore:* Well I used to be a trailer driver and my company moved to Linden. So we were taking a ride around here one day and I seen the house and I bought it, when my wife was alive. *I worked nights and it appeared to be safe. The house was cheap. I paid \$109.00 a month for taxes and the mortgage. My salary at that time was \$49.00 a month.*

*Brenda Velasco:* Where did you move from Michael?

*Michael Salvatore:* I moved from the bomb, Newark, New Jersey.

*Brenda Velasco:* So this was quite a contrast to Newark, New Jersey.

*Michael Salvatore:* Oh, yes, it was good. It was good then.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, Kaitlin, question four.

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

*Michael Salvatore:* Okay, you ready? When you came into Woodbridge there was a circle there on Green Street. There was a hotdog store there and a junkyard and you came down Green Street there was nothing there but an **ACME**; an **ACME** that's like **ShopRite**. You came down Green Street and there were two gas stations. One on each side and that was it: no bank or nothing. You came all the way down to Worth Street and on Worth Street there was a little store, okay.

*Brenda Velasco:* Worth Street is where you go for Iselin Middle School?

*Michael Salvatore:* Right there, yes. Well there was no high school either there so we all went to Woodbridge. Well I'm going to tell you, that's why Woodbridge (High School) was a powerhouse. There was no Colonia (High School) either. Okay, now when you came down Green Street all along there, there was nothing: all woods. There was a nice black family who lived there. His name was Poacher. He used to come over to cut the lawns. He was the only one who lived there. *There were only four houses on my block; it was mostly woods. There are many more homes now.* If you came down Green Street the only place that was there was Chain O' Hills, Woodbridge Oaks, and you came down further there was no firehouse but there was a school there and they moved it out of there. Now there's a firehouse and that guy that had that tavern on the corner, that's still there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Flips.

*Michael Salvatore:* What's the name?

*Dan D'Arci:* Flips.

*Michael Salvatore:* Flips, right. Now the other side of the street was the funeral parlor. I don't remember.

*Brenda Velasco:* Costello's.

*Michael Salvatore:* What was it?

*Brenda Velasco:* Costello.

*Michael Salvatore:* Costello's. Now if you came down that street there, all the way down, I ran the Little League for forty-nine years. We built three fields there.

*Dan D'Arci:* Cooper's Field.

*Michael Salvatore:* Cooper's Field, he knows.

*Brenda Velasco:* It's called Cooper Avenue back there.

*Michael Salvatore:* Yes. There were no houses around there. There was nothing there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Deanna, you're next with question five.

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

*Michael Salvatore:* There was no firehouse there. There's a volunteer firehouse there now. There was a school there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, did you have a library?

*Michael Salvatore:* I don't remember a library. The only library I remember was in Woodbridge and the one on Inman Avenue. I think that's it, I'm not sure.

*Dan D'Arci:* Do you remember the one on New Dover Road?

*Michael Salvatore:* Yes, that's the one I forgot about.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, that's where it was, the library on New Dover Road (and Chain o' Hills).

*Michael Salvatore:* Yes, New Dover Road.

*Brenda Velasco:* Which is now the home of Merrill Park Baseball League.

*Michael Salvatore:* We had a post office.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, you had a post office.

*Michael Salvatore:* A small post office.

*Brenda Velasco:* Where was that located Michael?

*Michael Salvatore:* Where it is now (Middlesex Essex Turnpike) though but down further nearer to Green Street. (At an earlier time, the post office was near the movies on Oak Tree Road)

*Dan D'Arci:* Down here.

*Michael Salvatore:* Yes. You had the big park.

*Brenda Velasco:* Merrill Park?

*Michael Salvatore:* Merrill Park where every holiday, 4<sup>th</sup> of July, they used to have big stuff for us here but because there was an unfortunate accident there they stopped it.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, so you had the fireworks in Merrill Park?

*Michael Salvatore:* Yes, we used to have that, yes. Well, we had the railroad come through. We had no high school, Iselin High School or Iselin Middle School.

Everybody went to Woodbridge. That's why Woodbridge for years was a

powerhouse. Same thing with Colonia, is that Colonia that's got a high school there?

*Dan D'Arci:* He's talking about sports where all the children went to.

*Michael Salvatore:* Right.

*Dan D'Arci:* Woodbridge High School was the only school they had.

*Michael Salvatore:* That was the only school they had but Woodbridge took them all. That's why they always had a great football team.

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

*Michael Salvatore:* What didn't I do? I ran the whole Little League. Even the girls' softball, I ran it all. In fact, we built that building that's there. It's still there, now I think the kids play in Colonia. *I worked the kitchen for thirty-five years.*

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, you ran the Little League and the girls' softball league. Was there a movie house? Did you go.....

*Michael Salvatore:* Well I'm not down there. The movie house was down on Correja Avenue in Iselin but that's across Route #27.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Michael Salvatore:* It's on the corner there. Because they didn't have no senior citizen building there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Right, Olsen Towers.

*Michael Salvatore:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Michael Salvatore:* You're giving your age away.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so you had the movie house. *Movies were only ninety cents back then.*

Alright, Julienne, question 7.

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

*Michael Salvatore:* Well there was no Woodbridge Center then. Either they came to church or they came to see the kids play ball. Oh by the way, they built eight new houses where we used to have our fair. There was another building there where the nuns used to stay. Now they don't stay there no more and they have the fair now by the church.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, this is across from Flips tavern?

*Michael Salvatore:* Right, that's the tavern I couldn't think of. You know you couldn't get in there if you had a half of bag on. He wouldn't let you in there. He was a good guy.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, let's go to question 8. This is Ayushi.

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

*Michael Salvatore:* Loved it. I could tell you five thousand things. I loved it.

*Everyone knew everyone at one time. You were friends with everyone. You saw and knew people through Little League, St. Cecelia's Church.*

*Brenda Velasco:* Why?

*Michael Salvatore:* Why? Because I had everything I needed. Then when they built Woodbridge Center that was even better. I did everything there.

*Brenda Velasco:* What did you mean you had everything you needed Michael?

*Michael Salvatore:* Well, all kinds of stores.

*Brenda Velasco:* That's what we wanted to know.

*Michael Salvatore:* You know what I mean.

*Brenda Velasco:* Now you moved from Newark to Iselin.

*Michael Salvatore:* Yes, I moved because my company moved to Linden.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Michael Salvatore:* I used to be a trailer driver.

*Brenda Velasco:* But you were a stranger to Woodbridge.

*Michael Salvatore:* Oh, yes, I never heard of Woodbridge. Do you want me to tell you how I found it out?

*Brenda Velasco:* How did you find it out?

*Michael Salvatore:* Every Sunday I used to take my wife and my kid up (Route) 22 where they sell the sliced watermelon, right. So one day we're riding up there and I see the sign, Iselin. I called it Iceland. I came down Park Avenue all the way down there and I came down Green Street. Now it said Route #1, I could have went back to Newark off Route #1. When I got there she said to me, look at that house. And I said, "I'm going to buy it, peanuts", and we bought it.

*Brenda Velasco:* How much did you pay for your house?

*Michael Salvatore:* Wait till you hear this. I put ten dollars down, two hundred dollars when I moved in. I paid twelve thousand five hundred dollars. Now if you come by my house my kid put a top on it, two hundred thousand dollars. You should see it, beautiful.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so you originally paid twelve thousand five hundred dollars for your house?

*Michael Salvatore:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* And that's what those houses were going for? That's off of Worth Street right?

*Michael Salvatore:* Yes.

*Dan D'Arci:* What year was that?

*Michael Salvatore:* When I put the top on?

*Dan D'Arci:* No, when you bought the house.

*Brenda Velasco:* 1946?

*Michael Salvatore:* 1962 or 1963, something like that.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, so you lived in the Westbury section.

*Michael Salvatore:* Westbury, yes. Well, that wasn't the first one that they built. The first one they built was the Woodbridge Oaks, I think. It's still there now.

*Dan D'Arci:* Yes, on the other side of Route #27?

*Michael Salvatore:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, that's over by?

*Dan D'Arci:* Woodbridge Oaks is.....

*Brenda Velasco:* Bender?

*Dan D'Arci:* Behind the old Stewart.

*Michael Salvatore:* No, the one that's by the high school, what's that?

*Dan D'Arci:* That's Westbury.

*Michael Salvatore:* No, I'm Westbury.

*Dan D'Arci:* Yes.

*Michael Salvatore:* The next one.

*Dan D'Arci:* You mean the other side of the high school where the houses are on slabs and Park Avenue and Harrison?

*Michael Salvatore:* Yes, what's that?

*Dan D'Arci:* I don't know. Parkview, it's called Parkview.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, let's go on with the questions. We left off with Ayushi so we're up to you Humza.

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

*Michael Salvatore:* Well there was no discrimination just some people got loud mouths, that's it. But other than that we all lived together. Whether we were Indians, Italians, Germans or Irish, we lived together. There was no discrimination. The construction, I watched them build big buildings...by the railroad..... There were no riots.

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

*Everything, would never knock it down. Activities for seniors: Evergreen Center or trips to Atlantic City. His girlfriend lives in Greiner Towers.*

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

*Michael Salvatore:* I have two sons. One is a businessman in Florida. The other son, Michael John Salvatore Jr., lives in Iselin with Michael Senior. My sister-in-law, Nancy Pezza, also lives in the Township.

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

*Michael Salvatore:* Both my sons attended St. Cecelia's School, Iselin Middle School and JFK High School. One son graduated from Rutgers and my other son graduated from the University of Tampa in Florida.