

Oral History Interview
Rose Pelzman Mirkovich
WH024

(written transcript and digital audio)

On February 1, 2010, Rose Pelzman Mirkovich was interviewed at her home on 221 Avenel Street, Avenel by Brenda Velasco.

Brenda Velasco: Rose is the sister of one of our former mayors, Frank Pelzman, and she also **makes** delicious *kipfels*, stuffed **pastries**. **They are** out of this world, better than any bakery.

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

Rose Mirkovich: My name is Rose Pelzman Mirkovich. I live in the Avenel section of Woodbridge Township and my date of birth is November 15, 1921.

Brenda Velasco: So you've lived through quite a few experiences here.

Rose Mirkovich: Oh, absolutely.

2. How long have you lived in Avenel?

Rose Mirkovich: Since 1940 but I visited many years before. Since I was two years old, I visited here.

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

Brenda Velasco: Why did you come out to Woodbridge, the Avenel section, if you were visiting? **Whom** did you visit?

Rose Mirkovich: An aunt in Avenel: my father's sister.

Brenda Velasco: Because you weren't born in the United States.

Rose Mirkovich: No, I was born in Vienna, Austria and I came here when I was two years old.

Brenda Velasco: So if you've lived here since 1940, you've lived here almost.....

Rose Mirkovich: Sixty-some years.

Brenda Velasco: Sixty years, yes, that's a long time. So you've seen a lot, a lot, of changes?

Rose Mirkovich: More than sixty. 1940 to 2000 is sixty and then ten years is seventy years.

Brenda Velasco: Seventy years. Oh, my gosh!

Rose Mirkovich: Yes, I was about eighteen or nineteen when we moved.

Brenda Velasco: Why did your father eventually move to Avenel with his family?

Rose Mirkovich: Because they built houses that they could afford. The **Carragher** Brothers started building the development here in Avenel.

Brenda Velasco: Do you remember what streets it encompassed?

Rose Mirkovich: Well it encompassed from the railroad up to the highway, Route #1.

Brenda Velasco: Where did your dad and you move from then?

Rose Mirkovich: Irvington.

Brenda Velasco: That's where Olympic Park was at one time.

Rose Mirkovich: Wonderful, wonderful growing up.

Brenda Velasco: But you were only two years old when you moved here though.

Rose Mirkovich: No, no, that's when I visited.

Brenda Velasco: Right.

Rose Mirkovich: I was eighteen or nineteen when we moved here. (1939/1940)

Brenda Velasco: Eighteen or nineteen.

Rose Mirkovich: I think eighteen going on nineteen and that's when we moved into the Carragher Development here. My mother and father's home was one of the first ones built.

Brenda Velasco: Do you remember the house number and the street.

Rose Mirkovich: Sure, 12 Livingston Avenue. Dottie lives there now.

Brenda Velasco: You haven't moved very far either.

Rose Mirkovich: No, absolutely not. I love the State with all its problems and I love the town. I won't move from here at all.

Brenda Velasco: And you're right across from the school so you always see little kids.

Rose Mirkovich: I always see kids. I'm right across from the church (St. Andrew's), now that I don't drive anymore. I have a lot of friends that take me places, I have Frank's family and it's a wonderful life.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so your father and mom moved here because they could afford the house.

Rose Mirkovich: Yes, they could afford the house.

Brenda Velasco: And where did your dad work then?

Rose Mirkovich: My father worked for **Krueger's Brewing Company** in Newark.

Brenda Velasco: So this was convenient taking the highway up there.

Rose Mirkovich: That's right.

Brenda Velasco: Do you recall how much their house was?

Rose Mirkovich: Thirty-four hundred dollars.

Brenda Velasco: Thirty-four hundred dollars that was a steal but not at that time.

Rose Mirkovich: Do you know what I paid for this one? Fifty-five.

Brenda Velasco: And when did you buy this house?

Rose Mirkovich: When my husband came home from the service in 1946.

Brenda Velasco: So this was fifty-five hundred dollars in 1946 right after.....

Rose Mirkovich: Right after the war.

Brenda Velasco: 229 Avenel Street.

Rose Mirkovich: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, can't get anything like that now.

Rose Mirkovich: Oh my glory, we can't even get a garage or a shed for that!

Brenda Velasco: No.

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

Rose Mirkovich: The underpass, the railroad over Avenel Street and Route #1.

Brenda Velasco: What do you mean Route #1?

Rose Mirkovich: Well, when I was a girl and we went to visit my aunt, Route #1 hadn't been built yet in my early years. I remember going with my cousin and walking down and seeing what they were doing to Route #1. (It was called Ziegler Avenue/Street)

Brenda Velasco: So it was under construction then.

Rose Mirkovich: It was under construction at that time, yes. That's before we actually moved here. When we actually moved here as a family everything was done already. The underpass.....

Brenda Velasco: The underpass was already done by 1940? (1935)

Rose Mirkovich: I remember Mr. La Bat, who ran the library. One day I was in there and he could tell, you know, a lot that happened in Avenel because they were very prominent. I guess they owned a good part of the property here, and he told me that it was understood that the railroad was going to build an overpass like they had in Woodbridge and everyone agreed to that. One morning they got up and they found all the big trucks making an underpass and nobody knew how it got changed. And, of course it spoiled the center of the town, what was supposedly the center of the town.

Brenda Velasco: Where you live now.

Rose Mirkovich: Yes, that was supposed to be an overpass and nobody knew where or how it was changed. That was eighty years ago or more than that. Now that was just Mr. LaBat's.....

Brenda Velasco: His perception.

Rose Mirkovich: His perception, right.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so Avenel Street was here when you moved in?

Rose Mirkovich: Yes, right.

Brenda Velasco: That was always a thoroughfare. How about the other streets? Were they paved then the streets?

Rose Mirkovich: No, when we bought our house here they just had a two lane road here and you had shoulders. Even the highway had shoulders.

Brenda Velasco: And these were dirt shoulders?

Rose Mirkovich: Dirt shoulders, yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Rose Mirkovich: Avenel Street is a county highway, you know, and they had dirt shoulders.

Brenda Velasco: How about services, did you have any services when you moved here?

Rose Mirkovich: Oh, all the services.

Brenda Velasco: So you had city water?

Rose Mirkovich: Yes, well when the Carragher Brothers made the development, they started they made sure everything was in. There was sewer and water and everything.

Brenda Velasco: They paved the street for you then too?

Rose Mirkovich: No, that came later. There was a two way, you know, street and little by little the township paved one and then another over the course of the years.

Brenda Velasco: And then what about the stores?

Rose Mirkovich: Well now I asked Dorothy (Pelzman) to come but she had something else to do. Eleanor Kuzniak sent me a picture before the railroad was underpassed and in there we had several stores. There was a dry goods store, that was

the Kuzniak's, there was a shoemaker, cobbler, that was **Oziel**, there was the **A&P** and it was the local **A&P**, a small **A&P**, and a barbershop, Bill Perna, had a barbershop and **Lucas Butcher Shop** and I think there might have been a tavern but I'm not sure. The tavern could have come later too I don't know.

Brenda Velasco: Did you have doctors' offices here?

Rose Mirkovich: No, doctors' offices came after the development started filling up. Doctor's offices came to where the candy store is, next door. The candy store was Greenspan, I think its Greenspan, Nathan Greenspan.

Brenda Velasco: You've got a good memory. You can remember names too. That's great. How about houses of worship then?

Rose Mirkovich: They had the masses in the school until the first little church was built here.

Brenda Velasco: Okay you're talking about St. Andrew's.

Rose Mirkovich: St. Andrew's, right.

Brenda Velasco: So it was in School #4 and #5?

Rose Mirkovich: #4, there was just School #4 there. (Fourth grade classroom in School #4)

Brenda Velasco: So this was in the forties where they had the masses.

Rose Mirkovich: Well, no, by then the church was built already.(about 1941)

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Rose Mirkovich: Yes, not too long ago **it had been** built because I was married there and my brother made first communion there. The first pastor we had was Reverend Dusten. Before that we had visiting priests from St. James on Sunday morning.

Brenda Velasco: St. Andrew's just celebrated over fifty years.

Rose Mirkovich: Oh, yes, but this was the newer church. The older one was near where the rectory is now.

Brenda Velasco: Were there any other houses of worship in Avenel?

Rose Mirkovich: Yes, they had the Presbyterian Church up on Woodbridge Avenue and I think they had a synagogue on Lord Street where **Comcast** is now.

Brenda Velasco: That's right, I remember that there.

Rose Mirkovich: And then further on towards St. **Georges** Avenue I think there was a Baptist Church.

Brenda Velasco: So you had a variety of houses of worship here.

Rose Mirkovich: Oh, absolutely, yes.

Brenda Velasco: You had two **Protestants**, a Synagogue and a Roman Catholic.

Rose Mirkovich: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: And the only school you had here was School #4.

Rose Mirkovich: Right.

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

Brenda Velasco: Okay, now it gets us to public buildings and the first one is the post office.

Rose Mirkovich: Well, that was in a little store in back of the, by Pennsylvania **Avenue, they** had a group of little stores there. There was a dressmaker and the post office. I don't know who else.

Brenda Velasco: And that was right off of Avenel Street then?

Rose Mirkovich: Yes, but that was behind the cement divider there were you go up the other end of Avenel Street. That was behind there.

Brenda Velasco: So it's moved, the post office has moved.

Rose Mirkovich: A number of times, at least two or three times. It moved to where the pre-school place is now and then it moved down to Rahway Avenue. George Fox was the Post Master.

Brenda Velasco: So you had mail delivery then?

Rose Mirkovich: No, you had to go get it, you rented a box and you picked it up.

Brenda Velasco: How about a library?

Rose Mirkovich: We had Mr. LaBat. He ran his own little personal library and it was recognized in the local papers as the smallest library in the United States. It was written up in the *Newark Evening News* and it was the only library and it was well attended.

Brenda Velasco: When did it close? (1994)

Rose Mirkovich: I couldn't tell you. That might have been I guess when they started putting up, oh it was still there when they put up the school. The school had a library too, you know, a school library. I can't remember but it had to be in the 1950s around that time. I can't remember but around that time.

Brenda Velasco: And he didn't get money from the township?

Rose Mirkovich: Oh no, he ran it on his own.

Brenda Velasco: This was his own?

Rose Mirkovich: Yes, as far as I know. Now I can't say. I don't know I never asked and he never said but he ran it on his own.

Brenda Velasco: Now it's still being used for the public but a preschool, it's no longer a library.

Rose Mirkovich: Well, that's an entirely different building and everything.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, okay. So let's go to the parks.

Rose Mirkovich: Oh, yes. We had Avenel Park and that's the only one I know of. There might have been others in the other areas but that's the only one I know. They had, at that time, a wading pool.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Rose Mirkovich: And the kids went up there and they waded and piddled, whatever. Then of course after sanitary conditions were considered they closed it.

Brenda Velasco: Where was the wading pool?

Rose Mirkovich: It was right at the end of West Park Avenue as you go to the Park Place development there, right there.

Brenda Velasco: Then you've got the VFW.

Rose Mirkovich: Was on the side here, yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Rose Mirkovich: But that wasn't started until much later.

Brenda Velasco: That is a nice size park and it's also named after your brother.

Rose Mirkovich: Well it wasn't until just recently.(August 2006)

Brenda Velasco: I know. Okay and the firehouse.

Rose Mirkovich: Now I remember when I was a little girl and we came to visit my aunt, they would have a dance once a month. It was in a wooden structure on Remsen

Avenue that later was the iceman's house, I forget what his name was, and then they built the firehouse. The firehouse was built before we actually moved here; there was a firehouse but it was a small one right here. But that was the original firehouse that I remember on Remsen Avenue(1910). (In 1919, a hollow brick firehouse was built Hyatt Street and Ziegler Avenue. The present firehouse was built in 1929 at the corner of Avenel Street and Route 1)

Brenda Velasco: On Remsen Avenue, okay.

Rose Mirkovich: Yes and they'd have dances there and it was like a central place for people to get together.

Brenda Velasco: Like a social gathering.

Rose Mirkovich: Right. Upstairs they had pool tables for the volunteers and when they had something all the kids came. When the kids got tired, they went upstairs. They slept on people's coats on the pool table, the poor young kids, and they had a ball; everybody had a good time. Somebody would always bring us a little home brew and there were many, many fist fights. That always happened but it was the social gathering place. There was, on Avenel Street where **Dominic's** is now, **Stern's Bakery**. It was a commercial bakery and on Friday nights we would go up there and get fifteen cents worth of bread dough and come home and make our own pizzas.

Brenda Velasco: They must have been delicious.

Rose Mirkovich: Oh, you have no idea how good it smelled there every night and my aunt lived right across the street there.

Brenda Velasco: So that's where you aunt lived that you visited!

Rose Mirkovich: In that little house that's still neglected now because my cousin, who was my bridesmaid, grew up there, she and her sister, they were the **Reimers**. She's more or less, don't say anything about this but she's a recluse. She doesn't come out anymore.

Brenda Velasco: So that's where you visited.

Rose Mirkovich: Yes, that's where we visited.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, because that was one of the questions that I was going to bring up later. Okay, how about the schools?

Rose Mirkovich: Well, all I know is that there was this one here.

Brenda Velasco: School #4.

Rose Mirkovich: Yes and the kids went to Woodbridge for high school. School #11 in Woodbridge was the middle school at that time.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, because by the time you moved here you didn't.....

Rose Mirkovich: No, I didn't I was nineteen but my brother started school here.

Brenda Velasco: Okay and this is where Frank went to school.

Rose Mirkovich: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Then eventually he went to Woodbridge High School on Barron Avenue.

Rose Mirkovich: Yes.

6. What did you do for recreation?

Brenda Velasco: Since you visited your aunt here what did you do?

Rose Mirkovich: Not very much. You rode roller skates or bicycles and that was all. You played tag and tennis and hide and seek.

Brenda Velasco: And if you visited your aunt, because this was before you were eighteen, you had to cross the highway to get to Avenel Park then.

Rose Mirkovich: No, by the time we came there was West Park Place already and we went out Livingston Avenue and up Center Street and over to the park.

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

Rose Mirkovich: Well, when I was a girl the focal point of the community was the firehouse.

Brenda Velasco: And that was the firehouse on Remsen Avenue.

Rose Mirkovich: Right, but as I got older then they had the school here and the church.

Brenda Velasco: It was mostly family oriented.

Rose Mirkovich: Everything was family oriented.

Brenda Velasco: So you could bring your kids.

Rose Mirkovich: Oh, yes. There was no such thing as babysitters at that time. You took your kids all over when I was young. Your kids went with you.

Brenda Velasco: And that's how they learned about behaving.

Rose Mirkovich: Absolutely.

Brenda Velasco: They had to behave.

Rose Mirkovich: Absolutely, and they respected their elders and they listened to all the elders whether you were related or not. The kids were wonderful. There were very prominent families here, the **Jandruvich**. They had the little house that is now the **AT&T** building there on the corner of.....

Brenda Velasco: Avenel and Route #1.

Rose Mirkovich: Right, they were very, very good and then I forgot what the name was of the people who owned the garage, the gas station. They had a lot of children. They had the **Thalers**, he was a builder, and they had the **Eblings** he was a plumber I think and they were all prominent people. Then there were the **Wokovitzs** and the **Sterns**, they were in public real estate and the bakery, they were the businesses here. Then of course there was **Security Steel** that was the biggest employer. My uncle worked there, my cousin worked there before she got married and even I worked there for a while.

Brenda Velasco: Did you work there before you got married or after you got married?

Rose Mirkovich: I worked there for awhile before I got married and for a while after I got married. During the war I worked there.

Brenda Velasco: When did they close **Security Steel**?

Rose Mirkovich: It went through a couple of different stages. It went to be art metal and there was some other company involved in there and finally it was **General Dynamics**. Let's see, Frankie worked there as a blue print boy when he was thirteen, so he was born in '34, around the late '40s or early '50s I guess. Maybe a little later even.

Brenda Velasco: Because that was a principal employer.

Rose Mirkovich: That was a principal employer, yes.

Brenda Velasco: Were there any other employers in the township in your area?

Rose Mirkovich: Not right around here except those little local stores and there might have been things on Rahway Avenue but I don't know, that was too far out of the way.

Brenda Velasco: What about the Maple Tree?

Rose Mirkovich: The Maple Tree was also the center of the social world.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Rose Mirkovich: There they had like summer picnics and they had a pavilion there. I also used to remember them when we would drive up Rahway Avenue to visit my aunt. They had a big sign there and I always laughed because the sign was misspelled and it said, *Beer Sold by the Picher*, and I used to get a kick out of that.

Brenda Velasco: I'm sure you would; anybody would. Most people wouldn't notice it though Rose, you noticed it.

Rose Mirkovich: A kid in school was taking up spelling that struck you funny, you know.

Brenda Velasco: Because that was a big piece of property.

Rose Mirkovich: Oh yes, and a lot of summer events took place there. Dances, picnics, company picnics from **Security Steel** and I even think that **Regina** had their company picnics there from Rahway, the vacuum cleaner place.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, I know what you're talking about. It was like a *mecca* for more than just Avenel, it was for the companies as well because it had a nice piece of property and it had those groves with the trees.

Rose Mirkovich: Yes it was.

Brenda Velasco: And now it's.....

Rose Mirkovich: Senior residence.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, its age restricted, so it's still serving the community in a different way.

Rose Mirkovich: Absolutely.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, let's see, anything else? Your kids went to School #4.

Rose Mirkovich: Yes

Brenda Velasco: And they just walked there, there were no buses.

Rose Mirkovich: Well right across the street, yes, I mean right up the street, yes, right. I'll tell you, before they built School #5 the schools got overcrowded and when it was like junior high school they had to go to Woodbridge and then they had busing.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, when they went to Woodbridge they had the bus. What grades did School #4 go up to then when your kids were there?

Rose Mirkovich: At that time it went up to eighth.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so it was a K.....

Rose Mirkovich: It was elementary, pure elementary and then ninth through twelfth was the high school.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, in Woodbridge.

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

Rose Mirkovich: I liked the roots, I never liked living in rent (**apartment/house**), I like living in roots and you felt you belonged. All the people were new people

coming from different areas and you really congregated together. You really stuck with each other and you helped each other out and it was a neighborhood.

Brenda Velasco: Because your kids grew up here. You had your brother right around the corner from you and then his family and you had your cousin down the street in Avenel.

Rose Mirkovich: Yes, absolutely.

Brenda Velasco: But you had many people because of the developments.

Rose Mirkovich: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: And as you said you haven't moved out.

Rose Mirkovich: And I have no intention. I stayed with my son in Virginia for a month last year and they were so good to me. But if I had to live with my kids, I'd cut my wrists.

Brenda Velasco: Different generation.

Rose Mirkovich: Different way of life entirely. He enjoys being country gentleman down in Virginia now and it's a different way of life. My daughter lives in Piscataway and I love her dearly but I would cut my throat but don't put that in.

Brenda Velasco: And she's right here anyhow so that's not far.

Rose Mirkovich: Right, she lives in the area within the county.

Brenda Velasco: That's right, Middlesex County.

Rose Mirkovich: Exactly.

Brenda Velasco: So she's not far at all.

Rose Mirkovich: No.

Brenda Velasco: Did you drive by the way?

Rose Mirkovich: No, not until after I was married.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so in the 1950s you started driving?

Rose Mirkovich: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: But how did you guys get.....

Rose Mirkovich: We had the No. 48 bus would come and it would come from Rahway and make the loop going into Woodbridge into Avenel here. It came down Avenel Street went through Livingston Avenue up Center Street back through Park Avenue and back to Rahway Avenue and then into Rahway. It didn't use the highway.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Rose Mirkovich: It used St. Georges Avenue and back into Rahway and the same thing coming back, the same thing.

Brenda Velasco: So it would pick up a lot of people.

Rose Mirkovich: That was important. Now down on Rahway Avenue there was the #54 but that just went Rahway Avenue and that went all the way into Elizabeth, I think, and Rahway too and Perth Amboy and Perth Amboy was the hub.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, Perth Amboy was your hub for shopping then.

Rose Mirkovich: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: And where did you go for your food shopping because you mentioned an **A&P**.

Rose Mirkovich: There was an **A&P** but there was a supermarket in Rahway.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Rose Mirkovich: But there was a little butcher shop in the **A&P** and you could get everything you wanted there. Also there was, in Perth Amboy, the farmer's market. Every Saturday, when my father was off, and of course we only had one car, we'd take a ride into Perth Amboy and stock up. There was a live chicken market and we stocked **up on vegetables** and fruits and homemade sausages and fresh rye bread. Really it was something to do to go shopping on Saturday morning to the farmer's market in Perth Amboy.

Brenda Velasco: Okay and you only had one car and now families.....

Rose Mirkovich: Oh yes, now it looks like a used car lot in front of every house.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, you're right, because we have so many cars. Okay, anything else you want to mention pertaining to Question #8?

Rose Mirkovich: It's friendly, it's social and it's a wonderful, wonderful town to live in.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, then let's go to Question #9.

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

Rose Mirkovich: I remember when I was working in **Security Steel** when they had the explosion in Sewaren or Port Reading there. It was the **flare** factory that exploded.(1940)

Brenda Velasco: So you felt it then?

Rose Mirkovich: Oh, yes. We looked out of the window and we saw it but we didn't know what it was and it was really a tragedy. Also, the train wreck.

Brenda Velasco: You were living here by that time.

Rose Mirkovich: Oh, yes.

Brenda Velasco: That was in 1951. Did you go down to see?

Rose Mirkovich: My father went but he didn't want any of us to go down because it would only cause confusion, it was bad enough. But he went and saw if he could help and I don't know but he came back and he said don't go. The hospitals were filled all over.

Brenda Velasco: And that flare factory, that exploded there was one person killed there.

Rose Mirkovich: Oh, there was more than one. I think there was, maybe it was just talk. It was a big happening.

Brenda Velasco: I mean you didn't have 24/7 cable back then.

Rose Mirkovich: No, we had nothing. You were lucky if you had a radio because it was just before the war. You didn't have a television until after the war which was '46.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, how about any accidents on Avenel Street?

Rose Mirkovich: Yes, there was a family, who went up to get a pizza and went across Route #1 and were hit by a large truck or something. The people in the car were decapitated.

Brenda Velasco: Oh my gosh!

Rose Mirkovich: Yes, that was a bad, bad accident. Now I didn't see that but I heard about it. It was around that time but it was very bad.

Brenda Velasco: Were you married at that time?

Rose Mirkovich: No, I don't think I was married yet.

Brenda Velasco: So it was in the 1940's.

Rose Mirkovich: Yes. Also, now this was very vague, but I think there were a group of high school kids **after the prom that was hit by a train too**. But I'm not sure of this.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Rose Mirkovich: That could have been a headline somewhere else.

Brenda Velasco: Now in your written part you mentioned that you used to go down to watch the automobile races.

Rose Mirkovich: Oh, that's when I was a little girl, when I was very young and we'd come visit my aunt. My father would climb the tree and it was where the field is now, athletic field, by the high school. There was a little nice shady area and the ladies would sit there with their kids and the kids would run around and the men would watch the auto races. They were in the full sized cars.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, they were?

Rose Mirkovich: Yes, they were the full sized cars, they weren't midget cars. It was actual auto races.

Brenda Velasco: That was in the current athletic field for Woodbridge High School.

Rose Mirkovich: Yes, but that was in the late 1930s.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, and during World War II you said you worked at **Security Steel**?

Rose Mirkovich: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: So you just walked down the street.

Rose Mirkovich: That's right and I'd come home for lunch every day. That was a nice place to work. It was almost like family. The executives and the administrators, **everybody was very personable, wonderful**.

Brenda Velasco: Do you remember what your salary was back then?

Rose Mirkovich: Yes, I think I got twenty dollars a week.

Brenda Velasco: Twenty dollars a week.

Rose Mirkovich: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: But that was great, you didn't need a car.

Rose Mirkovich: No, but you didn't wear pants either, you had to go in skirt and heels.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, and what was your job there?

Rose Mirkovich: Well, I started out as a file clerk and then I wound up as secretary to the engineer.

Brenda Velasco: And how long, approximately? It was during World War II?

Rose Mirkovich: Well let's see, I started there before I got married and I didn't leave until my husband came home from the service which was in 1946. So I worked there for about six years.

Brenda Velasco: Then there were other people, you mentioned that your brother....

Rose Mirkovich: Yes, he started there as a blue print boy.

Brenda Velasco: When he was thirteen?

Rose Mirkovich: Yes, no when he was thirteen he started for the shoemaker. He would open the shoe store so the people could drop off their shoes on the way to the train. Because the guy who owned the store, it wasn't **Oziel**, it was another guy later on, and he didn't want to come in that early so Frankie opened the store before he

went to school. Then when he was sixteen, he started as a blue print boy in the engineering department in **Security Steel**.

Brenda Velasco: Can you think of anything else with significant happenings?

Rose Mirkovich: All the things that wouldn't affect the town at all.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

10. What do you like about Woodbridge today?

Rose Mirkovich: Everything.

Brenda Velasco: Anything in particular.

Rose Mirkovich: The people, the area and the advantages for the senior citizens. Woodbridge does a lot of its senior citizens.

Brenda Velasco: **Do you** belong to the Community Center?

Rose Mirkovich: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, great.

Rose Mirkovich: I think I was one of their original belongers.

Brenda Velasco: I remember when you joined. That's great.

Rose Mirkovich: Even though I can't get there anymore, unless I go by the township bus, I still will keep up the membership. Sometimes there would be something that I would want to go to and I want to have the right to go there.

Brenda Velasco: And with membership, you do.

Rose Mirkovich: And you have the right, yes.

Brenda Velasco: Then you have the senior club at St. Andrew's.

Rose Mirkovich: Yes, and the Avenel Democratic Club.

Brenda Velasco: That's right.

Rose Mirkovich: And the Rosary Society. There's enough to do if you can get out and do it. But as I say with the township **bus, I think** it runs twice a week where you can go shopping on it and once a month it would go to the Woodbridge Center. All you'd have to do is get a bus number, call up in advance and they would pick you up at the door.

Brenda Velasco: That's great!

Rose Mirkovich: They'd even help you in with your packages. You're only allowed two carry-ons, but they'd even help you with that. I mean, where does a town do that?

Brenda Velasco: It keeps you busy.

Rose Mirkovich: And how.

Brenda Velasco: I know you belong to all these organizations because to get an appointment to interview you, we had to go with your schedule.

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

Rose Mirkovich: Well, Dottie, nephews and nieces and cousins, or a cousin.

Brenda Velasco: And they're all within Avenel.

Rose Mirkovich: They're all in Avenel, right.

12. Any other stories or events that you would like to discuss?

Rose Mirkovich: Well I'm just very content here.

Brenda Velasco: You were important because your brother became mayor.

Rose Mirkovich: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: How did you feel? Did you have any expectations when he was a little boy because he was a kid to you?

Rose Mirkovich: No, because when George was courting me, we'd go to the baseball games in Newark. We'd all have to take Frankie with us so **there'd be** no hanky panky.

Brenda Velasco: He was your chaperone.

Rose Mirkovich: He was our chaperone, yes.

Brenda Velasco: And he was going to see a baseball game at the same time.

Rose Mirkovich: At that time you could afford it. Even during the war when George was overseas, he was a prisoner of war; I used to take Frankie to the baseball game in Newark, I think it was the Newark Bears. You know, it didn't cost anything to park and you could get a hot dog for a quarter and it was something to do on a Sunday afternoon because we had no car and my father would let us take the family car just to go to the baseball game. You were allowed a certain amount of gasoline.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, gas was rationed then.

Rose Mirkovich: Yes and **the G.I s** when they came home on furlough they were given an extra ration so that they could go visit relatives and things. I remember when I came home from lunch, one day my mother was crying in the doorway and I said mom what's the matter. She said, "I think George is a prisoner of war." **She** said **that, but there** was nothing about prisoner of war at that **time; she just** said that.

Brenda Velasco: She had a feeling?

Rose Mirkovich: We got the telegram that **said the president** regrets to inform you that your husband is missing in action and she said prisoner of war. I remember that so vividly and I stayed home the afternoon and I went back to work the next morning because I wanted to go back to work.

Brenda Velasco: How long was he a prisoner of war?

Rose Mirkovich: Three months. It was towards the end of the war already.

Brenda Velasco: And where was he held?

Rose Mirkovich: In Europe.

Brenda Velasco: Wherever he was held it, wasn't a pleasant experience.

Rose Mirkovich: No, but it was towards the end of the war and they were better off in many ways. They were **better off than** their own (prison) guards because they at least got Red Cross packages from Belgium, not from the United States, but from Belgium they got the Red Cross packages. They had one package to share between two fellows and there were cigarettes in there. They could pawn them off to the guards for, I don't know for what, but.....

Brenda Velasco: But it was a trade.

Rose Mirkovich: A **trade, yes**. Then I remember getting up one morning and there was a knock on the door and the **postmaster**, what was his name, a young fellow, he lived over on West End **Avenue. Well anyhow**, he came to the door with a postcard and they had three sentences on there and little boxes and they were in **French. I knew Mr. LaBat** would help because they were French and I asked him if he would translate it for me. Because one of the boxes had an X in it and it said that he was a prisoner of war, he was not hurt and he was alright and he was a lucky fellow. That's when I knew he was a prisoner of war.

Brenda Velasco: Did you meet your husband in Avenel too?

Rose Mirkovich: No.

Brenda Velasco: Where was he from?

Rose Mirkovich: He was from Cranford.

Brenda Velasco: So you convinced him to move here.

Rose Mirkovich: Oh, yes. He wanted to move to Cranford where his father had a piece of property and I said over my dead body. I loved his mother dearly; his father ah, but that's neither here nor there. I met him at my cousin's wedding in Westfield. I was working at the **Blue Ribbon Bakery** in Union at the time and it was one of these home weddings, the reception was in the home. This is personal, I had my eye on another guy, one of the neighbors of my **cousin** and he had his eye on another cousin that was there and I didn't care for George because he looked too old to me. I thought he was the husband of one of the other guests there and I had no use **for him**. He asked me if I would go out on a date with him and I said, "oh ask my **mother**." I knew my mother and father would say **no**. **But** my aunt, the mother of the bride, knew his parents who had a store in **Westfield**; **they** had a tailor shop in Westfield. My aunt had the highest respect for the family and everything, so she convinced my mother to let him go out with me.

Brenda Velasco: And then what happened? See, love works in mysterious ways.

Rose Mirkovich: It works in mysterious ways. In fact that year I had **a date to go**, I had graduated early out of high school so I was **sixteen**. **I had a date** with a seventeen year old to go to the prom and I broke the date for George.

Brenda Velasco: He won your heart.

Rose Mirkovich: Yes, he did.

Brenda Velasco: You went to Irvington High School then?

Rose Mirkovich: Yes, Frank Mauro High School.

Brenda Velasco: What year were you a graduate of that school?

Rose Mirkovich: Now let's see, I graduated when I was sixteen so that would be '36, I think.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, and during the Depression.....

Rose Mirkovich: Oh that's another story but that didn't take place in Avenel that took place after the Depression. My brother was born during the Depression. My mother and father were janitors or maintenance in an apartment and they moved to their own apartment. He worked for the old **United Brewery** that went apart and at one time he worked at, which is now a hygrade but it was **Finks Bologna Factory** earning ten dollars a week. That was the salaries at that time. He started a trucking business I don't know whether that has anything to do, that's not important. But he was such a good natured man, he lost the business because he moved people and didn't have the heart to charge them, so he just sold his truck. But then he got a job in the brewery. He started at the old **United** and when that closed, he went over the **Kruegers**.

Brenda Velasco: And Newark was a center of the brewery industry at that time.

Rose Mirkovich: Newark must have had at least ten breweries at that time.

Brenda Velasco: **Anheuser-Busch**.....

Rose Mirkovich: **Pabst, Hensler, Tromors, Rheingold, Kruegers, Ballantine** and a lot of little ones too. Some of the names I can't remember.

Brenda Velasco: A lot of these are no longer in existence.

Rose Mirkovich: No, none of them are except **Anheuser-Busch**. You know when George came back, he worked in **Ballantine**. My father got him into the union, and he started in **Ballantine**. If anybody had told me then that **Ballantine** would no longer be.... because he worked there his whole life, thirty-four years, and then they closed down.

Brenda Velasco: Was he able to get his pension?

Rose Mirkovich: Well there was really nothing left but there was a Class Action and we were included in the Class Action but he was dead already and I got that. But I remember the day that he said that they offered him a buyout because he was one of the old members and they transferred him to **Falstaff**. **Falstaff** bought their label, but it has nothing to do with Avenel.

Brenda Velasco: No, but it has something to do with labor relations at that time and it impacts the people who are surviving because a lot of people lost their pensions.

Rose Mirkovich: **Well, he** came very close. But he didn't get a pension but they gave him an early buyout and let him collect unemployment until he was old enough, I don't know how it was. I remember him sitting at the kitchen table crying because he thought he was going to retire after thirty-four years, retire from **Ballantine** comfortably. But we lost our insurance; we lost our medical care and everything. But by that time, I was already working with the school system so I had insurance. I said to him, we'll survive. The only thing was it was the year that Linda was getting married.

Brenda Velasco: And that's a big expense, I know that.

Rose Mirkovich: It wasn't too bad because she had it at the **Sulpha Springs Inn**, that's where we had the reception. When her son and fiancé were looking for a place they **went up in that** direction. They found this place that they loved and it was everything they wanted and it was where Linda got married. Can you believe that? When she said where it was, we were flabbergasted. Could you believe that? Life is very, very peculiar.

Brenda Velasco: Can't always plan it, can you?

Rose Mirkovich: Don't plan and always have Plan B. Don't depend on Plan A.

Brenda Velasco: Well, is there anything else that you.....

Rose Mirkovich: No.

Brenda Velasco: I think we covered a lot.

Rose Mirkovich: I think we covered a lot, too.

Brenda Velasco: And I enjoyed it very much and I'm happy to sit down with you.

Rose Mirkovich: You finally got it.

Brenda Velasco: I finally got you to sit down with me. So thank you Rose Pelzman Mirkovich for the interview and as you know it will be going into our local history archives and people will.....

Rose Mirkovich: But eliminate what isn't important.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, but thank you again.

.....

After the formal interview, Rose Mirkovich elaborated on her arrival to the USA with her father, while her mother was left behind in Europe. Her aunt who lived in

Westfield was able to sponsor Rose and her dad after the Great War (World War I) because Rose was born in Vienna, Austria. Her twenty-five year old father arrived at Ellis Island when Rose was 2 years old in 1923. Because of the shifting political borders, her mother remained in the Sudetenland (German speaking) area of Czechoslovakia for a number of years.

Rose also recalled that there was another factory in Avenel in the 1950s. It was the Avenel Mill Factory next to where the post office was located on Avenel Street. It made baby outfits, layettes for newborns, booties, sweaters, etc. It was a source of employment for the local women including Rose's mother. About 15-20 ladies worked there and one man supervised.