

Oral History Interview

Rich Anzivino

WH052

(written transcript and digital audio)

On June 22, 2009, Rich Anzivino was interviewed at the Main Library by Brenda Velasco at 12:30 P.M.

Brenda Velasco: Rich is from Woodbridge Proper and also Physical Features is his beauty shop on Main Street.

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

Rich Anzivino: My name is Richard David Anzivino. I was born on September 13, 1934.

2. How long have you lived in Woodbridge?

Rich Anzivino: I grew up in Woodbridge and I have been here for seventy-four years. I still maintain an address on Main Street.

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

Rich Anzivino: The way our family got to move here was a migratory thing. They came to the U.S. through Ellis Island in 1888 and migrated to Port Reading which is where they settled on Second Street. My grandmother had fourteen children, two of which are recipients, not the Purple Heart, but they're on the honor roll for having been in World War I: the honor roll that's at Town Hall.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, so your family has been in Woodbridge for a couple of generations. Your grandparents?

Rich Anzivino: Yes, grandparents.

Brenda Velasco: Mother?

Rich Anzivino: Parents but none of my children live here.

Brenda Velasco: So at least three generations of Anzivos have lived here?

Rich Anzivino: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: When you said they immigrated, they immigrated from what part of Italy?

Rich Anzivino: Foggia. It's an artsy community right across the Aegean Sea from Albania.

Brenda Velasco: So it's from Italy that they traveled.

Rich Anzivino: Kind of, yes.

Brenda Velasco: Well they settled in Port Reading which was a large Italian community at the time.

Rich Anzivino: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: You and your parents moved to Woodbridge Proper.

Rich Anzivino: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Where did your dad come from?

Rich Anzivino: Well he grew up in Port Reading.

Brenda Velasco: And your mom grew up in Port Reading, too?

Rich Anzivino: My mom actually was an orphan and they met at a social function. She grew up in New York in an orphanage and they met and got married and made me.

Brenda Velasco: And your brother.

Rich Anzivino: And my three brothers.

Brenda Velasco: So it was through your paternal line that you had relatives in Port Reading?

Rich Anzivino: Right.

4. What physical changes have occurred over the years in the area you lived?

-houses, streets, services, stores, houses of worship, schools, etc.

Brenda Velasco: Because your shop, right now, is on Main Street.

Rich Anzivino: My shop used to be an appliance store.

Brenda Velasco: Okay. And that's 66 Main Street, where you live.

Rich Anzivino: I bought it from Ellen and Adam Sabott in 1974 and gutted the building and made a beauty salon out of it and I have a tenant upstairs.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, and what were some of the other changes?

Rich Anzivino: Oh, Main Street went through drastic changes, all of the stores have changed. I don't think anything is there that used to be there when I grew up: **Choper's Department Store**, **Christensen's** is gone and **Harry's Fruit Stand** is gone. Oh, the church, the First Presbyterian Church that's still there.

Brenda Velasco: United Methodist.

Rich Anzivino: I'm sorry, you're right, I was thinking of a different church.

Brenda Velasco: That's one of the few remaining.

Rich Anzivino: Yes, United Methodist. My building that I'm in is in some of the old photos that you have of Main Street. The first part of my building is over one hundred years old. When I had it gutted, the architect, as we tore it apart, as the building goes back towards James Street, I own the whole lot from Main Street through to James Street, and there were two additions going on and he could show me the different construction during those periods; this period and this addition was put on during the next period. You know, just from how the construction was done.

Brenda Velasco: So that's a part of archeology, looking at the construction of buildings and you can tell the different time. Now, your dad or your grandfather had a gas station?

Rich Anzivino: My father had the **Richfield Gas Station** on the corner of Pearl and Main. By the way, my grandfather was a blacksmith. I think the fire alarm bell is still outside the Port Reading Firehouse and my grandfather forged it. It looks like a barrel stave but it's not a complete circle. They used to hit that with a hammer or something and that was the fire alarm. I think it's still out there. I should have driven by to see if it was still there.

Brenda Velasco: And if it is, would you take a picture of it?

Rich Anzivino: Okay.

Brenda Velasco: I would love to have that picture and we'll know that your grandfather forged it. Okay and your mom also had a beauty shop?

Rich Anzivino: Yes on Amboy Avenue and also in her home on Church Street.

Brenda Velasco: What was the name of her.....

Rich Anzivino: **Mona Andre** and I still have the phone number.

Brenda Velasco: For your business?

Rich Anzivino: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: You still have the phone number that she used?

Rich Anzivino: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay so that'll be interesting to appear.

Rich Anzivino: I bought her salon when she retired and then outgrew it and moved to Main Street. That was in 1971.

Brenda Velasco: And how about growing up on Church Street because you also grew up on Church Street.

Rich Anzivino: We were mischievous little devils. We had BB guns and we would do things that you were not supposed to do with them and my father would break them.

Brenda Velasco: Well, there were four boys.

Rich Anzivino: Yes. We maybe broke a window or two but we never poked anybody's eyes out.

Brenda Velasco: How about the housing? Did you have as many houses?

Rich Anzivino: Oh, yes. We grew up at 113 Church and that house is still there. In fact, the mason and I built the garage in the back about 1950. The mason and I built the two car garage in the back, way in the back.

Brenda Velasco: This is before you went into the Korean War then?

Rich Anzivino: Yes, I went in '52 into the Korean War.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, we'll get back to that in another question. What schools did you attend then?

Rich Anzivino: St. James and then No. 1 School.

Brenda Velasco: What grades at St James did you attend?

Rich Anzivino: Kindergarten and first, second I went over the No. 1 and then behind it, was that No. 5?

Brenda Velasco: School No. 11.

Rich Anzivino: 11, you're right, I'm getting old. Then to 11 and graduated from the eighth grade there and went to Woodbridge High on Barron Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: And what was your class at Woodbridge High?

Rich Anzivino: '53.

Brenda Velasco: 1953, alright.

Rich Anzivino: They hired me to do the entertainment at the class reunion we just had last year. I performed for five hours they kept me singing.

Brenda Velasco: Of course, good memories.

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

Brenda Velasco: What public buildings were in Woodbridge Proper as you were growing up? Where was the post office located?

Rich Anzivino: It was over on Pearl Street. That's the last place I remember it and then, of course, it moved to Main.

Brenda Velasco: Where on Pearl Street was it? Do you remember?

Rich Anzivino: It was in that empty lot of the pictures I showed you next to where the Japanese restaurant is now; that printer purple building is there now.

Brenda Velasco: So then it moved to Main Street.

Rich Anzivino: And it used to get flooded out all the time; that was a flood zone.

Brenda Velasco: Was that before they made the railroad trestle?

Rich Anzivino: No, well it was before and during. The flooding didn't stop until they built that aqueduct that goes all the way from North Park to Sewaren.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, how about the library?

Rich Anzivino: Barron Library, my favorite library. I used to go there all the time. I love that building.

Brenda Velasco: It's on the Historic Registry.

Rich Anzivino: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: It's a beautiful building.

Rich Anzivino: And I'm dying to do a concert there. I see all the concerts they have in there. My venue is just so perfect for that application but every time I go over there they say "don't call us we'll call you", and I'm singing all over the State of New Jersey. I mean like whole series at Ocean County libraries. I do a lot of performing for non-profit organizations: the American Red Cross, the American Cancer Society, and I did four fundraisers for Deborah Hospital. You know, these are all benefits, I don't charge for those. But I do a lot of benefits around the State and Woodbridge has no interest in using me. But, that's life.

Brenda Velasco: There's always time.

Rich Anzivino: No, I can live without it, I do plenty. But I talked to John Eberhardt, you know, over at Park/Recreation. I haven't tried talking to any of the people that run this place because I'm sure they would love the program.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, well that's another possibility.

Rich Anzivino: No, no. *Sinatra and Friends on Broadway Trivia Show* I do and I give away prizes.

Brenda Velasco: Well, this is something to look into then.

Rich Anzivino: Yes, my web you can go and check it out. It's on my website.

Brenda Velasco: Okay. Let's get to parks. What parks did you visit because you didn't live too far?

Rich Anzivino: I wasn't much of a socialite or a park user during my youth. We were so poor I shined shoes in bars at five years old on up. I made the money to buy my first pair of roller skates. No lie, we were that poor. Everything was around something to do to make money. I had a paper route-nine miles. What kid today would walk nine miles? I had a nine mile paper route for the *Perth Amboy Evening News*. We used to pick up our papers on Fulton Street seven days a week and a nine mile paper route. Snow, ice, no matter what, I was out there toting my papers around. But it was very, very busy. If I wasn't in school, I was out making money doing something. I always shoveled snow, I mean, every place.

Brenda Velasco: You had the incentive.

Rich Anzivino: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, what about the firehouse? Was that always located there?

Rich Anzivino: On School Street, no. I don't remember where it was. I remember the synagogue, the old synagogue across the street from where the firehouse is now and I remember one time I had walked from Church Street down to the gas station my father had and he got angry at my mother for letting me go that far. I couldn't have been more than five or six years old. My father walked me back home and as we walked up School Street, in the old synagogue the only way to get from the temple to the Shul which was in the basement was outside. You had to go on the outside like a fire escape and then go downstairs and across the brook. As these little kids were coming down with their yarmulkes on and everything, there were boys on the other side of the brook trying to throw rocks at us. I'm not lying, this is the truth. But they couldn't reach him, they were much too far. And I remember it so clearly, my father knelt down and said, Dick, see what those boys are doing over there. If I ever see you do something like that I will break both your legs. Do you understand? Do you hear me? I mean, I knew what he was

saying, you know, but like don't ever let me see you doing that. He was so unprejudicial. I mean we had black friends that came to the house. I mean, you know, he was good, he was very good that way.

Brenda Velasco: You were very fortunate to be raised in a household like that.

Rich Anzivino: Well, he was like that; I admired that about my father.

Brenda Velasco: He was good. Alright, and we mentioned the schools already and that's interesting about the synagogue because most people associate it with Amboy Avenue but originally it was on School Street.

Rich Anzivino: Yes, well actually not really. It was set way back off School Street. Further back than School No. 11 off of School Street; it was way back. It was part of that project that they own now where the synagogue, well it's not a synagogue anymore.

Brenda Velasco: No, it's the animal veterinarian.

Rich Anzivino: Rabbi Neuberger invited me to a Seder there once. I used to sing with Mark Grossman and Marty Friedman, he was on drums and Mark played the guitar. We used to rehearse in the synagogue downstairs. Then he invited me to a Seder.

Brenda Velasco: You had a very open childhood then.

Rich Anzivino: Yes.

6. What did you do for recreation?

Rich Anzivino: I was in the weightlifting club.

Brenda Velasco: And where was that?

Rich Anzivino: Bowling, I loved going bowling.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, where was the weightlifting club, was that a private club or in school?

Rich Anzivino: Yes, it was in Mark Grossman's garage.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Rich Anzivino: I have pictures of it there.

Brenda Velasco: And how old were you then?

Rich Anzivino: About fourteen or fifteen I started and up until I was seventeen.

Brenda Velasco: Okay and then where did you bowl?

Rich Anzivino: Either **Bowlmor** or **Majestic**.

Brenda Velasco: Right, there was a **Bowlmor**, other people have mentioned it too in the interviews.

Rich Anzivino: Oh, okay.

Brenda Velasco: Was that on Amboy Avenue?

Rich Anzivino: I did **Majestic** also but I'm just foggy on the years.

Brenda Velasco: That was when you were a teenager?

Rich Anzivino: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Rich Anzivino: Well, I had to make my own money to go bowl.

Brenda Velasco: In between your work.

Rich Anzivino: When I came out of the service I gave my parents my severance pay because they weren't doing that well, God's honest truth.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, you were a good son then. Did you have a bike?

Rich Anzivino: Bicycles, scooters, I used to make my own scooters from orange crates, a 2 X 4 and old roller skates that were no longer useful. I made scooters out of that. Then I got into motorized scooters. I even have pictures of the ones that I drove and rebuilt. Cushman, it was a

Cushman. Then I got into motorcycles when I was seventeen and I've had motorcycles all my life, probably over fifty. I've had almost every brand of motorcycle you can think of that I owned at one point.

Brenda Velasco: You had an Indian?

Rich Anzivino: Absolutely.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Rich Anzivino: Harley-Davidson, BMW, AJS, Triumph, Matchless, Vincent HRD, Black Shadow; that's the only one I wish I still had. In 1953, I bought that and it was doing 150 miles an hour on the autobahn in Germany and a Healey went by me and almost blew me off the road like I was standing still. I'll never forget that. It almost killed me.

Brenda Velasco: Well it didn't and you're here so good. Is there anything else that you can think of for recreation that you and your parents did in your family?

Rich Anzivino: We were water people. We loved the ocean and my mother would rent a house down the shore. In fact, she bought a house once in Shore Acres for four thousand bucks and sold it a year or two later because we didn't get down there enough.

Brenda Velasco: Did you visit your family in Port Reading? Your grandparents?

Rich Anzivino: Well when I was young and grandma was still alive. I was nine years old when she died but every Sunday we were in Port Reading. I mean, it was just a family ritual, every Sunday. We'd sit at a dinner table in the basement; we never went upstairs, for five or six hours just sitting at the table. And then when we got done eating the kids would have to leave and the grownups played cards.

Brenda Velasco: How did you sit everybody at that table because your grandmother had fourteen kids?

Rich Anzivino: It was a big table.

Brenda Velasco: I'm sure it was with that whole family.

Rich Anzivino: Like when they'd go into Chicago early on. That was after grandma died. Well, we were there and my aunt lived in Newark. She would be there sometimes and sometimes not. Oh, my aunt Lucy lived in Elizabeth. She'd be there sometimes and sometimes not. But my father and my uncle Joe were the younger kids in the family. It was a ritual every Sunday so, you know, in answer to your question, it wasn't everybody every Sunday.

Brenda Velasco: Alright.

Rich Anzivino: But it was every Sunday for me and my family.

Brenda Velasco: That was the ritual.

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

Rich Anzivino: My grandmother's house. I have to say that for the family because the word family isn't here in the questionnaire. But when you say, for my family, it was unquestionably grandma's house.

Brenda Velasco: Okay and how about in Woodbridge? What was the focal point, you know just, was it Main Street or?

Rich Anzivino: Yes, absolutely Main Street and then we'd catch the bus to Perth Amboy where they had five theatres. We only had the **State Theatre** in Woodbridge. Tom Speck was the manager. Mom used to give us twenty-six cents and we'd have money for candy and we'd go to the movie. I mean two features, comedies, news and the serials.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, okay.

Rich Anzivino: You'd have to come back next week and see what happened to the girl lying on the tracks with the train coming.

Brenda Velasco: Was she going to survive or not.

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

Rich Anzivino: It had a strong sense of, I don't want to say affluence, but living where we lived was fancy compared to where we came from at grandma's. No running water, an outhouse, no bathroom, and no plumbing. The wires were, we had electricity, and it was strictly for lights. There was nothing to plug in and you'd turn the switches on those big fat switches, clack; the actual wires were along the wall and they'd go in the switch and out the switch to the light. Click, click, you know, so when we bought the house on Church Street, I mean, oh God, it was a palace, you know. So we felt like we arrived. And I still walked to school all the way down to wherever I was going at the time: no buses. If it snowed it could snow up to your butt and you still had school and the teachers got there too.

Brenda Velasco: Quite different from today.

Rich Anzivino: Oh, is it ever and when the food fell on the floor if you liked it you just kissed it up to God and ate it. I'm never sick. Still to this day I will do that, I will do that. If I drop a carrot or something I was eating and I dropped it, I will eat it. I'll hang around people that are as sick as a dog because I believe firmly that exposure and the development and the enrichment of our immune system is what keeps us from getting sick-not being astringent.

Brenda Velasco: You're living proof of it.

Rich Anzivino: I have relatives that spray the phone when somebody uses the phone. They spray it with disinfection. You know they say, oh my God I don't want to catch what they've got and every other week they got some illness going on.

Brenda Velasco: And you're healthy. Alright, you had a sense of community?

Rich Anzivino: Yes, very much so.

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

Rich Anzivino: Well the train wreck, I forgot the year, but, you know, that's a matter of record.

Brenda Velasco: 1951.

Rich Anzivino: Oh, okay. That was a big one.

Brenda Velasco: Did you witness that?

Rich Anzivino: Not witness it, but I went by it. I didn't see the train actually because that was just the year before I went to the service.

Brenda Velasco: Well, let's look at World War II.

Rich Anzivino: The races, they used to have a racetrack up where Woodbridge High School is.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, okay, races.

Rich Anzivino: I remember the racetrack. Riots, did we have riots in Woodbridge?

Brenda Velasco: Not necessarily, I just threw things in for this question, Rich.

Rich Anzivino: Discrimination, okay discrimination was, again, looking in retrospect my father was so ahead of his time. I mean, we're talking, I was born in 1934 so by the time I was nine years old, '43 or '44, oh he was appalled any talk of, you know, "that old Jew" or that N word. You know they used that loosely back in those days and he would stand up against it the way, our level of politically incorrect use of those terms. And you know the kind of things that

people thought were humorous but are politically incorrect; he spearheaded that back in the early '40s. He wasn't an activist or anything like that but I remember his comments about.....

Brenda Velasco: It starts in the home though.

Rich Anzivino: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: It starts in the home and he did a good job of it then.

Rich Anzivino: My son-in-law is black and we like love him to death. My daughter said you see color?

Brenda Velasco: It's the person inside.

Rich Anzivino: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, how about World War II? Because you grew up in.....

Rich Anzivino: My brother was in World War II. There are pictures of him in the book during his basic training. He was in the Navy but the life during World War II was interesting with the rationing of butter, the rationing of meat and the rationing of gasoline. Most any of the luxury items were rationed.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, the staples were all rationed then.

Rich Anzivino: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: As well as luxury items.

Rich Anzivino: Yes, and we had a victory garden that my mother grew everything conceivable. In fact, we used to come home from school for lunch and she'd throw a salt shaker out the back window and we would rip things out of the garden and bring the garden hose over there, wash it off, put a little salt on it and eat the tomatoes and carrots, whatever. We used to even eat raw corn. It was sweet. Most people won't eat raw corn and it's delicious.

Brenda Velasco: It's sweet. If it's good corn it's sweet. Where was this on Church Street?

Rich Anzivino: Yes, this was on Church Street. We had a large backyard: 113 Church Street.

Brenda Velasco: Now your father had a gas station during World War II.

Rich Anzivino: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, that was the one on Main.

Rich Anzivino: Main and Pearl.

Brenda Velasco: What was his role because he owned that gas station?

Rich Anzivino: Well, dad was too young for World War I and too old for World War II so he slid right in the middle. He enlisted at the end of World War I and they threw him out because he was too young. I know he loved to fly and he bought a World War I Steersman PT17 Pursuit Trainer which I flew with him when I was nine years old. We went over and I pointed the *Empire State Building* with him. And if you don't know what pointing means I will explain it.

Brenda Velasco: You're going to have to explain it. But where was it also housed, the plane?

Rich Anzivino: At Westfield, oh excuse me, Hadley.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Rich Anzivino: Westfield first and then Hadley; Westfield Airport and then Hadley. If this microphone was the *Empire State Building* and you're flying your airplane how you point it, it's a practice maneuver, you flew up to it and then you have to drop your wing and keep your wing pointed right at the building and fly it perfectly around three hundred and sixty degrees and then fly it off.

Brenda Velasco: What an experience.

Rich Anzivino: And at nine years old I did that.

Brenda Velasco: Wow that was quite a treat!

Rich Anzivino: I soloed after four hours which is phenomenon!

Brenda Velasco: Yes it is. Now, your dad also had something to do with the mail at this time during World War II?

Rich Anzivino: Yes, he had a transfer contract with the U.S. Post Office to take classified mail from the post office, bring it to the train under armed guard, and that was that.

Brenda Velasco: Anything else that you can think of, anything else that happened in Woodbridge when you were growing up?

Rich Anzivino: Nothing off hand. But, in the event if I should think of it as I'm putting this stuff together, I'll be more than happy to jot it down.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, you just write it down.

Rich Anzivino: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: But you were also in the Korean War, too, you said.

Rich Anzivino: Yes, I served in '52 to '56.

Brenda Velasco: '52 to '56, okay, and you had graduated from high school by that time?

Rich Anzivino: No, I left high school in my junior year and enlisted. I finished high school after the service and I graduated from, what was called, A&E School; Aircraft and Engine School when I was an aircraft and engine mechanic. Because I did so well academically in that field, I was sent to Germany instead of Korea and they chose the top ten or twelve. I missed the calling by about six men; there were six guys after me that all went to Korea. They needed flight line mechanics. That meant you had to be able to work on any part of the aircraft and on any kind of aircraft. I was proficient at jet engines and reciprocating engines and aircraft repair so that qualified me to work on anything that flew into the airport. Most mechanics are only good at one thing, or maybe two; but I scored perfect scores on every end of it. It was fortunate that I wound up there.

Brenda Velasco: You sure were.

Rich Anzivino: It was better than Korea.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, you were fortunate, but that was your talent that you had. Okay, if there's nothing else for question nine then let's go to question ten.

10. What do you like about Woodbridge today?

Rich Anzivino: Versatility. I mean, in this area, just about anything you would want is, you know, within striking distance. I think it's a great central place to live and to locate. I mean, you have access to New York City or down to the shore. I could have lived in, and in fact when I was doing my TV shows, I toured the entire country. For a whole week I would stay in Atlanta, Georgia or Miami, Florida or Binghamton, New York, wherever I was sent by my employer. And I came back to little old Woodbridge, New Jersey and settled in and opened by business.

Brenda Velasco: As you said, it's a great location.

Rich Anzivino: Yes, I love the seasons. My son lives in Florida and he's begging me to move to Florida. I have no desire to and no desire to retire either.

Brenda Velasco: Well you still have a lot of energy, so don't. You've got a successful business as well.

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

Rich Anzivino: No, my son was the last one and he moved down to Florida. I have one son in Colorado, a daughter in North Carolina and a son in Hazlet.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, only one left in New Jersey. Do you have any cousins, aunts or uncles living in Woodbridge any longer because the Anzivino family was a big family?

Rich Anzivino: My Uncle Nick's son still lives in Port Reading. Oh, I'm sorry he moved to Carteret. His last name is Lane. He changed his last name because he was a magician and he took a stage name. He was an excellent magician.

Brenda Velasco: But he lives in Carteret, not Port Reading.

Rich Anzivino: Oh, so that let's that out.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, that let's that out.

Rich Anzivino: Okay, no.

Brenda Velasco: No, nobody is left out of this large huge family. There are no more Anzivino's.

Rich Anzivino: They all moved to different places.

Brenda Velasco: They all moved to different places.

Rich Anzivino: I'm the only one.

Brenda Velasco: You're it and it's your business. Okay, are there any other stories that you have that you want to mention that we didn't cover in this interview?

Rich Anzivino: Well, I would like to tell you why I appear to be so happy. I just came back from the best trip of my life.

Brenda Velasco: And where were you.

Rich Anzivino: I took my mother-in-law to the airport.

Brenda Velasco: We're going to conclude this. Thank you very much.