

**Oral History Interview**  
**Vincent Martino, Joseph DeMarino, Frank Iacovone**  
**WH041**

(written transcript and digital audio)

On May 13, 2009, Vincent Martino, Joseph DeMarino, and Frank Iacovone were interviewed at the Woodbridge Main Library by Brenda Velasco at 9:30 A.M.

I have the good fortune of interviewing three residents, or former residents, of Port Reading, but they're all of Woodbridge Township. We have Vinnie Martino, former Freeholder and Councilman in Woodbridge Township and he worked on the Port Reading Railroad in his youth, and I have Frank Iacovone who is still a Woodbridge resident though he moved out of Port Reading and is in Sewaren right now and he worked on the Reading Railroad and then to my very right I have Jo Jo DeMarino, former Mayor, former Sheriff, multiple roles he's played in Woodbridge Township. I'm Brenda Velasco, the coordinator of the Oral History Project and today we're going to be discussing not so much Woodbridge but Port Reading, the history and the role of the Reading Railroad. So I'm going to through it open to each of the three people that are present at the Main Library. Vinnie, we're going to start with you because you got this whole group today. (Vincent Martino – Councilman: November 1972-December 1979, January 1995-December 1995, January 2002-December 2005. Joseph DeMarino – Mayor: 1980-1983, 1988-1991.)

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

*Vinnie Martino:* My name is Vincent R. Martino. My date of birth is 8/12/34. I sound younger by putting it that way, you know. I'm a lifelong resident of Port Reading.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, you never moved out. Okay and Frank.

*Frank Iacovone:* My name is Frank Iacovone. I was born on 5/18/22 and I live in Sewaren.

*Brenda Velasco:* But you did, at one time, live in Port Reading?

*Frank Iacovone:* Yes, thirty-five years in Port Reading.

*Brenda Velasco:* And Jo Jo.

*Joe DeMarino:* Joe DeMarino. Next month it'll be seventy-five years that I'm living here in Port Reading, born and raised here, and I'm the first generation of Italian American.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay and I think all of you are first generation Italian, am I correct Vinnie and Frank?

*Vinnie Martino:* Yes.

*Frank Iacovone:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, seventy-five years. Give us the exact year.

*Joe DeMarino:* I was born June 10, 1934.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

**2. How long have you lived in Woodbridge?**

*Brenda Velasco:* Vinnie you've lived all your life in Port Reading.

*Vinnie Martino:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Frank, how long.....

*Frank Iacovone:* Thirty-five years in Port Reading.

*Brenda Velasco:* Right, and seventy-five years for you Jo.

*Joe DeMarino:* Brenda, when we say we were born in Port Reading back then they had midwives and we were born in our homes in Port Reading.

*Brenda Velasco:* You were born in your home?

*Joe DeMarino:* Absolutely.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Vinnie Martino:* I wasn't. My grandfather had a hotel/tavern in Port Reading so I was born in Rahway Hospital.

*Brenda Velasco:* Well you came from the upper crust there, a hotel/tavern. What was the name of the hotel/tavern by the way?

*Vinnie DeMarino:* McNulty's

*Brenda Velasco:* McNulty's

*Vinnie DeMarino:* Yes, they lost the license under prohibition here.

*Brenda Velasco:* Frank?

*Frank Iacovone:* I was born in Mrs. DePrile's house by a midwife.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, you were born in Mrs. DePrile's house by a midwife.

*Joe DeMarino:* Yes, that's on the corner of Turner and.....

*Frank Iacovone:* Fourth.

*Brenda Velasco:* Turner and Fourth, okay, and you had the midwife, you had the hospital, Vinnie, and Jo you had the midwife too. Okay, things were different back then. But they're coming back in right now.

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

*Brenda Velasco:* Vinnie, why did your family move to Port Reading?

*Vinnie Martino:* Well my grandfather, my father and his sister came to America and naturally, just like all the other immigrants came, to seek a better life. And I guess the word, travels, that the Reading Railroad had a port there by the water and that was the place to settle. So I assume that, just like all the other immigrants, my father was born in Italy and was a youngster when he came with his father here and his father.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, what part of Italy are we talking about?

*Vinnie Martino:* Pietrastornina.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, now, where was your father from Jo?

*Joe DeMarino:* My father is from Simone which was a province of Avellino. Avellino was like a County in Italy and it's still there. He was from Simone and my mother was a Pietrastornina, the same town next door to Vinnie's mother and father.

*Brenda Velasco:* So they were from basically the similar area and Frank where.....

*Frank Iacovone:* Mount St. Angel my father was from.

*Brenda Velasco:* Was that from Avellino too?

*Frank Iacovone:* No.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Frank Iacovone:* By Foggia.

*Brenda Velasco:* You were on the Adriatic side?

*Frank Iacovone:* Right.

*Brenda Velasco:* And why did they he come Frank?

*Frank Iacovone:* He came by himself. He left his wife in Italy and he came by himself because he heard there was work in Port Reading so that's where came to work.

*Brenda Velasco:* Many of the Italians did come without their wives at the time and they'd send money home but eventually.....

*Frank Iacovone:* She came over five years later.

*Brenda Velasco:* And Jo?

*Joe DeMarino:* And me, my grandfather and my mother came here when she was only about three or four years old. The first and the last of the DeMarino family and my father, of course, came over when he was sixteen years old. Neither of them ever went back. They came here in the late 1800s or early 1900 and they came to Port Reading. My father had an aunt living in Paterson, New Jersey and when they came over at that time, of course, they all came because of a, like Frank said, a better life and a chance for opportunities for jobs and things like that. But I think the most important thing is when they came they came with what they call WOP, without papers, and that's what the definition used to stand for and it still does, I think, to those that use it. But it was without papers and when they came they either had to go to a relative or to a community and that's how most fathers came, to a community where there was like nationalities and languages and, of course, Paterson like I mentioned, parts of Newark and Jersey City, Port Reading and South Amboy were the locations of Italian Americans.

*Brenda Velasco:* And Paterson, at that time, was the silk capital of New Jersey.

*Joe DeMarino:* That's right, New Jersey.

*Brenda Velasco:* And the United States.

*Joe DeMarino:* There was a big market for tailors, a lot of tailors worked there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Right and there was a big Italian population at that time and so Port Reading was another mecca, another attraction, for Italian Americans coming over who needed a job.

*Joe DeMarino:* And Port Reading, mostly, because they were labor intensive. In other words the railroad, which is one of the biggest industries in the country, certainly was the biggest in Woodbridge at one time and also Port Reading, of course.

#### **4. What role did the Reading Railroad play in your town?**

*Brenda Velasco:* Jo we'll go to you and then we'll do the reverse with Frank and Vinnie.

*Joe DeMarino:* Well the Port Reading Railroad, actually, was like oxygen is to human beings, blood is to human beings, it was the life of the community; not only Port Reading. Many people, even when I worked there as a kid, were from Fords, Hopelawn, Iselin, and Avenel. You know, so it was made up of all people from Woodbridge Township. However, the bulk were from Port Reading. You know, it was the largest industry in Port Reading and it was labor. You didn't have to have much of an education nor did you have to have much of an understanding of the American language. There was a net group of Italians, Hungarians and Polish all working.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, so there were different ethnic groups?

*Joe DeMarino:* Right.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, Frank, what's your opinion of.....

*Frank Iacovone:* Well, I think it was the heart and soul at that time. Most of the people came and worked there and that was it.

*Brenda Velasco:* And it wasn't just Italians as Jo had just stated?

*Frank Iacovone:* No.

*Brenda Velasco:* Vin.

*Vinnie Martino:* The Reading Railroad was also across by the Central Railroad. There was a cross track with a central crossing and on my mother's side I had an uncle who was the gateman. In 1915, they put the gates up and he was there as the gateman until the bridge went through.

*Joe DeMarino:* But explain, you mean the gate that stopped the traffic.

*Vinnie Martino:* There was a railroad crossing gate before the bridge.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, we're talking Port Reading Avenue.

*Joe DeMarino:* Yes.

*Vinnie Martino:* Port Reading Avenue and his other brother was his foreman and he lived in Elizabeth. He was the foreman for the Central Railroad. The railroad played an important part as far as employment went both for people that came in earlier, whether they be Irish or in some cases Polish. They had Polish people working there too, more on the Central Railroad, I think. The coal dumper was predominantly Italian. There were a few, right Frankie, there were a few. I'm trying to think of some of the names of the people that worked there. The Griesheimer's worked there.

*Frank Iacovone:* What do you mean the engineers?

*Vinnie Martino:* Yes, they worked there, other than Italian. There were other ethnic groups.

*Frank Iacovone:* Of course, there were Polish people there.

*Vinnie Martino:* Yes, Polish.

*Frank Iacovone:* You had people from Amboy working there.

*Vinnie Martino:* Buchaks, didn't Buchak work there?

*Frank Iacovone:* Yes, Buchak.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so this was one of the main sources. We had the terra cotta industry, the clay pits, but this was another major employer at the time.

*Joe DeMarino:* It's interesting thinking about the railroad. The word gantry dancers was used but they were people that, when I say labor intensive, there was the camps, it was called the camps, a section of Port Reading that actually started long before the communities where there. Our parents lived there.

*Frank Iacovone:* My father lived there too. My mother and father lived in the camp.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so all your parents lived in the camps.

*Joe DeMarino:* Exactly.

*Brenda Velasco:* Where were the camps located because they are not there anymore?

*Joe DeMarino:* Today ProLogis, they wiped it right out. I mean, it was in that section. It used to be behind Oliver. There's a gas station, still there Brenda, and directly across from that gas station was a road that went directly over to the camps where they lived. The unique thing about it, I've got to bring it up, because the community was not only, because the parents who worked there as laborers, but mostly the kids became very skilled professionals and to those that lived there at the camps worked, I mean, believe or not, were doctors, lawyers, teachers, just about every occupation but they suffered from alcoholism and wound up working on track gang and they had a community of their own. They used to actually go out and repair tracks; skilled professional people.

*Brenda Velasco:* Now when you're talking that they were professional, were they professional in Italy that settled over here?

*Joe DeMarino:* No.

*Frank Iacovone:* No, no.

*Brenda Velasco:* These were the descendants of the first.....

*Joe DeMarino:* They were all nationalities but they were people that, unfortunately, fell under the alcohol problem.

*Vinnie Martino:* Remember Mr. Genovese?

*Frank Iacovone:* Yes, Tony.

*Joe DeMarino:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Let's go to Mr. Genovese whom you're talking about.

*Frank Iacovone:* He was the central foreman. When we had a derailment, he was right there to fix the tracks.

*Brenda Velasco:* Now when we get back to the camps though, did they have running water, did they have paved streets?

*Joe DeMarino:* Yes, the camps had homes that were owned by the railroad.

*Brenda Velasco:* These were company towns then.

*Joe DeMarino:* That's it. These were people that came in from all over the country brought in by the railroad. They drifted, they drifted and picked up and given jobs working in these camps. They had, in fact it was funny, they had, I used to deliver bread there for D'Orsi's Bakery by the way. But, anyway, they used to have stores and all where these people bought their food and it was deducted off of their pay.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, so these were company stores then.

*Joe DeMarino:* They were actually part of the company.

*Vinnie Martino:* There was two of them, I think, one part of the camps and one Robinson's that was down by.....

*Frank Iacovone:* No, Robinson's that was on the opposite side. That was by the dumper.

*Vinnie Martino:* Oh, dumper.

*Frank Iacovone:* Yes, that was by the dumper, Robinson's.

*Joe DeMarino:* That was a store.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh, okay. Now how many rooms did these camps have and what were the structures made out of, wood?

*Joe DeMarino:* They were regular wood shingled homes with tar paper roofs.

*Frank Iacovone:* Yes.

*Joe DeMarino:* They were called shanties.

*Vinnie Martino:* Shacks.

*Joe DeMarino:* They were called shacks. It was just wherever the railroad guys used to live and work.

*Vinnie Martino:* There was another bunkhouse that was up further that was by the railroad, that's where the gandy dancers used to come in and stay a lot.

*Joe DeMarino:* That was another terminology for them, gandy dancers.

*Vinnie Martino:* Do you know what a gandy dancer is?

*Brenda Velasco:* No, you're going to tell me, Vinnie, though.

*Vinnie Martino:* It's a traveling railroad worker.

*Brenda Velasco:* Ah!

*Vinnie Martino:* They travel up and down the railroad.

*Joe DeMarino:* These doctors, these lawyer, these people I mentioned to you.

*Vinnie Martino:* Right Frankie?

*Frank Iacovone:* Right.

*Joe DeMarino:* That was one of their names, gandy dancers.

*Vinnie Martino:* They were traveling railroad workers.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so they worked hard?

*Vinnie Martino:* Oh, yes.

*Frank Iacovone:* Oh, yes.

*Joe DeMarino:* Oh, yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* They worked hard and.....

*Joe DeMarino:* Received little pay.

*Brenda Velasco:* And received little pay, okay.

*Joe DeMarino:* And most of their pay was owed to the railroad for their food and stuff like that.

*Vinnie Martino:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* From the company town.

*Joe DeMarino:* And whatever they had left, they drank it up.

*Brenda Velasco:* So they were misfits but they worked hard, and not necessarily misfits, but they didn't fit that.....

*Joe DeMarino:* Believe me, I talked to the people there that were surrogates and legitimately. I mean, if they carried anything with them they carried that documentation. That's how they wound up getting jobs in a place like this.

*Brenda Velasco:* And your parents lived there Vinnie?

*Vinnie Martino:* My father.

*Brenda Velasco:* Your father lived there, okay.

*Vinnie Martino:* My father lived there, yes. When he came over from Italy with his father the two of them and his sister and then my grandmother came a year later, I think after he came; a year, no more than two. Like you said Frankie, one came and then the other one would come.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright and when did they start moving out Vinnie?

*Frank Iacovone:* When they made enough money.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh, thank you.

*Frank Iacovone:* When they made enough money to buy a home.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Joe DeMarino:* Those weren't the drifters, the gandy dancers, those are our parents who came over and worked here and they would save enough of money and, of course, they bought a house across the street not far from the tracks.

*Brenda Velasco:* So they could walk to work.

*Joe DeMarino:* Frank and I lived next door to each other.

*Frank Iacovone:* We lived next door to each other.

*Joe DeMarino:* The railroad was right across the street.

*Brenda Velasco:* Then going back to what Vinnie said about the gatekeeper that was your uncle?

*Vinnie Martino:* Great uncle.

*Brenda Velasco:* Great uncle, alright. The railroad, there wasn't an overpass?

*Frank Iacovone:* No.

*Vinnie Martino:* No, grade crossing.

*Brenda Velasco:* It was a grade crossing.

*Frank Iacovone:* Right.

*Brenda Velasco:* Right over the streets then. And then when eventually was that overpass built?

*Joe DeMarino:* I'll tell you.

*Frank Iacovone:* 1950.....

*Joe DeMarino:* No, no.

*Frank Iacovone:* '60s.

*Joe DeMarino:* We were the commissioners then, it was 19.....

*Frank Iacovone:* '58.

*Joe DeMarino:* When we built the firehouse, just before that.

*Frank Iacovone:* '58.

*Joe DeMarino:* It was around the late '50s.

*Brenda Velasco:* Late '50s, okay.

*Vinnie Martino:* Late '50s right.

*Brenda Velasco:* And then that changed for Port Reading too, the makeup of Port Reading because.....

*Joe DeMarino:* Well, it was more of a change for Carteret and for that section of Port Reading. You could be tied up by the railroad when a hundred to a hundred and fifty coal cars would go across. You'd be there twenty or twenty-five minutes waiting across the street.

*Brenda Velasco:* Wow!

*Joe DeMarino:* There was difficulty with ambulances and emergency equipment. They would have to go all the way around to Rahway.

*Vinnie Martino:* See in Carteret there are only two roads, one in right here on Port Reading Avenue and one in West Carteret. Correct Jo?

*Joe DeMarino:* Yes.

*Vinnie Martino:* What happens is the, well it's happening again you know now with like ethanol or whatever they're running now. They tie up the railroad crossings.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, with the longer trains because of the agricultural product, the corn coming in for the ethanol fuel and so on. Okay, well we've answered quite a few of the questions already. We've gone through Questions #1 through Question #4.

- 5. Did any of your family members work for the railroad? What jobs did they perform?**
- 6. At what age did you begin work for the railroad? How many years did you work for the railroad?**
- 7. What were the hours you worked? What was your pay?**
- 8. Were there any benefits provided for the workers?**
- 9. What jobs/duties did you perform while working there?**

*Brenda Velasco:* Vinnie we're going to start off with you. At what age.....

*Vinnie Martino:* I went to work on the railroad and actually what happened was we had a dumper gang which was dumping coal and feeding the New York market in the barges. All summer long just one shift would be there but in the wintertime they put two shifts on so I, in fact I think it was Jo that told me, that I should go to the railroad that they're hiring. When I went I wound up in the boiler room on the 11 P.M. to 7 A.M. shift where they were on the 6 P.M. to 2 A.M. shift. So I was in the boiler room where they fired the boilers where we burnt coal and when it got real cold I went in there and there would be nine hand fires. Then I'd get a shower in the morning and go to, and we had the auto feeders too that we could feed and catch some sleep sometimes but then we'd go to school the next day and had a split session.

*Brenda Velasco:* You're in high school then?

*Vinnie Martino:* Yes

*Brenda Velasco:* I want to know the age you started working.

*Vinnie Martino:* Sixteen.

*Brenda Velasco:* Sixteen.

*Vinnie Martino:* Sixteen or seventeen in that range.

*Joe DeMarino:* No, it was sixteen.

*Vinnie Martino:* Sixteen.

*Brenda Velasco:* You were still attending high school though.

*Vinnie Martino:* Oh yes, all of us. A lot of people in Port Reading went to high school and worked on the railroad at night.

*Joe DeMarino:* At that time you had the split session. Woodbridge High ran 7 A.M. to 12 Noon and 12 Noon to 5 P.M.

*Brenda Velasco:* Right.

*Joe DeMarino:* Okay, we went to school, Vinnie and I, and most people up until we built the new high school here in Woodbridge. But our shifts were 11 A.M. to 7 P.M. that I was on.

*Vinnie Martino:* And I was on.

*Joe DeMarino:* There was also a 6 A.M. to 2 P.M. shift.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, let me get to Frank. When did you start working?

*Frank Iacovone:* 1924.

*Brenda Velasco:* 1924, no, no, no.

*Frank Iacovone:* I mean I was twenty-four years old when I started working. (1946)

*Brenda Velasco:* You were twenty-four years old.

*Frank Iacovone:* Right and I worked thirty-six years for the railroad.

*Brenda Velasco:* Wow! So did you work for it while you were in high school too?

*Frank Iacovone:* No.

*Brenda Velasco:* And what shifts did you work?

*Frank Iacovone:* Well, I had a lot of different jobs there. I started as a messenger boy. Then I went up to janitor, clerk, yard master and a train master. Then I ran the whole railroad yard there.

*Brenda Velasco:* And that was your last job running the whole.....

*Frank Iacovone:* Train master.

*Brenda Velasco:* Train master.

*Joe DeMarino:* And Frank was one of the last guys there because the railroad started drifting apart.

*Frank Iacovone:* Then Conrail took over and I had to take care of Perth Amboy, Carteret and West Carteret plus Shelley's in Bayway.

*Brenda Velasco:* So you had a lot of experience with the railroad then?

*Frank Iacovone:* Yes, and I worked twenty-four hours a day. Any derailments I was out there, I had to be out there. Anybody got hurt I had to be out there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, okay, extensive. Jo when did you start?

*Joe DeMarino:* Fifteen or sixteen years old. We didn't tell the truth in those days when we needed a job and they needed help so bad that they'd hire you and didn't check too close. So that was when I was a freshman or about to be a freshman in high school.

*Brenda Velasco:* Wow!

*Joe DeMarino:* And I worked the 11 P.M. to 7 A.M. shift, like Vinnie. I used to forego the lunch hour so that I could get off a little earlier around 6 A.M., run home, shower, shave, and get on the corner to get the school bus to go to Woodbridge High. Of course, school then, was 7 A.M until 12 Noon.

*Brenda Velasco:* Right, so you had split sessions.

*Joe DeMarino:* Yes. I started out there as a trimmer and I worked around the docks.

*Vinnie Martino:* Explain what the trimmers are Joe.

*Brenda Velasco:* You're right Vinnie we have to explain some of these terms.

*Joe DeMarino:* I'm going to do that now.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.



*Joe DeMarino:* A trimmer, just so that you know, works on the dock under the dumper, the McMyler dumper that's there. What happens is the coal cars that come in come in full; these trains of fifty or a hundred or a hundred and fifty cars. They come to a certain section and these are what we called "the pig", a nickname that was given for it. The correct name was.....

*Frank Iacovone:* It was a barney.

*Joe DeMarino:* A barney, alright, and the car would come up over the barney, this would raise and the coupler would push that car up a hill up on top of the dumper. There were car riders on them. A lot of parents were car riders.

*Frank Iacovone:* My father was.

*Joe DeMarino:* Yes, his father was a car rider.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay Frank, so your father was a car rider.

*Joe DeMarino:* Yes, right, and the car rider, what his job was, with a stick, he would work a hand brake around the top of the wheel. It was a dangerous job. When the car got over on the top they would actually stop it so it stopped on the dumper. Then, of course, there would be a crew as the dumper would go up, there's a telescope with a man in it that supervises the dumpster coal into these barges. A trimmer, what we used to do, we're on the docks, and the telescope only had so much movement so that when those cars dumped coal in it would go to the left or right a very short distance and the coal would be dropped into a barge and to keep the barge level for floating and all, we actually had to go into the barge while the coal was being dumped and with hand shovels we would shovel that coal out to keep the flow coming out of the scope out of the dumper for the purpose of the tugboats to take the coal off to New York.

*Brenda Velasco:* So this was quite a dangerous job?

*Joe DeMarino:* Yes, very dangerous. In fact, they used to have shrimp boats from Alaska, New York State.....

*Brenda Velasco:* And Norway too, from Scandinavian country?

*Joe DeMarino:* Norway, yes, and they were very dangerous because they were holds. Holds didn't have open barges like we had then and today. The barge moved back and forth. They were actually dumped in the hole. You had to go in the hole when the coal was being dropped in and on your hands and knees, with a shovel, keep moving it across to get as much coal into those fish boats so that they can make the trip back to Norway, back to Alaska, and back to the northern popular cities that use coal along the United States and Canada.

*Brenda Velasco:* And was this process still being used, Frank, by the time you left?

*Frank Iacovone:* They still use that.

*Brenda Velasco:* They still use that process?

*Frank Iacovone:* Yes. Well after the coal dumpers stopped then they didn't use it anymore.

*Joe DeMarino:* Up until the.....

*Frank Iacovone:* Then Conrail took over and mostly it was all tank cars; tank farm it was called.

*Vinnie Martino:* Dumpers stopped in when, 1970 something, no?

*Brenda Velasco:* In 1950 somewhere?

*Vinnie Martino:* No.

*Joe DeMarino:* No, no, the dumper?

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes.

*Joe DeMarino:* No the dumper went.....

*Vinnie Martino:* '65 or '70.

*Frank Iacovone:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Frank Iacovone:* When Conrail took over it took everything and messed up everything.

*Joe DeMarino:* The dumper we mean. The McMyler.....

*Brenda Velasco:* The McMyler coal dumper. Yes, which is still there in disrepair and we brought the State out to see it last year, last summer.

*Frank Iacovone:* The whole back is burnt down.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, it's not safe to be there right now.

*Joe DeMarino:* Brenda, then after the trimming, when the weather changed, of course, less use for coal during the summer months, they laid off people. I shifted and that's how Vinnie shifted. We shifted jobs and I went to the car shop. Now the car shop is actually where the gantry dancers used to be and that's why I was friendly with most of them at the time and that's where they repaired boxcars and engines and all that. Physically raised them and drove them over pits where they were greased, they were oiled, repaired and all that. I used to take care of the heating and the boiling for the heating of that area. So they were mostly the two jobs that I had. My grandfather, well, he had other jobs. We'll get into that in another question.

*Brenda Velasco:* Vinnie, your jobs were similar to.....

*Vinnie Martino:* Yes, I worked there when I was seventeen, sixteen, when I was in high school. Then when I came out of the Army, in '56, I went back there and worked on the dumper and I think what Joe pointed out before, and Frankie both, you know that how it was a dangerous area and we wanted to become brakemen, when you become a car rider, and a brakemen gets the same salary classification. And another fellow from Woodbridge, Ronnie Decibus who owns Woodbridge Movers, him and I went up to become car riders and we took one ride down from the dumper when one car, as Joe mentioned, would push the other car out and it would go up and there would be an automatic track to send it down to the, what you'd call the.....

*Joe DeMarino:* It's called the light track.

*Vinnie Martino:* Well we went up and you're just way up in the air and you're looking over the back and all you see is water, we went back and said, "we don't want to be car riders no more...."

*Joe DeMarino:* And some of those cars went off. It's like a roller coaster ride. It goes down the dumper, it goes up the tracks that actually bends it towards the sky, and then it come down the light track.

*Brenda Velasco:* I'm glad you used that analogy of a roller coaster ride because that's what it looked like.

*Joe DeMarino:* That's exactly what it's like.

*Frank Iacovone:* That's exactly what it's like.

*Joe DeMarino:* That too was dangerous. Car riders had to control the speed of that car coming off the track so that when it came down it went on the light track. Some of them went over it.

*Vinnie Martino:* Or the track didn't switch fast enough, you know, when it would come back down.

*Joe DeMarino:* Yes.

*Vinnie Martino:* That was scary. Your father did that for years.

*Frank Iacovone:* He done it until he retired.

*Vinnie Martino:* What's her name, Charlotte Scarpoletti, her father was a brakeman for a long time.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay so Frank, your father was a brakeman.....

*Frank Iacovone:* Right.

*Brenda Velasco:* Which was quite dangerous.

*Frank Iacovone:* It was dangerous.

*Brenda Velasco:* Now, was there higher wages for something like this?

*Frank Iacovone:* No, same thing as the brakeman and the yard, same pay.

*Vinnie Martino:* But higher than the laborer's brakeman.

*Frank Iacovone:* Yes, well, I'm talking about the brakeman. He was called a brakeman, my father.

*Joe DeMarino:* I think Brenda is referring to the danger of the job being paid more.

*Brenda Velasco:* No, there was no extra pay because it was more dangerous.

*Frank Iacovone:* No they wouldn't pay no extra money.

*Joe DeMarino:* People got killed and people got hurt easily on the railroad.

*Frank Iacovone:* Right.

*Brenda Velasco:* I'm sure.

*Joe DeMarino:* We've had some die.....

*Frank Iacovone:* My father got hurt a couple of times up there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, was there Worker's Compensation at the time?

*Joe DeMarino:* No.

*Frank Iacovone:* No, nothing.

*Brenda Velasco:* Was there medical?

*Vinnie Martino:* Under the Railroad Retirement Act for permanent employees that were there but that didn't cover half of the social security. It didn't have.....

*Joe DeMarino:* No, what they did is, the Railroad Retirement Act was a benefit for people, per say, that worked on the railroad. The industry was so big in the United States that it had its own pension system. What had happened, when social security came in, those of us, myself included, the years that I worked, were transferred. I think Frank don't have social security. He has the railroad retirement.

*Frank Iacovone:* No I don't have it, I got railroad retirement.

*Joe DeMarino:* But I, because I didn't have sufficient years, you had to have ten years or more, I was only there five years and then what they did is they take your pension that you paid into the railroad retirement and incorporate it.

*Brenda Velasco:* They transfer it.

*Joe DeMarino:* Right, into social security.

*Brenda Velasco:* And Vinnie, how many total years did you have on the railroad then because you were in high school?

*Vinnie Martino:* About two years.

*Brenda Velasco:* Then when you came out of the Army.....

*Vinnie Martino:* Yes, then I went back in '56 I worked there and then I went back again. Whenever they got busy they'd.....

*Frank Iacovone:* Wintertime they mostly went back.

*Vinnie Martino:* It took you a long time to become permanent. If you wanted to be permanent you had to go through the winters.

*Frank Iacovone:* Because the coal was frozen.

*Vinnie Martino:* Just to talk about what they had down there at the dumper, and Joe can pick up on this probably too, they had what they'd call a big heating house that they would put all these cars in and turn on the steam in the heating house to melt the coal.

*Joe DeMarino:* They're quarter mile garages.

*Vinnie Martino:* Yes.

*Joe DeMarino:* They're garages about the quarter of a mile.

*Vinnie Martino:* There would be four tracks in there.

*Joe DeMarino:* Right and the train would drive right in.

*Vinnie Martino:* And then I'd come in, I'll never forget this, on a Sunday night cold being, you know, January or February or December and the boiler, they were firemen, classified firemen, he said, "go up the heating house and close the doors".

*Frank Iacovone:* Yes.

*Vinnie Martino:* And I'd go up to the bare roofs. Talk about being scary, right, the wind was blowing and I'd go all the way up there and close the doors and then walk back to the boiler room.

*Brenda Velasco:* And what did they do in those big heating houses?

*Vinnie Martino:* Turn the steam on and melt the coal in the car so you could dump them the next day.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, because they were frozen in winter.

*Joe DeMarino:* Those heating, what he's talking about, those heating houses were sealed, the doors were sealed. In other words, they were shut tight and actually you walked into a steam bath.

*Frank Iacovone:* There were ducts underneath to keep the heat to heat the cars; there were ducts underneath the railroad.

*Joe DeMarino:* Ducts meaning the heating things melting the cars because they froze.

*Brenda Velasco:* Right, because in the winter we had severe winters. Worse than what we have now.

*Joe DeMarino:* The dumper that was a dangerous thing because those coal cars froze and all the time those heating houses didn't melt all the coal so when they got up on to the dumper and they turned them that coal froze. Men used to go bring it back down in there and hitting them with sludge hammers and all the trimmers would go.

*Frank Iacovone:* The trimmers did that, right Jo, the trimmers.

*Joe DeMarino:* The trimmers, that's what we used to do.

*Brenda Velasco:* So you had several jobs then, Vinnie, working for the railroad.

*Vinnie Martino:* Different areas.

*Brenda Velasco:* Different areas.

*Vinnie Martino:* I think he had more though. He was in the repair shop and the....

*Joe DeMarino:* And then I went to the car shop, wherever they needed me. Sometimes I even oiled the dumper if the guy didn't show up.

*Vinnie Martino:* Right.

*Joe DeMarino:* Vince remembers, if my uncle didn't show up to work I would go up there and grease the cables and all for the dumper to keep them free.

*Vinnie Martino:* Not only that, his father, Joe's father, walked from.....

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, Frank's father.

*Vinnie Martino:* Frank's father walked from down by the Port Reading Post Office area, that section in the back, every day to that dumper.

*Joe DeMarino:* There was no ride, you had to walk. It was a mile walk. If you people don't realize it today, Brenda, and you're a Councilwoman, if you went from Port Reading Avenue to that dumpster, you're talking about a mile, over a mile.

*Frank Iacovone:* Right, he walked every day.

*Brenda Velasco:* And working on the railroad, at what age did you father die?

*Frank Iacovone:* My father died, he was ninety-three.

*Brenda Velasco:* Well, that was quite good.

*Joe DeMarino:* Considering breathing coal in.

*Brenda Velasco:* Right, considering the danger of the job, but the walking and being outdoors and everything.

*Joe DeMarino:* My father was eighty-seven and my grandfather was ninety.

*Vinnie Martino:* My mother was eighty-seven. She lived right across from the railroad all her life since she was a little girl.

*Brenda Velasco:* So this is longevity I'm in a room with.

*Joe DeMarino:* Nobody sued for coal dust or throat or skin cancer or anything.

*Brenda Velasco:* Did they get the disease associated with the black lung?

*Joe DeMarino:* There may have been some but to be honest with you I haven't heard of any.

*Frank Iacovone:* No, I've never heard of anybody.

*Joe DeMarino:* Never. I heard about it from the miners of Pennsylvania, but that's about it.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes.

*Frank Iacovone:* Never from Port Reading.

*Vinnie Martino:* Entirely different circumstances in mine coaling and handling.....

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, you're underground mining coal.

*Vinnie Martino:* Today with the mining I don't believe half of them threats.

*Brenda Velasco:* While you worked your shifts were they eight hour shifts?

*Joe DeMarino:* Eight hour shifts.

*Brenda Velasco:* And Vinnie, this went across the board except Frank when you became a train master?

*Frank Iacovone:* That was twenty-four hours a day.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, were you compensated for that or were you just on-call?

*Frank Iacovone:* Just on call I had to go out. I was on salary.

*Vinnie Martino:* He was senior management.

*Brenda Velasco:* And therefore you were not compensated?

*Frank Iacovone:* No.

*Joe DeMarino:* No, twenty-four hours was called a one day salary.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, let's look over those questions.

*Joe DeMarino:* I wanted to bring up my grandfather for work. He was a section leader on the railroad and on the docks also. My Uncle Charles worked on the docks as well and once in a while he was the oiler, the guy that used to oil the dumper. My father was a hustler. A hustler was, in those days coal engines had no diesel fuel, it was about then, and he used to keep the coal shoveled into the engines to keep the engines going and then eventually worked his way up to being an engineer for the railroad driving the engines and, like Frank walked in the yards, Frank would set up cars and how many had to go on what track and so on and my father, with an engine, would maneuver them around, that is, put them in position for delivery.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, and how many cars Frank, because you worked there the longest, how many cars were coming into the yard a day?

*Frank Iacovone:* Oh, we used to get one train, one train a day, about one hundred or one hundred and fifty-cars a day.

*Brenda Velasco:* Joe, do you want to add anything?

*Joe DeMarino:* And when he's saying a day, he's talking about a shift he's talking about a eight hour shift. During the winter months.....

*Frank Iacovone:* They had two trains.

*Joe DeMarino:* They had two trains come in, maybe two hundred cars a day.

*Brenda Velasco:* The demand for the coal then.

*Frank Iacovone:* Right.

*Joe DeMarino:* Right.

*Brenda Velasco:* And that Vinnie, what you said, this is when they were hiring all the time.

*Frank Iacovone:* Yes, in the wintertime they hired.

*Brenda Velasco:* And you worked out in the elements then.

*Vinnie Martino:* Most of the time. Well, in the boiler room you were by the furnace but you had to go out and the cinders that came out of there went into a cinder car and we'd put the steam pipes in it so that it'll keep the cinders melted. All these different things we had to do.

*Brenda Velasco:* You had a variety of duties then for each job that you had.

*Vinnie Martino:* Yes, each one.

#### **8. *Were there any benefits provided for the workers?***

*Frank Iacovone:* Well later on they got hospitalization.

*Brenda Velasco:* Do you remember when that came about Frank?

*Frank Iacovone:* I don't remember but we did get hospitalization.

*Brenda Velasco:* And as Jo had mentioned previously you were not under social security.

*Frank Iacovone:* Right.

*Brenda Velasco:* That came out in about 1938.

*Frank Iacovone:* We were under railroad retirement.

*Brenda Velasco:* The Railroad Retirement Act, okay. Did they have a doctor.....

*Frank Iacovone:* On the job, no. They had doctors though, you know, that you would go visit. If you got hurt, they'd send you. I got hurt on the railroad and they sent me to Amboy. I got twenty-seven stitches in my leg.

*Brenda Velasco:* Wow! And how did you.....

*Frank Iacovone:* It was my fault. Piggy backs came in. When the dumper slowed down we have piggy backs come into the yard.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, you're going to have to define that, piggy backs.

*Joe DeMarino:* You're talking about boxcars, truck trailers.

*Frank Iacovone:* Trailers, truck trailers on flat cars coming in.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, yes.

*Frank Iacovone:* Well, I wanted to start in a hurry so we could start unloading the cars. I went there to pick up one of those, what do you call them, plates and the plate slipped and the pin went right in my leg.

*Brenda Velasco:* Wow!

*Frank Iacovone:* I was off over a month for that, but they paid me everything.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, but they did pay you.....

*Frank Iacovone:* Oh yes, they took good care of me.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, they wanted you, you stayed there.

*Frank Iacovone:* They took good care of me, that's one thing I could say.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, now Vinnie, you only worked there fleetingly, off and on.

*Vinnie Martino:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Did you have hospitalization when you worked there?

*Vinnie Martino:* No, I don't think we had hospitalization there.

*Brenda Velasco:* And Jo, neither for you?

*Joe DeMarino:* No, I was there five years from 1949 to 1953, five years.

*Vinnie Martino:* There was a point where I was asked once if I wanted to stay full time, we won't even go into it. Whether they analyze you differently or what I don't know but I said no I didn't want to.

*Joe DeMarino:* The theory between parents and kids at that time is the parents worked there, the kids all started working there, and then the parents tried to stop that, didn't want us to continue. Frankie is one of the breed that parents worked there and he continued to work there. In our case, they tried to get us off.

*Vinnie Martino:* They'd discourage you if they could but they couldn't discourage the pay because they paid more than anybody else.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, let's look at the pay then. What was the pay?

*Joe DeMarino:* About a dollar ten an hour which was good.

*Brenda Velasco:* A dollar ten an hour, okay, you're going back to 1949 then?

*Joe DeMarino:* Right.

*Frank Iacovone:* At that time I was only getting a dollar an hour when I started as a janitor.

*Brenda Velasco:* And you're right, that pay in 1949 wasn't bad.

*Joe DeMarino:* Well there was a school teacher by the name of Ceasar Zullo who lived in Port Reading who worked on the railroad and he worked.....

*Frank Iacovone:* On the tower.

*Joe DeMarino:* On the tower, right, he was a tower man.

*Frank Iacovone:* Controlling the switches for the entry.

*Joe DeMarino:* Controlling the switches. He'd actually shifted when trains were coming down and maneuvered them from track to track. I was making more money than him working on the railroad. So he took a railroad job and was making more as a railroad man than a teacher.

*Brenda Velasco:* Vinnie, when you worked there it was about a dollar or a dollar ten?

*Vinnie Martino:* A dollar ten or a dollar fifteen, something like that. I was hired on minimum wage, that's how much I know.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay. Have we covered the different jobs on the railroad because you defined.....

*Frank Iacovone:* One thing I'd like to add, I regret I never took anything from the yard, you know, but I went through that yard when it was closed and they had what they call a pinch bar and a pinch bar was nothing more than a manual long handle with a latch on it. You put that under the car and one person could move that car.

*Brenda Velasco:* Wow, due to leverage.

*Joe DeMarino:* Yes, due to leverage.

*Frank Iacovone:* Well, they used to do it on the dumper.

*Joe DeMarino:* It was a long bar, it was like five or six feet long and they would have what was similar to a can opener opening a can. This here pinch bar used to slide under the wheel and raise it up and when you pushed down you would move that car two or three inches. We used to use them to start those cars rolling.

*Vinnie Martino:* Yes, from the heating house, we'd go up to the heating house and you'd take a pinch bar and you'd pinch it and the car rider would be at the other end of the heating house and when you sent the car down he'd catch the car, you know, just get on it and climb up and.....

*Joe DeMarino:* The car would go by; he'd actually jump on a moving car.

*Vinnie Martino:* He actually jumped on a moving car.

*Joe DeMarino:* That was another dangerous there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes.

*Vinnie Martino:* I tried to explain that pinch bar to somebody, an engineer in fact, and he couldn't understand how one person could go move a car. I said, well I'll tell you if I could find one.....

*Frank Iacovone:* I don't think there's any around.

*Brenda Velasco:* And you were never able to find one.

*Vinnie Martino:* The last time I saw a pinch bar was when Jo and I were up in Scranton at the museum and there's this pinch bar.

*Brenda Velasco:* And you recognized the purpose of it.

*Vinnie Martino:* They were a dime a dozen.

*Frank Iacovone:* They had them all over, all through the yard.

*Vinnie Martino:* Every factory that got a delivery of cans or whatnot, they had pinch bars to move the boxcar down. All over they were.

*Brenda Velasco:* Frank, looking at the questions, Question #6 through Question #9, and Joe you also, was there anything that we should add there?

*Joe DeMarino:* Well I'm looking. We explained the years that I worked and Frank did his and what our positions were, the hours that we worked, married 6 P.M. to 2 A.M., like Vinnie said, two in the morning that is, and the 11 P.M. to 7 A.M and the regular day shifts. The pension system you mentioned was a benefit from the yard, we explained that, and I think the jobs and the duties that I performed and Vinnie performed and I guess Frank told his.

*Brenda Velasco:* Frank you mentioned you alluded to all, because you had the biggest variety of jobs, did we miss anything?

*Frank Iacovone:* I enjoyed it, really enjoyed it. I worked myself from down the bottom all the way to the top.

*Brenda Velasco:* From janitor to the top.

*Frank Iacovone:* Yes, the top job I could have on the railroad.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay and you're still getting a pension?

*Frank Iacovone:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Because I want you to stay alive.

*Frank Iacovone:* Thirty-seven years I'm getting a pension.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so you retired thirty-seven years ago.

*Frank Iacovone:* Twenty-seven years I mean. (1982)

*Brenda Velasco:* Twenty-seven years you're retired.

*Frank Iacovone:* Right.

*Joe DeMarino:* You know what, when I look at Frank and his brother was an engineer, he had several brothers, Brenda the unique thing, and you would have had one of guests, Joe Zullo, I understand was supposed to be here today, and of course commitments came up for him, but if you look at the kids of all those that worked on the railroad, you had doctors, lawyers, all professional skilled people, none of the parents ever even went to high school, you understand. My father was fortunate he went to like sixth grade or seventh grade.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, this is the American dream though.

*Joe DeMartino:* Right.

*Brenda Velasco:* You all represent.....

*Vinnie Martino:* My father went to the fifth grade.

*Frank Iacovone:* My father went to the sixth grade too, in Italy.



*Brenda Velasco:* But this is what the American dream is, you come over, better economic opportunities.

*Frank Iacovone:* I have one son a mechanic and one a doctor.

*Brenda Velasco:* But it gave you the choice of what you wanted to do.

*Frank Iacovone:* Right.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, and if you remained your salary, the last year that you worked there what was your salary?

*Frank Iacovone:* Thirty thousand dollars a year.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, and that was, what year did you leave in Frank?

*Frank Iacovone:* I don't remember. Thirty-six years I'm retired.

*Joe DeMarino:* You're retired thirty-six years now. You're eighty.....

*Brenda Velasco:* 1982 or 1983 you retired?

*Frank Iacovone:* Yes something like that.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay and you still have your medical and your pension.

*Frank Iacovone:* Right.

*Brenda Velasco:* And it was a good job.

*Frank Iacovone:* Yes, but I don't get medical, I have to pay for my own medical. I have, you know, Medicare but I belong to AARP because they don't give you nothing; railroad don't give you anything.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, I didn't realize that. As a retiree, as an annuitant, you don't get anything.

*Frank Iacovone:* Nothing.

*Joe DeMarino:* Other than the pension.

*Frank Iacovone:* Pension, right.

*Brenda Velasco:* Other than the pension. Okay, I'm glad you clarified that.

### ***10. Did you work on the McMyler Coal Dumper?***

*Brenda Velasco:* Vinnie, you worked on the McMyler coal dumper?

*Vinnie Martino:* Yes, I'd pick up on something else Dr. Zullo was supposed to be here Brenda. He and his brother, Eddie, was a dentist up here in Woodbridge. They both worked on the dumper. Joe, in the summer, worked on the section gang and they used to go out there, when you mentioned before Dominic Genovese and I could remember I'd go down there, walk down. We all walked down the railroad tracks, you know, it was an attraction for kids too, you know, where we could go without getting caught, but Dominic Genovese who lived, you remember Dominic don't you Joe?

*Joe DeMarino:* Yes, he lived on the end of Lee Street.

*Frank Iacovone:* He'd sit on the water cans so nobody could drink the water.

*Vinnie Martino:* Yes, and he'd blow the whistle, right, and you'd hear him yell, "eat the one sandwich". It was break time, you know, eat the one sandwich, but Port Reading, as a town, was named after the Reading Railroad. It was a port of the Reading Railroad.

*Joe DeMarino:* Excuse me it was a port to Reading, Pennsylvania; a direct route from Reading, Pennsylvania, but close as water, to be Port Reading.

*Vinnie Martino:* The Reading Headquarters was in Reading, Pennsylvania but it was a port of the Reading Railroad and when the town got so united and stayed so united because all their parents and everybody worked on the railroad. So it was a close knit town.

*Brenda Velasco:* It was a community.

*Frank Iacovone:* Right.

*Joe DeMarino:* Brenda if you took, when Vince and I went to Italy two years ago, and if you took that community, Apizostuni, a part of Avellino, if you looked at the cemeteries, the streets, the names of the people there and all and you picked it up and plopped it right in Port Reading you would think you were in the same place and nothing moved. It's the same names.

*Brenda Velasco:* So many came over from that town but this was part of that whole immigration.

*Joe DeMarino:* Immigration moved and came right over and still until today, in fact, I got oabunch of them coming over to see me in either August or October of this year. There'll be about five or ten visiting me for that period of time. You know, my parents spoke Italian and spoke English and I still speak a little Italian and understand it. Not as well as I'd like to but it was amazing, when we went to that town Vinnie and I went through the cemeteries walking. We went up to the different industries and the same names, same people, compared to here. Our parents lived side by side, house to house. You know the houses were made like that.

*Brenda Velasco:* And they came to the United States and didn't live far apart either.

*Joe DeMarino:* Right together. Well, that's how they came, one followed the other.

*Brenda Velasco:* Well this is part of the Padrone System too, I believe. They would contract the laborer in Italy and pay their passage over and then you had to work a certain number of years.

Frank, I think you mentioned they came without the women?

*Frank Iacovone:* Right.

*Brenda Velasco:* And the women stayed behind, the money went back there and then eventually they came they brought the women and established their families here.

*Joe DeMarino:* And most of them, my father included, to get their citizenship actually were drafted into Army here in this country and, ironically, he had to go back to France to fight. But that's how they got their citizenship, most of them. In fact we had, and I think Town Hall still has, I know my father's name used to be on it, the plaque, Vinnie, with all the First World War veterans from Woodbridge.

*Vinnie Martino:* That's in the new Town Hall, isn't it?

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, we have the plaque.

*Joe DeMarino:* All their names are listed.

*Frank Iacovone:* First World War veterans.

*Joe DeMarino:* Yes, they're all the First World War veterans.

*Frank Iacovone:* I know they put that up there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay and your dad fought in the First World War then.

*Joe DeMarino:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* He was drafted.

### ***11. Why did you leave?***

*Joe DeMarino:* In fact, that's what ended our careers. I was in the Navy reserves in 1952 and 1953 and I wound up going into the Marines. That was during the Korean War. After that it came out that the police attested the other forty-eight years I spent here in Woodbridge Township.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh, right, I forgot to mention your career. You were in the police force too?

*Joe DeMarino:* Oh, yes, I started when I got out of the Marines I took the test for the State Police and the local police and ironically, the difference in salary, was twenty-nine thousand dollars a year with the State Police. The policeman was like twenty-five, so you didn't have to

travel. In those days State Police had to live at the barracks. But then from the police I went to the Prosecutor's Office and Public Defenders, forty-five years all totaled; the sheriff and the mayor, whatever.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay and Frank, you just stayed. You stuck it out with the railroad.

*Frank Iacovone:* Right.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Frank Iacovone:* Well, I enjoyed working for the railroad. They kept my family going. I raised five kids.

*Brenda Velasco:* Put food on the table.

*Frank Iacovone:* Yes, put food on the table for my five children.

*Brenda Velasco:* And Vinnie, you eventually left the railroad though.

*Vinnie Martino:* Yes, actually I drove a truck for Oliver Supply which was owned by the Pellegrino family and then, after the Army, I drove for Hess for seven years and then I went into sales and I stayed in sales up until I retired.

*Brenda Velasco:* Do you ever regret leaving the railroad?

*Vinnie Martino:* In a way, it was healthy. Say what they want to say about coal but a lot of the people were healthy on the railroad. They ate good, they ate their meals, they were out exposed to the air all day and God bless Frankie here, what eighty-eight years old.

*Brenda Velasco:* That's right, and he's still going strong.

*Vinnie Martino:* And you know, we didn't fear coal like they got everybody thinking you're going to die if you see a piece of coal today, you know. You know, I always believe something, and I have to say it, this country is great because you had two things during World War II, you had coal and you had steel and you could run it right here in the country and you had the railroads that did the transportation. We fought two wars, at once, much, much larger than they are right now. But it played an important part in World War II the railroad.

*Joe DeMarino:* It wasn't easy, there was the bad side.

*Vinnie Martino:* Troop rangers used to come in, remember when we were kids the troop rangers.

*Joe DeMarino:* The bad side, Brenda, is those people you were talking about from Italy that contracted, I'm talking about the Italians.....

*Brenda Velasco:* The black market.

*Joe DeMarino:* I knew that background best. Those people, when they came here, got jobs but they had to give part of their hourly salary to those bosses, who were mobsters really, who controlled the railroad. In fact you go back to some of the crimes that occurred there were crimes of people that worked there, you know: taking it out on mobsters and vice versa until Father Galassi came around and that's why he became a popular name. He was a priest of Holy Rosary in Perth Amboy but he also had the Port Reading St. Anthony's parish.

*Brenda Velasco:* He had both parishes then.

*Joe DeMarino:* Yes, at the time, right. He traveled by horse and carriage back and forth. He had stepped and stopped the corruption against immigrants.

*Brenda Velasco:* So he took an active part of the immigrants. He was an advocate for the immigrants?

*Joe DeMarino:* Absolutely, he made sure that the games stopped where they took part of the salaries of these poor people that were only making fifty or sixty cents an hour.

*Brenda Velasco:* And this occurred and this was the senior side.

*Joe DeMarino:* Right and when you say about the community in Port Reading, and I think because we were a group of one nationality, sometimes the reputation of the Italian American

was shattered even by those here in Woodbridge. I remember when I went to high school and all and right away he would say, oh he's one of these Port Reading guys, you know, like we were a mob because of our Italian heritage, I guess, you know.

*Brenda Velasco:* I think this was the time there was a stigma against immigrants.

*Joe DeMarino:* There was stigmas against blacks, there was stigmas against immigrants and the Italians.

*Brenda Velasco:* This is unfortunate and some people still continue this today with other groups being singled out but all of you achieved much.

## ***12. What would you like people to know about Port Reading?***

*Joe DeMarino:* What I like about the railroad, that railroad and everybody that worked there, and the town of Port Reading, everybody that lived there, were the same. Those who lived worked. They walked back and forth. It was nothing for me to walk into Frank's house and sit down with his mother and father and eat and they would make things for me. Houses weren't bolted shut. They were wide open. You could go from house to house, place to place, family to family, I mean, and that's the way it was, you know.

*Frank Iacovone:* Right.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so Frank you had him over for dinner frequently; your mother had to feed him.

*Joe DeMarino:* He lived right behind me.

*Brenda Velasco:* And Vinnie, this was all at your house as well?

*Joe DeMarino:* Our mothers, my mother and Vinnie's mother would go back and forth.

*Vinnie Martino:* His mother and my mother were very friendly.

*Joe DeMarino:* Nobody had cars at that time. A big thing for me was, even though I didn't like it at times, was walking to my grandfather's house which was four streets away. Would you believe four streets away that I could make that walk in about two minutes? But with my mother and my father sometimes it took two hours and the reason was because we almost stopped at every house and there were always people sitting on the porches and that's the way it was. It was a beautiful time.

*Brenda Velasco:* It was a very close knit family and it still is. I don't think you have that as much in the other sections any longer.

*Joe DeMarino:* No.

*Brenda Velasco:* And I've been interviewing from all sections but Port Reading has been unique in that way that it's been so long this way and you're still here and you hopped over to Sewaren, Frank.

*Frank Iacovone:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Not too far.

*Joe DeMarino:* I'll tell you I'll make you a bet, and I've walked this town many times, every section of it, that if you went to Port Reading and walked house to house, I could physical walk into each house and show you the kids and their parents and tell you the history of their families in the entire community. If you look at the other sectors, if you look at Colonia, Iselin, Fords, they're in and out. They're people that were here and now gone.

*Brenda Velasco:* It's a very mobile society in those other areas.

*Joe DeMarino:* Exactly. Port Reading, as mobile as it is Brenda, you will see the roots are still there, the kids are still there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, the DeMarinos are here.

*Joe DeMarino:* The Covino's, the Iacovino's, the Guartino's.

*Frank Iacovone:* In fact there's one of the foreman down there, Tat Coppola, he's Dominick, whose nickname is Tat, he's still living. Joe sees him pretty often, I think, or is in contact with him.

*Joe DeMarino:* My uncle's ninety-three. He's still living. You know, that's interesting you brought that up Brenda. And I thought about that after you had mentioned it, that you didn't see any lawsuits and you didn't hear about anybody breathing in the sulphur and the coal and what not and we lived in it, I mean we actually lived in it. I guess we were just lucky at that time.

*Brenda Velasco:* Well, you're living proof of it right now.

*Joe DeMarino:* And there was no coverage back then.

*Vinnie Martino:* In fact, when the other fellow that was supposed to be here today, Dr. Joe Zullo, he worked on and off for several years during the wintertime and the summertime on the section gang, you know, out there laying and moving and changing the ties on the rails and whatever they did, and Joe, of course, went fifteen years in the Army and became a surgeon. The town was usually proud of the Zullo's, that particular family, because there were three doctors in the family and it was unheard of at that time. Right, Frankie, for three doctors in one family let alone an immigrant. Carmen, I think, was born in Italy, his father.

*Joe DeMarino:* That's what I was telling Brenda, that the offspring of that generation, our parents, if you look, we had doctors, lawyers, engineers, scientists, policemen, firemen, sheriffs, mayors, freeholders, whatever you want to name.....

*Frank Iacovone:* Deorsa Freda was a teacher/principle.

*Brenda Velasco:* That's right.

*Joe DeMarino:* But I'm saying they all came from that one area and all from the railroad. The railroad was actually like the father and the mother to everybody there.

*Brenda Velasco:* It provided for Frank.

*Joe DeMarino:* You couldn't wait, I mean, some of us did wait, I really went in at fifteen. We didn't have much money in those days. They knew my father worked there and they hired us.

*Brenda Velasco:* Things were a lot less, not as rigid, as they are now and with computers everything gets documented. It's a different era. You were fortunate you grew up in that era, in some ways. You had an experience that your children will never have.

*Joe DeMarino:* You know Brenda, you're right.

*Brenda Velasco:* Their great-grandchildren will never have.

*Joe DeMarino:* You hit the word. I've watched what happened with computers. Before when I walked the street we met the people, I told you about walking around visiting different people on the way, and today with the computer we went right back, in my opinion of course, it's a necessary thing unfortunately today, we can't live without them, but the computer put us right back in the cave. People don't even ask anymore how many bedrooms you have for the kids, they want to know if you have a room for the computer. And people are locked into them. They don't meet anymore.

*Brenda Velasco:* That's one of the negative effects of the computer age, the socialization skills.

*Joe DeMarino:* And to tie that railroad, that railroad was our computer. It was a place we went to meet. Even when I was off, I would go to the railroad to talk to Vinnie or Frankie.

*Brenda Velasco:* That was the focal point.

*Joe DeMarino:* Right, the railroad was the life and blood of the community.

*Brenda Velasco:* A magnet for the community. Okay, Frank, would you like to add anything? Is there anything that we haven't mentioned? Joe, I think we covered.....

*Joe DeMarino:* We covered just about everything.

*Vinnie Martino:* I think we covered everything.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, we're going to conclude then. I thank you for enlightening me about the Reading Railroad. My familiarity with it was from the Monopoly game and that's how I always introduced it (Port Reading). There is a Reading Railroad and it just goes on and on and here we had it right in Woodbridge.

*Vinnie Martino:* One quick question that I think Frankie could probably answer or maybe Joe, the creosote plant, the foreign and creosote plant where they greased over the logs, was that part of the railroad?

*Frank Iacovone:* That was owned by the Reading Railroad.

*Vinnie Martino:* Owned by the Reading Railroad, okay.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, thanks fellows.

*Vinnie Martino:* There's a movie over in the.....

*Joe DeMarino:* Explain the creosote plant, Vinnie, what it did. Are you familiar, Brenda, what that is?

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh, yes.

*Joe DeMarino:* They used to grease up the poles, the telephone poles, the railroad ties....

*Frank Iacovone:* Well railroad ties because once the old railroad ties came into the creosote plant we used to bring the rare, you know, ties in and put them in there and put them in a heating house loaded with grease.....

*Joe DeMarino:* With tar and grease at times.

*Brenda Velasco:* And the whole idea was the life span: longevity

*Joe DeMarino:* It extended the life of the railroads and the wood. The wood was rare.

*Vinnie Martino:* You talk about smoke, I got a Reading magazine home that can show you the railroad. It has pictures of the creosote plant, you know, in it.

*Brenda Velasco:* Of this creosote plant?

*Joe DeMarino:* Yes, Port Reading.

*Vinnie Martino:* Calvin Lee lives in Woodbridge, he's still living Calvin Lee I believe.

*Frank Iacovone:* I know Calvin Lee.

*Vinnie Martino:* You know Calvin Lee.

*Frank Iacovone:* Yes.

*Vinnie Martino:* He was a carpenter down there and he lives on, I forget what the street, right off of Green Street just before.....

*Frank Iacovone:* I don't know where he lives.

*Vinnie Martino:* Cal Lee, he's got to be in his nineties too, but he worked on the creosote plant. In fact, he's in that magazine.

*Brenda Velasco:* Wow.

*Vinnie Martino:* I'll make a copy of it.

*Brenda Velasco:* Please, and then we're going to compile it for the library. We'll have the written transcript in the library as well as the museum.

*Vinnie Martino:* Reading employees used to get magazines, right Frank?

*Frank Iacovone:* Yes.

*Vinnie Martino:* Then they stopped.

*Brenda Velasco:* That would be great.

*Joe DeMarino:* You know Brenda, if you want, I'll take you. There's a way you can still drive down to the dumper. It's the remnants. It's only the skeleton of what was then but you can see if you come in that way, the way the cars and all moved. It's phenomenal.

*Brenda Velasco:* Well I was there last summer with Dolores Gioffre.

*Vinnie Martino:* How did you get there?

*Brenda Velasco:* ProLogis gave us permission. We parked in the parking lot and then we walked out there.

*Vinnie Martino:* We drive right up there.

*Frank Iacovone:* Where did you get permission to go up there?

*Brenda Velasco:* It's private property.

*Frank Iacovone:* From Hess?

*Brenda Velasco:* No, ProLogis.

*Vinnie Martino:* Joe and I went in the front off the.....

*Joe DeMarino:* Frank, I took him where you had the trailer, the office, at the end.

*Frank Iacovone:* Oh, yes.

*Joe DeMarino:* I went over the tracks.

*Frank Iacovone:* Oh, over the tracks.

*Brenda Velasco:* It would be great to go with all three of you because your memories are going to be jogged again. But right now we have to conclude this. I want to thank you Frank Iacovone, Joe DeMarino, Vinnie Martino for giving me your personal stories of the Reading Railroad which was the life and blood of Port Reading.

*Joe DeMarino:* Thank you Brenda for the opportunity.

*Frank Iacovone:* Thank you.

*Vinnie Martino:* In Woodbridge

*Brenda Velasco:* So thank you again and Woodbridge, you're right.