

Oral History Interview
Raymond Walter Zirpolo
WH111

(Written transcript and digital audio)

On Friday, November 14, 2012 Raymond Walter Zirpolo was interviewed by Brenda Velasco at 12:30 P.M. at the Main Library.

Brenda Velasco: Many of you know Ray from **The Club** but he also grew up in the Colonia section of Woodbridge Township. We're going to hear about him growing up in Colonia during the '50s and what it was like.

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

Raymond Zirpolo: My name is Raymond Walter Zirpolo. I grew up in the Colonia section of Woodbridge close to the bridge over Route 27. My date of birth is March 4, 1945. I have lived in Woodbridge ever since.

Brenda Velasco: Never left. Okay, so you grew up when World War II was just concluding or it was going to be ending in a few short months. You didn't experience World War II so we're going to hear about Colonia and this was New Dover Road where you grew up. (Babbling Brook was the name of his home located at 335 New Dover Road)

Raymond Zirpolo: Yes.

2. How long have you lived in Woodbridge?

Raymond Zirpolo: I lived in Woodbridge Township all my life. I lived in Colonia until probably 1970 and then I got married and lived in Colonia for another ten to fifteen years. Then I moved to Woodbridge Proper in about 1998. I now live on Green Street about five houses from the train station and I love it.

Brenda Velasco: And it's even easier to walk to the train station. That's quite an asset.

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

Brenda Velasco: Did your family originally come from Woodbridge?

Raymond Zirpolo: No, my family was from Rahway. I lived there until I was five years old. My father had big ideas and big eyes. He bought a home in Colonia that we couldn't afford and my mother said she didn't want to move there but he said he already bought it. We moved in and somehow it all worked. I just loved growing up in Woodbridge, Colonia in particular.

Brenda Velasco: So your mother was unwilling to come to Colonia from Rahway? So they moved here in 1950 then?

Raymond Zirpolo: 1950, yes.

Brenda Velasco: What was the address that they.....do you remember your old address?

Raymond Zirpolo: 335 New Dover Road. It was called *Babbling Brook*. (Built in 1925)

Brenda Velasco: Which is a beautiful, beautiful home. Okay, and your father wanted to get out of Rahway and.....

Raymond Zirpolo: Well, my father just had big ideas and he saw this beautiful house which we probably couldn't afford. In fact I understand six months before they bought a separate house in Rahway that they never moved in to which made it even crazier. But somehow it all worked, somehow he put it all together, and my mother did end up loving Colonia. She was just worried about the house being too much. It was a beautiful place.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, it is. How many rooms did you have there, do you remember?

Raymond Zirpolo: You know I don't know because it's a large house but it has large rooms. It really only has three bedrooms maybe four but it has large rooms. It was very comfortable and had a very open feeling.

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

Brenda Velasco: Since you grew up in Colonia and you moved here when you were five years old what physical changes occurred over the area that you lived in?

Raymond Zirpolo: Well the area we lived in.....well remember there used to be a train station in Colonia and there used to be a post office there and there was a little candy store. There was a lady called Nellie Grady, the old witch we called her, and we would go there to buy candy and stuff. She had a little pad and she'd write the numbers down, five cents and ten cents. Then when your mother or father came there once a week or so whenever to get the mail, they would go inside and pay your bill which was probably all of a dollar fifty or two dollars or something.

Brenda Velasco: So you had credit.

Raymond Zirpolo: Oh, yes.

Brenda Velasco: She kept a little ledger and you had credit. How far was this from the train station and the post office?

Raymond Zirpolo: The actual train station was right up against the tracks, it's now gone. And I think there were two or three stops every morning and every evening for people going to New York. The post office was like fifty feet away sharing this building with the little candy shop so to speak. I think it was there until probably the early '70s. It was fun for us kids because we would actually sit on the edge of the tracks and put pennies on the tracks and watch the trains come by and swish over them and flatten them and then take them home with us. That was sort of something to do at the time.

Brenda Velasco: So this was right off of New Dover Road then.

Raymond Zirpolo: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Was there an overpass over the tracks when you were growing up already?

Raymond Zirpolo: Yes, the same bridge that's there has been refurbished. Many of the kids, on our side of the tracks so to speak, still went to School 2 and 16 (Outlook Avenue). A good portion of Colonia right in that area was already built up. The building tended to happen more towards Chain O Hills Road and Iselin, that section and then the further sections more towards Inman Avenue and Wood Avenue where the building was. But most of the houses along there were fairly old.

Brenda Velasco: This was the estate area and is also where Dr. Albee with your library.....

Raymond Zirpolo: Are you talking about the Dr. Albee that stands at the top of the hill or the one in Colonia where the hospital was?

Brenda Velasco: Well that could be right because there was a hospital which wasn't too far from you.....

Raymond Zirpolo: That was up by the Parkway.

Brenda Velasco: That was up by the Parkway but that was long gone by the time you moved there.

Raymond Zirpolo: Yes, that was.

Brenda Velasco: There was only foundation because that was only in existence for about two years. (June 1918-October 1919)

Raymond Zirpolo: But there actually was the Albee home at the top of the hill and I think we were like ten or twelve years old and the place by then was empty, I won't say abandoned but empty. And we actually somehow figured out how to get in there one day. There were four or five of us and we just went around the house. We shouldn't have been there, obviously, there was no furniture or anything there. I remember going up into the attic and opening some of the windows and kind of climbing on the roofs, what a great view you had. Then one fellow there, Walter Drinkith, I don't know why I remembered this, but he took the little motor off a moving picture camera which was probably an old thing that didn't work anyway probably about as big as your fist. Wouldn't you know it though, a couple of weeks later, the police showed up at all our houses? And we had to go down to the police station which my mother beat me for pretty good. It was kind of funny because we went down there and I guess everybody was really scared being like 10, 11 or 12 years old. But actually somebody else had broken in there after us, older kids, with beer cans and I guess they had done some writing on the walls or something. But it scared us pretty good.

Brenda Velasco: That was a wakeup call.

Raymond Zirpolo: I don't think we woke up, but it was a wakeup call.

Brenda Velasco: Where exactly was the Albee house?

Raymond Zirpolo: If you took New Dover instead of bearing left at what was the library you went straight up the hill. I'm assuming if you made the right turn everything on the left there are probably three or four houses there now or maybe five or six houses. It was a beautiful old place with stained glass windows. Most of the people in that area went to School 2 and 16 which is now some kind of offices for the Board of Ed. It was kindergarten through 6th grade. For some reason I remember my kindergarten teacher's name was Mrs. Nichols. I have no idea why I remember that and I remember the principal was a woman by the name of Mrs. Hoblasol. I think the family had a Chevrolet dealership down in Rahway. In 6th grade, we had two 6th grades. The two teachers were Mr. Mullen and Fred Buonocore who went on to become the superintendent of Woodbridge Schools. He was one heck of a baseball player. He could really hit that ball pretty hard. I also remember that Mr. Mullen had this crazy looking little Kaiser something car. But it was a nice school. It was kind of a bit of community because we had fairs to raise money.

Brenda Velasco: Where did you have the fairs?

Raymond Zirpolo: Right there on the playground behind the school. I remember my mother ran one once; and one year we raised like three or four thousand dollars. Back then that was a lot of money.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Raymond Zirpolo: But when you went to the end of Outlook Avenue or Fairview, there was just woods there so there was no park there where Merrill Park is today. As kids, we had a great time playing there with all kinds of dumb things that kids do. Then they had the creek that ran down eventually to **Home Depot**. I remember as kids building rafts and then they made poles; Chuck Dorean-he was a good raft builder I remember that. It was a good time.

Brenda Velasco: You had a regular playground there; I mean with just the woods and everything.

Raymond Zirpolo: Oh, yeah it was really a fun time. Quite a few of the friends stuck together for a number of years. In fact, there are four or five of us that still see each other on a somewhat regular basis-some living in Colonia more like by the **Country Club** there. My best friend lives at the end of Outlook, John lived up more by the Parkway, but we all went to School 16 and it was just a nice little school and a nice little community.

Brenda Velasco: It was nice and small and it was like self contained. The only store you had was that candy store there. So where did your mother go shopping? Because living in that part of Colonia, you couldn't walk to like a **Foodtown** or **Wegmans** or anything?

Raymond Zirpolo: I don't remember when it was built but on Route 27 where the **Ford** dealer is now and where the health club is now.....

Brenda Velasco: **New York Sports Club.**

Raymond Zirpolo: That was actually a **Food Fair**; I think that was the name and then at the other end where the clothes store (**Joann's Fabrics**) was a **W.T. Grant**. In between were a bunch of little stores and I remember my mother shopping there for a while. Eventually when the big **Foodtown** opened where **Home Depot** is now, it kind of ruined business for the **Foodtown (Food Fair)** and there was no **Ford** dealer there. I think that's where all the folks from the area shopped at.

Brenda Velasco: I didn't even realize there was that shopping complex there. It was right in between New Dover Road and the **Country Club** right in there.

Raymond Zirpolo: Yes, right in there.

Brenda Velasco: So that made it handy. That was an ideal location for kids growing up.

Raymond Zirpolo: Yes, and it was also an ideal location for drag racing on Route 27 because you could start at the **Food Fair** and you could see all the way up to the bridge if there were any police up there so it was a great place to grow up.

Brenda Velasco: I assume your mom didn't know of all your exploits.

Raymond Zirpolo: She knew of one. Well, she knew of one I didn't tell you about but she knew of one.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, you don't have to tell me everything.

Raymond Zirpolo: Oh, okay.

Brenda Velasco: That was a good location. I hadn't realized all those stores were there. Okay, we got the schools what about houses of worship?

Raymond Zirpolo: I think we went to the church on Avenel Street, the Presbyterian Church I think it was. I remember we went there. I remember some of my friends used to go to the White Church and then some of my friends used to go to the church up on New Dover Road right across from Wood Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, and that was the Methodist on New Dover Avenue and that was in Edison then. As far as services from the town, where was the library?

Raymond Zirpolo: Well, there was a little library right down where New Dover crosses the stream and there was not a main library then. Back in the early '60s somebody had a building I think it was the restaurant over on Rahway Avenue and it was converted to the library.

Brenda Velasco: The **Cameo**

Raymond Zirpolo: Even before the **Cameo** it was a library.

Brenda Velasco: Joe Urso.

Raymond Zirpolo: Yeah, so that was a library there for a number of years and then a great fellow came into town to be the library director and eventually built a nice great big library by Woodbridge High School. (Mr. Edwin Beckerman)

Brenda Velasco: And by the Health Center there and was that the Beckermans?

Raymond Zirpolo: Yes Lee (Ed) Beckerman, a wonderful man, a great guy. Every once in a while I see him. (Lee Beckerman is the director of TV-35, son of Ed Beckerman)

Brenda Velasco: Now did that occur during your father's administration?

Raymond Zirpolo: Yes, he hired him. (Mr. Beckerman became the first director of the Woodbridge Public Library system and united all the community libraries into our system)

Brenda Velasco: What I failed to mention, sorry, I mentioned **The Club**. I forgot to mention your father was the mayor and it was during the 1960s (1962-1967) and created "the all American city" (1963). But he was responsible for that whole library system.

Raymond Zirpolo: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: You mentioned that Merrill Park wasn't there.

Raymond Zirpolo: Correct. It was one of the greatest places to play though. There were a lot of woods; places to do boy things like play war or do whatever we did.

Brenda Velasco: And boys have a creative imagination when it's unorganized. They do far better with that. Alright we've gone through Question #4 basically.

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

Brenda Velasco: We mentioned the post office was right by the train station and that would be ideal for the trains just dropping off the mail there going back to that era. The library was on the corner of Chain O Hills and New Dover. There were no parks because you had forests or woods all over the place.

Raymond Zirpolo: I guess so I mean we had enough there to do. I see your next question is what did you do for recreation?

Brenda Velasco: No, wait a minute, I want to go back to Question #5. Where did you go to middle school then or junior high school?

Raymond Zirpolo: When I got to 7th Grade I went to Rutgers's Prep in New Brunswick.

Brenda Velasco: Now how did you get there?

Raymond Zirpolo: Well you either took the train and when you go off at the train station the school was right at the top of the hill or you took the 134 Bus.

Brenda Velasco: Where did you catch the 134 Bus?

Raymond Zirpolo: Right down at Route 27 by the train station. It was a short walk.

Brenda Velasco: It was ideal. You graduated from Rutgers's Prep then?

Raymond Zirpolo: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, what year?

Raymond Zirpolo: 1963.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, so let's get down to Question #6.

6. What did you do for recreation?

Raymond Zirpolo: I don't remember football as a little kid. I remember baseball and I remember Little League. In fact I remember there was a kid that I think played with us, Mickey Lanza, who went on to become quite well known for Woodbridge Little League. I think they even named a park after him.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, or a field right in Merrill Park.

Raymond Zirpolo: I guess we made a lot of our own fun. I guess we did our things on the side. We had bicycles and we traveled a lot. Sometimes in the summer my friend who lived at the end of Alwat Avenue I could go to his house and I wouldn't be home for a week or more.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Raymond Zirpolo: My mother knew where I was. He had an outdoor pool so I liked that. My house had an indoor pool but outdoor pools were more fun.

Brenda Velasco: Of course, during the summer.

Raymond Zirpolo: But we did a lot of riding on our bicycles. I mean we would ride to Perth Amboy and we even rode to Plainfield one day. I think a couple of us somehow thought there was a tank somewhere all the way on the other side of Route 22 and I remember I was going up New Dover Road to Park Avenue over (Route) 22 just to see this dumb tank thing. But we were like thirteen at the time so I guess it was okay. But yeah, you used your bicycles a lot then and they weren't special bikes, they were just regular bikes. Of course when I was a kid growing up I had a bike, I liked cowboy stuff, and I had a Hopalong Cassidy bike. It even had two holsters on it and one time I left it down by the golf course and it got stolen. Of course, my mother said it serves you right now you don't have a bicycle. But I guess we made a lot of our own fun then like even Boy Scouts. We had a Boy Scout troop and in fact we went to a place called Camp Corra on the Delaware. I tried to search it out and it's not there anymore. It's probably just all trees. People came from I guess all around Middlesex County. We were not sort of a cr me d la cr me in the Boy Scouts so to speak but one year we decided to show them. And they gave us this decrepit old camp that didn't even have lean-tos, it had platforms and it had tents, and we actually decided to show them up and we cleaned this place up and made it great. We won it for the best camp so we showed them that even though we weren't the best example of Boy Scouts, we could do it.

Brenda Velasco: What troop did you belong to?
Raymond Zirpolo: Oh, I haven't the slightest idea.
Brenda Velasco: Where did you meet? Do you remember where you met?
Raymond Zirpolo: You know I don't remember.
Brenda Velasco: Was it with the school or with the church?
Raymond Zirpolo: I'm sorry I just have no recollection at all.
Brenda Velasco: But you had a good time.
Raymond Zirpolo: I had a wonderful time. We went to I remember a Jamboree once by Old Bridge on this big lake. I don't even know if it's there anymore. It was a really great experience for us. Boy Scouts was just fun. I don't remember necessarily whether any of us had any badges but we enjoyed it.
Brenda Velasco: You had a good time.
Raymond Zirpolo: We had a good time; we had a really good time.
Brenda Velasco: That was a good experience especially growing up you had all the comforts and eventually you had television, too, because television was coming into its own by the '50s, correct?
Raymond Zirpolo: I think so. Yeah, we probably had a TV by then.
Brenda Velasco: Forget computers because we're pre-computer.
Raymond Zirpolo: Well we could also take a ride to Rahway. Rahway had a fancy movie theater then with upstairs balcony. Then Iselin had a theater on the corner of Correja and there was even a theatre, not too long, in Woodbridge. I'm not sure if it's where the **Quick Chek** is or where **J.J. Bitting** is.
Brenda Velasco: I think by the **Quick Chek** that's where the theatre was.
Raymond Zirpolo: Then you had one in Perth Amboy so they had a lot of theaters back then. In fact as you got older, you could go upstairs to the balcony and sort of hide in the back and smoke if nobody was watching you. There were a lot of different choices. Like I say we rode our bikes a lot all over the place.
Brenda Velasco: Good exercise.
Raymond Zirpolo: Yes.
Brenda Velasco: And you didn't have clubs back then for physical fitness.
Raymond Zirpolo: We didn't need them back then.
Brenda Velasco: No. Okay, anything else you want to add for recreation there?
Raymond Zirpolo: Nothing that I can think of. It's just that I think we entertained ourselves is what we did. We decided to get it together and do things. A funny part of it is as I think about it; it was probably really all boys. I don't remember even remembering girls until probably like fourteen or fifteen. Then you start getting into the driving age and then things changed a little.
Brenda Velasco: And hormones kicked in and everything else.
Raymond Zirpolo: I was thinking more about cars.

7. What was the focal point of your community?

Brenda Velasco: Did you have a focal point?
Raymond Zirpolo: Not that I remember. I mean in the summertime you played Little League. In the wintertime, I'm not sure what we played or made our own games. I can't say I recall a focal point per say.
Brenda Velasco: It was just the neighborhood.

Raymond Zirpolo: It was spread out pretty good. I mean when you consider that Wilbur (Hlaviland) was at one end of the spectrum over by the Colonia Country Club far past there and then we were at the other side and people were in between up by the Parkway. We were pretty spread out and yet we all knew each other and hung together and grew up together; some people more successful than others. A couple of people died of drug overdoses in the '60s and '70s unfortunately.

Brenda Velasco: That was also the era.

Raymond Zirpolo: I guess.

Brenda Velasco: Yeah, '60s and '70s.

Raymond Zirpolo: I never tried anything so I don't know.

Brenda Velasco: But that was the era. I was teaching by that time. That was the crazy era.

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

Brenda Velasco: What did you like about living in your section of Colonia and now you live in Woodbridge?

Raymond Zirpolo: I will say one of the reasons I moved to Woodbridge is because Colonia was just too quiet. Woodbridge just has more movement. You know living near the train station you have people walking by at six in the morning and ten at night to and from the train station. You have two schools, the Middle School and the elementary school, compared to Colonia which was a little bit too quiet. You know when you're growing up you're just a kid so you don't always think about your community because it's sort of there and you accept it for what it is. You don't really get to see a lot of other communities. All of our friends, the parents though they came from different economic strata; all, I guess you would say by today's standards, were somewhat liberal. Nobody thought about race or color or creed though Colonia was a fairly white community at the time. But we were just a bunch of kids from a bunch of different families who had a good time.

Brenda Velasco: You had a good childhood.

Raymond Zirpolo: Yes, I had a great childhood. I really had a great childhood with great parents, hardworking parents. My father used to say, "he and my mother were in the iron steel business; she ironed and he stole".

Brenda Velasco: He had a good sense of humor but he also made Woodbridge the all American city.

Raymond Zirpolo: Yes, he sure did.

Brenda Velasco: That's quite a status to have. That was about 1966 or something like that. (1963)

Raymond Zirpolo: Right, at the time of the New York World's Fair (1964/1965). In fact, Woodbridge cleared a lot of property which I think is owned by Colonial Pipeline now; and they set up simple roads so people could come there and plant tents. I guess they didn't have RVs back then so people could go to the World's Fair.

Brenda Velasco: This was in '64, I think, the World's Fair.

Raymond Zirpolo: I think so.

Brenda Velasco: It was in Brooklyn or Queens, somewhere there. (Flushing Meadows, Corona Park in Queens)

Raymond Zirpolo: Yes, I went there a lot in fact. I went to school in Iowa and people from as far away as Iowa and Wisconsin came and worked at the World's Fair. It was an exciting time.

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

Brenda Velasco: We just mentioned the World's Fair, people coming all over, anything else? Construction?

Raymond Zirpolo: Well it was in, I guess, the mid-'60s when Woodbridge Center had its germination. At the time it was the clay pits, they called it, and everybody thought it was a dump. My father, at the time, traveled to two or three cities trying to convince developers that it was a great place for a mall. In fact.....who was **A&S** and **Stern's**?

Brenda Velasco: **Abraham & Strauss.**

Raymond Zirpolo: What was the company?

Brenda Velasco: That was the company that came out of Brooklyn, one of the retail stores. You also had **Stern's** there.

Raymond Zirpolo: Anyway, he actually got them interested and those retailers actually went out and found the **Rouse Company**; and **Rouse** was actually the one who built the mall and then the anchors had their own stores. That was an exciting time when that opened up, I think in, 1970 (1971). I think I was overseas at the time. But that was a great thing for Woodbridge and I think until this day it's a good thing. It's easy to get in and out of. It probably has three or four thousand jobs for young people in this town and it's a great place.

Brenda Velasco: And if you look at the license plates, I was just with people from Staten Island this morning; Woodbridge Center is about twenty minutes from Staten Island.

Raymond Zirpolo: I know.

Brenda Velasco: So not only do they come here to buy our gas which is much cheaper than New York, but they come for the clothes and everything else.

Raymond Zirpolo: No sales tax.

Brenda Velasco: Right, you know city sales taxes you have them in Staten Island and they're twenty minutes away so it's been a great shopping *mecca*. And the property it owns makes it one the largest shopping areas in New Jersey. Not that it's all built up yet, because it hasn't been.

Raymond Zirpolo: It's a great mall, it really is. It's a nice layout and I think the biggest thing is the trust of the people and how easy it is to get in and out of. Except for the two weeks around Christmas, it's amazing how it doesn't impact on the local community. So often you hear about complaints that I can't get by the mall. That's not the case in Woodbridge at all. But I think it's really for jobs. There are literally four thousand plus jobs in there for relatively high school educated and not necessarily skilled in any particular field but a good place to start in the retail field.

Brenda Velasco: Now you mentioned it was the clay pits, did you ever go to the clay pits when you were growing up?

Raymond Zirpolo: No, I knew people who did. Sometimes young people when they would find somebody's car that wasn't their own and they would want to hide it they would park it in there is what I heard but I never experienced it.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Raymond Zirpolo: And there was the milk farm at the top of the hill that people don't know about.

Brenda Velasco: Do you remember the name of it?

Raymond Zirpolo: **Maple Hill** was it. I think it was **Maple Hill Farm**. When I was a kid there actually was a dairy there.....in fact there was a dairy in Metro Park when I was a kid at the top of the hill and then it just became a stable. I'm sure that whole area of Metro Park was just fields.

Brenda Velasco: It was fields with cattle.

Raymond Zirpolo: The Cooper family owned a lot of it.

Brenda Velasco: That's right, that was Cooper, and then they sold it and it's become.....

Raymond Zirpolo: I don't think they sold it. Mr. Cooper said to his wife, unless it changed, do not sell only lease. So a good portion of those buildings like Alfieri, unless they changed their mind, hold ninety-nine year leases.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, they're on leases.

Raymond Zirpolo: Unless they decided to change their mind.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, because I remember going to Menlo Park Mall and seeing cattle and I couldn't get over the juxtaposition. Here you've got all these major roads and this must have been in the early '60s, there were cattle there. This is before Metro Park.

Raymond Zirpolo: In fact **Crystal Arms** is also part of Cooper. They sold to a developer there. Actually at the top of the hill where **Eastern Airlines** used to be was called free school land and somebody had left that to some kind of trust to the Board of Education. When my father came into office there was this old codger who was running the trust and he wanted to keep it that way because he earned fees off of it each year. But my father, of course, had a sale of it and the money went to the Board of Ed. **Eastern Airlines** came in, then all the other office buildings.

Brenda Velasco: And its right by Metro Park and it's also by the Parkway exit right there.

Raymond Zirpolo: Then again there's a place that really has very little impacting on the local population to traffic.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, especially since they built the parking decks. It's not only service, it's also parking decks; where as you in Woodbridge on Green Street you have more parking now for those who do the New Jersey Transit. In fact it spills over to local streets.

Raymond Zirpolo: A little; some.

Brenda Velasco: Some okay. But Metro Park, with that service parking lot and then the parking decks, that's alleviated that issue of parking.

Raymond Zirpolo: Sure, it helped a lot.

Brenda Velasco: So that was a wild vision then. Now was your dad responsible for Metro Park?

Raymond Zirpolo: No, he was responsible for taking the free school lands and selling them so the Board of Ed got the money and then development took place. I want to show you how great it is. I think it was **MacDonald's**, the Mayor (John McCormac) said **MacDonald's**, I think MacDonald's, has leased fifty thousand square feet of space in one of the buildings and will do training of people who are going to work for **MacDonald's** from Connecticut, New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

Brenda Velasco: It's a regional center right there.

Raymond Zirpolo: It's a great center, yes.

Brenda Velasco: And once again the access. The road network whether it was the Parkway or Route 27 or your railroad was right there.

Raymond Zirpolo: I understand that **Quik Check** on Gill Lane is probably one of the most successful **Quik Checks** because so many people are coming off the train that they're going in and out of there to grab.....

Brenda Velasco: Coffee.

Raymond Zirpolo: Yeah, and even that kid's school. When I first saw that kid's school down there, the **Rainbow Academy**, I said what a terrible place to build an academy. Surely is a great place because parents can drop their kids off there and then get on the train and go to work.

Brenda Velasco: It's right on the way to the train.

Raymond Zirpolo: Yeah, it's great.

Brenda Velasco: And then when you get off the train you can shoot right over there. You don't have to make detours. No, that was a good location that he had. Okay, anything else: sports or accidents?

Raymond Zirpolo: None that I can think of. I know that years ago when they had that terrible train accident in Woodbridge my uncle (Dr. Gene Zirpolo) was a doctor in Rahway. I guess when the word got out about that terrible train accident, he couldn't even get there because of the traffic jams of people who wanted to gawk and come see it but that's about all I know of it (1951). You know Woodbridge is another great place for people who want to travel to New York. The only down side of getting on the train in Woodbridge is you don't get a seat because it's filled up by the time it leaves South Amboy so you stand.

Brenda Velasco: But some get off in Newark. By the time they get off in Newark then you can get the seat. Now with the double-decker trains, see you take it from Woodbridge – Coast Line or if you take it from Metro Park maybe you can get a seat. You have the double-deckers now so that's alleviating something but its great having at least two train stops.

Raymond Zirpolo: Well living right down the street, it's amazing how many people you see just walking up and down the street. When I go out to get the newspaper at six in the morning pretty regularly I see the same three, four or five people walking by.

Brenda Velasco: And they don't need a car.

Raymond Zirpolo: And they don't need a car.

Brenda Velasco: So it balances out. Before we leave Question 9 were you there when the Parkway was being built? Do you recall that or were you too young?

Raymond Zirpolo: I think the Parkway was pretty well along. Of course remember now the stretch of the Parkway from the Raritan River up to Union is not the Parkway.

Brenda Velasco: What's it called?

Raymond Zirpolo: It was actually built.....I think it was called by the New Jersey Highway Authority. They started building it and then one day like I say they decided to have the Parkway so if you notice there are no tolls from South Amboy up to Union and I guess the New Jersey Highway Department pays the Parkway Authority to maintain it. I don't think anybody knows that that happened.

Brenda Velasco: No that's a stretch with no tolls, that's how I know it. You hop on in Union after the Union toll plaza and if you can get off just before the Raritan toll plaza you don't pay anything.

Raymond Zirpolo: And remember the gas stations on north and south in Colonia you used to be able to get off there. You'd get off there and go to, I guess, what is Iselin on one side and Colonia on the other. That was opened for years. I think they only closed it up ten or twenty years ago and probably because the local people complained about it. I can remember as a kid we had a house in Avon and we would drive down (Route) 34, I remember that. I remember because my father, my sister was like starting when she was fifteen, he would slide over against the door and she would slide up against him and he would go to sleep. My fifteen year old sister would drive the car but not with my mother in the car.

Brenda Velasco: No, your mother was the one who.....

Raymond Zirpolo: Yeah, I guess the Parkway was being built along there.

Brenda Velasco: Yeah, it was being extended because I remember Route 34 with the lights and everything. The Parkway just opened up the shore area.

Raymond Zirpolo: Amazing isn't it?

Brenda Velasco: And to the point where the people live there permanently now. And unfortunately if you're by the water a lot of them got hit badly this time around with Sandy.

Raymond Zirpolo: I remember at Avon at the time when.....I think five people lived in Avon all winter long because it was a summer community. And then over the years so many people started moving there that they actually had to buy up houses and tear them down to build a school. And another funny thing I remember about Avon was they didn't have storm sewers in Avon so there was a high crown in the road and the curbs on the side of the road were like eighteen inches high because there's this big huge like opened gutter. And when it rained and the water went in there as kids you would just sort of float in the gutters. You never went into the river though because there were always bars that stopped you from entering. But it was a fun thing when you were a young kid then. They probably think it is terrible today.

Brenda Velasco: You managed to have fun wherever you landed.

Raymond Zirpolo: Oh, yeah.

Brenda Velasco: That's why you have **The Club**.

10. What do you like about Woodbridge today?

Brenda Velasco: Okay, you still haven't moved out of Woodbridge. You're here and you have a daughter that's here, too.

Raymond Zirpolo: Two daughters, but one daughter lives in Tinton Falls.

Brenda Velasco: What do you like about Woodbridge today?

Raymond Zirpolo: Well, I think Woodbridge is a wonderful community. I think it's a good microcosm and a macrocosm. It's quite a blending of population. I think, for example, our Indian community is good for Woodbridge. Just don't drive through that road on the weekends.

Brenda Velasco: Oak Tree Road, right.

Raymond Zirpolo: But I can remember twenty years ago when Oak Tree Road was falling apart and buildings were falling down and nobody was renting stores and the theater was empty. It has become a very vibrant community but Woodbridge is a nice interesting mixture. I think most of the sections of Woodbridge, which over the years, probably deteriorated a little bit have come back. I think it's really hard to find a house that's deteriorating or falling apart in Woodbridge. Of course Woodbridge Township has some great programs for helping people paint their houses and do things like that.

Brenda Velasco: Yeah, and one of them is *Tooling Around the Township* which you guys have been involved with from the inception of that program I think around 2001.

Raymond Zirpolo: Yup, every year.

Brenda Velasco: You've always been a strong supporter.

Raymond Zirpolo: Well, Woodbridge is a good community. I think our schools are good. I'm sure that some are better than others. I think our roads are very well maintained. In fact I used to kind of joke that if I closed my eyes I could tell when I got to Edison, Perth Amboy or Rahway because the roads became bumpy. I think especially now with this mayor and this program the roads are really excellent. And Woodbridge, I think it's a great place to live. It's a great place to come to and travel to from other places. Like when I say to people if you drive through New Jersey, you had to go through Woodbridge whether you knew it or not.

Brenda Velasco: *Crossroads of New Jersey*. Look at how many roads we have.

Raymond Zirpolo: And we don't have traffic jams in Woodbridge either.

Brenda Velasco: No, or else at least know how to facilitate.

Raymond Zirpolo: The only thing I do miss is the drive-in where the **ShopRite** is now. The drive-in was a fun thing as a kid and even when my kids were growing up, I remember going there with a little dumpy station wagon we had. We would pull in backwards, open the back up and my wife and I would sit there with our German Sheppard and watch the movie. I probably miss that from Woodbridge.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, I don't know of any drive-in in the area anymore.

Raymond Zirpolo: No, the one up on Oak Tree Road was a **ShopRite** and the one in East Brunswick are now condos. I think you have to go to Ohio to find a drive-in.

Brenda Velasco: Well, we do have for the summer the drive-in and for Halloween have the drive-in at the Community Center.

Raymond Zirpolo: That was great; that was really great.

Brenda Velasco: *Ghostbusters* so we're trying to do it that way but you're right. You could bring the kids in their pajamas when you had a family and they'd go to sleep and didn't care.

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

Raymond Zirpolo: My brother still lives in Colonia in the house we grew up in. My sister passed away a couple of years ago. She was living down the shore. Both of my parents passed away. My mother died five years ago and my father about twenty-five years ago. My one daughter still lives here and one daughter lives in Tinton Falls. We live in Woodbridge and I really love it. I was very lucky that the house came for sale and just rode by it one day. I said oh it looks great and luckily made a deal. Actually my house backs up to what was the Woodbridge High School a long time ago and now it's the Woodbridge Middle School. It is where the Council and mayor are sworn in every New Year's Day.

Brenda Velasco: And you can walk there.

Raymond Zirpolo: Yup, I sure can just walk out my backyard.

Brenda Velasco: Because the traffic for parking is horrible at the Middle School right now.

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

Raymond Zirpolo: I don't think so. I enjoyed growing up in Woodbridge. I did go away for four years to college and I did go away for four years in the military but I came back.

Brenda Velasco: You sure did. Do you remember your years of military service?

Raymond Zirpolo: September, 1967 to September, 1971. Of course in between there I did go to college in Iowa for four years. We had a wonderful four years in Iowa and it was a great experience.

Brenda Velasco: But you came back here.

Raymond Zirpolo: Oh, yeah. No one ever questioned us coming back here.

Brenda Velasco: Woodbridge drew you back. Now growing up in Colonia did you ever feel that because your father was a mayor that you had special problems because you were the son of a mayor?

Raymond Zirpolo: I don't think so, not that I remember. I know it didn't matter to any of my friends. You know I had a house with an indoor pool but that didn't matter to them either. No, I don't think. You kind of got the feeling that somebody wanted to be your friend because maybe who your parents were you kind of figured that out pretty quick.

Brenda Velasco: And you know what? You kept in touch with all your friends and they kept in touch with you.

Raymond Zirpolo: Yup.

Brenda Velasco: Is there anything else that you can think of growing up? Was there a swimming pool, a hole, down by the Albee estate at all?

Raymond Zirpolo: Well, we would go swimming down there by the library. I mean it was a creek (Sucker Creek) and you know boys being boys like Huck Finn. It wasn't very deep so if you sat in it, it probably came up to your waist. I do remember things like having frogs which you don't seem to see around here anymore, frogs and pollywogs and dumb things like that. Sometimes we got into trouble but it was never anything significant.

Brenda Velasco: You were boys; you were mischievous and full of energy.

Raymond Zirpolo: It's just interesting how Woodbridge and Colonia and Iselin the places have aged and I think they have aged very well. It was a great place to grow up and grow old.

Brenda Velasco: There are a lot of things for us. Okay, if you can't think of anything else we're going to conclude and I thank you. I thank your daughter, Erin, for being on top and pushing us along.

Raymond Zirpolo: You're welcome.

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After the formal interview concluded, Ray was asked why he located **The Club** at 585 Main Street. Ray mentioned that his family had owned much of the land in this area. Previously, a **Hanover Trails Steakhouse** had been located there. **Mack Cali** also was involved in this property. **The Club** not only would meet the need for a fitness club but also provide indoor tennis courts which were not available in this area. Ray Zirpolo went to meet Ernest Hansen of **Perth Amboy Savings** who agreed to the loan.