

Oral History Interview
Victor D'Alessio
WH064

(written transcript and digital audio)

On September 17, 2009, Victor D'Alessio was interviewed at the Henry Inman Library by Brenda Velasco at 1:00 P.M. Brenda Velasco interviewed Victor's sister, Albina D'Alessio, a few months earlier. At this interview they are concentrating on Woodbridge but in particular the Port Reading section.

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

Victor D'Alessio: My name is Victor D'Alessio. I was born on October 19, 1941 and I was born and grew up in the Port Reading section of Woodbridge.

2. How long have you lived in Port Reading?

Victor D'Alessio: I lived in Port Reading until I left for school, college, and at that time I was seventeen. After college I worked in Connecticut for three or four years and then I came back but not to Port Reading. I came back to Woodbridge and I lived there for about three years until I married and moved out.

Brenda Velasco: So you lived approximately twenty to twenty-one years within Woodbridge Township....

Victor D'Alessio: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: In that small enclave called Port Reading which has played a very prominent role in the history of industry and immigration for the residents of Woodbridge.

Victor D'Alessio: Yes.

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

Victor D'Alessio: Well, my parents were immigrants from Italy. My father came first. He came before my mother and was single at the time. At the beginning he went up to Boston and he spent a short time there. However his friends from his home town and people from his home town had originally settled in what is now Port Reading. At some point in time he decided to leave Boston and go to Port Reading because that's where his friends were. That's where all the people from his home town were and that's why they actually settled in Port Reading.

Brenda Velasco: And they stayed there for quite a long period of time. What was the hometown that your dad was from, do you recall?

Victor D'Alessio: Yes, the town is Pietrastornina and it's in southern Italy and it's about an hour outside of Naples, again a small town up in the mountains. My sister and I visit it occasionally. We try to get there on a regular basis.

Brenda Velasco: Do you still have relatives there?

Victor D'Alessio: Oh yes. As a matter of fact my mother was the only one that left from her family and my father was the only one that left from his family. So we have, I think my sister counted them one day, I think like ninety cousins that are still

living in Italy and some of them come to visit us and we try to get there every three or four years.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, you have a regular cultural exchange program going then.

Victor D'Alessio: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: And you have a base in Italy. When did your mother come then?

Victor D'Alessio: My mother came in 1934. My father came before the stock market crashed. I think he came like in '26 or '27 and he established himself and saved some money. He went back then and married my mother.

Brenda Velasco: So they were married in Italy then?

Victor D'Alessio: They were married in Italy and then they came back in 1934.

Brenda Velasco: And that was the height of the Depression.

Victor D'Alessio: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: So those were tough times for them.

Victor D'Alessio: Yes and my father had money at the Woodbridge National Bank and, you know, back in those days I think his first job was at **Standard Oil**. I think he used to tell us that he was making like ninety-cents an hour or something, whatever they were making. Anyway he was able to save like a thousand dollars or so and he lost it when the bank closed.

Brenda Velasco: Right, there was no FDIC back then: nothing.

Victor D'Alessio: Yes, he lost it. As a matter of fact, well I guess forty years later he built a store in Port Reading and he needed a mortgage and he went to the bank in Woodbridge. He went by himself and he was older by then, he must have been around sixty-one or sixty-two, and he told the banker he needed a loan to build this store in Port Reading. After the banker asked him all these questions he said, Mr. D'Alessio have you ever had any trouble with this bank and my father said, yes I had trouble with this bank. Then the man said, what kind of trouble did you have? He said, in 1929 the bank closed and I lost a thousand dollars. At that point, supposedly, the person at the bank said to my father you got the loan. He tells that story. I'm not sure it exactly happened that way, but that's how he tells it.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so then your dad worked for **Standard Oil** for awhile. Did he work for the **Reading Railroad**?

Victor D'Alessio: No.

Brenda Velasco: But he was attracted to Port Reading because his friends were there.

Victor D'Alessio: Right and I think because of the railroad and because most of the people who were in Port Reading were Italian immigrants he decided to start a business and he opened up a bakery and Italian grocery. So he never really worked on the railroad but there was that connection, I mean, it was because of the railroad and because those people were immigrants it attracted him to Port Reading and also the business that he started.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, especially if you want pasta and you want your tomato sauce.

Victor D'Alessio: Oh he had all of these specialty items.

Brenda Velasco: Such as.

Victor D'Alessio: Like for instance things that I can just remember real quick. I remember green olives, the Italian olives, the dried green ones which I never did like. He would buy them by the barrel and people would come over, that's one thing that I remember. As far as the meats go all of the Italian cold cuts. His specialty was

Italian sausage and people would come into the store and order it, all very elderly immigrant Italian people. Their kids never came to the store it was always the elderly people who came and they would order sausage. On Saturday mornings my sister and I would take the meat and cut it up into like little chunks and my father would take it and mix it and season it and my mother would make the sausage. My mother was the only one who knew how to run the sausage machine. I mean it's very difficult to get it even and that's what she did but that was like a specialty. Then, of course at Christmastime, especially the Neapolitans, the southern Italians, had this big seafood dinner, all the families on Christmas Eve. One of the specialties is eel so every December my father would go to **Fulton Fish Market**, he had a truck, and he would buy live eels and he would bring the eels, back again in a barrel. Again all of these people, all of these immigrant people, would come in to buy their eels for their Christmas dinner and it was always great fun.

Brenda Velasco: Oh I'm sure.

Victor D'Alessio: Oh it was and we even had have a 8 mm film of one of the, I don't know which year it was, you know, people coming in buying the eels and of course they were alive and, I mean, you go to pick them up and they're very.....

Brenda Velasco: They're wiggly.

Victor D'Alessio: Yes, they're wiggly and, you know, the women would jump back, you know, and you'd put them in the bag and the bag would be flipping all over. It was great fun.

Brenda Velasco: And you enjoyed it.

Victor D'Alessio: Oh, yes, because, you know, it was Christmastime which is always the nice time of the year especially in Italian families and the eel thing was a ritual. Every year at Christmas, you know, my father would get the eels.

Brenda Velasco: So you were like a supplier to the workers of the **Reading Railroad**?

Victor D'Alessio: Yes, the **Reading Railroad** became an employer, most of the people worked at the railroad. A matter of fact my neighbor, Mr. Coppola, I think he was like a foreman at the dumper because the coal dumper was the big thing.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, McMyler Coal Dumper.

Victor D'Alessio: Right and you know they all worked on the railroad. At that time, you know, it was very active. Trains used to come in from Pennsylvania, hundreds of coal cars, would come in and then most of the people who worked at the dumper would just take the cars and actually dump the coal into barges and then the coal would be taken away.

Brenda Velasco: Because you didn't work there we're going to also use the generic questions from other interviews.

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

Victor D'Alessio: Well when I was living in Port Reading, to be honest, it didn't change very much. However whenever I went back, in later years, there were lots of changes.

Brenda Velasco: In the 1960's you saw.....

Victor D'Alessio: Yes, I would say yes because I was in college in the '60s so this had to be after, basically housing developments. When we were kids we used to call it "the Woods". It was pretty close to Carteret and we would, you know, go there and there were ponds there and when they froze in the winter we would go ice skating and we'd go hiking. Now it's all housing developments. We have a new church. The original church, St. Anthony's, the old church was knocked down and they built a new church. The schools, P.S. #9 and there was a small school in Hagaman Heights....

Brenda Velasco: That was a two room.....

Victor D'Alessio: Yes, that was a two room schoolhouse, it was really something, and now they have all new schools. The post office; it's changed quite a bit. I noticed that even the older houses and these were really older houses, you know, for working class people, every time I go back, you know, they 're really well kept, the landscaping is improved and now they have aluminum, well I say aluminum....

Brenda Velasco: Vinyl siding, yes.

Victor D'Alessio: Vinyl or aluminum siding which back then they had used asbestos, not asbestos but artificial brick. I think it was like tar and whatever it was back in those days. So the houses are really well kept and well maintained. I noticed that there has been an improvement just in the old neighborhoods.

Brenda Velasco: Right and the old housing style.

Victor D'Alessio: Yes, the old housing.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, because eventually your family had to move out of there.

Victor D'Alessio: Right.

Brenda Velasco: Why don't you relate why that came about?

Victor D'Alessio: Okay there was a.....

Brenda Velasco: What street did you live on by the way?

Victor D'Alessio: We lived on Fourth, Fourth Street and the main avenue. Back then it was, it's Port Reading Avenue now but back then it was the main street. I think back then it was Woodbridge Avenue, I don't remember, but now it's Port Reading Avenue. Well there was a general (redevelopment) project called Bowtie. What they did was where we were, where my father had his business and house located. They were rezoning the area and they were improving the traffic flow. It was a pretty bad spot by the way. There were a lot of accidents there. There was heavy traffic and it wasn't unusual for every, on a regular basis there were accidents, automobile accidents. Well anyway, as it turns out, they actually bought the property.

Brenda Velasco: They bought your dad's property?

Victor D'Alessio: Yes they bought it. It was supposedly at fair market value and although, particular my father, didn't want to do it at all, I guess, they had no choice. Then what they did is they took the money that they got for the property in Port Reading and they built a house in Woodbridge Proper. It's got a Fords mailing address but its' still Woodbridge Proper. With the money that was left over my father bought the property back, the original property where our house was, and he built a food store and he leased it to **Krauszer's** and it's still there, it's still in Port Reading.

Brenda Velasco: Because they really have no food stores in Port Reading.

Victor D'Alessio: Well they have a couple of delis, what we call uptown. Port Reading had an uptown and a downtown, Hagaman Heights and the Avenues. So there was like four sections in Port Reading.

Brenda Velasco: What was the uptown considered?

Victor D'Alessio: Uptown was from like the railroad tracks to the Turnpike. We were downtown so downtown was like from the railroad to I don't know what street in what they called Hagaman Heights but Hagaman Heights was on the Carteret border. Then the Avenues were on the other side of the Turnpike. So you were either from the Avenue, downtown, uptown or Hagaman Heights.

Brenda Velasco: Okay and about what time did that Bowtie Project come in?

Victor D'Alessio: It was the early sixties because I was in college. (1964)

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Victor D'Alessio: Well maybe not the early sixties, well the sixties, because they had the new house built in '64 or '65.

Brenda Velasco: Okay so early sixties when you were in college.

Victor D'Alessio: Yes, because in 1966 the house was finished and we owe it to Italy as a family so we all took a trip that summer and then when we came back the house was ready and then we moved into the new house.

Brenda Velasco: Now when we were talking about your house on Fourth Street was the business right in the house as well?

Victor D'Alessio: Yes, the business was downstairs and we lived upstairs. And also we had two apartments that my father rented. So he did okay for himself.

Brenda Velasco: He sure did.

Victor D'Alessio: Business was good and they had the two apartments.

Brenda Velasco: So there was a steady income as well.

Victor D'Alessio: There was a steady income, yes.

Brenda Velasco: And you also had, I know, many good friends living there because I've interviewed Dominic and Madeline Coppola.

Victor D'Alessio: Yes most of them were people that we knew. As I recall I don't think we've ever rented it to anybody that we didn't know. Not for anything, these people needed apartments and, you know, they were available.

Brenda Velasco: It was a symbiotic relationship; it worked out well for everybody.

Victor D'Alessio: Yes, it worked out well.

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

Victor D'Alessio: We had the firehouse.

Brenda Velasco: Was the firehouse always there?

Victor D'Alessio: Yes, it was always there. We had one post office, which again my father had a building that he owned and he leased it to the Post Office Department.

Brenda Velasco: Where was this at the time?

Victor D'Alessio: That was on Turner Street and again I think its Woodbridge Avenue, the main road, which is now Port Reading Avenue. Let's see, we had two schools. There was P.S. #9 and there was the Hagaman Heights School which was the two room school and that was it.

Brenda Velasco: Which school did you attend?

Victor D'Alessio: I went to P.S. #9.

Brenda Velasco: Grades kindergarten through.....

Victor D'Alessio: Yes, all through eighth grade and then I went to Woodbridge High School.

Brenda Velasco: On Barron Avenue?

Victor D'Alessio: My first year I was at Barron Avenue.....

Brenda Velasco: As a freshman.

Victor D'Alessio: As a freshman and then in my sophomore year the new high school was ready and we had split sessions back then so I think I went in the afternoons for one year and then.....

Brenda Velasco: Then you took the morning session.

Victor D'Alessio: I don't remember.

Brenda Velasco: And how did you get to the school?

Victor D'Alessio: Well P.S. #9 we walked. It was less than two miles so we walked and, of course you know being in Port Reading with the railroads sometimes we'd get caught by, we used to call them longees. The trains used to come in from Pennsylvania and I mean it would take like twenty minutes for these trains to cross the highway, maybe not twenty, that might be an exaggeration but a good ten minutes or fifteen minutes for these trains to cross over. There was no overpass then.

Brenda Velasco: Okay this was a grade crossing.....

Victor D'Alessio: And there was a guard. There was nothing like they have now. There was a little coop, not a coop, a little station with a pot stove and I remember his name was John, John was the guard and every time a train came he would go out and blow the whistle and hold up the stop sign and the trains would come into Port Reading. Sometimes when we were on our way to school we would get stuck.

Brenda Velasco: Which made you late for school.

Victor D'Alessio: And we would have to tell Mr. Brown, the principal, that we got stuck by a longee; we used to call them longees.

Brenda Velasco: Some of those trains had about a hundred or a hundred and fifty cars.

Victor D'Alessio: As a matter of fact some of them were so long that they didn't even fit in the yard and the yard was pretty big so they would break it and bring half in and then go back and get the other half.

Brenda Velasco: So your dad may not have worked there but the railroad still dominated and impacted your business and impacted the transportation.

Victor D'Alessio: It was the essence of Port Reading that was the railroad. I mean you couldn't get away from it. Oh, you asked me before how things have changed. Well, what really changed is that the railroad died. I mean the coal business just died and Hess Oil came in and suddenly now it was **Hess Oil**, the **Hess Oil Refinery**, it was no longer the **Reading Railroad**. I don't know how many locals worked for Hess Oil but I would imagine **Hess Oil** also became a major employer of the local residents.

Brenda Velasco: So once again it was affiliated with the transportation industry whether it's railroad or the energy source.

Victor D'Alessio: Well that's one way how Port Reading changed. I mean changed in terms of the industry and now you go by the railroad and there's, I guess it's still active but not like before. What you see is the refinery, you know.

Brenda Velasco: The refinery dominates and **PSE&G** with their smoke stacks.

Victor D'Alessio: Well that's Sewaren.

Brenda Velasco: That's Sewaren, right, and Sewaren is where you're having a lot of the complaints with the railroad with the ethanol now, **Shell Motiva**, so it's a little different.

Victor D'Alessio: I didn't know about that. I know that they're doing a pretty decent job in making Sewaren a nice place to spend a few hours.

Brenda Velasco: The Marina there is beautiful.

Victor D'Alessio: The Marina, yes,

Brenda Velasco: Did you have a library?

Victor D'Alessio: We had a library but it was not a public library. It was actually Father Milos who was the original, not the original pastor, but the priest, when we were growing up, at St. Anthony's who actually built the library. So the library was actual a part of St. Anthony's, the parish. Father Milos did a lot for the town. The library was one of his projects. So we didn't have a public library per say.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, how about parks, did you have any parks then?

Victor D'Alessio: Yes, we had one. As a matter of fact it was on Fourth Street. We actually called it the Fourth Street Playground and in the summer that was where we all spent our summers and, you know, we played baseball every day. They had horseshoes and baseball I mean we spent all of our time there.

Brenda Velasco: And that was close to you.

Victor D'Alessio: Yes, it was very close. But I guess it was the downtown crowd that really hung out at the Fourth Street Playground but occasionally somebody from Hagaman Heights or from The Avenues would come and, you know, they would join us.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, anything else in that question? We've got the firehouse and we've got the schools so that takes care of question five.

6. What did you do for recreation?

Victor D'Alessio: Well, we didn't have a recreation center per say, not like now. I mean Woodbridge has a recreation center on Main Street. I mean it was the Fourth Street Playground.

Brenda Velasco: That was it.

Victor D'Alessio: That was it. Again it was, again, baseball and horse shoes and when it rained we would play cards or whatever. In the winter, whenever it snowed, we had some streets that were hilly and we would all get our sleds and we would go sleigh riding. That was it, you know, I mean there was no recreation center or nothing like that. I mean we just did it on our own.

Brenda Velasco: You had to improvise.

Victor D'Alessio: Yes, we did and we had fun.

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

Victor D'Alessio: Well, the church and school.

Brenda Velasco: St. Anthony's (Church).

Victor D'Alessio: I would imagine, yes, because again most of, I would say there were like six hundred people in Port Reading when I was growing up. I think there were six hundred, don't quote me on that but it wasn't a big number and, you know, basically we were all Catholics. We all went to St. Anthony's. I mean if you'd go to church on Sunday the whole town was there, you know. So I would say probably St. Anthony's and the school.

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

Victor D'Alessio: I think it was just the people. It was like one big family. People were unique, they were just really different. There again, they were basically immigrants. I guess what I liked it was just, you know, one big family. Then, of course, there's the cultural aspects, you know, the customs, the culture.

Brenda Velasco: You shared it.

Victor D'Alessio: Oh, yes, I mean it was nothing to visit your neighbor and they were cooking they would invite you over or the women would get together and cook these dishes especially around the holidays. As a matter of fact, even after my mother moved to Woodbridge, well my father too, I mean the women would still get together on the holidays and they would can their own tomatoes. It was just that kind of a way of life which maybe I'm a little biased because I am an Italian American but for me it was just a wonderful way to grow up you know.

Brenda Velasco: You were very fortunate because Albina felt the same way, your sister.

Victor D'Alessio: And whenever we see people from Port Reading, I mean, it was just like you never left, you know. You're always happy to see them and they're happy to see you. You talk about what we used to do when we were kids and growing up.

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

Victor D'Alessio: I remember the Woodbridge train wreck. I remember that just like it was yesterday. I remember who told me about it.

Brenda Velasco: How did you learn about it?

Victor D'Alessio: Well, my next door neighbor, as a matter of fact, the people who rented one of the apartments and they were from Port Reading. His name was Joe Libitsky and he was in Woodbridge and he came back and said that there was a train wreck. But I still remember like the images. I guess we had television back then.

Brenda Velasco: 1951 was the train wreck.

Victor D'Alessio: Okay, 1951 so I remember seeing it on the news and it was just something that I remember. The other thing was building the Turnpike. I guess that was in 1948 or 1949 and it came right through Port Reading and, I mean, the trucks and traffic and everything building this Turnpike. We were amazed, when we found out, that it was like six lanes and there were no traffic lights, you could just drive right through. You know, for us that was like what six lanes and no traffic, no stop signs or no traffic lights. See that was a big deal back then.

Brenda Velasco: And the exit was in Carteret.

Victor D'Alessio: There was an exit in Carteret.....

Brenda Velasco: And then later it was further south, it was in Woodbridge but in the Fords section or southern part of Woodbridge Township you have the exit from the Turnpike for the Parkway where everything links up.

Victor D'Alessio: Right.

Brenda Velasco: So it was much further away. So you just saw the construction.

Victor D'Alessio: Well it came right through Port Reading. It was, as a matter of fact, we were on Fourth Street and if you went all the way to the end of Fourth Street you would actually hit the railroad but then at the other side of the railroad was where the Turnpike actually came through, it came through Port Reading.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, was there anything else? Well **Hess** came later.

Victor D'Alessio: Yes, **Hess** came later. I was not there when they built **Hess**. But, you know, I really I couldn't really think of anything else.

Brenda Velasco: Again, when did they put the bridge over Port Reading Avenue?

Victor D'Alessio: That was after I left.

Brenda Velasco: After you left.

Victor D'Alessio: I don't even remember them doing that.

Brenda Velasco: Because there is not a grade crossing there for the railroad.

Victor D'Alessio: No, now the bridge goes over it not like before.

Brenda Velasco: So it was later on in the '60s or something.

Victor D'Alessio: Because in Port Reading there was not only the **Reading Railroad** but there was the **Jersey Central**. And actually there was a station Port Reading had a stop and trains used to stop in Port Reading. I don't know where they actually came from. I think they probably came from either Newark or Jersey City but they would go all the way down the shore and even now, **New Jersey Transit**, Point Pleasant is the last stop (Jersey Coast). Because I was an altar boy in St. Anthony's and every year we had what they'd call the adult boy trip. We would go to Asbury Park because every summer a person in the priesthood would come to Port Reading and he'd be assigned to the parish and he would basically be the one that took us down to Asbury Park and we would go on the train. We would get on the train in Port Reading, at the station, and we would go down to Asbury Park and come back on the train. Another thing that my father did was, because he had a truck, he would deliver the mail to the station. My mother would stay in the store, he would only take like twenty minutes or so, and I remember I used to help him especially at Christmastime when there were sacks of mail. So we would go to the post office, twice a day, we would pick up the mail from the post office in Port Reading and bring it to the station in Port Reading. But that was the **Jersey Central** not the Reading and they were passenger trains and they would have a mail car and the train would stop and the mail car door would open and they would throw off the bags that were coming to the **Port Reading Post Office** and we would put the bags on to the train that was leaving and then, I guess, we did that twice a day.

Brenda Velasco: So your whole store was a family affair?

Victor D'Alessio: Yes, while my mother and father actually, you know, worked together and my mother played a pretty important role. My sister and I helped. Once I went away to college, well, when I came back they had already moved the store, the store was gone.

Brenda Velasco: Which occupied most of their working time so that was quite a big adjustment.

Victor D'Alessio: My mother and father came over in 1934. I don't know when he actually opened the bakery and the store. But in 1948 they moved from one building in Port Reading and then he built the store that he stayed in until Bowtie, he built that in 1948. So from '48 to '64 they were in the same place.

Brenda Velasco: Same location.

Victor D'Alessio: Same location on Fourth Street.

Brenda Velasco: How about any events when you were a kid? Your sister had mentioned something about a television program.

Victor D'Alessio: Yes, this is kind of interesting. When I was in college, and this was my senior year so it was 1963, on ABC, Channel 7, they had a program called *Meet the Professor* and it was like a half an hour program on a Sunday. The head of our department was selected as a participant in the show and I happened to be, at that time, in the senior class. So we found out that he had been selected for this TV show and, so of course, when I called home I said by the way I might be on television, there's a TV show called *Meet the Professor*. So my father, again, told all his customers that I was going to be on a TV show. Well as it turns out, I really lucked out, because one of the segments, and by the way when I told him there was a TV show we had no idea if we were going to be on or not, we had no idea of what they were doing. But I was really lucky because one of the procedures was that we would be given design assignments. When we met in our design classes, Professor Redman the head of the department and selected for the program, would come around and critique our work. One of the segments in the show was Professor Redman coming down and critiquing us. Well, it was really fortunate because I think there must have been fifteen in the class but I think they showed like three and I was one of them. (University of Bridgeport, Class of 1963)

Brenda Velasco: And you were one of them and you were from Port Reading.

Victor D'Alessio: And I was from Port Reading. So it was a weekend, it was a Sunday. I came home to see the show with them and you got to remember we had a little black and white 12 inch television set and I saw the show, you know, and then that night I went back to Connecticut because my class was the next day. But Albina tells me that after the show all of his customers would come back into the store and say that, you know, oh Victor was on television. Back then it was a big deal. It wasn't quite *Jeopardy* but back in those days it was a big deal.

Brenda Velasco: It was a big deal to see someone you knew on TV from Port Reading. Wow!

Victor D'Alessio: Yes, the grocer's son. You know one of the things that we really hadn't talked about, not from the questionnaire or our discussion was, of course, the value of an education especially in my family anyway. I mean education was the road to the future. I mean there was no way my sister and I would have ever gotten away without going to college, you know. It was really very important and, you know, my sister became an educator and she became a principal.

Brenda Velasco: She became a very successful educator because I attended the college after she graduated. (Newark State College)

Victor D'Alessio: Oh, really.

Brenda Velasco: And in the field of special education she was a pioneer in New Jersey. Her name is always, always referred to.

Victor D'Alessio: When people still see her and meet her on the street they're happy to see her and always asks her how she's doing. It amazing how many times that happens. And I became an industrial designer and I worked for, twenty years, at a company in Teaneck and we were design consultants.

Brenda Velasco: What were some of the things you designed?

Victor D'Alessio: We had a variety of projects because we were basically consultants. The big ones were we had a contract with **NASA** for a long time. We did all of their traveling exhibits, a lot of the visitor centers, and the Paris Air Show. That was always great fun because it gave us a chance to get to Paris for four weeks. I was never excited about going, you know. My wife used to say how could you not be excited? You know, you're going to Paris. I'd say you think I'm going to Paris to tour. I mean these were like ten hour or twelve hour days seven days a week getting these things ready for the opening, you know. But it was still Paris. I remember one day I had to go to the Embassy for something, the U.S. Embassy, and I mean while we were there we had an apartment and we took the Metro to work. We just became like, you know, part of the community. I remember one day I came up the Metro stairs and as I got to the top I looked out and I saw the Eifel Tower. Suddenly it hit me, I really am in Paris! So those were great experiences. I traveled all over because we did a lot of international work. I was in Singapore for about a year and then I hadn't really planned on staying there that long but that's how long the project took, I couldn't get out. Then after we finished that, they asked me if I wanted to stay to work on a project in Hong Kong. I really didn't want to stay but I couldn't say no, so I stayed for about another six or eight months and I worked in Hong Kong. Then, still with the company in Teaneck, we got a project for the National Science of Malaysia and we were the design firm and I spent about three years, not steady, off and on in Malaysia until the project was done.

Brenda Velasco: So you had some interesting experiences with your career choice.

Victor D'Alessio: I mean it was great fun. I enjoyed every minute. There were days when I couldn't wait to get to work. I remember some nights I would stay late, Toshi was my boss at the time, and he'd say go home it's getting late but I loved what I did. It was great fun. I traveled all over and met a lot of interesting people.

Brenda Velasco: Did Port Reading ever have an impact on you?

Victor D'Alessio: Not really but, you know, growing up I had some skills. I could always draw and I loved building things. I mean I can't tell you where it came from. I think my mother was fairly talented in terms of what she did. As a matter of fact one of the projects that we worked on we had **Sikorsky Helicopter** as a client and we were actually hired to do the interior design for their first commercial helicopter. But while we were there, they were redesigning President Nixon's helicopter and we did some mockup work for the helicopter and I remember we had to have some cushions made. We went to a person over at Teterboro Airport but I don't know if he was on vacation at the time, he couldn't do it. So I said to Toshi, you know my mother is pretty good with sewing and that kind of thing, I said so let's have her make it. So I did. I brought all the stuff home and my mother actually put together and sewed the cushions for Nixon's helicopter.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Victor D'Alessio: So that was one of those.....

Brenda Velasco: Port Reading goes right into the presidential.....

Victor D'Alessio: That's true and I remember the day. We took a test flight, you know, and this was up in Stratford, Connecticut and I remember the day we took a test flight and we flew around over, they were in Stratford, **Sikorsky** was in Stratford, Connecticut, and I remember we went out over Long Island Sound and they would check certain things like, you know, any kind of vibration because we worked on some furniture like the presidential chair and all that stuff. Those were all interesting experiences and once in a lifetime. Because, I mean, the presidential helicopter that's all we did at the time. I mean we never went down to Washington or anything, all the work was done up in Connecticut.

10. What do you like about Port Reading today?

Brenda Velasco: I know you moved to Plainfield, you no longer live in Woodbridge or Port Reading but you still come back.

Victor D'Alessio: Yes, I still come back and I'll tell you if it's not to go to St. Anthony's or a wedding or whatever, you know, sometimes I just go back just to see how it's changed and what it's like. I don't have too many friends back there, I kind of lost contact with most of the people. But once in a while I'd just go back for nostalgia and just go take a look and see what's happening.

Brenda Velasco: So you have good memories?

Victor D'Alessio: Yes good memories. It was a good place to grow up.

Brenda Velasco: I thank you for sharing them. Is there any other story you want to mention about Port Reading or your family?

Victor D'Alessio: No, other than that the people were so unique. They were mostly, again, immigrants, not very well educated but their hearts were in the right place. They worked hard and they were always warm and friendly. It always made you feel good. I remember Mr. DaPrile, who lived across the street. One of the things that they did was they had fruit trees; they had like gardens you know all of them had gardens. Even my mother whenever she got a break from the business she was always out in the garden. One thing that I remember about Mr. DaPrile and there was a Mr. Cardiello, they both had fruit trees and of course in the winter if they didn't protect the trees and the trees would die. So every fall, and I remember primarily Mr. DaPrile because he lived across the street, he would take the tree and tie it and then they would wrap it in whatever they could find. Tar paper.....

Brenda Velasco: Awnings.

Victor D'Alessio: Anything that would insulate the tree from the cold and in the spring they would take it all off and, you know, I guess late in the summer or whatever they'd had their fresh figs.

Brenda Velasco: This was a symbol.

Victor D'Alessio: Its things like that, you know, some people had animals. I mean I was pretty young then but I had an aunt in Woodbridge who, you know, she had a chicken coop. I remember the rooster was really nasty, a nasty little bird. She had an incubator, you know, the chicken would lay eggs and I remember going over there one day and.....

Brenda Velasco: Where did she live?

Victor D'Alessio: Actually the house was on the road that the high school is on.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Victor D'Alessio: That goes past the Reo Diner, what is that?

Brenda Velasco: That's Amboy Avenue.

Victor D'Alessio: Amboy Avenue, yes the house was on Amboy Avenue but she had a big yard and the chicken coop was not on Amboy Avenue. The chicken coop was on, I forgot what the other road was in the back of that house. I remember one day we went there and she had eggs and she had an incubator and she opened up the incubator and pulled out the tray and there were like all these chicks, you know, that's the kind of thing I remember. The holidays were always special. Every holiday had certain foods and certain traditions and Albina and I, until this day, try and maintain it: Easter and Christmas; Albina is a lot more traditional than I am. At Lent she will still give up something for the Lenten season and won't touch it until Easter Sunday, you know.

Brenda Velasco: And you won't touch meat on Friday, Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

Victor D'Alessio: Well, actually we eat meat on Friday but Good Friday she'll call me and say now this Friday is Good Friday, remember you can't eat meat. God forbid I should eat meat on Good Friday!

Brenda Velasco: Right, it's being part of a community. You sacrifice a little because we've gotten so many good things in return.

Victor D'Alessio: And it was well because we were all Catholics but it was also like an Italian tradition. So it was a good experience.

Brenda Velasco: Well, I thank you for your time.

Victor D'Alessio: You're quite welcome. I enjoyed it actually.

Brenda Velasco: And I enjoyed the interview. It gives me back my past as well but thank you again.

Victor D'Alessio: Oh, you're quite welcome.