

Oral History Interview
William A. Kovacs
WH078

(written transcript and digital audio)

On April 19, 2010, William A. Kovacs was interviewed at the Henry Inman Library by Brenda Velasco at 11:00 A.M.

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

William Kovacs: I'm William A. Kovacs. I live at 46 Rutgers Avenue in Colonia and I am seventy-three years of age. I was born December 8, 1936.

2. How long have you lived in Colonia?

Brenda Velasco: Did you always live in Colonia?

William Kovacs: No, I didn't. I was born in Fords, really Perth Amboy General Hospital, and my parents, of course, lived in Fords where I resided for twenty-three years.

Brenda Velasco: Twenty-three years and then you moved in Colonia?

William Kovacs: No, I moved to an apartment in Woodbridge right off St. George Avenue right across from Woodbridge High School. A lot of people would call that Freeman Street but that's St. George Avenue. It bears to the left if you're coming from Avenel.

Brenda Velasco: But all your time has been spent in this township?

William Kovacs: Yes.

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

Brenda Velasco: Why did your family originally move to Woodbridge or did they always live here, too?

William Kovacs: They always lived here also.

Brenda Velasco: So your mom and dad were born in Woodbridge?

William Kovacs: Yes, in Fords

Brenda Velasco: So you go back a long, long time. Did your grandparents come over from another country?

William Kovacs: Yes, Poland. My grandfather and grandmother came from Poland. That's my mother's side and my grandfather came from Hungary.

Brenda Velasco: And that's your father's father?

William Kovacs: Yes.

**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: So if you were born in 1936 you've seen Woodbridge go from a very small community, about twenty-five or thirty thousand people to close to a hundred thousand.

William Kovacs: Yes, from one high school to three.

Brenda Velasco: One high school to three and we should mention that you were in education, too.

William Kovacs: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: And we'll get to that later on but let's look at Fords because that's where you grew up. When you lived in Fords what was the address, do you recall?

William Kovacs: That's a tough one. No it's not: 30 Hamilton Avenue. Very close to New Brunswick Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: Which was the main avenue back then.

William Kovacs: Yes, along with King Georges Road.

Brenda Velasco: Did you have a lot of houses on your street back then when you were growing up?

William Kovacs: Yes, there was. It was a section of Fords where there were a lot of homes. Then later on we were called Old Fords and off Ford Avenue that was known as New Fords. We had a grove called Varady's Grove.

Brenda Velasco: And what did you do at Varady's Grove?

William Kovacs: Our Lady of Peace Church had numerous picnics and in those days industrial factories had picnics. We would be there on Saturday or Sunday and later on they just sold Varady's Grove and homes came in.

Brenda Velasco: This is where the Lafayette Estates are in that area?

William Kovacs: Fords Middle School.

Brenda Velasco: Fords Middle School area, okay.

William Kovacs: It's on the other side of Ford Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: So that was a popular place to go to then.

William Kovacs: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: How about going back to your street, Hamilton Street? Was it paved at the time when you were growing up? Did you have sidewalks and curbs?

William Kovacs: We did have a sidewalk in front of our home. There were quite a few homes there but we didn't move into that home until 1951. We rented three or four different times and we lived with my grandmother while this home was being built.

Brenda Velasco: Where did you live when you rented, still in Fords?

William Kovacs: Yes, Izola Avenue was the first home that I remember. That was across from School #7 in Fords. I lived also on New Brunswick Avenue and King Georges Road.

Brenda Velasco: You really traveled. Was there a lot of open space back then?

William Kovacs: Yes, in fact on Hansen Avenue, which is right across from School #7, we thought it was the largest hill in the world and that's where we used to sleigh ride.

Brenda Velasco: So there weren't that many home there?

William Kovacs: No, not many. There was a grocery store in town.

Brenda Velasco: This was on New Brunswick Avenue?

William Kovacs: Hansen Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: So there was a grocery store on Hansen Avenue and what did you purchase there? You went shopping there?

William Kovacs: Yes, but that was in my younger days so I don't remember too much about that.

Brenda Velasco: You weren't interested in shopping.

William Kovacs: No. What was funny we also lived on King Georges Road, very close to **Liberty Tavern** which wasn't there then. A family by the name of Straub owned this complex and we lived in the upstairs apartment and downstairs was a grocery store.

Brenda Velasco: That was convenient.

William Kovacs: And what had happened is that, in those days, you had a little book so when you went shopping for bread and milk and eggs and whatever, you didn't pay, you wrote everything in the book. So Thursday or Friday was payday for my dad so we had to pay the rent and we had to pay the grocery bill and whatever. It seems everything went to Straub.

Brenda Velasco: They made out quite well.

William Kovacs: Yes, and then to the left was a confectionary store owned by the son whose name was Straub who was very influential in starting up the Little League many, many moons ago.

Brenda Velasco: This is the Little League in Fords?

William Kovacs: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Because we didn't have Woodbridge Youth Recreation at this time. It was the individual communities. So I'm sure you supported the son's confectionary store as well.

William Kovacs: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: What did you buy in the confectionary store because we don't have too many of them around anymore.

William Kovacs: Well, we had those baseball cards.

Brenda Velasco: Ah, right.

William Kovacs: And I think they might have only been a penny a card; and I know potato chips were a big factor in our home.

Brenda Velasco: Do you recall any other stores in that area?

William Kovacs: Well **Liberty Tavern** was not there. **Dambach's Grocery Store** was on New Brunswick Avenue and his son was the judge or lawyer later on in life. There was a drugstore off New Brunswick Avenue by the name of **Katz, Katz Drugstore**, and there was a confectionary store called **Kayburt's** right across from Fords movie house. Later on in high school it was just like *Happy Days*, it was the same thing. You could go there and enjoy your evenings.

Brenda Velasco: So you mentioned the theatre.

William Kovacs: Yes, and we would go every Saturday. That was our matinee where it only cost twenty cents to get in.

Brenda Velasco: Those were the days.

William Kovacs: And I think my mother gave me fifty cents and there was money left over.

Brenda Velasco: Did you just have one movie there?

William Kovacs: Yes. They used to have serials on Saturday: *The Phantom* and *The Shadow*.

Brenda Velasco: This was great for kids. So that meant if there were serials you had to come back each Saturday to see what was happening.

William Kovacs: Right, and the fellow who owned it his name was Mr. Lang.

Brenda Velasco: How about houses of worship?

William Kovacs: Our Lady of Peace Church, which is brand new now, they have an annex, they didn't have it in those days. They always had the church and school with the same building and later on they had a new church and across the street they built an annex.

Brenda Velasco: That's where the knights meet now?

William Kovacs: I think so.

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

Brenda Velasco: How about the schools? What schools did you attend?

William Kovacs: School No. 7. In those days they only had two schools, Woodbridge No. 11 and Fords No. 7 where they went from first grade to eighth grade.

Brenda Velasco: So no kindergarten then.

William Kovacs: I would say no. I think I went to kindergarten at Our Lady of Peace Church and then I switched over. We also at the school, which is still in existence, School No. 14. We did not have a sixth grade at Fords School No. 7 so we had to walk over two and a half miles to school; just for sixth grade. School No. 14 had grades one through six but they had to go to School No. 7 for grade seven. The kids from Hopelawn had to go and Keasbey in Fords.

Brenda Velasco: Because Mrs. Fee was the principal.

William Kovacs: No Fee was, I think, from Keasbey. We had Mr. Sharp.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, he was at School.....

William Kovacs: He was at School #7 and #14 and a woman by the name of Mrs. Ketsis was the secretary and her husband was a principal in Iselin somewhere.

Brenda Velasco: So Iselin had a school then too?

William Kovacs: Yes, School #6 which is now the firehouse but they had to go to Woodbridge #11 if I'm correct on that. I think I am. They also had another school, Iselin #15, which is off Correja Avenue and is now townhouses.

Brenda Velasco: Where did you end up going to middle school?

William Kovacs: There wasn't a middle school.

Brenda Velasco: There wasn't a middle school

William Kovacs: No, the school had grades one through eight. Then when we got into seventh grade that's when we would change classes for arithmetic and history. It wasn't called math then, it was called arithmetic; English and geography also.

Brenda Velasco: After your schools in Fords, and you walked to school I'm assuming.

William Kovacs: Definitely.

Brenda Velasco: So you walked about two and a half miles.

William Kovacs: When I had to go to School #14.

Brenda Velasco: For that one year.

William Kovacs: Right, but I was very close to School #7, later on, in walking distance so that wasn't a problem.

Brenda Velasco: And you could show up late at school then.

William Kovacs: No, you wouldn't even think of it. It was much different in those days than it is now.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

William Kovacs: I remember my cousin lived in Hopelawn and when she had to go to seventh and eighth grade she used to ride her bike to our home and then walk two blocks or so to School #7. When I first started teaching there wasn't a job in physical education so I was a fifth grade teacher at School #7. I went back to my roots.

Brenda Velasco: So you went back to your roots.

William Kovacs: I was the only male teacher at that time in the school but it was grades one through six then.

Brenda Velasco: And that was at School #7?

William Kovacs: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: And you graduated from college in 19.....

William Kovacs: 1958 and high school 1954.

Brenda Velasco: It was Woodbridge High School and was this a new high school? Was this the new high school?

William Kovacs: No, Barron Avenue which we thought was so large and now when we go back for the reunions it's so small because for our fiftieth class reunion, on a Saturday afternoon, we went back to Woodbridge and we took a tour.

Brenda Velasco: That was great.

William Kovacs: It was fantastic.

Brenda Velasco: That was for your fiftieth you said.

William Kovacs: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: And I know you were a teacher as well. You taught at School #7 fifth grade and then.....

William Kovacs: I think it started at sixth grade which was my first years and the second year was fifth grade. I did go in the service for six months, in the National Guard. Then when I came out I was teaching physical education. A job opened up and at that time; there were only two physical education teachers for elementary in the district. We had about eleven schools apiece.

Brenda Velasco: You really traveled.

William Kovacs: But Woodbridge has come a long way. Now they have one for each elementary school.

Brenda Velasco: Yes and physical education is an integral part. You cannot graduate without passing physical education. I think it's now mandated by New Jersey statutes.

William Kovacs: We hope it stays that way.

Brenda Velasco: By all means.

William Kovacs: We don't think it will change back.

Brenda Velasco: No, the kids have to have a release of energy somewhere with the day.

William Kovacs: Plus with physical fitness. They don't like moving.

Brenda Velasco: That's right.

William Kovacs: They don't like running.

Brenda Velasco: No, but it's an integral part of education.

William Kovacs: Correct.

Brenda Velasco: So there were only two physical education teachers for all the elementary schools at one time. This was about '59 and then from there you went from elementary school physical ed.....

William Kovacs: Then I went to Colonia Junior High. They were all new at that time except Barron Avenue became a Junior High. Then we had Fords, Colonia, and Iselin. Avenel wasn't built yet until maybe '63, I'm not sure of the date. (1964)

Brenda Velasco: I can look that up. Lois Rotella was nice enough to give me all of the dates that the schools opened because of the times. Woodbridge population just shot up.

William Kovacs: Yes, it definitely did.

Brenda Velasco: It went from a handful to where you had a school population of twenty thousand in about 1970. So you were in the heyday of that expansion of school kids and with the new high schools coming about, too. So where did you end your career in teaching then?

William Kovacs: Then Kennedy High School opened up in 1964 the graduating class was 1965, so I went over there and became the driver's ed teacher. That was the only opening. They didn't have any openings in physical education. Pat Osborne's husband was the football coach.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, Ronnie.

William Kovacs: We were very close. In fact at Colonia Junior High, he was at Colonia Junior High, him and I were at together.

Brenda Velasco: So you taught in quite a few schools.

William Kovacs: Yes, then I ran the Driver Ed Department from 1972 to about 1993 when there was no more behind the wheel.

Brenda Velasco: I think kids can use it.

William Kovacs: Oh yes.

Brenda Velasco: So you had an extensive career. When did you retire?

William Kovacs: '98.

Brenda Velasco: 1998?

William Kovacs: Yes

Brenda Velasco: So that's like forty years you taught.

William Kovacs: Forty and a half years.

Brenda Velasco: Forty and a half.

William Kovacs: The half is because of the six months that I was in the service.

Brenda Velasco: Quite a career in education.

William Kovacs: I've seen a lot of families.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, you have. Well that's an advantage though. If you enjoy education, you like to see the families.

William Kovacs: Of course, I still sub: only elementary physical education where they still enjoy gym and running, jumping, dancing and marching.

Brenda Velasco: That's the elementary level. That's the nice thing about that.

William Kovacs: But you can see in fifth grade already they're starting to.....

Brenda Velasco: Too sophisticated sometimes.

William Kovacs: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: So you've also seen by the expansion of teams.....

William Kovacs: The three high schools.

Brenda Velasco: Three high schools and also the leagues and everything that the high schools are involved with. So you witnessed.....

William Kovacs: Quite a few things.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, because Woodbridge High School was a powerhouse when you were going there, right?

William Kovacs: Not really. Not in '53 or '52. I would say around '56 or '57 or '58 when Nick Bresco was the coach and Frank Capraro was his assistant. Then they went through different leagues also. Greater Middlesex County, Central Jersey when they played Linden, Union and Plainfield; of course, Perth Amboy was always around. They always played Perth Amboy and New Brunswick.

Brenda Velasco: Of the public buildings, when you were growing up in Fords, and we're just going to confine it to Fords, post office, where was the post office?

William Kovacs: It was on New Brunswick Avenue but since it moved it still is on New Brunswick Avenue near **Fords Jewelers**, across the street.

Brenda Velasco: That's a landmark.

William Kovacs: In fact, I used to come home early from college. During Christmas I used to save my three cuts and then I worked in the post office, Christmas, for four years.

Brenda Velasco: This was the heyday of the post office, too.

William Kovacs: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: How about the library, was there any library around?

William Kovacs: Yes, across from the old fire company.

Brenda Velasco: On Corielle Street then?

William Kovacs: I think so.

Brenda Velasco: The Fords Women's Club.

William Kovacs: Yes. Is that still there?

Brenda Velasco: The Fords Women's Club, right. The building is still there.

William Kovacs: I know Pat Osborne belonged to that club and was instrumental in a few things.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

William Kovacs: And across the street was the Fords Firehouse which now has moved to King Georges Road.

Brenda Velasco: Right.

William Kovacs: And that's where **Straub's** store was across the street but on an angle.

Brenda Velasco: From where.....

William Kovacs: The new firehouse is.

Brenda Velasco: So **Straub's** was on King Georges Road.

William Kovacs: I think I still remember the number. I think it was 658.

Brenda Velasco: You're good. How about parks?

William Kovacs: I would say our life revolved around Fords Park. We would get on our bikes with a lunch; I know you heard that many times. We would go to the Fords Park and play stickball in the tennis courts because no one at that time was playing tennis but it was blacktopped and they had the high fences and we would stay there until three or four in the afternoon and then we'd come home for dinner. But what I

wanted to mention to you before I forget in center field of Fords Park they used to have a clay pit and that clay pit was called Dunhams and people used to swim there illegally.

Brenda Velasco: So this was a clay pit that had been filled in with water.

William Kovacs: Yes, I guess. But years ago there was an auction back there and this was in back of the auction off Route #9. In fact the Armory was there at that time and they moved from there to Main Street.

Brenda Velasco: So this was the center field in Fords Park at one time.

William Kovacs: Further out. They used to ride horses back there in that area.

Brenda Velasco: My gosh!

William Kovacs: That's in the forties now. No one ever mentioned that to you?

Brenda Velasco: No.

William Kovacs: I also want to mention there were clay pits in back of **The Club** in Woodbridge. It was called **Rafty's**. That was illegal swimming also.

Brenda Velasco: This was in the forties again then.

William Kovacs: And that section of Main Street was called Dog Patch. Do you remember *Lil' Abner*?

Brenda Velasco: Yes, I do.

William Kovacs: Well we used to call that Dog Patch. There might have been one family that lived in there at that time.

Brenda Velasco: And there also used to be the landfill for Woodbridge Township there.

William Kovacs: In those days it wasn't there yet; that came later. That's when they had the one with the stack with the burning and all that sort of stuff. That's when the politicians got in a little trouble when they threw, I don't know, leaves or bags or whatever in that area.

Brenda Velasco: Right and that's where the Community Center is now.

William Kovacs: Right, but back in there, there was only one home.

Brenda Velasco: And look at it today. You've got Mocci Court over there and off of Howell Avenue you've got all these.....

William Kovacs: Frank Capraro lives over there also.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, he does.

William Kovacs: The family that lived there was a black family and their last name was Hagler and they were very active in football and whatever. Around '57 or '58 they were star athletes.

Brenda Velasco: Wow! So this would be Woodbridge High School.

William Kovacs: Yes. Another thing I wanted to mention too about Fords. I guess we all know where **Dalina's Tavern** is. You go over, we call it the Keasbey bridge, that little bridge over there and to the left is St. Stephen's cemetery but to the right where 440 and 287 is, there used to be a dump. That's where Woodbridge dumped all the garbage. It was called Keasbey Dump. No one mentioned that to you yet?

Brenda Velasco: No, not at all. So it was to the right side then.

William Kovacs: Yes, and further back. Then later on the highways came in with the industrial highway. 440 from the Outer Bridge and then it meets 287, I guess, in Edison near the Turnpike or whatever exit, Exit 10.

Brenda Velasco: So you've seen tremendous changes when you were growing up.

William Kovacs: Oh, yes. Well, I go back so far.

Brenda Velasco: But you were observant as well.

William Kovacs: In fact, I was walking with my brother today and I asked him about that. I said, can you help me out on anything? He said after 440 they always went through Fords to go into Metuchen and Edison and whatever. So now since they have 440, the mom and pop stores weren't making as much business as they were before. So it hurt the economy in Fords.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, you had the decline. It's only recently within the past ten or so years especially with **Fords Jeweler** and then the county put in the roads so that's what brought about 440 moving in.

William Kovacs: Do you know what used to be 440? Going through Hopelawn, what do you call it?

Brenda Velasco: West Pond?

William Kovacs: No, where the shopping center is in Hopelawn where **Walmart** is.

Brenda Velasco: That West Pond Road, I think.

William Kovacs: Is that what they call it now. They used to call that 440 but they changed it because when you came over the Outer Bridge you went through Fords that way also, King Georges Road. When I was there they didn't have any shopping in that area.

Brenda Velasco: No, **Two Guys** comes in much, much later. The fifties I think maybe because that preceded **Walmart** and there is something else on Route #9 where that intersection is. It's a numbered road but they had changed a lot.

William Kovacs: In fact they had a camp, Perth Amboy did like Kilmer, but I can't remember the name of it. That was in Perth Amboy after you went through the light. I can't remember that road.

Brenda Velasco: On Smith Street, where Smith Street is?

William Kovacs: No, that's in the Keasbey section. I'm talking about the Hopelawn section by Warren Park, you go up the hill.

Brenda Velasco: Florida Grove Road?

William Kovacs: There you go, Florida Grove Road. After you cross over Florida Grove Road into Perth Amboy on the right hand side, you call them duplexes or whatever. Something else before I forget I was in Fords when the Parkway went through and then I had seen them moving duplex homes on King Georges Road where they had to untie all the wires and move wires. They would pick up these duplex homes and move them one block or two blocks; whatever the new place was going to be.

Brenda Velasco: Like Hansen Avenue. Some of them were moved to Hansen Avenue I think. I had interviewed somebody there.

William Kovacs: It was before Liberty Street going towards the Parkway where those homes were.

Brenda Velasco: Did you take any pictures of that or anything?

William Kovacs: No.

Brenda Velasco: That would be interesting to have pictures of that, actual homes.

William Kovacs: They were up on wheels and they were pulling these homes.

Brenda Velasco: That was quite a feat to move them.

William Kovacs: And these were duplex homes.

Brenda Velasco: So they were huge homes to move.

William Kovacs: Yes, they were. I know a friend of mine, his name was Dennis Szabo they moved his home. Where, I don't know. That was only about six years ago.

Brenda Velasco: That's amazing. They don't usually do that anymore and I know they moved St. James Church, the old church, they moved it on wheels down Main Street. There are other homes because we just had the historic tour yesterday and some of these homes have been moved around. It's amazing what they would do.

William Kovacs: Yes, nowadays they don't do that, they demolish the home.

Brenda Velasco: That's it, rebuild.

6. What did you do for recreation?

William Kovacs: They did not have any Little League at that time but for my brother they did. I think it was St. James Church who started it probably in 1951. They played in back of St. James Church property, the old one, and Woodbridge 11; that's where they played their games. I know one year his team won. It was known as the *Reo Diner Tigers*.

Brenda Velasco: **Reo Diner** was still there. So he had to commute from Fords, your brother.

William Kovacs: You mean to play.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

William Kovacs: My father had a car at that time so he drove him.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, dad was called in to help.

William Kovacs: Did anybody mention Charlie Farr yet?

Brenda Velasco: No.

William Kovacs: He used to be a plumber for Woodbridge Township and he was one of the coaches and a fellow by the name of Bill Leahey. His son is a priest. I don't know if it's St. Benedict's or dealing with the Prep School.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, St. Benedict's in Newark, Father Leahey. Okay, so Bill Leahey was also involved with.....

William Kovacs: Yes, he was the coach for the *Reo Diner Tigers*. Most of the teachers from the fifties or sixties would know Charlie Farr just like that.

Brenda Velasco: And what did you do? Where did you play? You played stickball in Fords Park you said.

William Kovacs: Right and then as far as recreation I had to go to Perth Amboy to play in the league, say fourteen, fifteen and sixteen.

Brenda Velasco: And this was a baseball league?

William Kovacs: Yes, and Woodbridge had leagues for me to play in say at the same age, fourteen or fifteen. We played in a baseball league which was not organized. Fathers were the coaches and basketball. Woodbridge Township did have that.

Brenda Velasco: That was from the township itself, the basketball.

William Kovacs: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: And you used the schools then for practice?

William Kovacs: Well we never practiced we just played games. It was up to the coach, a father, to get a field. They didn't have many fields. Woodbridge has not really improved their fields since then.

Brenda Velasco: How about football? Was there Pop Warner back then?

William Kovacs: No.

Brenda Velasco: But you played football too, right?

William Kovacs: Yes, but in fact they had a freshman team at Woodbridge High, JV and Varsity, but it was split session. The seniors and juniors went in the morning so most of the time on the JV were senior and juniors on the Varsity. But if you were an outstanding athlete, they allowed you to take the college prep course. Then some sophomores played with the Varsity, not many but some, which I did not. But Vinnie Buonocore did. That's the ex Superintendent of School's brother.

Brenda Velasco: Fred.

William Kovacs: Yes. In fact he played football in 1950: Fred. When he was a senior I was a freshman.

Brenda Velasco: Because football has always been stressed with Woodbridge.

William Kovacs: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: And we're seeing demographic changes.

William Kovacs: And then they were decent teams. When I got on the team not so much; we didn't do as well.

Brenda Velasco: Anything else for recreation? You mentioned Varady's. Did you go there on your own or with your family or.....?

William Kovacs: And Fords Park. But Fords Park was really nice at that time. They had stands with a roof on it and just like a real baseball stadium you could sit behind the catcher up to about twenty rows and it extended to first base and third base.

Brenda Velasco: So this was big.

William Kovacs: Yes, it was nice and then Woodbridge High used to play their Varsity baseball games there. Probably not too many people remember that. In that time industrial leagues were very big in baseball. My father played for **General Ceramics**. I played in that field also which was in Keasbey, **General Ceramics**. **California Oil** had a team also. I guess they don't do anything there in Perth Amboy now. I don't know if it's called **Kalso** or **California Oil**.

Brenda Velasco: A lot of it has left the State. What is left, not necessarily with the staggered hours and so on, you don't hear about the industrial leagues any more.

William Kovacs: No, I know they don't have that anymore. Maybe bowling they might still.

Brenda Velasco: Did you have bowling in Fords?

William Kovacs: Yes, we had a bowling alley, sure.

Brenda Velasco: Where was that located?

William Kovacs: New Brunswick Avenue. Going towards Edison it was just past the movie house. I think it burned down. Then it became a restaurant.

Brenda Velasco: So you had a lot of activities going on. You had the Fords Park, you rode your bike, and you made up your own games with baseball.

William Kovacs: Well, I guess a lot of people tell you it's not the same anymore with the Little League. Everything has to be structured for the job to go out and play and it's a little different as far as the people that we have in this area. You know you worry about your child walking the street by themselves.

Brenda Velasco: It's different times. It's unfortunate.

William Kovacs: Very different.

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

Brenda Velasco: What was the center of your community at the time, do you think?
William Kovacs: I think it was family. Families were a lot closer then. Don't forget we just had the radio. We didn't have TV yet. A few more years we did but we used to sit around and listen to the radio. *Stella Dallas* and *The Shadow* and *Jack Armstrong*.

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

Brenda Velasco: Because you've got good memories.
William Kovacs: Well, it was very safe. You never heard of violence. As you hear people will always say they never locked their doors and that's how it was. The only thing that disturbed the Fords setting was that someone ran away from home. We never knew why. We just couldn't figure out why someone would do that.
Brenda Velasco: Did you ever recall somebody that you knew running away from home?
William Kovacs: Yes.
Brenda Velasco: And who was that?
William Kovacs: His name was Jaffe. I can't think of his first name. I think at that time he was only in eighth grade.
Brenda Velasco: Wow!
William Kovacs: I think.
Brenda Velasco: Did he ever come back?
William Kovacs: No, never heard whatever happened to him.
Brenda Velasco: Poor parents.

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

Brenda Velasco: It can relate to construction or accidents.
William Kovacs: We had the Woodbridge train accident. I'm sure people have spoken to you about that.
Brenda Velasco: Yes.
William Kovacs: And then **California Oil** or **Chevron** tanks blew up in Perth Amboy but it affected the surrounding areas because it blew out the windows.
Brenda Velasco: Do you remember when that was and how old you were?
William Kovacs: No, I'm not sure. It could have been in the forties.
Brenda Velasco: So that was when you were.....
William Kovacs: Growing up, yes.
Brenda Velasco: You were still a kid.
William Kovacs: As far as I can remember. Then, I guess I mentioned to you about some of the schools that were closed. You know Woodbridge #3, Strawberry Hill.
Brenda Velasco: You saw that.
William Kovacs: I taught there. I taught physical education there and then years later it was gone.
Brenda Velasco: Okay, so that was Strawberry Hill that closed on you.
William Kovacs: Woodbridge #8 which was Keasbey and Iselin #15.

Brenda Velasco: That was the one on Correja Avenue.

William Kovacs: Off Correja Avenue, yes. It became homes. School #6 in Iselin became the firehouse. Pat Osborne's father-in-law was the chief and all that good stuff.

Brenda Velasco: That's the one on Green Street then you're talking about.

William Kovacs: Yes. Then they closed the one in Iselin: #2 and #16.

Brenda Velasco: So you saw it expand and you saw it contract.

William Kovacs: The one in Sewaren, the one in Hopelawn and the one in Fords, School #7-my school. That building is still standing doing very well professionally, I think.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, it had a nice property around it, too.

William Kovacs: Oh, yes.

Brenda Velasco: That was a beautiful school. It was about three floors?

William Kovacs: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: So you saw quite a few schools. You saw about nine.

William Kovacs: And I'm still not finished, School #17 for the senior citizens there.

Brenda Velasco: Right, that's where Evergreen is now.

William Kovacs: I think we sold it to the township. McGreevey bought it for a dollar.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, it's being fully utilized.

William Kovacs: My granddaughters play volleyball there and the seniors use it.

Brenda Velasco: Multi-services is there, the Y uses it.....

William Kovacs: The YMCA.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, so it's still being used. That was quite a number of schools.

William Kovacs: And then the Port Reading School was leveled. I think that black top area, what would they call that, is that still State School there now? I know it goes into Amboy but I don't know if that's State Street. Across the street was Port Reading, the church was across the street.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, it Milos Way that leads you from Port Reading Avenue to whatever street that is. So they closed that and they leveled that one.

William Kovacs: And then going towards Carteret, on the left hand side, maybe where the new School #9 is, they had an annex. I think they had two or three grades there and that's gone also. But I forget the word that they called that, what kind of garage or whatever that was. I really don't know.

Brenda Velasco: So this was a big contraction in Woodbridge.

10. What do you like about Woodbridge today?

Brenda Velasco: You're in Colonia now; you're not in Fords.

William Kovacs: Well it's still home. Of course, we have a lot of traffic.

Brenda Velasco: Agreed.

William Kovacs: I mean when I still come to Colonia Library I have to watch.

Brenda Velasco: The off hours.

William Kovacs: Yes, the off hours. I know Colonia needs a bakery.

Brenda Velasco: We all miss **Vaccaro's**.

William Kovacs: My wife wishes **Shop Rite** was in Colonia instead of **Foodtown**. She thinks it's too far to go to Woodbridge or Clark.

Brenda Velasco: Was your wife from Fords, too?

William Kovacs: Carteret.

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

William Kovacs: My daughter lives in Colonia.

Brenda Velasco: If she lives in Colonia do you have grandchildren then?

William Kovacs: Yes. In fact, my son, but he lives down in Hunterdon County, he's a Doctor of Chiropractic and he had an office in Iselin on top. But he eventually moved out for other reasons I'm not going to mention. Oh you know what we have to mention the old Colonia Library.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

William Kovacs: You know where that is, New Dover and Chain O' Hills which is Merrill Park's business office or whatever you want to call it.

Brenda Velasco: It's the *Merrill Park Baseball League* right now.

William Kovacs: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Did you ever use that library?

William Kovacs: I didn't.

Brenda Velasco: So that's another change.

William Kovacs: I really didn't use the library until I retired. Now I read all the time. Isn't that something? Well, I was either involved in coaching and recreation; this or that or whatever. I didn't have the time.

Brenda Velasco: Well, it's here to use.

William Kovacs: Well, I use it.

Brenda Velasco: It's a gem.

William Kovacs: Yes it is.

Brenda Velasco: Because we're all linked with the other libraries in the township.

William Kovacs: If they don't have the book, they'll get it for me.

Brenda Velasco: That's right.

12. Any other stories that you'd like to mention or discuss?

Brenda Velasco: You covered quite a bit and you remembered quite a bit.

William Kovacs: I guess I mentioned to you that Perth Amboy was the city to go to and we had three buses that went through Fords. We had the #82 which was the Sadowski Parkway, that's where it would go, that was on King Georges Road. Then we had the #4 and the #6. That came from New Brunswick and they both went down New Brunswick Avenue in Fords but one went through Hopelawn on New Brunswick Avenue and the other one made a right by **Dalina's Tavern** and went through Keasbey to Perth Amboy. The all went to Perth Amboy. That's where all the shopping was done and market.

Brenda Velasco: And you weren't linked to Woodbridge at all through the mass transportation, the public transportation. It was always Perth Amboy.

William Kovacs: Right.

Brenda Velasco: Did you mom go to the market then?

William Kovacs: My grandmother did and we had relatives in Perth Amboy.

Brenda Velasco: But it was an easy way to move around.

William Kovacs: Yes. My father didn't even have a car at that time. Then when TV came into existence we used to take the bus to Perth Amboy to one of our relatives and watch Milton Berle. I guess you heard people talking about that.

Brenda Velasco: What night was he on? Was he on Tuesday?

William Kovacs: Sunday

Brenda Velasco: Sunday night?

William Kovacs: No, no, no.

Brenda Velasco: That was Ed Sullivan on Sunday.

William Kovacs: Saturday? *Toast of the Town?* Texaco?

Brenda Velasco: Texaco that was the one.

William Kovacs: Oh, it had to be Saturday.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, Ed Sullivan was Sunday and then Jackie Gleason too was later. Slapstick humor, it was fun.

William Kovacs: Oh, he was the best. How about Ernie Kovacs?

Brenda Velasco: That's right.

William Kovacs: He was before his time.

Brenda Velasco: You're right.

William Kovacs: His tricycle and then his falling down. It was just like *Laugh In*.

Brenda Velasco: And he died too young. Okay, good memories.

William Kovacs: Well, most of the churches are new, St. John Vianney.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, that's Colonia.

William Kovacs: Port Reading church. I mentioned Fords movie and Fords Park with its baseball. *Woodbridge Independent*, some people had to mention that already.

Brenda Velasco: No. What was *Woodbridge Independent*?

William Kovacs: That was the newspaper that came out every Friday; once a week. Johnny Royal was the sports editor and later on in life he owned the **Spread Eagle** in Colonia off St. George Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: What did he own?

William Kovacs: **Spread Eagle**, the bar. Now that goes to the sixties when he started with that.

Brenda Velasco: And that was in Colonia?

William Kovacs: Yes, on St. George Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: I know where it is.

William Kovacs: To the right is Avenel and to the left is Colonia.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, it was on Route #35 then.

William Kovacs: Then we had a lot of paper routes. Oh, we didn't have Merrill Park at that time.

Brenda Velasco: The big park was Fords Park for you.

William Kovacs: Yes, I think it may have been the forties they started building Merrill Park.

Brenda Velasco: I'll have to look that up.

William Kovacs: Because I worked for the county and I worked for the township when I was in college but never on Merrill Park though. I was in New Market. At that time they called it **Hadley Airport** before they built up South Plainfield. I don't even want to go. Now here's another one, Sand Hill School. Did you ever hear of a Sand Hill School? Well that might not be in Woodbridge but if you're on King

Georges Road by Our Lady of Peace you cross over, the **Dunkin Donuts** is on the left and you go over the bridge.....

Brenda Velasco: That might be Edison.

William Kovacs: Well there was a school there on the right hand side they leveled but years ago that was called Sand Hills.

Brenda Velasco: Sand Hills School, okay. I'm going to have to do some research on that. Probably Edison because when you're heading down there.....

William Kovacs: Yes, but you didn't go too far.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, we're going to have to look that one up. Okay, well I thank you very much and I know this is a busy library and there are a group of students who will be coming in shortly. Thank you.

William Kovacs: You're welcome.