

**Oral History Interview**  
**William and Norma Drost Almasi**  
**WH92**

(written transcript and digital audio)

On December 17, 2010, William and Norma Drost Almasi were interviewed at 184 Main Street in Woodbridge by Brenda Velasco on a Friday morning. Also present were Anne Marie Almasi, their daughter-in-law and William Almasi, Jr., their son.

*Brenda Velasco:* So we're going to start off with the first question. Bill, we're going to lead off with you and then Norma you're to follow.

- 1. Identify individual-name, section, date of birth.**
- 2. How long have you lived in Woodbridge?**

*Bill Almasi:* I was born in Woodbridge and have been in Woodbridge all my life.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* What section?

*Bill Almasi:* I was born on Main Street and then when I got married we moved to Sherry Street.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* Now didn't you live in grandmom and grandpop's house for a while?

*Norma Almasi:* We lived on Main Street for a year.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, for a year you lived on Main Street.

*Norma Almasi:* I mean two years.

*Brenda Velasco:* Two years, okay. Do you recall the address on Main Street?

*Norma Almasi:* Yes, 296.

*Brenda Velasco:* 296, so not too far from the office which is at 185 (184) where I'm interviewing you.

*Bill Almasi:* Right, yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, Norma, where were you born? What part of Woodbridge?

*Norma Almasi:* Woodbridge, on Lillian Terrace.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, that's Woodbridge Proper, too.

*Norma Almasi:* Right, right behind the old Town Hall.

*Brenda Velasco:* What was your date of birth or just give me the year?

*Norma Almasi:* Mine was '29.

*Brenda Velasco:* 1929?

*Norma Almasi:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Bill, what year were you born in?

*Bill Almasi:* 1926.

*Brenda Velasco:* So you are older? You married a kid then and I think who has also joined us is your son. Would you introduce yourself please?

*William Almasi:* Yes, I'm William Almasi, Jr.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, we're going to call you William in comparison to Bill.

*William Almasi:* Okay.

*Brenda Velasco:* But I wanted the recorder to also get your recording as well. Okay, so we took care of Norma, Lillian Terrace, 1929 and you basically lived in Woodbridge.....

*Norma Almasi:* All my life.

*Brenda Velasco:* All your life too. Alright, so looking at this, 1926 to 2010, that's quite a long period of time. You've seen a lot of changes then?

*Norma Almasi:* Yes.

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

*Bill Almasi:* Why did they move to Woodbridge?

*Norma Almasi:* We don't know.

*William Almasi:* How did grandpop end up here?

*Anne Marie Almasi:* Wasn't this a Hungarian section?

*Bill Almasi:* My grandfather came out from Europe first.

*Brenda Velasco:* Where in Europe did he come from?

*Bill Almasi:* Hungary and he got situated over here and then he sent for the family; and father and my uncles and aunts then they all came out. Then from there they spread out. They all went their different ways, got married and went with their families.

*Brenda Velasco:* They all lived in Woodbridge though.

*Bill Almasi:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* What was the *mecca*? What was the attraction for Woodbridge?

*Norma Almasi:* Clay pits, because that's where they worked.

*William Almasi:* It was Polish and Hungary wasn't it, too?

*Norma Almasi:* Yes.

*Bill Almasi:* Yes.

*Norma Almasi:* They worked in the clay pits.

*Brenda Velasco:* It was jobs.

*Bill Almasi:* Jobs, yes, the industry.

*Brenda Velasco:* Industry and on this Woodbridge seal you have a picture of a kiln so this is one of their attractions and this is what other people have said who have lived here a long time and have a Hungarian background. So you have seen this whole town demographically change as well.

### **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:* You lived here for eighty-four years then?

*Norma Almasi:* Yes.

*Bill Almasi:* All my life.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so you've seen a lot of changes just alone on Main Street

*Norma Almasi:* Right.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, let's look at the houses. Norma, do you want to start off or.....

*Norma Almasi:* Well the houses were all here but now they're all changed into offices on Main Street. Where our property was there's Woodbridge Center.

*William Almasi:* The old clay pits and sandpit was **Valentine Brick Company** and our property up there was bought out and Woodbridge Center took the property over in 1969.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, and the clay pits were famous.....

*Bill Almasi:* We did own part of that.

*Brenda Velasco:* You owned part of Woodbridge Center, what is Woodbridge Center now?

*William Almasi:* Right, yes.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* And Wegmans.

*Brenda Velasco:* And Wegmans.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* And Wegmans as well.

*William Almasi:* And Wegmans later on.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, right.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* What is really important is that Woodbridge was like a mining town and that there was a lot of clay here. We brought some clay over to the Holland Tunnel from Woodbridge so Woodbridge has a part in that history as well.

*William Almasi:* The best clay on the East coast came from the Woodbridge area here. They had the best plasticity clay on the East coast. It's been used for baseball fields, as far as infields, the smelting refineries for the castings and stuff that they mix the clay with the other mortar to isolate for the castings and brick was the main thing; **Valentine Brick Company** there. There were a couple of brick companies.

*Brenda Velasco:* And in fact there's still a kiln off Pennval Road.

*William Almasi:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* It's the only one intact in this eastern strip of New Jersey. The clay pits went from Carteret, I think, to Sayreville.

*William Almasi:* There was a brick factory in Sayreville too, wasn't there dad?

*Bill Almasi:* Yes.

*William Almasi:* What was the name of that one?

*Bill Almasi:* Sayre and Fisher.

*William Almasi:* They were the two big brick factories in the area?

*Bill Almasi:* Yes. Sayreville was where the biggest one was.

*Brenda Velasco:* Did you work in those factories and in the pits?

*William Almasi:* Supplied materials to them?

*Norma Almasi:* No, no, no. Your father started the **John Almasi Trucking Company**.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* Bill was born in 1926, that was the year that **John Almasi Trucking Company** was incorporated and what happened was grandpop Almasi came over here, a Hungarian immigrant, couldn't speak English, and started this bus route. And the bus route.....

*William Almasi:* Well he drove for a bus person who owned a couple of buses and then he borrowed money and got his own bus and then he got his bus route from Perth Amboy to Carteret around and he established that bus route and had the rights to it.

*Brenda Velasco:* But that connected also Avenel and Carteret.

*William Almasi:* Carteret, yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*William Almasi:* So we went from pushing a cart and trying to sell fruit in the bad times there, right dad?

*Bill Almasi:* Yes.

*William Almasi:* To driving a bus for somebody, borrowing money and bought his own bus.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* But he sold the bus route to **Public Service** which was interesting.

*Bill Almasi:* **Public Service** bought him out.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* During the Depression and he got a huge amount of money at that time.

*William Almasi:* Which was thirty thousand dollars.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* He bought land, he bought Woodbridge Center, he bought near where Wegmans is and he bought a farm in Maryland. He said if you have a farm you can always eat.

*William Almasi:* Live off the land.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* Yes, live off the land.

*Brenda Velasco:* Well he came from a farming community probably in Hungary and that's what .....

*William Almasi:* My grandmother's lady friend was down there so that's where they bought it.

*Brenda Velasco:* Now Norma, let's get to you family, too.

*Norma Almasi:* They were from Perth Amboy.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Norma Almasi:* They were both born and raised in Perth Amboy.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay. And why did they move to Woodbridge because you lived on.....

*Norma Almasi:* Well, they got married and they bought the house. It was a new development right behind what used to be the **State Theatre** and the old Town Hall. Then the Depression came and they lost the house and they moved to Sherry Street. They rented a house there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay. So let's get back to Question #4 because we're going to be doing sidebars all along. Alright, so Main Street was paved at this time?

*Bill Almasi:* No.

*Brenda Velasco:* No?

*Bill Almasi:* What year are we talking about?

*Brenda Velasco:* When you were growing up. We just want to do when you're growing up.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* What did Main Street look like?

*Norma Almasi:* Wasn't it brick? It was brick then.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* It was brick?

*Bill Almasi:* They had brick then.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* I'm going to ask, were there horse and buggies, I mean, what was there?

*Bill Almasi:* Oh, yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* There were stables. Weren't there stables?

*William Almasi:* Yes, there were stables right on the corner over there.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* Where **Bittings** is was that a stable?

*Norma Almasi:* No, I don't think so. It was a coal.....

*Anna Marie Almasi:* A coal place.

*Norma Almasi:* Yes.

*William Almasi:* Right where the church was, wasn't that a stable at one time there?

*Bill Almasi:* What's the name of that club that shut down over there?

*Brenda Velasco:* Sleepy's or something.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* **Sleeps.**

*William Almasi:* The old **Barbary Coast** is what it was.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, **Barbary Coast** and then before that Nick Venezia owned it, the **Barbary Coast.**

*Anne Marie Almasi:* Nick Vertagna, didn't he own it too?

*William Almasi:* No. Vertagna owned the other one, what was it, the one over by **Poor Billy's** there where the clothing store is there?

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so **Bittings** was a coal company and the stores were down.....

*Norma:* On Main Street. There were stores on Main Street, yes. And there was a hotel where the **Reo Diner** is, that corner.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* A hotel?

*Norma Almasi:* Yes.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* I didn't know that.

*William Almasi:* How many stories was it?

*Norma Almasi:* Just two stories.

*William Almasi:* A bed and breakfast type thing?

*Norma Almasi:* I just know it was a hotel.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, and then what type of stores did you have on Main Street then Norma?

*Norma Almasi:* There was a food store.

*Brenda Velasco:* Did you have an **A&P**?

*Norma Almasi:* Yes, it was a small **A&P**, right. There was a drug store, **Jackson's Drug Store.** I can always remember that being there.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* **Woolworth's**, what about **Woolworth's**? Was **Woolworth's** always **Woolworth's** or was it something else?

*Norma Almasi:* No, **Woolworth's** was always **Woolworth's.**

*Anne Marie Almasi:* That was there forever.

*Bill Almasi:* **Christensen's Department Store.**

*Norma Almasi:* **Christensen's Department Store.**

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh, okay.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* That was there forever.

*Norma Almasi:* But first there was a little store across the street and then they moved across and made it to the bigger store.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, then they expanded.

*Norma Almasi:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Were there any fruit stores there or.....?

*Norma Almasi:* I don't remember that but I remember a fruit cart used to go around to the neighborhood. That was fruit and vegetables.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Bill Almasi:* Horse and wagon.

*Norma Almasi:* Horse and wagon.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* What about the scissor man? Did you have a scissor man cart or anything?

*Norma Almasi:* Yes, generally someone came out sharpening knives and scissors.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so you had a peddler sharpening scissors and knives visiting the homes?

*Norma Almasi:* Yes, they came by a car and went around to homes.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* Did they come in a horse and buggy?

*Norma Almasi:* No, no, no, a regular car.

*Brenda Velasco:* A regular car?

*Norma Almasi:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, how about houses of worship?

*Norma Almasi:* Well, there was the Methodist Church, all the churches. St. James is the only one that's new.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* But didn't you move St. James or....?

*Norma Almasi:* Yes, St. James was on the corner there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Which corner? Was it on Main Street?

*Norma Almasi:* No, no, no, it was on Amboy Avenue.

*Brenda Velasco:* Years ago.

*Norma Almasi:* Oh, originally years ago it was right here.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* Where?

*Norma Almasi:* Right about here someplace.

*Brenda Velasco:* Right around 184 Main Street then.

*Norma Almasi:* Yes, right around here someplace.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, and then they had to move it down.

*Norma Almasi:* Yes, that was before our time.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, you're not that old, right?

*Norma Almasi:* As long as I've known it's always been on Amboy Avenue.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* When do you think they made it into the big church it is now?

*Norma Almasi:* When we graduated from eighth grade. What year was that?

*Anne Marie Almasi:* Okay, so 1968 the church was refurbished.

*Norma Almasi:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* I know they're celebrating their 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary this year.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, so they've been here a long time. Not exactly at the corner of Amboy but.....

*Anne Marie Almasi:* Somewhere around there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Somewhere on Main Street.

*Norma Almasi:* It was across the street where the school parking lot is.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Norma Almasi:* That's where the church was.

*Brenda Velasco:* That's where it was moved to from upper Main Street. Okay, how about schools?

*Norma Almasi:* They're all the same; we had them.

*Brenda Velasco:* Where did you go to school Norma?

*Norma Almasi:* No. 1 and No. 11 and Woodbridge High School. The high school was on Barron Avenue then.

*Brenda Velasco:* And Bill, where did you go to school?

*Bill Almasi:* St. James.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, you went to St. James School.

*Bill Almasi:* And then to Woodbridge High School. Then I went into the service.

*William Almasi:* When did St. James start?

*Anne Marie Almasi:* 175 years ago, so he's not that old.

*William Almasi:* The school?

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, where was the school that you attended though Bill for St. James?

*Norma Almasi:* Where it is now.

*Brenda Velasco:* Where it is now, okay.

*Bill Almasi:* Yes.

*William Almasi:* We actually demolished the old church, right? Didn't we take down the old church or we built for the foundation for the new church?

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, I mean, when I look at the Almasi family.....

*William Almasi:* Not to throw too much into it but I'm just saying.

*Brenda Velasco:* No, you've been involved, intertwined, with a lot of the twentieth century Woodbridge history.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* Yes, we go way back.

*Brenda Velasco:* You go way back in the twentieth century. We're not going into Colonial times because this is an immigrant family that did very well. You're an example of a success story and Woodbridge has been good to a lot of people.

*Norma Almasi:* Right.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* There are a lot of hardworking people in Woodbridge.

*Brenda Velasco:* Agreed, and that's the only way you can make it sometimes. Okay, do you see anything else in Question #4, all four of you, that you would like to answer more about? If not, we'll go to Question #5.

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

**6. What did you do for recreation?**

*Norma Almasi:* Well the schools, now you have the new high school.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* You all went to School #1? The Board of Education was your high school, right?

*Norma Almasi:* No, no, no. What's the junior high now on Barron Avenue (Woodbridge Middle School)?

*Brenda Velasco:* That was the high school and then there was only one high school.

*Norma Almasi:* For the whole township.

*Brenda Velasco:* For the whole township, for the two of you. Now William Jr., when you went to high school did you go to Woodbridge High School?

*William Almasi:* I went to St. James and I went to junior high over on Barron Avenue.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so they already had the.....

*William Almasi:* Yes, because that only went from the seventh, eighth and ninth. So I went to the ninth grade on Barron Avenue. And then Woodbridge High School started tenth, eleventh and twelfth grades.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, were you on split session then?

*William Almasi:* No.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*William Almasi:* They had eight hundred and thirty kids, I think, that graduated from our class.

*Brenda Velasco:* What class did you graduate?

*William Almasi:* '72.

*Brenda Velasco:* And Anne Marie you.....

*Anne Marie Almasi:* I went to St. Mary's in Perth Amboy and graduated in '72 as well.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, both Class of '72. What was your graduating class then Bill from Woodbridge High School?

*Bill Almasi:* I never graduated from Woodbridge. I was in high school and then I had to go in the service.

*William Almasi:* The Navy.

*Bill Almasi:* And when I got out of the Navy, I never went back to school. I went right to work with the company.

*Brenda Velasco:* And you've become very successful without a high school degree. Norma, were you able to graduate from high school?

*Norma Almasi:* Oh, yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, and Norma what was your class?

*Norma Almasi:* '47.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, Class of '47. So you were in high school during World War II.

*Norma Almasi:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, and then the kids you graduated with if they went into the service it would be the Korean War then.

*Norma Almasi:* Yes, in my senior year the war had ended and a lot of the boys who left school came back and finished and graduated with us.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Norma Almasi:* There were quite a few that graduated with us.

*Brenda Velasco:* That was good.

*Norma Almasi:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* That was very good. Okay, what about the public buildings that have been here such as the post office?

*Norma Almasi:* That's new.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, the post office is new. When you were growing up where was the post office located?

*Norma Almasi:* Next door to where the Chamber of Commerce is.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, got it.



*Norma Almasi:* The water company was there and the post office was next to it.

*Brenda Velasco:* How about the library?

*Norma Almasi:* That was the Barron Library.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, where the Barron Arts Center is? Do you remember anything about the library there?

*Norma Almasi:* No, not right now. It was nothing special just that it was there and they used it.

*Bill Almasi:* We used it. It's been there for a long, long time.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, 1877. But that was a private library at that time. Okay, now about parks?

*Norma Almasi:* The playground is still there.

*Brenda Velasco:* We're talking about Pearl Street in that area. Did you utilize it because you were down in that area?

*Norma Almasi:* No, I was up in this area but we walked all the way down there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Norma Almasi:* That was the only playground we had.

*Brenda Velasco:* Do you remember any of the equipment that was there?

*Norma Almasi:* The same thing that's there today.

*Brenda Velasco:* Fine, so the township was providing going back to the 1930s as well.

*Norma Almasi:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, were there any public parks that you used?

*Bill Almasi:* No, that was the only park around.

*Brenda Velasco:* That was it.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* Now, where did you go ice skating? Wasn't there ice skating up here?

*Norma Almasi:* No, down the park lake on the street here.

*William Almasi:* I used to go to Oak Street pond.

*Norma Almasi:* Oh, the Oak Street pond.

*Brenda Velasco:* Right.

*William Almasi:* End of Bunns Lane there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, Oak Street.

*William Almasi:* We all used to ice skate there and fish.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* During my day all the parks, more or less, had ice skating and you could only ice skate if they hung this red ball.

*William Almasi:* You had Oak Street but you had the main one down over here, too.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, along Park Avenue.

*William Almasi:* Park Avenue, yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* And it goes quite a few blocks there.

*Norma Almasi:* I remember when the streams were nice bubbling brooks and now they're mud streams.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* So the entertainment was free when you grew up.

*Brenda Velasco:* You were lucky. Okay, how about the firehouse?

*Norma Almasi:* It was always there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, the firehouse was always there.

*Norma Almasi:* Maybe not the old one but.....

*Brenda Velasco:* They just expanded.

*William Almasi:* Where you had, I don't want to interrupt, but over where Mack-Cali building is there was a big pond over there. That was called Rafty's. That was the nickname. I guess guys used to make rafts or whatever but there was a big waterhole there as far as a pond there. I remember we used to go swimming or.....

*Norma Almasi:* Rollerskating.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* How about swimming? Did you used to go swimming down Sewaren when you were young, at all, either one of you?

*Norma Almasi:* Yes, my mother used to take me to the beach there.

*Bill Almasi:* Not much. We used to go to the old duck pond, the old clay pits ponds.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* Really.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so Norma you went to Sewaren swimming.....

*Norma Almasi:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* And Bill where did you go swimming?

*Bill Almasi:* They called it the duck pond.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, you called it a duck pond but.....

*Bill Almasi:* The old clay pits ponds. They dug the clay out and they never filled it and there was just water there all the time and that's where we all used to go swimming.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* So when you came out were you all like red from the clay?

*Bill Almasi:* No.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* No, it was clear?

*Bill Almasi:* No, the water was clear but I mean....

*Anne Marie Almasi:* It was clear.

*Bill Almasi:* It was clear.

*Brenda Velasco:* A little dangerous though right.

*Bill Almasi:* Well, I mean you know, when you go into water it's all dangerous but it was a hole that just after they dug the clay out the rain used to fill the hole up and that's the way they left it. And that's where we used to go swimming and ice skating.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* Well, what was it like in the summertime like when you were very, very young and your buddies would get together? Would you like run up to the duck pond or.....

*Bill Almasi:* Oh, yes, sure.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* Oh, yes, I mean.....

*Brenda Velasco:* You didn't live far from the duck pond though. You were close.

*Bill Almasi:* Yes, but I mean we used to swim there and ice skate there.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* Do you remember any of the names like when you were really young?

*Bill Almasi:* The names?

*Anne Marie Almasi:* Yes, names of your friends when you were really young running around as little kids.

*Bill Almasi:* Bobby Golden, I can't think of them all now but Bob Ramos.

*Brenda Velasco:* Was he related to Julie Ramos Estok (Julie Ramos)?

*Bill Almasi:* He lived on.....but, you know, there were quite a few of us younger guys. I can't remember all their names right now.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, but some of them were Hungarian too like the Ramos family.

*Bill Almasi:* Yes, there was some Irish and Italians mixed with us.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, was there anything else you did for recreation because Anne Marie mentioned a lot of it was free?

*Norma Almasi:* When we were teenagers we went to dances at the **Craftman's Club**.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* So how did you two meet, can you tell us?

*Norma Almasi:* We were at a dance.

*Brenda Velasco:* **At the Craftman's Club?**

*Norma Almasi:* No, no, at the ballroom in Perth Amboy and his buddy wanted to take my girlfriend home. So I had to go with him because his buddies were in the same car.

*Brenda Velasco:* So it was like a blind date then?

*Norma Almasi:* Right, and from there we just.....

*Brenda Velasco:* How long have you been married?

*Norma Almasi:* Sixty-two years now.

*Brenda Velasco:* It's lasted a long time. How many children did you have?

*Norma Almasi:* Two.

*Brenda Velasco:* That's a long marriage; that's quite an achievement nowadays. You had the ups and the downs like everybody else. Okay, anything else for recreation? Did you ride bikes at all? Did you have bikes?

*Bill Almasi:* Yes.

*Norma Almasi:* Oh, yes, we had bikes.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* What about bowling or did you do.....

*Norma Almasi:* No.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* Oh, I know what they did for recreation, **Almasi Tavern**. That was a social place, wasn't it?

*Bill Almasi:* Yes.

*William Almasi:* **Main Street Tavern** was the famous.....

*Norma Almasi:* On Sundays we used to go to the movies.

*Bill Almasi:* My uncle owned it.

*Norma Almasi:* And after the movie, we'd meet our friends at the tavern.

*William Almasi:* Didn't grandpop own it originally?

*Norma Almasi:* Originally, yes.

*Bill Almasi:* My father owned it.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, your father owned the **Main Street Tavern**.

*Bill Almasi:* Yes, and then my uncle retired from our business and my father gave him the tavern; and they've had it ever since.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so it's been in the family.

*Bill Almasi:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, with all the different laws that have come about.....when you went to the movies do you remember what it cost you?

*Norma Almasi:* Probably a dime; no more than a quarter.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* I remember.

*William Almasi:* How about the **State Theatre**, how long had that been up by **Bitings** down there?

*Norma Almasi:* That's where I used to go. It was right where the **Quick Chek** is. That's where the movie was.

*Bill Almasi:* Where's that Norma?

*Norma Almasi:* Where the **Quick Chek** is by the Town Hall, that's where the movie was.

*Bill Almasi:* Oh, yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* And then you could just walk it.

*Norma Almasi:* Yes.

*Bill Almasi:* Oh, yes.

*Norma Almasi:* We walked everywhere.

*Brenda Velasco:* If you have nothing else to add to Question #6 let's go down to Question #7.

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

*Norma Almasi:* I don't know. I don't know what you consider.....

*Anne Marie Almasi:* I think work.

*Brenda Velasco:* Work?

*Anne Marie Almasi:* Work. Everybody worked.

*Norma Almasi:* What was the.....

*Anne Marie Almasi:* What was the focal point of her life? Family and work.

*Norma Almasi:* Family and work, yes.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* And this has always been a family business. They were one and the same.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay and when we look at the family business it's an excavating.....

*William Almasi:* Total site work.

*Bill Almasi:* It was in everything.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* It started with.....

*William Almasi:* The oil refineries and the steel mill, all the construction around.

You had **Chevron, Shell, GATX** in Carteret, you had the steel mill in Carteret, and what was that, **U.S. Metals**?

*Norma Almasi:* That's right.

*Bill Almasi:* Yes.

*William Almasi:* All those supported everybody for jobs back then.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, we had a lot of heavy industry back then.

*Bill Almasi:* We did a lot of the work.

*William Almasi:* Fire metal laws changed and chased them all away.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, and we're facing over nine percent unemployment.

*Bill Almasi:* And we're still there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes you are.

*Bill Almasi:* They're all gone and we're still there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, you're a survivor.

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

*Anne Marie Almasi:* You could walk to church, you could walk to work and you could walk to the stores.

*Bill Almasi:* This is where I was born and where I grew up. This is where I made my living and this is where I stayed and am still here.

*Brenda Velasco:* And you like it then.

*Bill Almasi:* Yes.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* They're still in the house that they built when they were first married.

*Brenda Velasco:* Wow!

*Anne Marie Almasi:* On Sherry Street.

*Brenda Velasco:* Sherry Street.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* They built a nice brick house and it's still standing and it looks as beautiful today as it did then.

*Brenda Velasco:* You did a great job with that.

*Bill Almasi:* Yes.

*Norma Almasi:* Yes.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* They did.

*Bill Almasi:* When we first got married we stayed in an apartment.....

*Norma Almasi:* His mother and father owned a house on Main Street which is an office building now.

*William Almasi:* What's the address there?

*Bill Almasi:* 296.

*Norma Almasi:* 298 was that house and then they owned the house next door to it and it was a two family and when we got married we lived upstairs.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* I think that the interesting thing, or the stories that I've heard is that.....

*Bill Almasi:* We were there for two years and then we built our house.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* Is that Grandma Almasi used to run down the ravine, right, to get to our old.....

*Norma Almasi:* I used to do that.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* And you used to run down the ravine, you know. There was not that much communication back then.

*Norma Almasi:* Well, their office was in the house on Main Street then, the trucking company's office.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Bill Almasi:* Yes, there was no.....

*Norma Almasi:* It was on 298 Main Street, the office. The telephones didn't work like they do today.

*Brenda Velasco:* No, and then we have cell phones and we have blackberries.

*William Almasi:* Just so you know Metuchen Avenue was behind the house. So you have Main Street and Metuchen Avenue so basically there was a real small creek. They had a plank and we used to just walk down across the plank and we had the garage that we're still there.

*Norma Almasi:* I used to run down with messages for them.

*Brenda Almasi:* You were the messenger.

*Norma Almasi:* Before me, his sister did it.

*Brenda Velasco:* Times have changed.

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

*Norma Almasi:* Oh yes. Well the train wreck.

*William Almasi:* The train wreck.

*Brenda Velasco:* Were you able to witness the train wreck?

*Norma Almasi:* No, he saw it after it happened.

*Bill Almasi:* What's that?

*Norma Almasi:* The train wreck.

*William Almasi:* The train wreck.

*Brenda Velasco:* Do you remember.....

*Bill Almasi:* I didn't see it happen but I was there right after it happened. The cars rolled off the track up the top right down to Fulton Street there.

*Norma Almasi:* I was home because I just had my daughter and I was home with the baby.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay that was in 1951, the train wreck. Now did they get your equipment to move some of the trains?

*Bill Almasi:* The railroad took care of all that. We didn't get involved in that, not that I remember anyway.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* We were into materials, raw materials, moving materials at that time anyway. We didn't get into the heavy equipment until a little bit later.

*Norma Almasi:* Yes, right. They were more a trucking company then.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Bill Almasi:* The railroad handled most of that.

*Brenda Velasco:* How about.....

*Norma Almasi:* Well, Woodbridge Center and Wegmans or the office buildings that went up.

*Bill Almasi:* I know something later on more during my time, the St. James football field over by the Hungarian Club on the other side there. I don't know what the name of that street is back there, but we had projects where we bought thousands of loads of material in there. They had material that we helped build the field over there for them. The company and the employees all donated their time to build the field over there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, that's in back of the Hungarian Club off Port Reading Avenue then.

*Norma Almasi:* He's a charter member of the Hungarian Club.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*William Almasi:* Even the Hungarian Club they helped build that. Grandpop lent them all the money to actually build that there.

*Bill Almasi:* Yes.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* And we were married at the Hungarian Club.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, and Cardinal Mindszenty also visited the Hungarian Club and we used the Hungarian Club this past summer for the Woodbridge Drama Club. So it's still being used.

*Norma Almasi:* That's where their wedding reception was.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* Thirty-six years ago, so we're an anomaly too.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, you are. Okay, anything else for that that anybody wants to add? Were you involved with the construction of Woodbridge Center then? Was it your company?

*Bill Almasi:* Yes, we were involved in some of the excavation and we supplied the materials for them too.

*Brenda Velasco:* How about the office buildings, were you involved in the excavation there?

*William Almasi:* The office buildings where, up over here where Cali is and stuff like that?

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes.

*William Almasi:* We were just as a sub-contractor. We did deliver materials.

*Bill Almasi:* Well, some of the excavations too we were involved in and like you say we supplied the materials.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, and I know you're in Edison with Costco.

*William Almasi:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* I've seen the Almasi sign there too.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* We also did site work at the new Meadowlands stadium. That's a recent project. We just finished up there.

*Brenda Velasco:* So you're still going strong and the business was established in 1926, am I correct?

*Bill Almasi:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay and it's still thriving. Is this the third generation then?

*William Almasi:* I'm the third and my son's the fourth.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* And my daughter.

*William Almasi:* And daughter.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, very successful business.

*William Almasi:* And one of our businesses now is the Women's Business Enterprise, WBE, which we found as a niche as far as to get some of the work. All these government jobs need a certain percentage of minorities.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, and that includes women.

#### **10. What do you like about Woodbridge today?**

*Brenda Velasco:* Because you're all in Woodbridge, different areas.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* I just love that it's so easy to get everywhere: New York City and Pennsylvania. We have shopping, we have fine restaurants and we have great churches. I don't think we lack anything.

*Norma Almasi:* It's convenient to everything.

*William Almasi:* It's the center hub of the state.

*Bill Almasi:* How about my place in Sewaren?

*Anne Marie Almasi:* You have a beautiful storage facility in Sewaren.

*William Almasi:* He's got four acres in Sewaren over there right across from the pump station that we utilize, the company, and for the different people.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so you like it because of the location.

*William Almasi:* We are centrally located.

*Brenda Velasco:* We're called the *Crossroads of New Jersey*.

*William Almasi:* To go to New York City or go to Atlantic City, you know, or the shore points. All the major highways cross here. You have Metro Park, you know, so you're centrally located.

*Norma Almasi:* It's convenient.

*Brenda Velasco:* I agree, Norma.

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

*Brenda Velasco:* Norma and Bill, you still live in Woodbridge.

*Norma Almasi:* Yes.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* We're just about all here. Greg and Rosemarie are here. (Nephew and wife)

*Norma Almasi:* I have nieces and nephews here. (Nephew and wife)

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, nieces and nephews.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* And Kenny and Karen are here.

*William Almasi:* Eighty percent of the family is still here.

*Brenda Velasco:* Wow! That's unusual.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* That is quite unusual that eighty percent of the family have remained here.

***12. Are there any other stories or events that we didn't cover that you would like to discuss?***

*Bill Almasi:* Well except that we had the garbage collection too for the city.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh!

*William Almasi:* The cinders from the incinerator used to be moved around for the product then too, right?

*Bill Almasi:* Yes, cinders from the.....

*William Almasi:* Big incinerator.

*Brenda Velasco:* On Main Street where the Community Center is.

*William Almasi:* Yes, we used to sell that for fill and used it around for road cover back then cheaply.

*Bill Almasi:* But we did have the garbage for a long time until the city took it over from us.

*Brenda Velasco:* So you had it going back, and I forgot to mention did you have garbage pickup when you lived on Main Street?

*Norma Almasi:* They did it; the company took it.

*Bill Almasi:* The whole township of Woodbridge-we collected the garbage.

*William Almasi:* We used to do that early in the morning and then in the afternoon the trucks from the other construction. Anyway, would either help out or they fell behind.

*Norma Almasi:* Where was the garbage dumped then when we got it?

*Bill Almasi:* Keasbey.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, Keasbey was where you would dump the.....

*Bill Almasi:* Land dump.

*Brenda Velasco:* And we're still using Keasbey for recycling and construction materials for food and all sorts of things?



*Bill Almasi:* We collected it and took it up to Keasbey in the meadows up there and we dumped it there on the township property.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* Now how did the road originally go in front of 63 Metuchen Avenue before Woodbridge Center? Didn't that go way into Iselin or something?

*Bill Almasi:* It went out to Route #1.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* It went out to Route #1?

*Bill Almasi:* Yes, and remember Maple Hill Dairy?

*Norma Almasi:* Yes, Maple Hill Dairy was there.

*William Almasi:* When they built Woodbridge Center they cut off Main Street when they put Woodbridge Center Drive in.

*Bill Almasi:* Metuchen Avenue went right out to Route #1 from Woodbridge.

*Brenda Velasco:* And then with Woodbridge Center it was cut off and then it was Woodbridge Center Drive as you son said.

*Bill Almasi:* Yes, that's right.

*Brenda Velasco:* And you had the Maple Hill Dairy right in that area too where the apartments are now.

*Bill Almasi:* Yes, right. That's it.

*Brenda Velasco:* That's it.

*Norma Almasi:* What else? Anymore questions?

*Brenda Velasco:* No, I have no more questions. You did good.

*Bill Almasi:* We've been around.

*Brenda Velasco:* You've been around but I'm very glad we were able to sit down and interview both generations because you've been an important part with Woodbridge history.

*William Almasi:* Thank you.

*Bill Almasi:* I even forgot half of this stuff.

*Brenda Velasco:* Well, you did pretty good remembering Bill. And Norma's right here and if she forgot then Anne Marie was here. So we had a lot of prodding here. You guys did good.

*Bill Almasi:* I'll probably think about some of the stuff that I should have told you down the line.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* I think it's really important to know that how hard working you were and what an important part of the evolution of this business you are.

*Bill Almasi:* That's the way things were them days, you know, we worked.

*Norma Almasi:* You had a job.

*William Almasi:* You didn't have computers you worked with your hands.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, but look at how old your father is.

*William Almasi:* Yes, that's right.

*Anne Marie Almasi:* And he really does remember.

*Brenda Velasco:* And your mother.

*Norma Almasi:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, even though she's younger but you look great. You look healthy. I don't know I'm not a doctor. But I thank everybody for finding the time to sit down with me. Thank you.

.....

After the formal interview concluded, Bill and Norma Almasi recalled that they attended vaudeville acts at the State Theatre on Sunday nights.