

Oral History Interview
Susan Gerity Fox
WH093

(written transcript and digital audio)

On March 2, 2011, Susan Gerity Fox was interviewed at the Henry Inman Library by Brenda Velasco at 11:30 A.M.

Brenda Velasco: Susan Gerity Fox is the fifth generation of Geritys.

Susan Gerity Fox: Actually I'm the third.

Brenda Velasco: You're the third?

Susan Gerity Fox: My grandchildren will be the sixth.

Brenda Velasco: We forgot your children.

Susan Gerity Fox: Right, we'll skip them.

Brenda Velasco: So it's a long time family of Woodbridge, long time parishioners of St. James parish and also in the business community with the funeral parlor on Amboy Avenue. So they go back a long time and I'm very grateful that Susan agreed to be interviewed.

- 1. Identify individual-name, section, date of birth.**
- 2. How long have you lived in Woodbridge?**
- 3. Why did you or your family originally move to Colonia?**

Susan Gerity Fox: My name is Susan Gerity Fox. The Geritys are a family that have lived in Woodbridge for many years in the Woodbridge Proper section. My great-grandparents are buried in the first row of St. James cemetery right along Route 9. You can see their obelisk style headstone as you travel by. I've lived in Woodbridge my whole life. I can't say that my family ever moved to Woodbridge. My recollection is just that we've always been here. It was a lot of fun growing up here. I had many aunts and uncles and cousins. When I brought my husband back here to live after college, his head was spinning as I drove him around town identifying my uncle so and so lives here, my aunt lives here, my cousin lives here. He had never really been exposed to that kind of a large family unit all living in one place.

Brenda Velasco: That's quite unique.

Susan Gerity Fox: And to this day it really makes me happy to see my cousins in church and like that. I mean, many of them have moved away but some of them are still around and it's just a nice feeling to know that you still have some old family around.

Brenda Velasco: And young family because you have your grandchildren living right in Colonia now. But let's get back. Okay so you grew up in Woodbridge Proper. Where do you live now?

Susan Gerity Fox: I now live in the Colonia section; I moved there in 1994.

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

Susan Gerity Fox: I was born in 1948 in Rahway Hospital.

Brenda Velasco: So except for college then.....

Susan Gerity Fox: Yes, except for college I've lived here my whole life.

Brenda Velasco: And you talked your husband.....

Susan Gerity Fox: I brought him here after college. He kind of grew up. He started out in New York and moved to Old Bridge and then when we got married we came here.

Brenda Velasco: Was it ever discussed why your family settled in Woodbridge?

Susan Gerity Fox: It really wasn't. Irish people have a habit of, like really, they are not great communicators and you know there was always a little talk about my grandfather being alcoholic. So you just really didn't talk about things that much. I just knew that they started out living, I think, on Albert Street.

Brenda Velasco: Which is right off Amboy Avenue.

Susan Gerity Fox: Yes, right off Amboy Avenue; and then my grandparents built the house on Amboy Avenue. I think I saw the construction bill. I think it cost about fifteen hundred dollars to build the house on Amboy Avenue which I think was 329 Amboy Avenue or something like that. It's right at the end of Bergen Street when you come down Bergen Street to Amboy Avenue. My mother's parents, who moved from Perth Amboy, lived one house off the corner of Amboy Avenue and Bunns Lane. So not only have I lived in Woodbridge my whole life, I spent most of it right on Amboy Avenue between Bunns Lane and Green Street.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, but you were by a shopping district too.

Susan Gerity Fox: Yes, and that was one of the things that really appealed to my family. Living close to church we walked to church and we walked to town. My mother went, what she called, over town every day to do her marketing. And when my children were young we lived on Clayton Court which was sort of the park section. When we told them we were moving to Colonia they were very upset because they could no longer walk to town. At that time there was still a 5&10 there and other shops that would have appealed to like younger children but they're really not there anymore.

Brenda Velasco: Okay and that gets us to Question #4.

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 you were born right after World War II, you're one of those post-war baby boomers.

Susan Gerity Fox: Well, my first memories of living on Amboy Avenue, the building that my father bought at 411 Amboy Avenue where he established the funeral home, was that Amboy Avenue which was Route 35 was considered, even then, a state highway. It was only a two lane road, one lane going each way, and all the properties have what we would call in those days like a buffer between the road and the sidewalk which was green. There would be trees planted there, then the sidewalk and then your property. So one of the most dramatic things that I have seen change is just the construction of Amboy Avenue becoming a four lane road. One of the other remarkable things to me is that as a teenager we belonged to Woodbridge Swim Club which is now the site of that Michael's restaurant. Before Route 9 really became a big highway we used to go from the swim club across Route 9 into the clay pits

which is now Woodbridge Center. We would kind of hang out there for the day. I don't know what we did there but explore I guess; as kids we just explored.

Brenda Velasco: It was fun.

Susan Gerity Fox: But all of Woodbridge Center was just a big clay pit.

Brenda Velasco: Did you go swimming there?

Susan Gerity Fox: I don't remember actually going swimming in the clay pit but we spent our teenage years at Woodbridge Swim Club which was owned by the Gadek family.

Brenda Velasco: And you could walk to that too.

Susan Gerity Fox: We did walk; your mother didn't pack you in the car like we do now. Everybody was just told to take their bathing suit and a towel and get going.

Brenda Velasco: That was great.

Susan Gerity Fox: Yes, it really was. It was a nice way to grow up as a child.

Brenda Velasco: Were there a lot of businesses then on Amboy Avenue because your dad had the funeral parlor there?

Susan Gerity Fox: Across the street where there's now an empty lot was a building and there was a company in there called **Service Electric**, it was an electrical company. The lot next door, which is now the **7-Eleven**, was owned by Harry Bernstein's uncles and they had a used car lot. One of our summer recreational activities was to go over to the car lot and pop the tar bubbles in the heat. I know that sounds ridiculous but that's what we did. Kids just found ways to entertain themselves in those days.

Brenda Velasco: Where were these tar bubbles?

Susan Gerity Fox: Well the macadam I guess was of a different consistency than what we have now and the heat caused these little, maybe dime sized bubbles to like erupt on the macadam and we would just go over there with a stick and bust the tar bubbles. We spent a lot of time also exploring in the Woodbridge Creek which runs from the eastside of Route 9 and down through the park section under St. Georges Avenue and then down through the park where the tennis courts are by School Street there. We played a lot of tennis on the tennis courts on School Street. And we did a lot of ice skating because along that part of the creek which is closest to Route 9 that was actually a pond. Before you had all the salt runoff from like Woodbridge Center and Route 9 that you have today, that froze very solidly and we did a lot of ice skating there. We also did a lot of sleigh riding down what is now like Fleetwood Drive. There was a nice hill there and in those days the snowplows didn't really get down to the macadam as they do now so we always had a good time sleigh riding there.

Brenda Velasco: So you had recreation throughout the year.

Susan Gerity Fox: Yes, we did. It was really a nice place to grow up.

Brenda Velasco: It sure was. Okay, getting back to Question #4 the services that you had in the area, you had running water and.....

Susan Gerity Fox: We had, of course, running water and plumbing, I'm not that old, but we did not have air conditioning in our house. We slept many times in the attic in the winter which also did not have heat. I know in my mother's house she had four sisters and a brother and I think that the girls all slept in the unheated attic in that house also. This is something really nice, when my dad first bought the house on

Amboy Avenue old man Sam LaPenta was the oil delivery man. When Mr. LaPenta would come to the backdoor, we'd all yell Sam, Sam the oil man. To this day I still get oil delivery from old Sam LaPenta's grandsons. They still own the oil business in Woodbridge.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, I know I interviewed Frank and Bob LaPenta and Harry Bernstein as well as this.....

Susan Gerity Fox: It all ties in, right?

Brenda Velasco: It sure does. How about the stores?

Susan Gerity Fox: Well, the stores on Main Street were **Woolworth's** which was managed by a really nice man. I can't remember his name. There was **Modern Men's** which was a men's store where you would go and buy your dad's Christmas present. Then there was **Christensen's**, of course, which was a small department store and some of the Christensen family still live in Woodbridge. You would have a house account there, nobody had credit cards. But if your mom said it was okay, you would go there and buy something that you needed and you would just put it on the house account. Then the Christensens would send your family a bill, I guess, at the end of the month or send you down with some money at the end of the month to pay the bill. My mom shopped everyday at the little **A&P** there which is now, where I think, **Elek's** is. It had a wooden floor and probably five aisles and it had everything you needed.

Brenda Velasco: And she could walk there?

Susan Gerity Fox: And she could walk. She walked home everyday carrying two bags for dinner.

Brenda Velasco: Did she work?

Susan Gerity Fox: My mom, during World War II, worked as a secretary for Shell Oil. But after World War II, when she married my dad, she left Shell Oil because they didn't pay her the same as they paid the men so she was a little bit upset about that. My mom also had, and I'm going to show you this, my mother always said that she was the first young woman in Woodbridge to own her own car.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, maybe we can have a picture made of this because this is great. What kind of car was that?

Susan Gerity Fox: I really don't know but this is a picture of my mother, Marie Kowalczyk Gerity, and just so people know, even in those days people were concerned about their weight. Look what my mother wrote on the back of the picture, Chubby Marie. She's probably all of a hundred pounds there.

Brenda Velasco: She's like a rail; she's not chubby.

Susan Gerity Fox: No, she was never chubby.

Brenda Velasco: And that was 1941, right?

Susan Gerity Fox: Is that what it says?

Brenda Velasco: 1941.

Susan Gerity Fox: Yes, August, 1941. She had her own car.

Brenda Velasco: That was quite something back then.

Susan Gerity Fox: She was working for **Shell Oil**.

Brenda Velasco: Wow! Okay, did you have the movies there?

Susan Gerity Fox: There was a movie theatre on Main Street. If I'm recalling it correctly it might be where the Quick Chek is by the Woodbridge Town Hall. We did

go there to the movies on Saturday in the afternoons particularly in the fall and the winter when it was cold.

Brenda Velasco: Do you remember what the price was?

Susan Gerity Fox: Probably a nickel, maybe a quarter. I really don't know

Brenda Velasco: Oh, boy! And how long did you stay there because it wasn't just one movie was it?

Susan Gerity Fox: To tell you the truth I think probably it was a movie and there would be newsreels or something. Certainly not World War II newsreels, I was born after World War II, but probably newsreels of the day.

Brenda Velasco: Did you have a TV?

Susan Fox: Well, we did have a little black and white TV and I remember watching Ed Sullivan and Lucille Ball and Jackie Gleason. I had an aunt who lived in Elizabeth who owned the first colored TV that I can remember and it was a very big deal when she got it. We all got in the car and we drove up to Elizabeth to see the colored TV. The screen at the one that we had at our house in Woodbridge was probably maybe nine inches but we certainly had a good time. My brother, Leon, just remarked the other day that he remembers the night that my two sisters and I spent screaming in front of the television when the Beatles appeared on the Ed Sullivan Show.

Brenda Velasco: You along with many others.

Susan Gerity Fox: Exactly.

Brenda Velasco: How about houses of worship there?

Susan Gerity Fox: Well, we were always a member of the St. James Church in Woodbridge and I remember the old church.

Brenda Velasco: Where was that located?

Susan Gerity Fox: Well, the old church was probably on the property that's now the playground for St. James School because the school was next door and then the property where the church stands now, I think, was acquired by the church in order to put the new church. That really was the focal part of our lives going to church and going to St. James School. My father belonged to the Knights of Columbus and all his brothers, he had five brothers, all belonged to the Knights of Columbus. They had a bowling team and the bowling alley, in those days, was either the building where the Hutt's Law Firm is across from the Medicine Shop now or the building next to that which is like where the Park Primary Care Medical Practice is. It was one of those two buildings. I'm not a hundred percent certain which one. But Dad always sponsored a bowling team and it was usually his brothers and he would go up there and watch them bowl one night a week. There were probably eight lanes at the time. I do remember the people setting up the pins by hand in the early days before they had the automatic pin setters.

Brenda Velasco: You know whose family owned it at one time was Venezia.

Susan Gerity Fox: Yes, actually now that you mentioned that I do remember that.

Brenda Velasco: Because I interviewed him and he said he was one of the ones that set up the pins.

Susan Gerity Fox: Oh, Mr. Venezia the attorney?

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Susan Gerity Fox: He set up the pins?

Brenda Velasco: Yes, in the beginning.

Susan Gerity Fox: I believe that.

Brenda Velasco: Were there any other houses of worship in the area that you recall?

Susan Gerity Fox: Well, the synagogue was built across the street from the funeral home. I'm not really sure of the year but probably in the late '40s or early '50s. The rabbi for the synagogue lived two doors down from where we lived on Amboy Avenue. The house in the middle there was actually built by the people that my dad bought our property from. Their name was Satler. They were a lovely little odd couple and my dad would, on grass cutting day and I don't even remember if there were gas or electric mowers in those days probably by hand, he cut the grass for the Satlers and the rabbi living next door. After the Satlers passed that building was bought by a doctor who was very well respected and loved. His name was Cyril Huttner. I think he was also a member of the synagogue across the street. Because of the business my dad was in, the funeral business, we attended a lot of affairs such as picnics and barbeques and different events at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church which was just down the street on Amboy Avenue. There was a large Hungarian population at that time. Many of them came over in '56.

Brenda Velasco: Hungarian revolution.

Susan Gerity Fox: Yes, Hungarian revolution. But there was also a good sized population here even before the Hungarian revolution so my dad and my mother and all of us we attended a lot of picnics and different events there. We had a nice relationship with the Hungarian community there.

Brenda Velasco: But your dad was Irish.....

Susan Gerity Fox: And my mother was Polish/Slovak.

Brenda Velasco: Then the schools you attended.....

Susan Gerity Fox: The schools, that's an interesting story. While I attended St. James my mother and my dad also attended St. James. My mother attended School #1 and #11: School #1 now being the Board of Education building and #11 is still in existence, it's the Ross Street School. It always made me feel really good that my children attended the same schools as my mother. My daughter went to the Ross Street School and to Barron Avenue Middle School. When my mother attended Barron Avenue, it was the high school. My mother was in the Class of '33 with Dave Bixel's father and Mr. Jackson from the pharmacy. So it was Clare Bixel, Raymond Jackson, Elizabeth Mussachia, who is still alive and she taught music at Woodbridge High School for many, many years. So my mother, until probably the year 2000 or maybe the late 1990s was still going to class reunions with those people. They were very, very close to each other.

Brenda Velasco: Many of them stayed in the area.

Susan Gerity Fox: Many of them stayed in the area and raised their children there. Dave Bixel lived in the area until he died. Harry Bernstein is still in the area, one of Ray Jackson's daughters, I think, still lives in the house that he owned on Grove Avenue down near the Congregational church. It's a tight knit community. It was a very tight knit community in those days.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, I think we covered Question #4 very well.

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

firehouse, schools, etc.

Brenda Velasco: Do you remember where the post office was?

Susan Gerity Fox: Post office, I don't know, was that down on School Street at one time?

Brenda Velasco: It moved around.

Susan Gerity Fox: I do remember the changes on Amboy Avenue across the street from the funeral home when I was telling you about the **Service Electric Company**, the motor vehicle was in there for a long time.

Brenda Velasco: Where you got to renew your registration.

Susan Gerity Fox: Driver's license. I was baptized in the old St. Anthony's Church in Port Reading because my parents lived, for a short while, in what was called veteran's housing which was built along Old Road in Sewaren for the veterans to return to after the war with their families. They lived there for a short while and I was baptized there on Christmas Day, 1948 and the baptismal font that I was baptized in is now the holy water font in the new church as you go in through the back day.

Brenda Velasco: In St. Anthony's.

Susan Gerity Fox: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: How about the library?

Susan Gerity Fox: Well, as a child I walked everywhere in town and the library, of course, was the old Barron Library on Rahway Avenue and you went almost every Saturday. You put those books under your arm and you walked down to the library. And the first librarian. I don't remember her name, but I do know everybody was scared to death of her. She was a little old lady and wore her gray hair pulled back in a tight bun with glasses and you didn't dare raise your voice above a whisper. It really was a beautiful library and it's really wonderful that it is now the Woodbridge Arts Center.

Brenda Velasco: Which you were a member of or still are.

Susan Gerity Fox: Yes, I served on the Art Commission for awhile. Then when the new library was being built the library books were transferred to, I guess that was called the **Cameo**, that property across from the Woodbridge Car Wash. It's now something else (Arianas) but for a long time it was called the **Cameo** and that served as a temporary library. But I don't think that I went there very often because I think that was during my college years so I was pretty much away during those years.

Brenda Velasco: How about the parks?

Susan Gerity Fox: In our really young days, just as today, they hire young high school people to be like.....

Brenda Velasco: Counselors.

Susan Gerity Fox: Counselors at the parks and we did arts and crafts in the parks.

Brenda Velasco: Which park did you go to?

Susan Gerity Fox: I would say the one down by the railroad station.

Brenda Velasco: By Pearl Street?

Susan Gerity Fox: Yes, the Pearl Street. I have a vague recollection that there being one maybe on the backside of what's now St. James Church but I'm not one hundred percent certain but there was some kind of a park over there that we used to go to also. I didn't play sports in high school but when I got to college I took up tennis so

in the early in the 1970s I played a lot of tennis at the Pearl Street parks even into my married years. We would go down there on a bicycle and play tennis for hours.

Brenda Velasco: Very accessible for you.

Susan Gerity Fox: One thing I do want to talk about while we're talking about tennis is that my mother was very athletic when she was a young woman. She rode horseback, she ice skated and she played tennis and she told me that one time she and her friends scratched out a play tennis court in the property that is now across from St. Joseph's Home on Strawberry Hill: the property that's across the street on Amboy Avenue. I think it's now a condominium and there might be a Quick Chek in or something in the front there. They actually scratched out a play tennis court to play on.

Brenda Velasco: She was ambitious.

Susan Gerity Fox: She was very ambitious.

Brenda Velasco: And these were girls that did it.

Susan Gerity Fox: Girls and probably guys too, I really don't know who, but she told me that.

Brenda Velasco: Do you recall the firehouse?

Susan Gerity Fox: I do recall the old firehouse. All the people who were members, the Goldens, were a family that gave a lot of fireman to Woodbridge.

Brenda Velasco: They're still involved.

Susan Gerity Fox: Yes, they're still involved.

Brenda Velasco: Bobbie and John.

Susan Gerity Fox: And there were three other brothers. Oh, the Crowes, the superintendent of school I guess; they would be his grandfather and maybe his father. I'm not a hundred percent certain of that but the Crowes were a family that were always involved in the fire house and the Baders, Lou, Tom and Bob Bader were all firemen. Lou now lives in one of the Carolinas and Bob still lives in Woodbridge. He would be an interesting person to interview. I think he lives on Clinton Street or Sherry Street.

Brenda Velasco: I did interview Sophie Bader.

Susan Gerity Fox: Sophie is his sister-in-law, right?

Brenda Velasco: I have to keep that in mind. When you mentioned the old firehouse how is it different from the current one?

Susan Gerity Fox: I really don't remember it that well but I do think that it was just maybe a two bay firehouse and my recollection is that it was built of brick as were a lot of things because of the clay being basic soil in the Woodbridge area. A lot of things were built out of brick. Most of my uncles, on my father's side, were bricklayers which was a very significant business occupation at that time.

Brenda Velasco: Did they work in the clay pits at all?

Susan Gerity Fox: I don't know, my recollection doesn't go back as far as the clay pits but I do know that they worked out of a union in Perth Amboy and I also had acquaintances whose parents worked at like the **Valentine Firebrick Company** which would be on that street up behind St. Joseph's Home, old something road.

Brenda Velasco: Cutter Dock Road.

Susan Gerity Fox: Cutters Dock Road, exactly. I think that's where the **Valentine Firebrick Company** was which was a big industry in Woodbridge probably in the early 1900s to 1950 or something like that.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, then it was dying out.

Susan Gerity Fox: Right.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, schools, we mentioned where your mom went and your kids attended schools. Did they attend School No 1 or was that the Administration building by that time?

Susan Gerity Fox: My children?

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Susan Gerity Fox: No, School #11.

Brenda Velasco: So they attended School #11 for their elementary years?

Susan Gerity Fox: Elementary, and then they went to Barron Middle and then they went to a Catholic Girl's High School after that.

Brenda Velasco: Which one did they attend?

Susan Gerity Fox: High school?

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Susan Gerity Fox: They went to Mount St. Mary's in Watchung.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, and that's Donna Turek.

Susan Gerity Fox: Donna Venezia Turek is the director of admissions there.

Brenda Velasco: And she's a Venezia.

Susan Gerity Fox: She's a Venezia, right. Actually Woodbridge, I think, has a long history, starting with her and her sisters and probably women before them that I'm not aware of but the people in St. James Church were served by the nuns from that Mother House, the Sisters of Mercy. So the Sisters of Mercy served St. James School and St. Mary's High School in Perth Amboy. So a lot of children of my era went to St. Mary's High School in Perth Amboy. But there were people who did go to the all girl's school called Mount Saint Mary's up in Watchung. The problem with that though was in those days there was no busing so the parents had to get the kids back and forth. I'm not sure that all three girls went there but I do know that Mrs. Venezia drove Donna and whichever sisters went there back and forth all the time.

Brenda Velasco: Daria and Debbie.

Susan Gerity Fox: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, that was quite a trek.

6 What did you do for recreation?

Susan Gerity Fox: Well, we went, as teenagers, to the Woodbridge Swim Club in the summer which I said was owned by the Gadek family and as a matter of fact I recently got in touch with two girls who I was very friendly with there. One girl's name was Marilyn Prosac who now lives down in Mount Holly and the other girl's name was Jane Heko Smith and she lives in the Iselin section of Woodbridge. I would see Jane over the years because she worked in Jackson's Pharmacy on Main Street so we always kind of kept a relationship going. So we did that in the summer and we played tennis at the tennis courts on Pearl Street and we would ride our bikes all around town. Your parents sent you out at nine o'clock in the morning to play and basically you came in for lunch. Actually we even walked home from school for

lunch from St. James and went back. Then your mother would call you in about five or five-thirty for dinner. In the nice months you would go out again after dinner and play things like spud and catch and jump rope right on the street behind where we lived which was called Middlesex Avenue. It was just a little street but it was a nice safe place to play but it didn't get a lot of traffic.

Brenda Velasco: The whole town was safe and you were all over.

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

Susan Gerity Fox: Well, I would have to say that the focal point of the community was the church. We all went to school there. My mother was president of the PTA when my brother was in school so that was probably the mid and late sixties. She kept a scrapbook of the time when she was going through the Chairs of the PTA because everything was printed in the newspaper in those days. If the PTA was having a meeting or a bake sale or if they were going to say a novena for somebody, it would be in the *Woodbridge Leader* which was down by the railroad in Woodbridge on the property that is now probably the parking lot for, is it **Walgreen's** on one side and then there's something on the other side?

Brenda Velasco: There's **Walgreen's** on one side and now it's a **Kentucky Fried Chicken** on.....

Susan Gerity Fox: Okay, well on the back part of that, close to the railroad tracks, because I remember the building being close to the railroad tracks, there was the Woodbridge newspaper which was called the *Independent Leader*. It printed all kinds of news including, like I was saying the PTA news and what was going on in the PTA. My mother kept this huge scrapbook of all the events that was going on. It was really, really interesting.

Brenda Velasco: Did you keep that?

Susan Gerity Fox: Actually when my mother died we put it out at the wake and I think that we donated it back to St. James School.

Brenda Velasco: That's where I wanted you to put it. Good, excellent.

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

Susan Gerity Fox: Well living in the Proper section it was just so nice because you could walk to everything. We walked to school, downtown, to the movies, to the swim club and to the tennis courts and you rode your bike all around town. It was just a nice way to grow up. It's unfortunate that kids don't really have that much freedom today the way that we did. You know parents are always looking out for their kids. I understand that, I have them myself and my grandchildren and you never let them out of your sight anymore. But in those days people were very comfortable with just letting their kids out to play like all day long so we did all outside recreation.

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

Susan Gerity Fox: Well, the construction of Woodbridge Center, I think, was a really big happening. When I went to college the plans, I guess, were being drawn up and so after college I actually went through the **Abraham & Strauss** training program with the idea that I would ask to be transferred to Woodbridge Center when it was

opened. So after college, I graduated college in January, 1971, I went into Brooklyn every day after that for about six months, and that took me to June for the training program. Then as soon as I was ready to be made an assistant department manager I asked them if I could work at Woodbridge Center. So I did work in the early **Abraham & Strauss** store there but I really didn't care for that kind of work. So then I decided that I would go into the funeral business with my dad. But I think the development of Woodbridge Center was really a big event that changed the course of Woodbridge Township. One of the other things about Woodbridge Township was the convergence of all the major highways going through it: Route 1, Route 9, the Parkway and the Turnpike. I mean it's just such a convenient place to live for that reason. I mean you can go anywhere from here very conveniently.

Brenda Velasco: Right, and not only the highways but the railroads.

Susan Gerity Fox: The railroads, yes. Also, I remember the old Newark airport. On a Sunday afternoon we'd all get in the car and it would be like an excursion. We would go to the airport to watch the planes land and take off. There was a very elegant restaurant there called the **Newarker** which I always thought one day I would get to eat in but eventually the airport was knocked down and that restaurant is gone now.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, anything else for Question #9 you can think of?

Susan Gerity Fox: No.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, then we'll go to Question #10.

10. What do you like about Woodbridge today?

Susan Gerity Fox: What I like about Woodbridge today is I still like the convenience of living in a place that everything is so accessible to the highways. It makes it so convenient to fly in and out of Newark airport. You can be there in twenty minutes. I take the train, even now, into New York City. My older daughter lives in the city and I take the train into the opera and show. I like that Woodbridge is a large township but divided into small communities. I think people who live in each section of the township take pride in the special characteristics that make up their particular little section of the township. You know Woodbridge Proper being like the business area and the municipal government area and Colonia, while it does have its own little downtown, being more of a residential area. Sewaren is like the boating area because of the accessibility to the marina and municipal boat ramp. As a matter of fact here's a picture of my dad filling up. He had a boat which he call *Hobo* and in the background is the funeral home, right, and he's filling up the gas tank for the boat at the **ESSO Station** across the street which until very recently was where **Marty's Brakes and Muffler Shop** was. So this is an old picture here. This might have been a Buick or Cadillac, I don't know; but that's the funeral home in the background and the **ESSO Station**.

Brenda Velasco: That would be a great picture to have too and using the word **ESSO**, not **Exxon** or **Standard Oil**, that shows the period of time.

Susan Gerity Fox: Well speaking of **Standard Oil** the street I live on in Colonia, which I only came to find this out by talking to a neighbor Maria Ciardello, she told me that that street and that neighborhood was pretty much developed by the people who worked for **Standard Oil** in the area, her dad being one of them.

Brenda Velasco: And what street is this?

Susan Gerity Fox: I live on Surrey Lane now.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

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

Susan Gerity Fox: Well, my aunts and uncles on my father's side are all deceased. I have an uncle who lives in Metuchen from my mother's side. I do have a few like second cousins who still live in town. One of them is named Bill Gerity and the other is Dave Gerity. Most of my cousins have moved away and that really does make me sad because..... I couldn't understand why anybody really needed to move out. I thought it was a nice place to live and raise kids but I guess with the girls it was a matter sometimes of going where your husband goes for work.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, like you dragged your husband.

Susan Gerity Fox: Right, exactly, but my younger daughter does live in the Colonia section off of Inman Avenue on Starlight Drive and she brought her husband back here, too. He grew up in Howell but they met at Stevens Institute where they both went to college. So she lives there and they both take the train which to me is just so ironic because I took the train from there to high school. I went to high school in Elizabeth and there we are on the train all the time going north and even now south. Sometimes when we're at the beach my daughter will come to the beach on the train. But we're always along that, I guess that's call the coastline of the train, you know. I mean generations of our family have used the train.

Brenda Velasco: And they've modernized the train cars, they're double-decker now.

Susan Gerity Fox: They've modernized the train cars but I will tell you this. I remember the old train station because when I went to school in Elizabeth in the late '60s there was a little brick structure up there on the platform where a man sold the train tickets. (Susan attended Benedictine Academy). Now it has been knocked down and modernized but my daughter, who takes the train everyday with her husband, they both go into the city, says it's been so cold and windy up there that it's just very, very uncomfortable. You know it's been modernized but at a cost. But it's really neat to go to the train station because it's so elevated and you get to look out over all of Woodbridge and I just think it's really neat for people in town. Even if you're not taking the train just go up there and take a look around the town from the train station.

Brenda Velasco: Hey, you used to go to Newark Airport and just watch the planes arrive.

Susan Gerity Fox: That's exactly right and you know what else we did on Sundays lots of times? My dad would take us on the Staten Island ferry. We would go down to Perth Amboy and get on the ferry and go across to Tottenville, Staten Island and just come back. We just went for the ferry ride. It was an afternoon excursion.

Brenda Velasco: That was quite cheap I'm sure.

Susan Gerity Fox: Probably a nickel or a quarter.

Brenda Velasco: Because the Staten Island ferry-we used to use the Goethals Bridge to Staten Island and then New York City and then back to St. George-that was only a nickel without the car.

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

Susan Gerity Fox: I can't really think of anything off hand.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, well I thank you very, very much for a great interview and of a Woodbridge that is long gone.

Susan Gerity Fox: You're welcome.

Brenda Velasco: You were fortunate to have known it, thank you.

.....

After the formal interview concluded, Susan and I were looking at some old photos. One photo showed her dad with an auto that had a plate medical examiner. She mentioned that Dr. Wilentz, brother of the Wilentz legal firm, was the medical examiner for the area. Dr. Wilentz allowed her dad to assist with autopsies.

Their family doctor was Dr. Zirpolo whose office was in Rahway.