

**Oral History Interview**  
**Midge Fahey Custode**  
**WH033**

(written transcript and digital audio)

On March 19, 2009 at 11: A.M., Midge Fahey Custode was interviewed at the Henry Inman Library by Brenda Velasco. Midge is a long time resident of Colonia as well as a long time parishioner of St. John Vianney.

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

My full name is Margaret Fahey Custode and I live on 9 Edgewood Avenue in Colonia.

*Brenda Velasco:* And what year were you born in?

*Midge Custode:* 1922.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, 1922.

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

In November, 2009, it will be 55 years.

*Brenda Velasco:* And that is at the same address?

*Midge Custode:* Same address.

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

My husband had property here. We never really thought we would ever come out here but we wanted to get a house and start to have children. We had three children, and since we couldn't find anything that we could afford, we decided to see what we could do and use our property and then we built the house.

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

*Midge Custode:* Elizabeth.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so you lived in Elizabeth. How did your husband happen to buy this property?

*Midge Custode:* There was a man in his neighborhood who was selling property out here. How that man came to have it, I don't know. But he was selling and talking to people about property out here and Joe's father told him to get in on this as an investment. Joe was only about 19 or 20 years old.

*Brenda Velasco:* So he was just out of high school.

*Midge Custode:* But he just listened to his father and that's how he bought this property.

*Brenda Velasco:* Do you recall how much he paid for the original property?

*Midge Custode:* Actually I don't because he bought this property long before I even knew him.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Midge Custode:* All I know is that the taxes were about a few hundred dollars; that's all it was.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so that goes back to before 1955 right?

*Midge Custode:* That's right, before that. I didn't even meet him until maybe five years after he bought that property. I didn't even know about that property. I never heard of Colonia.

*Brenda Velasco:* Most people didn't.

*Midge Custode:* No.

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

When we moved here there were about five houses on Edgewood Avenue. There weren't many anywhere around here. We had dirt roads and we had nothing but electricity. We had no water, we had no gas; it was just the electricity. We still had the well which we used. Then we had dirt roads. There were no paved roads; we had dirt roads.

*Brenda Velasco:* Was Lynn Crest the development behind you? (School #22)

*Midge Custode:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Was that built yet?

*Midge Custode:* No that was built, I think, after we were here about a year all of this development started to go up. It was one development after another one. I was here about a year and a half or so, I think, and then Lynn Oaks went up.

*Brenda Velasco:* Was Oak Ridge here when you moved in?

*Midge Custode:* No, none of those developments were here when we moved in. They came like a year later.

*Brenda Velasco:* What year exactly did you move to Colonia?

*Midge Custode:* 1954.

*Brenda Velasco:* 1954, okay, so we didn't have Lynn Oaks or Oak Ridge and you used well water and I imagine you had a septic tank back then?

*Midge Custode:* Yes, septic tank. Only electricity that's all we had was the electricity.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay. Before we started this interview, you mentioned that there was a farmer who.....

*Midge Custode:* Yes, Mr. Graseck and he owned all this property of Lynn Oaks and as far as Lynn Oaks went, he owned all that property. He had cows, pigs and chickens. It was like a little farm, it was like a little farm. I remember one day, across the road, I saw she was out there with the cow. The cow gave birth to a calf, one day, I couldn't believe it. I saw the cow and she was taking this calf out.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, this was Colonia.

*Midge Custode:* That was Colonia; you could never believe this. It was real country.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, yes.

*Midge Custode:* And that was one thing that we really liked; we liked it because we thought it was great for kids. It was a great place for kids to grow up.

*Brenda Velasco:* It was so quiet back then.

*Midge Custode:* It was very quiet.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, so what were the schools then? Where did your kids go to school because you had the three children.....

*Midge Custode:* Right, we had the three children. Two of them went to St. Cecilia's and my one son, he couldn't get in, he had to go, one year to School #17, over here; it used to be School #17.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, and what's it called now? Is that the Evergreen Center?

*Midge Custode:* Now it's the Evergreen Center.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so he had quite a hike to School #17 then?

*Midge Custode:* I think he took a bus; you know, I can't remember that. I don't know if he took a bus or I just drove him every day.

*Midge Custode:* There was a school bus for Sr. Cecilia's but I don't think he could have been; he'd be too close, maybe, for, I don't know, isn't that funny, I can't remember how he got to school.

*Brenda Velasco:* That was a long time ago.

*Midge Custode:* I either drove him or he had a bus.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Midge Custode:* But he only went there one year.

*Brenda Velasco:* Then he also switched to St. Cecelia's?

*Midge Custode:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, and what were the houses of worship here?

*Midge Custode:* Well, there was the Jewish synagogue somewhere up in the area. There was a church where St. John Vianney pre-school is. That used to be a church. It was non-denominational.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so you did have that one. That's on Lake Avenue right now.

*Midge Custode:* Yes, that's on Lake Avenue right now and then we had St. John's; no we didn't have St. John's we had St. Cecilia's, at that time.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so St. John's was like a mission church eventually or.....

*Midge Custode:* No, no, no, St. John's was established as a parish but we did not have a church until like two years. We had the parish but we had our masses, believe it or not, in every public school. We went to the public schools here. We went to School #20 over there, we went to the junior high school up here, it was the junior high at that time; we used the public schools for mass until we got the church.

*Brenda Velasco:* And the church is celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in June, so the church was built in 1959.

*Midge Custode:* Yes, in '59 we started but we didn't have the church, actually, until, what was it, two years later maybe.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so maybe 1961 or so.

*Midge Custode:* We also had our religious education classes in all the public schools on Saturday morning.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Midge Custode:* That's another thing that's hard to believe. I don't know if they'd be able to do that today.

*Brenda Velasco:* I don't know either.

*Midge Custode:* Of course those teachers who come for special ed, you know, not special ed but.....

*Brenda Velasco:* Supplementary services.

*Midge Custode:* Supplementary, they have to come out of the building; they can't go in the building.

*Brenda Velasco:* Right, they have to use the trailers when they go to the parochial schools or a private school today.

*Midge Custode:* But in those days we did have our religious classes in public schools.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Midge Custode:* Once a week, once a week, every Saturday.

*Brenda Velasco:* And then the masses were held in the public schools. How about the stores? Because when you moved here.....

*Midge Custode:* Nothing, we had to go to Rahway.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, Rahway.

*Midge Custode:* I can't remember the name of the store but I remember Mayor Zirpolo, do you remember Zirpolo?

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes.

*Midge Custode:* He owned that store, I think.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, that was a butcher store?

*Midge Custode:* No, it was a supermarket.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh, a supermarket.

*Midge Custode:* A small supermarket, not like big today. Then there was another one on Oak Tree Road in Iselin. We went to one over there. I still pass it, the building is still there, but it's a different business all together.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Midge Custode:* That's where we had to go to the store.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so either Iselin or Rahway because this was such a rural....

*Midge Custode:* Yes, that was it; there was nothing.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, was Inman Avenue paved?

*Midge Custode:* Yes, Inman Avenue was paved, I do remember that. I remember the bus that used to come out here, it only went up as far as the cemetery; it only went to the cemetery. My father-in-law used to come down on a bus and walk from the cemetery over to our house because he'd just like to go out and work around, chop down and dig trees, you know, whatever he did. He'd plant a few things. He liked that.

*Brenda Velasco:* Because you had a big piece of property.

*Midge Custode:* Yes, it was a big piece of property, it was 200 X 200. But he enjoyed that. He was from the soil back in Italy. That's what he'd like to do so that's what he did on a Sunday.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay and we're talking about St. Gertrude's Cemetery where the bus would stop?

*Midge Custode:* Yes, St. Gertrude's Cemetery.

*Brenda Velasco:* And the bus came from Elizabeth; was it the 62?

*Midge Custode:* It was the 62.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, and we still have that bus but it comes much further on Inman.

*Midge Custode:* Oh, yes, now it goes all the way down.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so no malls then?

*Midge Custode:* Oh, no, no malls.

*Brenda Velasco:* No strip malls and no Vaccaro's Bakery.

*Midge Custode:* No, none of that. The only one we had was the drug store. I can still remember he was on the other side of Inman Avenue then.

*Brenda Velasco:* By the post office.

*Midge Custode:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* That was Jerry Rosa.

*Midge Custode:* That's right Jerry Rosa and for the post office we had to go to Rahway.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay and that's why our zip code in Colonia is based on Rahway.

*Midge Custode:* Right.

*Brenda Velasco:* We're 07067.

*Midge Custode:* Right and then we didn't have mail delivery to the door. We had to go over to Amherst. No, no, we didn't go that far over; we just went across the creek. What is that street?

*Brenda Velasco:* Jordan?

*Midge Custode:* No, no, no Jordan.

*Brenda Velasco:* Beekman?

*Midge Custode:* No, this is down on this side. It's not far from here.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, we're on Beekman right now at the library.

*Midge Custode:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* The next one would be Amherst, alphabetically.

*Midge Custode:* Wait, wait, I'm trying to think. We walked over Inwood, maybe at the end of Inwood, and we had to pick up our mail there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Midge Custode:* And sometimes there would be a flood so we would have to come up Inman Avenue and go down to Amherst to get our mail.

*Brenda Velasco:* That was quite a distance to pick up your mail.

*Midge Custode:* It was.

*Brenda Velasco:* Moving from Elizabeth you had.....

*Midge Custode:* Oh, yes, we had everything.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, yes and this area was notorious for flooding.

*Midge Custode:* Yes, it was, they had a lot of flooding there.

*Brenda Velasco:* With the Pumpkin Patch Creek.

*Midge Custode:* Then for a very short time, I don't know why it was, but for a very short time we had to take our mail, we had to go over to Wood Avenue, right on this side, you know, the Woodbridge side, to pick up our mail. That was only for a short period of time. Then we got it, you know, right to the door.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, after you were here for awhile.

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

*Brenda Velasco:* Well, we just mentioned that we didn't have a post office you had to go to Rahway. How about the library, where did you go for?

*Midge Custode:* There was that little library that we had.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, Chain O Hills and New Dover Road.

*Midge Custode:* Chain O Hills but then there was the main library. It was on, I guess, Rahway Avenue, coming from Rahway. We had to go over there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Well, it's the Barron Arts Center now.

*Midge Custode:* No, it wasn't the Barron Arts Center.

*Brenda Velasco:* Cameo?

*Midge Custode:* It might have been the Cameo.

*Brenda Velasco:* On Rahway Avenue.

*Midge Custode:* I just remember it was way over on Rahway Avenue. Where ever it was I don't remember that.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so you saw this library being built.

*Midge Custode:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* The Henry Inman Library.

*Midge Custode:* Right, yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, how about parks?

*Midge Custode:* Parks?

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes.

*Midge Custode:* Oh, we had Roosevelt Park. It was great. We had a lot of picnics in Roosevelt Park. In those days, we had very, very cold winters and we used to go ice skating on the lake.

*Brenda Velasco:* Wow!

*Midge Custode:* I can't remember the last time, because we just haven't had these cold winters that the lake could freeze. But when we first came here, for quite a few years, we used to go all the time over to ice skate.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay and you'd take the car?

*Midge Custode:* Yes, yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, how about Henry Inman Park, was that here?

*Midge Custode:* No that wasn't that's the one that just.....

*Brenda Velasco:* That's the one on the other side of the creek from the library.

*Midge Custode:* The other side of the creek.

*Brenda Velasco:* By Getty.

*Midge Custode:* By Getty, oh that wasn't there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so you really didn't have.....

*Midge Custode:* That's pretty new, I think.

*Brenda Velasco:* Probably, yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Now how about Merrill Park? Did you have Merrill Park?

*Midge Custode:* Yes, we did have Merrill Park. That was a nice place too. We used to have a lot of picnics and things in those days.

*Brenda Velasco:* Did they have the petting zoo there at the time?

*Midge Custode:* Yes, I think they did.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, because they have big picnic groves as well. Alright, how about the firehouse?

*Midge Custode:* Yes, there was a firehouse. I'm pretty sure it was the same firehouse. Yes, because we only lived there a short while and across the road from us there was a man that owned that property and he had a little shed over there and he used to keep kerosene, whatever he kept in there. But it went on fire one night and the fireman came and they had to use our water because there was no other water.

*Brenda Velasco:* There were no fire hydrants.

*Midge Custode:* No, we had no water out here. Everybody had to have a well, but nobody else was around so we were the closest ones and they used our water. I was so worried that it would go too much and we wouldn't have any water left, but it wasn't that big of a fire.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so how many years had you been living here when that fire happened?

*Midge Custode:* I would say less than a year.

*Brenda Velasco:* Wow!

*Midge Custode:* It was very short; it wasn't long after we were here.

*Brenda Velasco:* What a contrast from Elizabeth because this was a volunteer fire department and you came from Elizabeth with a paid fire department.

*Midge Custode:* That's right, yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Naturally fire hydrants.

*Midge Custode:* Yes, different

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

Well, like I said, we used to have a lot of picnics. My son was in the Little League; we did have the Little League.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Midge Custode:* Mostly we were involved with children's things, you know, for the Boy Scouts, the Girl Scouts, Cub Scouts, we did all that, and there would be a lot of get-togethers for things like that. We used to go roller skating.

*Brenda Velasco:* Where did you go roller skating?

*Midge Custode:* South Amboy.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Midge Custode:* There was a place. I guess it's still there. In fact, we went there even when we were much older until we didn't drive around at night much. Yes, we went to South Amboy roller skating and ice skating and I guess mostly with these groups with the children. We'd be involved with all the activities that they had. That was it.

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

Well I guess it would have to be, probably the church because there were so many things going on up there. We were on so many committees and things.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, and what church are you talking about?

*Midge Custode:* St. John Vianney.

*Brenda Velasco:* St. John Vianney, so you were one of the original members?

*Midge Custode:* Yes. Yes, that was the main thing, I think, that we were involved in.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, and what were some of the activities that St. John Vianney had?

*Midge Custode:* We had a lot of parties.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh well, parties are good.

*Midge Custode:* You know there was an Italian Night, the Knights of Columbus used to have that Irish Night, they used to have a Polka Night for the Polish and, of course, every year we had the St. Patrick's Day dance. The kids, there were a lot of activities for the kids. Baseball, and I remember my son was involved with wrestling for a while when they were just kids.

*Brenda Velasco:* Wow! Was this out of St. John Vianney?

*Midge Custode:* Yes. Joe Fennelly, do you remember Joe Fennelly?

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes.

*Midge Custode:* Well he had a lot to do with that, what did I just say?

*Brenda Velasco:* Wrestling.

*Midge Custode:* Wrestling, yes. Mostly it was activities for children except for, you know, like we had a Christian family moving in the church and we were active in that but other than that the church activities we were in were activities that involved our children. We were with them all the time.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, were you a member of the Altar Rosary Society?

*Midge Custode:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Midge Custode:* I was even a president at one time.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright.

*Midge Custode:* And I was a secretary. Yes, I was very active in the Rosary Society.

*Brenda Velasco:* And I know your husband, Joe, is very involved with the St. Vincent DePaul Society.

*Midge Custode:* Yes, he's the president. He's thinking of retiring though. Don't say that; I already said it.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes you did.

*Midge Custode:* Well, he's considering it.

*Brenda Velasco:* And that is a society that aids the poor; paying their rent.....

*Midge Custode:* Whenever people are being evicted they help them out. Somebody died and had to go home to Columbia and she wanted to have her children go so they paid for that. Whoever is in need, in real need, it's all for the poor. They really don't give out for anything else, just whatever is for the poor.

*Brenda Velasco:* Right, okay, now when you go back to the founding of St. John Vianney how many families were involved at this time?

*Midge Custode:* Well, by the time we built the church, I would think it would be pretty close to, I don't know maybe two thousand even. By the time we got the church built because all these developments had come up in the meantime and that's where all these people were coming from and they were all going to St. John Vianney.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, like Oak Ridge?

*Midge Custode:* Maybe it was more but I couldn't be sure.

*Brenda Velasco:* Lynn Crest.

*Midge Custode:* Yes, Lynn Crest and what was the other one?

*Brenda Velasco:* There's Canterbury down off of Cleveland Avenue.

*Midge Custode:* Yes that's another one and, wait, Shore Crest is over there and this is Oak Ridge Heights.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh, right, right, right, right.

*Midge Custode:* They were all built up so I would say at least close to two thousand. I don't know for sure though.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay and it's greatly expanded.

*Midge Custode:* Oh, now it's over four thousand.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, four thousand families. Did your children attend the parochial school at St. John Vianney then?

*Midge Custode:* No, no they didn't. They were in St. Cecelia's.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay so they finished up at St. Cecelia's.

*Midge Custode:* Yes, because St. John Vianney started with third grade and my children were already over that. They only took, you know, the first three grades and each year they built up.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, anything else you want to mention about the focal point of your community at the time?

*Midge Custode:* Well, I don't know, I guess that was about it.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, this was the church and the family activities.

*Midge Custode:* Yes, and like you said there weren't that many people at first and it was quiet here. I never got involved with politics or any of these clubs. We didn't have many clubs. I think the Democrat, I think, I shouldn't say it because I don't know but there was a.....

*Brenda Velasco:* Civic Improvement Club.

*Midge Custode:* The Civic Club was here, yes, the Civic Club was here.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright.

*Midge Custode:* I remember the airport we had up on Lake Avenue. Was it Lake Avenue?

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, you're right.

*Midge Custode:* And there was a turkey farm on Oak Tree Road.

*Brenda Velasco:* Wow!

*Midge Custode:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Where was this? How far on Oak Tree Road?



*Midge Custode:* Well down to like, what is that? I guess it was Wood Avenue and it was down by Oak Tree Road. That's where it was. I think it was along Wood Avenue and close to Oak Tree Road. There was a turkey farm and of course we had this slaughter house where Mr. Grasseck worked.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay and where was this slaughter house then, roughly?

*Midge Custode:* That was on Oak Tree Road also but beyond Wood Avenue. I'm not exactly sure but it was in that area. I know he got gored by a bull once.

*Brenda Velasco:* He got.....

*Midge Custode:* Yes, he got gored. I guess his leg; something happened to his leg.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh! Oh!

*Midge Custode:* He's dead and gone now; so is his wife. He was good to me. I remember many times, you know, we didn't have paved roads and I used to take my little one over to, when she was going to kindergarten, St. Cecelia's. I used to walk her over to the bus stop at Wood Avenue and the reason I always had to walk her, it only was a short distance but, there's a man there, Mr. Richey, no not Richey, whatever his name was, but he had geese and they would walk behind you and they would be.....

*Brenda Velasco:* Nipping you.

*Midge Custode:* Well, they never nipped but so close and I was so afraid and I used to walk her to make sure that she was okay, but sometimes we'd have rain and I would take the car and I would get stuck in the mud and Mr. Grasseck used to come over and I'd go to him and he'd take me on, he had a tractor, a big tractor, I would be hanging on the back of the tractor and he would take me over to pull out my car. It only happened about three times but it happened. I still remember him; he was good to us like that.

*Brenda Velasco:* How many acres did he own again?

*Midge Custode:* It was thirteen acres I believe; I believe it was thirteen acres. It could have been a little bit more but I think it was thirteen.

*Brenda Velasco:* And then he sold it?

*Midge Custode:* He sold it. That's when Lynn Oaks came in. All that, Lynn Oaks, was all his property. It was all like a big open field and then it was all woods: a lot of trees. Our kids used to go across from us behind those houses now there's a creek, you know the creek that runs behind there, that used to freeze over in the winter. We had such cold winters then and our kids used to go ice skating there, like in the wintertime, just across the street because it was a small creek and, you know, you could go over there. Nobody was there.

*Brenda Velasco:* That was a great place to raise the kids.

*Midge Custode:* Oh, we loved it. We thought it was great.

*Brenda Velasco:* They had the woods.

*Midge Custode:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Geese; ice skating not too far.

*Midge Custode:* Yes, it was a good place for kids. We were happy because we lived on Bayway Avenue and we lived close to.....

*Brenda Velasco:* In Elizabeth.

*Midge Custode:* We lived close to the Goethals Bridge.

*Brenda Velasco:* Right.

*Midge Custode:* And you had all these big heavy trucks going all the time. You could never let your kids out of your site; you couldn't leave them out. You know, we had a little yard but. We knew we had to move; we couldn't stay there with children.

*Brenda Velasco:* What an experience for them growing up in that town.

*Midge Custode:* Oh, they had a wonderful time. My little Ralph was the one that he used to love animals and plants and all that kind of stuff and he used to make little museums. Like he'd find little animals or, I don't mean little animals, like a snake maybe. We used to have snakes when we first came out here. Other things we used to have was, you know, what is that fern?

*Brenda Velasco:* An air fern or ferns that grow in the woods?

*Midge Custode:* I forgot the name of it, but you know you put a lot of it, like when you have a flower arrangement, you put all these ferns; I don't know what you call that. I forgot what it is.

*Brenda Velasco:* I don't know the name.

*Midge Custode:* We used to have a lot of that in our yard. It used to be all over.

*Brenda Velasco:* With the shade.

*Midge Custode:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* You had it because of the shade from the trees.

*Midge Custode:* But then we also had, like, blueberries, no, I guess they were blackberries. I don't know if they were blackberries, but our kids used to go out, and then after the other kids came in too, they'd go out and pick those blackberries. So we had an awful lot of nature. It was really great.

*Brenda Velasco:* No more; no more.

*Midge Custode:* No, but things change.

#### **8. What did you like about living in your section of Woodbridge (Colonia)?**

We loved it when we came here. You know, people used to say, oh so boring, it's so quiet. I mean, oh, we loved it. We were very free. You'd be lucky if you saw two or three cars go by in the street. There was nothing here, no traffic, very little. We just loved it here. And also, we forgot, we did have Rahway Theatre. We used to go to the Rahway Theatre. We'd have movies in the Rahway Theatre.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Midge Custode:* And they used to have the organ.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes.

*Midge Custode:* They used to have that organ. That was another thing we did. But we really did love it here. We were so happy. We never regretted moving here. We really loved it. And then we started having neighbors and they had children. That was one good thing that more children came, you know, we got to be friends with the parents. It was kind of nice.

*Brenda Velasco:* And they became your friends.

*Midge Custode:* Yes. Today we hardly know our neighbors because everybody is working. Nobody gets to meet anybody. Well, if you go to the clubs or what, you meet. All the mothers were home and in the summertime we always had children around and we were good friends but, you know, then all of a sudden people went to work and nobody sees anybody. I have neighbors on the corner I've never seen them yet. I still feel bad about that but I can't help it.

*Brenda Velasco:* But you also worked for a while.

*Midge Custode:* I did work. I worked in St. John's for 23 years, I think I worked in St. John's library. I enjoyed that. That was the perfect job for me, I was like the boss. Nobody else knew anything about what to do.

*Brenda Velasco:* That was 23 years. I remember you when you were there.

*Midge Custode:* Yes.

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

Well, the construction, we used to see right across from us when they were putting up Lynn Oaks. We saw all of that going up and my kids used to go out with Kool Aid and the men used to come over and for a nickel they would buy Kool Aid because they used to work in the hot summer. Because that fire that we saw; the first fire that we saw. But, except for that construction, I really don't remember any.....

*Brenda Velasco:* It was mostly housing developments and this was all part of the.....

*Midge Custode:* Yes, that was it. There was a lot of building going on.

*Brenda Velasco:* A lot of building.

*Midge Custode:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* And then eventually you got a paved street.

*Midge Custode:* We did get a paved street and, you know, during the summer before they were paved, they used to come down the street with the trucks and they would be pouring oil out of the trucks to keep the dust down. That was a pretty interesting thing when we saw that. I was just thinking today.....

*Brenda Velasco:* They used to do it on the baseball fields also for the children to play Little League.

*Midge Custode:* Who knew?

*Brenda Velasco:* Right, and then they used to spray for mosquitoes.

*Midge Custode:* Yes, they did. They sprayed for mosquitoes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Because this was swampy at one time too. It was low lying especially with the flooding we had with the Pumpkin Patch Creek.

*Midge Custode:* You know it was funny, when we first moved here we had a lot of blue jays, a lot of blue jays, and, do you know, I don't think I've seen a blue jay in about three years. We don't have them anymore.

*Brenda Velasco:* Are you feeding the birds?

*Midge Custode:* No, you know why, I don't feed, oh we do feed the birds like when there is snow on the ground.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, yes.

*Midge Custode:* But my next door neighbor has, all over the place, she has birdhouses. She feeds them all the time.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh, wow!

*Midge Custode:* Oh, she's into birds; she loves birds. I was on her step one time and this woodpecker, I was talking to her, and she was standing by the railing of the thing, this woodpecker came over and it went right next to her hand. I said, I never saw a bird do this.

*Brenda Velasco:* That's unusual.

*Midge Custode:* She said this bird comes all the time. I feed this bird. This bird comes; this woodpecker.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so we don't have the cows and the geese anymore.

*Midge Custode:* No, no.

*Brenda Velasco:* But we got the birds.

*Midge Custode:* We got the woodpeckers.

*Brenda Velasco:* The woodpeckers.

*Midge Custode:* Yes, right.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, alright, were there any other accidents besides that fire that you mentioned?

*Midge Custode:* I do remember that a house blew up but I think that was much later, much later. I think you might have even known about it: a gas explosion. It was in Rahway but it was right on Inman Avenue but I think even you might have known.

*Brenda Velasco:* That's a while.

*Midge Custode:* It was long ago, but I don't think it was like from the early days. I don't really know of any. No I just can't think of anything.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay and you saw this library go up too?

*Midge Custode:* Yes, yes we saw the library go up.

*Brenda Velasco:* You saw Colonia built

*Midge Custode:* Oh, yes. It started from nothing.

*Brenda Velasco:* With the strip malls on Inman Avenue.

*Midge Custode:* Now the malls are all over the place; we've got a lot of malls.

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

Well, I think everything is here really. I like it all, you know, like when we had the senior citizens up here, Evergreen, and we have all the health programs that they do. I think, really, that you have everything that you need. We have the Community Center and that's what I like; I like all this. I like the Colonia Pride Day and the whole thing. There's so much community activity, you know, in this place and we've always had pretty good mayors. They've always been sort of with the people; I think they are.

*Brenda Velasco:* They're reflecting what the people want.

*Midge Custode:* Yes, and they seem to respond. Years ago, I'm not so sure. I don't remember too much about anything but I know today we have so many things. We didn't have all these things then.

*Brenda Velasco:* No.

*Midge Custode:* But we have everything now. The health programs that we have and the fact that the mayors always come and make themselves here and present and the seniors, there are all kinds of programs for seniors.

*Brenda Velasco:* We have the Senior Olympics even.

*Midge Custode:* I know.

*Brenda Velasco:* And now your husband was also involved with art.

*Midge Custode:* Oh he's an artist, yes, yes. That was his job. He was a graphic artist and he paints for himself you know.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, I've seen some of his work displayed at the Barron Arts Center.

*Midge Custode:* He did a series of popes and I think he's so proud of them because he's got them hanging up in the living room. He starts with the popes that we knew. We go back to Pope Pius XI, all the way up to Pope Benedict. He's got them all on the wall.

*Brenda Velasco:* Wow!

*Midge Custode:* And everybody that comes in here he has to show them. I think he's so proud of it.

*Brenda Velasco:* That's a talent.

*Midge Custode:* It is a talent; it is a talent. I kept saying, you should show these and he says, no, no, no.

*Brenda Velasco:* He's a very modest person.

*Midge Custode:* Very modest, very modest.

*Brenda Velasco:* He always has been since I've known him.

*Midge Custode:* He's a good artist.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Midge Custode:* The only thing we don't like is the taxes, but of course, you can't do anything about that.

*Brenda Velasco:* No, and I think that's true of everybody in New Jersey, right now with the property tax.

*Midge Custode:* Yes, it's true.

*Brenda Velasco:* What were the taxes, you said, when you first moved?

*Midge Custode:* Well, when we first came out here they were like \$100.00 or \$200.00; something like that, a very low, very low amount.

*Brenda Velasco:* This was much cheaper than Elizabeth.

*Midge Custode:* But we had nothing.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, you had dirt roads and well water.

*Midge Custode:* I'd much rather pay the taxes and have paved roads and all.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Midge Custode:* And there's a lot of things for children; so many activities. I like this Colonia paper, what is it? Colonia.....

*Brenda Velasco:* Corner, by Debbie Meehan.

*Midge Custode:* She covers everybody. You got all the schools that are represented. I really think it's a great place. I don't know what else we would need. Everything's convenient.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes.

*Midge Custode:* Your doctors, your, well I don't need a lawyer, but lawyers, everything.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh, we've got a lot of lawyers in case you need them.

*Midge Custode:* I know there are a lot of lawyers. Oh, we had a lawyer for the house; for the property.

*Brenda Velasco:* Right, because you just divided your property.

*Midge Custode:* Yes, we did.

*Brenda Velasco:* You sold it and your husband's niece moved in the next door.

*Midge Custode:* Yes, she did and we are glad that she did because we have nobody. Betty's down in South Carolina so.

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

Well, yes, all our nieces and nephews. There's a bunch of them but they're the only ones.

*Brenda Velasco:* Because your daughter Betty.....

*Midge Custode:* Yes, she's in Carolina now.

*Midge Custode:* It's going to be hard for her to help us out if we needed it.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, yes and Ralph, there's a monument to him?

*Midge Custode:* Yes, there's a monument up at the VFW. He was the only person from Colonia who, you know, died in the service.

*Brenda Velasco:* During the Vietnam War. Okay and we also have a tree dedicated to him at Henry Inman Park as well as for John.

*Midge Custode:* For John.

*Brenda Velasco:* For John as well.

*Midge Custode:* I really don't know why. Why John.

*Brenda Velasco:* Because John was involved in the community with St. John's as well.

*Midge Custode:* Oh, he was involved that way, yes. I didn't know anything about that; I was surprised.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, well that was Charlie Shaughnessy.

*Midge Custode:* Yes, Shaughnessy. He's doing it, you know, for Ralph too, you know.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, alright, so your family had played a significant role in the development of Colonia. You're one of our pioneers that were willing to move here.

*Midge Custode:* Well, I guess we're pioneers, yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, without running water; you were relying on that well water and septic tanks.

*Midge Custode:* Well, of course, you know my mother and the family never heard of Colonia. They thought we were going out into the boondocks, you know. They just thought it was just horrible. But we took a chance. I'd never heard of Colonia. I didn't know what it was all about and he never thought he would ever sell the property, you know. He just figured it was as a reinvestment. He never planned to move out of here.

*Brenda Velasco:* He listened to his father.

*Midge Custode:* We started looking for houses like in Elizabeth and Rahway; that's where we started to look.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes.

*Midge Custode:* The houses that we thought we'd like we couldn't afford. The houses that we could afford were worse than what you would want.

*Brenda Velasco:* You weren't happy, yes.

*Midge Custode:* And then he said, well what do you think about and I said, I don't know. I thought you'd have to have a lot of money, more to build a house than, but no. We did alright, we did alright.

*Brenda Velasco:* Do you recall how much it cost to build your house?

*Midge Custode:* I would say approximately, maybe, \$14, 000.00 to build our house.

*Brenda Velasco:* And this goes back to 1954.

*Midge Custode:* That's right.

*Brenda Velasco:* Probably 1953 you started building it back then.

*Midge Custode:* Yes, well, it didn't take a year; it took so many months, but it didn't take a year. But, you know, we've been happy here. We have no idea of ever moving away unless I became so decrepit and we had to forcefully.

*Brenda Velasco:* You're in good condition right now.

*Midge Custode:* Yes, right now.

*Brenda Velasco:* You go all over and walk and that's another reason for this location, it's so good.

*Midge Custode:* Oh, it's so good.

*Brenda Velasco:* You can walk to the store.

*Midge Custode:* That's right.

*Brenda Velasco:* Or drive to the stores, whichever, and you've got the library right here and the church right here.

*Midge Custode:* Yes, my daughter lives in Carolina and every time there's a house for sale in her area she used to call us up. She doesn't do it anymore; she learned. But she used to call us up and say, oh mom, there's this house. And I'd say, we're not going to go down there. I could not live down there. I mean the bugs in the summertime and the heat and humidity. But here, I

would never even think of, I couldn't live out of New Jersey. I doubt if I could live out of New Jersey.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, but you were brave to move from Elizabeth to Colonia.

*Midge Custode:* Yes, well I moved with my husband and it was the last thought of him. He said, maybe we should think about this, and maybe we can use the property. Actually, we did work it out alright.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, you sure did. Well, I thank you very much for your time.

*Midge Custode:* You're more than welcome.

*Brenda Velasco:* I enjoyed the interview talking to somebody who's been here for so long and seeing Colonia.

*Midge Custode:* There were probably a lot more things that happened but I can't always remember everything. After 54 years, you know.

*Brenda Velasco:* You did a good job, you did a good job. But thank you again.

*Midge Custode:* You're more than welcome. I'm very happy to do it.

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After the formal interview, Midge recalled a group to which she belonged in the 1960s: Brotherhood in Action. This group of women held meetings at each other's homes to promote understanding between the different faiths and races in Colonia at that time. It consisted of Jews, Catholics, Protestants, blacks and whites. Some members included Betty Fay, Mary Rossi, Mary Idell, Paula Morgan, Midge Custode, Mrs. Rothman, Mrs. Peck. Father Daly gave a speech at a civil rights rally in Woodbridge. In fact, Midge had a scrapbook of some articles describing the group and the issues that they advocated. She later donated the articles and met with Glenn Morgan, Paula Morgan's son, at my house and reminisced about some of the people and issues of the early 1960s.

Midge also related the story of Sister Julia, principal of St. John Vianney School, who prayed to St. Anthony for a building to house the Preschool. Eventually, St. John Vianney purchased the nondenominational church and that became the St. John Vianney Preschool. According to Midge Custode, Sister Julia found in the attic of that building a statue of St. Anthony.