

CAROLINE GRONSKY

An Interview Conducted by  
Sarah Germain

April 15, 2003

For The  
Department of Human Services  
of the  
Township of North Brunswick  
North Brunswick, New Jersey

INTERVIEW: Caroline Gronsky

INTERVIEWED BY: Sarah Germain

PLACE:

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GERMAIN: ...for the Department of Human Services for North Brunswick Township. Today, April 15, 2003, we are doing an interview with Caroline Gronsky, and the interviewer will be Sarah Germain. I'd first like to ask you, were you named after anyone?

GRONSKY: I was named after an aunt, yes, my mother's sister.

GERMAIN: Have you had any nicknames?

GRONSKY: Yes. I have a nickname which I will have today, which is Snooky.

GERMAIN: How did you get that name?

GRONSKY: My mother's sister, apparently they called her Snook or Snooky, and they just tagged it on to me. My sister still refers to me that way.

GERMAIN: Where were you born?

GRONSKY: I was born in New Brunswick.

GERMAIN: And when?

GRONSKY: April 29, 1938. I was born in a house on Somerset Street.

GERMAIN: Where did you parents work?

GRONSKY: My father worked for the *Daily Home News*; he was a stereotyper. And my mom was a stay-at-home mom.

GERMAIN: Do you know what their salaries happened to be?

GRONSKY: No.

GERMAIN: Not at all?

GRONSKY: No.

GERMAIN: Do you have any siblings?

GRONSKY: Yes. I'm the youngest. I have an older brother, Bill, who I guess is about--let me think now, seventy-six, somewhere around there. He lives in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. I have a sister, Chris, who is seventy or seventy-one. I'm terrible on ages. She lives in Denmark, Maine. They're both married and healthy.

GERMAIN: That's wonderful. Did you guys get along when you were growing up?

GRONSKY: Well, my brother, Bill, is like nine years older than I am, so there was a big age difference there. He was the big brother. My sister and I were six years different, so she always tried to be the boss and everything. In fact this past summer I just told her that. I said, "You know--" We get along fine now. We have a ball. I said, "You know, you were such a creep when we were growing up." She always used to holler at me. But we get along fine.

GERMAIN: Did you ever have to share a room with anyone?

GRONSKY: Yes, I shared a bedroom with my sister.

GERMAIN: What was that like?

GRONSKY: Okay. Well, we talk about that, too, that she was sloppy, and I tried to keep my side neat. We shared a double bed. So I would make my half of the bed but not hers, which I carried through. One time--my daughter still talks about that--my husband and I had a fight. So I made the bed, and I made my half of the bed and not his. And my daughter still talks about that. She thinks that's so cool.

GERMAIN: Did you and your family spend certain days or times together?

GRONSKY: When I was a youngster?

GERMAIN: Yes.

GRONSKY: Yes. Well, when we were youngsters, you just kind of stayed home. You didn't go out. We didn't have all the activities and things like they do now. So that we just stayed home. Of course it was during the war, so gasoline was rationed. So it was a big deal, after the war was over, to take a ride down to the Shore.

GERMAIN: Where is your favorite vacation spot with your family?

GRONSKY: Well, when I was younger, my aunt lived in Baltimore, and we would go down to visit them for a week, but we didn't go away on vacations to resorts or anything like that. We just visited family.

GERMAIN: Did you have any pets?

GRONSKY: Not really. We had a cat once. My mother didn't like animals, so we didn't really have any pets.

GERMAIN: Was there open communication between you and your parents?

GRONSKY: Yes. Yes and no. My father died while I was still in high school. So we never got over that parent to become friend thing, because I was only eighteen when he passed away. But my mom and I, yes, we became good friends.

GERMAIN: Did you have any chores that were split up between you and the other people in your home?

GRONSKY: Yes. It was up to my sister and I to clean the house every week. We did the cleaning, scrubbing and cleaning on Saturdays. But we didn't do the ironing because we didn't do it right.

GERMAIN: Where did your family buy food?

GRONSKY: Well, from what I remember, when I was small, we used to have to go into New Brunswick to the grocery stores. And then finally the big-- I guess probably, maybe I was ten, where Little Caesar's and Krauszer's is on Georges Road there opposite the shopping center, they built a market, and it was the Quality Market. Then Mayfair bought it out, and that was the big deal. We had a market right in the neighborhood. And then up where Subway

is now on Georges Road, that was a little butcher shop, and we used to go there. Really. And then down where--what is that where that bakery is down....? I can't remember the name of it. Farther down on Georges Road, past Laurel Place. It's the Lebanese bakery or whatever that is, that Lebanese store. There used to be a little market in there, Meg's Market. So you would kind of shop in there. But the big deal was when they built the Quality Market where the Krauszer's is now.

GERMAIN: Where did you buy clothes in stores?

GRONSKY: We used to go down into downtown New Brunswick. There were a lot of stores in New Brunswick to shop at then. You had Young's and Roselle's and Nathan's. Just little department stores.

GERMAIN: Do you ever remember not having enough food to eat because times were hard for your family?

GRONSKY: No, I don't remember not having enough food. I remember we ate a lot of eggs. We didn't have too much meat, but we had a lot of eggs. And everybody had a Victory Garden so you grew your vegetables. Unfortunately, my father had great luck with string beans, and we ate string beans forever.

GERMAIN: What were your favorite childhood games?

GRONSKY: I don't know that we played games, because, you see, I had my brother. Actually, I call him "my brother," he was a cousin who was a year older than I was. And the aunt that I'm named after was his mother. And she had passed away. He was only thirteen months old when she passed away. So my parents raised him. So to this day I'll fight you that he was my brother. But technically he was my cousin. But anyway, it was mostly boys in the neighborhood. There were really no girls to play with. So I used to like to read and to color, and I learned how to knit. And just that kind of stuff. I didn't really play games as such. We played Monopoly, you know, board games, things like that.

GERMAIN: What schools did you attend?

GRONSKY: I attended Maple Meade, Linwood, and New Brunswick High School.

GERMAIN: Was there an elementary school named Maple Meade back then?

GRONSKY: No, the one that's now the board of education offices was Maple Meade School.

GERMAIN: I didn't know that.

GRONSKY: And the superintendent of the schools was Mr. Judd. Arthur Judd was the superintendent, and my sister-in-law was his secretary.

GERMAIN: Do you remember how many children were in your classes? Were they small, large?

GRONSKY: I don't remember. I think they probably averaged maybe between twenty and twenty-five kids in a class.

GERMAIN: It's about the same now, maybe a little more. Was there any violence or drugs like there is today?

GRONSKY: No.

GERMAIN: What would you say your fellow classmates would remember about you best?

GRONSKY: I don't know. Not much. My name probably. If you told them Caroline Gronsky, they wouldn't know who you were talking about. But if you told them Snooky Thielsp?], they would probably remember. That's about it.

GERMAIN: Did you do any after-school activities, or did they have things like that?

GRONSKY: No, they didn't really have. They had Girl Scouts and things, but that was more affiliated with the Baptist Church up on Georges Road. I belonged to the Girl Scouts up there. But the schools didn't really have after-school activities.

GERMAIN: Did you like school?

GRONSKY: Yeah, I loved school. I used to play school. I used to like school.

GERMAIN: I plan on being a teacher.

GRONSKY: Are you? Good. I didn't like it that much. I didn't want to be a teacher. [Aside conversation] [BREAK]

GERMAIN: Was there any special clothing that you had to wear to school?

GRONSKY: No.

GERMAIN: You could wear anything?

GRONSKY: Well, you weren't allowed to wear pants or jeans. Oh, you weren't allowed to wear sneakers other than gym day.

GERMAIN: Were there any special trends going on clothing-wise?

GRONSKY: Not really. Back you then you just kind of wore what your mother put on you. You didn't argue.

GERMAIN: Did your mom make any of your clothes?

GRONSKY: My mother didn't. But we had a next-door neighbor lady who used to make a lot of clothes for me. She didn't have any children, so she would make dresses for me. She would make a dress for the first day of school and for the last day of school.

GERMAIN: Were there any hangout places where you and your friends hung out?

GRONSKY: Not me, no. You're talking grammar school or high school?

GERMAIN: Either.

GRONSKY: Grammar school, nothing. In high school there were places, sweet shops and things in New Brunswick, but I was never allowed to hang out. I went home.

GERMAIN: Was your school segregated when you were there?

GRONSKY: No. When I went to the elementary schools in the

township, you're talking what mid-forties, late forties. We had a few black students in the class, but there were very few black people in the township. But we had them, and they just were part of the kids. No big deal.

GERMAIN: And the same in your neighborhood, was it mostly--?

GRONSKY: No, there were none. The neighborhood was all white.

GERMAIN: Where have you lived as an adult, in North Brunswick?

GRONSKY: When I first got married in 1958, we moved to Metuchen for a year in an apartment. Then we moved back to North Brunswick for about five years while my husband was in the Army. Then we bought a house in East Windsor for a year and a half. Then we came back to the township and have been back here for thirty-six, thirty-seven years. So other than like those couple of years. And even when we lived in East Windsor, we always came back here to shop anyway.

GERMAIN: If you could live anywhere in the world, where would it be in the world?

GRONSKY: Well, right at this point in time I would live right where I'm at because my children are here. My children and my grandchildren are here. If I moved away, I'd be alone. And the

funny thing is, back in August of 2001, my husband and I went down to Annapolis, Maryland, to look around. We were going to retire down there because he has a husband who lives there, and it's beautiful. We looked around, and we came back, and we were thinking about it and thinking about it. Then September 11th happened. Then we didn't know what was going to happen to real estate, and my husband got sick and passed away. So luckily-- You know, if I had moved, I'd have been down there alone. So I'll stay right where I'm at.

GERMAIN: How do you feel today?

GRONSKY: I feel fine.

GERMAIN: That is good. Are you healthy?

GRONSKY: Basically, yes.

GERMAIN: What major illnesses and health problems can you remember having?

GRONSKY: I broke my foot last summer sweeping the front porch. That's the first broken bone I've ever had. I have high cholesterol which is fine. I take medication. But other than that, I've been very lucky. No major problems.

GERMAIN: Oh, good. Do you exercise?

GRONSKY: I try to walk every day. I walk about two and a half miles.

GERMAIN: More than I do. This is kind of silly, but have you ever been convicted of a crime?

GRONSKY: No. Is overeating a crime?

GERMAIN: If you could change something about yourself, what would it be?

GRONSKY: I would be more decisive in things. I worry about making wrong decisions all the time, and I should just say, that's the way it is. I worry about things like that.

GERMAIN: Have you ever had an experience that you would consider to be supernatural or psychic?

GRONSKY: Yes, I have. My husband has talked to me. I believe it. The night he died, he came to me and talked to me and he told me that he was fine. You don't have to write all this, but I'll just tell you the experience. He was in the hospital, and he came home. He had heart problems, and he came home, and he was home three weeks, and then he passed away. So at some point in that

time, he was home from the hospital, he came down one morning, and he said, "I had a terrible dream. I was so scared. I was afraid to go back to sleep." He said, "I was in this tunnel with this bright light." And he said, "I could see it. It was dark at both ends, and it was very bright. And I couldn't get out. And then I woke up." And I never connected it.

Then the night he died, he came. I didn't see him, I didn't hear him. I just got the sense of it. And he told me, he said, "I went through that bright light, and I'm not scared anymore." And he said, "You're going to love it here." He said, "I'm walking around with a smile on my face. I can't stop smiling." And he said, "You know me, I never smiled." And he didn't. He was a bit of a grouch. He said, "I didn't smile. I'm so happy." And he said that, "I told God, when it's time for Caroline to come, let her go through that light so that she'll know." But he said, "You're not coming for a long time." Then he told me--this was all the night he died. He said, "God gave me a full-time job. I'm your guardian angel." So that's why I wear the pin. And he has, you know, like I said, I don't hear him, I just sense him with me. So, yes. That's kind of scary. But, you know, like I said, when he told me about the light before, I never connected it. And then afterwards, I thought, well, wait a minute, you know. Who knows? We'll find out.

GERMAIN: Did you ever know something was going to happen before it actually did?

GRONSKY: No.

GERMAIN: What do you usually dream about?

GRONSKY: Craziness, crazy dreams sometimes. I don't know. I dream nothing. I don't know. Nothing really.

GERMAIN: What is the scariest thing that has ever happened to you?

GRONSKY: Probably when my husband died, and I was left alone and, realized that I have to make all these decisions myself. And just being alone.

GERMAIN: How did you deal with that?

GRONSKY: One day at a time. Crying a lot, a lot of praying. But I'm getting there.

GERMAIN: Would you consider yourself to be creative?

GRONSKY: Yes. I do a lot of needlework. That's what I dream about at night. I get answers to my crazy problems. Like you want to do something or make something work, and I'll get these Rube Goldberg ideas. Well, that'll work.

GERMAIN: What is the most embarrassing thing that has ever happened to you?

GRONSKY: You mean today? I don't know. I don't know. I'd have to think about that. I haven't really ever had anything really that....

GERMAIN: Well, that's good.

GRONSKY: Yes, yes.

GERMAIN: How would you describe your sense of humor?

GRONSKY: I don't know. I like kind of slapstick. Off-color's okay. I don't like really raunchy humor. But just kind of silliness.

GERMAIN: Have you ever played a practical joke on somebody?

GRONSKY: Not that I can remember.

GERMAIN: Do you have any hobbies besides needle working?

GRONSKY: Well, I like to read, but I'm consumed by needlework. I sit and do it for hours on end.

GERMAIN: What kind of needlework do you do?

GRONSKY: Counting cross stitch is what I like to do the best. Right now I'm working on a big picture of old-time Charleston, just houses. I do wedding invitations and birth announcements and all kinds of things.

GERMAIN: Did you do them for your children?

GRONSKY: Wedding invitations?

GERMAIN: Yes.

GRONSKY: I did my daughter's. My son's not married, but I did my daughter's wedding invitations. I did birth announcements for the kids. I've done everything. I'm running out of wall space. When I used to work, I used to do it for people and sell it. Not to make money because you can't make money doing that. But as favors I would stitch the wedding invitations or things like that for them. And then I make windsocks. I'm not exaggerating; I must have made a hundred windsocks. They're just out of plastic canvas and yarn, and you put ribbon on them and hang them outside on the porch, and they blow in the wind. \_\_\_\_\_ right now I have an American flag up.

GERMAIN: Could you describe your religious beliefs?

GRONSKY: Yes, I'm Roman Catholic. I'm a convert. I converted after I got married. Always went to church. But I think my beliefs are stronger now since my husband passed away. I put my complete faith in God every day that He's going to take care of me today, and I don't have to worry. And He did that just as an example last Monday when we had the snow. What was it, six inches or whatever we had? I have a snow blower, but I don't know how to use it. So when we had the blizzard, I got the neighbor across the street. I said, "I'll make a deal with you. If you'll do my driveway, you can use the snow blower." Which he did, which was fine.

But then we had this snow, and he wasn't home. I said, well, I won't worry about it. And I went out to get the mail, and my sidewalk was done. The people next door on this side were doing their driveway, and that's when they did my sidewalk up to the driveway. And I thanked them. Then a little while later, I'm sitting there, and I hear a snow blower in my driveway, and it was the lady two doors down. She came down and cleaned my driveway. So I mean God takes care of me. So I can't worry.

GERMAIN: Is there anyone who is the most influential person in your religious life?

GRONSKY: No. Other than Jesus, no.

GERMAIN: And your husband motivated you to join?

GRONSKY: No. He did not know that I made the decision to convert until after I told him.

GERMAIN: How come you decided?

GRONSKY: Because I was expecting our daughter, and I just felt it was more important-- I mean I could say I was Protestant, and he could say he's Catholic. But if neither one's going to church, then you're going to have a child that's nothing. You had to be something. So at that point in my life I had a good priest that I could talk to that answered my questions, and I felt very comfortable with it. But nobody knew anything about it until after I had made the decision. It's probably the best decision I ever made in my life.

GERMAIN: What wise advice would you give to a grandchild on their wedding day?

GRONSKY: That the only person that you have to please is your mate. You don't have to explain to other people, you don't have to account to other people, just to each other and respect each other.

GERMAIN: How old were you when you started dating?

GRONSKY: Fifteen. Is that old?

GERMAIN: No. I'm seventeen, and I haven't dated yet.

GRONSKY: That's all right. You know, it's scary. My first date was my husband.

GERMAIN: So he also lived in North Brunswick?

GRONSKY: Mmmm hmmm. He grew up in North Brunswick also.

GERMAIN: Where were some of the places you went on dates?

GRONSKY: Well, when we dated, I was fifteen, he was sixteen. So we couldn't drive, so we had to take a bus everywhere. So he lived off of Livingston Avenue on Oakwood Place by the senior center. So his mother or father would pick me up and take me over to their house. Then we'd walk up to Livingston Avenue, and we'd take a bus into New Brunswick. Then we would go to the movies, either at the State or at the Rivoli Theater. This was usually Sunday nights. We dated Sunday nights. We'd go to the movies. Then we'd leave there, and we'd go to one of the restaurants in New Brunswick for pie and coffee or whatever. Then we would take the bus back home to his house. And then one of his parents would

drive me back home. We were such a regular that the bus drivers would wait for us on Sunday night. But that was about it. I mean, you know, because he didn't drive. We had to bum a ride to the senior prom.

GERMAIN: How has New Brunswick changed?

GRONSKY: New Brunswick? New Brunswick has gone away. To me there's nothing there in New Brunswick if it weren't for Rutgers and the hospitals and the county. I mean to me there's no shopping or anything in New Brunswick anymore. I had jury duty a couple of weeks ago. It's the first time I was in New Brunswick in I don't know how long. There's no reason for me to go down there. It's not like when we were kids at all.

GERMAIN: Do you have a good friend?

GRONSKY: I have one girlfriend. We've been friends for, oh, probably forty-five years. I met her-- When I got out of high school I went to work-- Well, I went to work for the Boy Scouts for six months. Then I got a job with the telephone company as a service rep. And I met her at the phone company the week before I got married. So that was in 1958, and we've been friends ever since. We talk on the phone every day. We go out shopping.

GERMAIN: That's wonderful. Has there ever been anyone in your

life that you considered to be your kindred soul? Your husband?

GRONSKY: Well, if you're looking for soul mates, you know.... We got along. Well, I guess we were because then that, too, made my daughter crazy. She'd come over, and we could finish each other's sentences and know what each other was thinking. But we were married forty-three years, so after that point you just kind of know what the other one is thinking,

GERMAIN: You are married.

GRONSKY: Well, I'm widowed, not married.

GERMAIN: How did you meet and match?

GRONSKY: How did we meet?

GERMAIN: Yes.

GRONSKY: We met on the school bus. Isn't that awful? We'd been on the school bus, and I said to a girl on the bus, I said, "Who's that? He's cute." And she shot her big mouth off and blah blah. He called me that night to apologize for the way she acted. And that was it. Then he said, "I'll meet you outside school the next day." This was in New Brunswick High School. He said, "I'll meet you outside school tomorrow morning." So I met him--or he

came up--and he was all dressed up in a suit and a tie. I thought, wow, that's really nice. He got all dressed up to meet me. They were taking senior class pictures. I didn't know. He never told me 'til years later.

GERMAIN: Describe your marriage proposal.

GRONSKY: Well, we kind of just knew we were going to get married. I mean we broke up and dated other people. But we always got back together. But then when he was going to give me my engagement ring, he was going to give it to me on October 28th because that was the day that we met. So he said, "Well, do it...." And that was something he always remembered. To the day he died, he always remembered that day.

GERMAIN: So you knew.

GRONSKY: Yes. So he bought the ring, and he had the ring like a month ahead of time. And I'll never forget this. I had been waiting for hours, and he said, "Do you want to see the ring? Do you want to see the ring?" I said, "I don't want to see it da da...." "Do you want to see it? Do you want to see it?" So finally I said, "Okay." So he gave me the box, I opened the box, and it was empty. He said, "You don't think I was going to show it to you?" So then the night he gave it to me, we waited-- Back then they used to put the engagements in the paper like the next

day. So he gave me the ring on a Saturday, and our engagement picture was in the paper on Sunday. So my father, of course, working for the paper, we'd always go into New Brunswick Saturday night and get the papers.

WOMAN: The engagement was in the \_\_\_\_\_.

GRONSKY: Right. So we go down to get the paper, and then he came back to give me the ring, and what he said to me was, "Even though you know everything about me that you know, will you still marry me?" So I said, "Yeah." He was my one and only. He was a grouch, but he was mine.

WOMAN: He was \_\_\_\_\_.

GRONSKY: That's right. And then when we got married, my father had passed away, and the *Home News* sent a photographer out. And my wedding picture was, well, I don't know. It's about that big. It's the two of us coming out of the church.

GERMAIN: When did he pass on?

GRONSKY: June of 2000. I mean, I'm sorry, January of 2000--2002. It's a little over a year.

GERMAIN: Where did you get married?

GRONSKY: Our Lady of Lourdes in Milltown.

GERMAIN: Still there?

GRONSKY: Mmmm hmmm.

GERMAIN: Who were your maid of honor and best man?

GRONSKY: Maid of honor was Barbara Sienowski[sp?], who worked with my husband. She wasn't a close friend. Because back then you had to have Catholic attendants, and I didn't know Catholics. And the best man was Joe Pichowski[sp?] who worked with my husband at the telephone company. And the amazing thing with him, we had lost contact-- My husband saw him from time to time at work, or he'd run into him. But they were both retired. And when my husband passed away, at the funeral home people are coming in. I just looked at this one man, and I said, "Are you who I think you are?" And it was. Joe came to the funeral, and I hadn't seen him in years. So I thought that was kind of neat.

GERMAIN: How would you describe your spouse?

GRONSKY: He was very honest, very fair, very rigid in his beliefs. He didn't take much nonsense: What was right was right, and he would do anything for you. But don't try to put anything

over on him because he wouldn't put up with that. He was very good to me, provided well, left me.... When we got married, we had \$300, and here we are.

GERMAIN: What do you admire most about him?

GRONSKY: About him? That he was very strong and very knowledgeable, like with different things with finances and things. He just knew what to do. He was good that way. I wish I was like that.

GERMAIN: Was your spouse ever in the military?

GRONSKY: He was in the Army for two years. He was drafted. He didn't want to do. He was drafted. Almost went to Cuba for the Cuban Missile Crisis. He'd gotten to the point where he had to send me his last will and testament and power-of-attorney and all that stuff. But he didn't go, thank goodness.

GERMAIN: What was his rating, his rank?

GRONSKY: He was a spec-5, whatever that is. A spec-5, and he was a company clerk, and was stationed the whole time down in Fort Benning, Georgia.

GERMAIN: Has your husband being in the military affected your

outlook on life or war?

GRONSKY: No. Because he was, as I say, he was drafted. He didn't want to go. I lived here while he was in the service. He was stationed down there. Every six weeks one of us would be flying back or forth, he'd drive home. But he wasn't there because he wanted to be there. So I wouldn't say it affected me in any way. In fact, I think I only saw him in uniform twice.

GERMAIN: How did you find out you were going to be a parent for the first time? Did you plan it?

GRONSKY: We planned it more or less, yes. So we knew.

GERMAIN: How many children do you have?

GRONSKY: Two. A daughter, Joanne is thirty-seven. She was born in November of 1965, so you can figure it out. My son was born in June of '67. So he's thirty-five or whatever, somewhere around there.

GERMAIN: Are they married?

GRONSKY: My daughter is married. She lives in East Brunswick. She's got two little girls. Christine is eight, and Amanda will be six next month. My son's not married.

GERMAIN: Where does he live?

GRONSKY: He lives in South Brunswick.

GERMAIN: So they're close.

GRONSKY: Oh, yes, they're close. That's why I'll stay where I'm at because they're my family.

GERMAIN: Do you remember anything about your children that they did when they were small that amazed you?

GRONSKY: They grew up to be adults. Let me think if they amazed me. Well, one thing that amazed me with my son, he read very young. I didn't sit down and teach him. I don't know how-- Maybe he was three or something. And he sat down, and I thought he had memorized the books. Then we gave him a comic strip or something and said, "Read this." And he read it. And I was amazed that he read very young. Then came to find out later that he had vision problems in his one eye. So to this day he compensates that way. He's got a wonderful memory. If I don't remember something that happened back then or something, "Hey, Jim," and he remembers it. But I think that's how they compensate.

GERMAIN: Is there--the funniest thing your children have ever

done when they were younger?

GRONSKY: No. They both have a wicked sense of humor. When they get together, they're funny. But nothing in particular that they've done.

GERMAIN: If you could be a parent all over again, is there anything you'd change about the way you raised your children?

GRONSKY: No. I don't know that you could. I mean we said that we had problems--don't put this in--we had problems with my son with alcohol. We had him in counseling and rehab and different things. But the bottom line is we did the best we could. Then you drop it, and then they're on their own. I think it took a long time, but I think he realizes that now.

GERMAIN: What did you find most difficult about raising your children?

GRONSKY: Well, other than the problems--as I say, we had a lot of problems with my son, so he was really a lot of it. My daughter was very easy, you know. She went to school and worked and she.... No, they were good kids. I mean I didn't have any problem with.... To this day, they don't talk back. They wouldn't dare. But, no. I don't know what I would do different. Nothing, really.

GERMAIN: What did you find most rewarding about being a parent?

GRONSKY: Well, I enjoyed it because that's what I wanted to do, I mean was to get married and have children, have a family. Just raising them, and they grew up to be productive adults. That's all you can ask.

GERMAIN: Were you a strict or lenient parent?

GRONSKY: I was more lenient than my husband. He was strict.

GERMAIN: Did you find that you treated your children differently?

GRONSKY: Ask them. They'll tell you I did. I don't think so. But they'll always tell you, you did. I don't think so. I think my son maybe got more attention because he needed it. It was different attention, the counseling and all that kind of stuff. But I didn't treat him differently.

GERMAIN: As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?

GRONSKY: A mother. Never really wanted a career. I mean everybody goes, I think, you want to be a teacher when you're little. But I didn't seriously consider it. I just wanted to get

married and have a family.

GERMAIN: What was your first job?

GRONSKY: My very first job? I was still in high school, and I worked in New Brunswick on Georges Street. They had a five-and-dime, Fishman's. Do you remember Fishman's?

WOMAN: No. Fishman's? I don't remember that.

GRONSKY: They had four five-and-dimes. They had Grant's, Newberry's, Woolworth's, and Fishman's. All the really smart kids got to work in Grant's. Fishman's was like the lowest on the totem pole. Fishman's would hire everybody. So I worked in Fishman's. I was there for a while. I still remember the \_\_\_\_\_ change. I think I worked Thursday nights and all day Saturdays. And I made \$3.75.

GERMAIN: Just for one night or hour?

GRONSKY: For Thursday night and all day Saturday. Made a total of \$3--I think you got something like forty cents an hour back then. And I would leave it in the store before I'd come home, find something to buy. So then I left there, and across the street was a bakery, the Berkeley Bakery, and they were hiring. So I went over there. I figured I could get a better job, so I

went over there, and they hired me. I went, and I bought a white uniform, and the whole thing, you know. I was going to work in this bakery. I think I worked there three days and they let me go. Because, like you, you're nervous. I was nervous, and I was afraid to wait on the customers. And they said it just wasn't working. I mean I would clean the cases and do all that. But I didn't want to wait on customers. So they let me go, and I was heartbroken. So then my father said, "Well, you don't have to work. Just go to school." Well, I was his little girl. I was the youngest. So I could get anything. So that was my jobs in high school. But then I got back at the Berkeley Bakery because when I went to work for the phone company, I turned their phone off for not paying their bill. I got 'em. Don't put that in there.

WOMAN: I'm not putting this in.

GRONSKY: But that was such satisfaction. So then, as I said, after I graduated high school I went to the Scouts, and I worked at the telephone company for almost ten years. Then I--

WOMAN: Downtown?

GRONSKY: Yes, as a customer representative in New Brunswick and Metuchen. Then I was home for thirteen years with the kids. Then when I went back to work, I went back to work driving a little school bus for Franklin Township for just a few months. And that

was only because Bob's uncle rented school buses. I couldn't get a job, and he gave me a job there. So I was there about six months. Then I applied at Federal Express. Then I got the job at Federal, and I was there for fifteen years in customer service. Then I retired. And now I do nothing. [Change to Side B of Tape] ...no, other than my husband.

GERMAIN: Do you remember someone saying something to you that had a big impact on how you lived your life?

GRONSKY: What I said before to you, when you said about the advice to give the granddaughter on her wedding day or something, the advice that you only have to account to each other for what you do, that advice was given to us when we got married by our next-door neighbor lady, the one who used to make me the dresses. Because back then-- My husband and I, we were married seven years before we had kids. So we were both working. So we were able to go out for dinner and go on vacations and do different things, which I'm glad we did then, because you had the kids then you didn't go on vacations, but I don't feel like I missed anything.

But I used to say sometimes about, you know, I felt bad because we're going out, and here's other people, you know.... And she always said to us, she said, "You don't have to account to other people for what you do." She said, "You're both working, and you're entitled to enjoy yourself and do what you want." And I just thought that was the best advice.

GERMAIN: If you could choose one person who has been in your life, who would you say is your hero?

GRONSKY: My mother, because she went through a lot. She was very quiet and gentle. She was always just a mom at home. Never really worked. She was only fifty-three when my father died, and she was alone for twenty-some years. I think she was seventy-nine when she passed away. But during that time, she had had a stroke, ended up in a nursing home, had both her legs amputated from diabetes. It just was a long, long struggle, but she never-- I mean toward the end she wondered why. But it was a long battle. And she would be my \_\_\_\_\_.

GERMAIN: How would you describe yourself politically?

GRONSKY: Very naive. I try to vote, and I read up on the elections and things. But I don't follow politics as such.

GERMAIN: Do you belong to a particular political party?

GRONSKY: No. I did vote for Bush.

GERMAIN: Would you say you're a liberal or a conservative?

GRONSKY: Oh, I'm conservative.

GERMAIN: Who would you feel was the most influential politician in the twentieth century on the national level?

GRONSKY: I'd say probably John F. Kennedy only because he had so much charisma and the way he died, and they made such a hero out of him. More as time goes on, I don't know that he was all that great.

GERMAIN: How about locally?

GRONSKY: I think locally, politicians, the one that did the most for North Brunswick was Fred Hermann years and years and years ago. He's what made North Brunswick a good place, and then it's changed.

GERMAIN: What U.S. president have you admired the most, Kennedy?

GRONSKY: No. Right now I admire President Bush, the current president, just because I think he stands behind what he believes in, whether it's a popular voice for the people or not. And I think he's proving himself.

GERMAIN: You were alive during World War II, Korean War, and Vietnam.

GRONSKY: Mmmm hmmm.

GERMAIN: What do you remember about any of them?

GRONSKY: Let's see. World War II--these are crazy things. I remember Pearl Harbor only because my father was in the National Guard. I was three years old. And he had a whistle that he wore on his uniform. And whenever he would get dressed to go to the meetings, he'd always let me blow the whistle. But they had called--something had happened with Pearl Harbor--and he had to get dressed and go. And I remember he couldn't let me blow the whistle. He had to go. I remember that.

I remember you had to tape up the headlights on the cars so that the lights didn't shine. I remember gas rationing. I remember coupons so I could get shoes. I guess clothing was rationed. So you only had so many coupons to get shoes. I remember putting cardboard in our shoes when you got holes in them. I mean it wasn't-- You didn't necessarily not have the money for them, but you just didn't have the coupons. And like I said, I remember the string beans, and I remember the eggs.

I remember when the war ended, we were down the Shore. I don't know. There were a couple of different days, there's like V-J Day and V-E Day. But this one was like in August, whatever it was, and we were down the Shore visiting friends at a Shore house. The word came over the radio, and I remember everybody going up to the highway with pots and pans and things.

WOMAN: V-J Day.

GRONSKY: V-J Day? I remember that.

GERMAIN: What does that stand for?

GRONSKY: Victory over Japan. And V-E was victory over Europe. That's about it. I don't really remember too much about-- I remember as a kid reading the paper, maybe five years old, something like that, reading the war headlines and thinking to myself, now, when I'm all grown up, am I still going to be reading about this war? And they just changed the name of it. It just goes on and on and on, you know. But I remember that.

The Korean War, my older brother, Bill, was over in Korea. I remember that. I was in high school then. And I remember the day he came home. Now at that time he was married, and his wife was the secretary to Mr. Judd in the township schools. His office was in Parsons School, which is now the parking lot. And she was his secretary. At that time my mother was working a little part-time job for a doctor in New Brunswick. So I would go home from high school, and then I would have to start supper.

I'll never forget. My mother had made meatloaf. I just had to put that in the oven. And then I had to peel potatoes. So my mother called me and said, Do this blah blah blah. So I did that. So my mother and father, he would pick her up, and they'd come

home from work. And my mother came in, and here's my brother and my sister-in-law with her. He was home from Korea, but they didn't tell me. They knew. They didn't tell me. And he came in, of course, for supper. The first thing I did was cry, and I said, "I don't have enough potatoes!" I mean these are the things that I remember. It makes sense, right?

GERMAIN: What about the Vietnam War?

GRONSKY: No, I didn't know anybody in the Vietnam War. That didn't really affect any of our family.

GERMAIN: Where were you when Pearl Harbor happened? You were--

GRONSKY: I was home. I was only like three years old.

GERMAIN: Where were you first found out about the assassination of President Kennedy?

GERMAIN: I was working at the telephone company in Metuchen in the business office. I had just come back from lunch, and I went to my phone, and I called my sister who was married and lived in East Brunswick. I called her to wish her a happy anniversary because her anniversary is November 22nd. So I called to wish her a happy anniversary. I said, "What are you doing?" She said, "Oh, I'm just dusting the living room." She said, "And I'm watching

the president's parade down in Texas." And she said, "Oh, wait a minute. He was shot!" She said, "Wait a minute." And then she came back and told me. So then I quick hung up and went back into the lounge in the back of the building to tell the other people on lunch. I said, "Turn the radio on." I said, "The president was shot." So then that's how we first heard it.

WOMAN: She was watching television?

GRONSKY: She was watching television and cleaning the living room. And then she told me on the phone.

WOMAN: Your sister?

GRONSKY: My sister, Chris.

WOMAN: I liked \_\_\_\_.

GRONSKY: Oh, okay, yes. No, she said she was-- I guess they were covering the parade or something, and she was watching that.

GERMAIN: What about the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.?

GRONSKY: I don't remember how I first heard about it. I do know with that one, I remember my father-in-law came over that night

because that was my father-in-law's birthday that day. I remember that. But I don't remember how I first heard about it.

GERMAIN: Did the death of Kennedy or Martin Luther King affect you or your community?

GRONSKY: Martin Luther King didn't affect me. I just thought it was a shame. There were so many back then, you just thought it was just going to go on. Because they had Bobby Kennedy and.... John F. Kennedy, I remember that was on a Friday, and we were at work. And I think they let us out of work a little bit early. I'm not sure. I don't remember that. But I remember going home, watching the television, watching it all day Saturday. Then Sunday morning we got up, and it was just about noontime or so, and Bob said, "Let's go for a ride. I'm tired of watching this on television. Let's go for a ride."

So we go for a ride and had the radio on, and then we hear where Lee Harvey Oswald got shot. I thought, this is craziness. So we went home. Then the phone company, of course, back then, benevolent benefactors that they were, we had to go to work on Monday. So we said, "That's crazy. Everybody's closing. That's the funeral." You know. But we go into work. So by ten o'clock they sent us home because there wasn't one phone call coming in. I remember that. No, you just thought it was craziness, you know.

GERMAIN: Now, at the same time, the Cold War was also going on.

Do you remember that?

GRONSKY: I didn't follow that too much. I don't know too much about that.

GERMAIN: The things about communism?

GRONSKY: No, I don't know too much about that at all.

GERMAIN: How did these events influence your opinion on the current state of world affairs and the war with Iraq and the war on terrorism?

GRONSKY: Well, my opinion is it's just a scary thing because you don't know who or where the enemy is. And they've got such weapons that they hide. It's scary. Plus I have a nephew over there with the 101st. He's a great-nephew actually. He's eighteen years old, and he's over there. His father-- Well, this is my sister's one daughter's husband, and then that's her son that's over there. Her husband's down in Virginia. He's due to get out. He's been in the military for twenty years. He's a West Point graduate. So it's their son that's over there.

Then I have another nephew on my husband's side, he's in California now; he's in the Marines. He was over in Afghanistan last year. Well, he was there when my husband passed away because he was on the ship the \_\_\_\_\_. We were sitting there the night

after my husband passed away, and the phone rang. I had Call Intercept, which is an odd ring. It was the first time I'd ever had a call, and I didn't know what it was. So I pick it up, and it says, "You have a call." Of course it's a computer you're talking to. But it said, you have a call, and it's a call from Steven. And I knew he was on the ship over there. They said, "Will you accept the call?" And you're supposed to, if you're going to accept, you either press 1 or press 2. I said, "Yes." I'm talking to this machine. But anyway, I did get the call. But he called from the ship because they had e-mail back and forth, and apparently they could keep in touch that way. Yes, so these wars are affecting me more because I've got nephews and things in there.

WOMAN: Was he Airborne?

GRONSKY: The 101st Airborne. So hopefully-- His mother is a basket case. She can't sleep. The doctor gave her medication, and it makes her sick, and she's been losing weight. So one day last week, it was about a quarter to eight, she was getting ready for work, and there was a knock at the door. She just froze in her tracks, her heart started pounding, because that's how they notify-- It was the neighbor had baked a cake, which was very nice. But who comes at quarter to eight in the morning with a cake? Hopefully, the way it's going, he'll be home soon.

GERMAIN: What changes in technology have occurred during your lifetime?

GRONSKY: Oh, my Lord! Oh, my Lord! Let's see. Well, let's see, when I left work from the telephone company, that was in 1965, when I had my daughter. That was with manual typewriters and teletype machines and things, because I operated a teletype and whatever. Then when I went back to work at Federal Express in 1980, not only did-- Well, you were beyond electric typewriters even. Now you were into the computer, and I had to learn how to operate the computer, and that was a big change. Computers like boggle my mind. Although I just went and bought one. I don't know why, but I did. Oh, just everything. Everything is instant now. You know, everything is instant replay, and they can go back and look things up. Everything's fast, fast, fast.

GERMAIN: Do you like that?

GRONSKY: No. Some of it is fine, some of it is. But I think that's the problem with the people. Everything is--they want instant gratification. They don't want to work for anything. They don't want to save for anything. I mean I see young people today, they have houses that we worked twenty years for, and they start out with that. That was another piece of good advice we were given, that when you start out, don't try to start out at the top. Because if you do, the only place you can go is down. And

I've seen it happen.

GERMAIN: How has the role of men and women changed during your lifetime?

GRONSKY: Drastically. When we started out, it was the man went to work, the woman stayed home and took care of the house, raised the children. Husbands cut the grass, washed the car, did those kinds of things. I mean not that it wasn't unheard of. I mean if you were sick, your husband would wash the dishes. But they didn't do the cleaning and things like that. Nowadays, it's more equal, I think. Of course most people work outside the house, too. Very few women stay home. So that's only fair.

GERMAIN: What changes in courtship and dating have occurred during your lifetime?

GRONSKY: Well, we both slept in our homes the night before we got married, if you know what I mean. It's much more relaxed now. Living together is accepted. Out-of-wedlock children are accepted. Not that I'm judging. But I mean I can remember when I was in high school, we had a couple of girls that were pregnant, and the next thing you know, they were gone. I don't know whatever happened to them. But, yes, morals need some work.

GERMAIN: Describe North Brunswick when you first moved into the

township \_\_\_\_\_.

GRONSKY: What I remember. Okay. I grew up on Franklin Road off of Route 130, which at the time--we were the last house on the street, and there was just a little path down to connect it to Farrington Boulevard, which went down to Farrington Lake. Which was during the war, so you couldn't go down to the lake. It was off-limits because it was the water supply. That was all woods. Down at the end off Farrington Boulevard, which is now, I guess, where Hoover Drive and those streets are, that was a farm. They used to have cows and chickens, and we used to go down there skating on the pond. We used to help them round up the cows. The pasture was farther down on the road. Sometimes the cows would get loose, and they'd wander around the neighborhood.

The traffic circle was just a circle. You could walk and cross over the circle. It wasn't the traffic like they have now. Where the shopping center is was just a big field. It was a farm. There was one house in the middle of it. If you wanted to get a bus out from us, it was a bus that ran from Hightstown, came down from Hightstown. It stopped all along 130 for people wanted to get into New Brunswick. I think it ran twice a day. There was a lot of open land, farms and things like that. Now everything is all built up.

GERMAIN: As a child, which parks in the township did you play in?

GRONSKY: I guess--what is it Frisch Park over in \_\_\_\_\_ Gardens. But when we were kids, that park wasn't there. That was there more like when my children were small. We didn't really have that big a park system when we were small. We just played in the fields.

GERMAIN: You settled down and had a family in the township. What made you stay?

GRONSKY: What made me stay? Just this is where my roots are. This is where my family is now. My husband I both grew up in the township. His parents are gone, his two brothers have moved. He's got one in California and one in Colorado. So the only family I really have here are my two kids, so I wouldn't move away.

GERMAIN: Did you participate in any local events or clubs in the town?

GRONSKY: No.

GERMAIN: Can you describe what the community was like?

GRONSKY: Back when we were younger, it was very rural. It wasn't what I know of--it wasn't all of these organizations. I mean they didn't have Little League and all these sports things that kids

were in. You just kind of went to school and went home and did your homework. It was more family-oriented. Did things with the family.

GERMAIN: Did you get along with your neighbors?

GRONSKY: Yes.

GERMAIN: Did you have get-togethers with people who lived close to you?

GRONSKY: When we were younger, when I was a child, we did at home there. Now that I'm married, when we moved here, I mean we're "Hello, how are you?" We didn't do get-togethers with the neighbors. Because when we bought our first house in Hightstown, we had that situation, where every night it was a party at somebody's house. It got to the point that you felt like you couldn't go out the door if you didn't tell them where you were going. When I moved here, I said, "I don't want that." So now it's "Hello, how are you?" Like I said, my neighbor shoveled me out, and it's that kind of a thing. We're not overly close.

GERMAIN: How did national and international events affect your community in the past?

GRONSKY: \_\_\_\_\_.

GERMAIN: What political party was in power when you first moved to the town?

GRONSKY: Probably the Republicans.

GERMAIN: Were there influential members of the community that helped you when you were growing up?

GRONSKY: I don't know. What do you mean by influential?

WOMAN: \_\_\_\_\_.

GRONSKY: Well, do you remember Mrs. Applegate?

WOMAN: Yes.

GRONSKY: I'm sure you've heard about Mrs. Applegate.

WOMAN: She was the principal at John Adams.

GRONSKY: Yes. Well, when I was a kid, her husband used to run the school buses. They had three school buses, did the whole township, and he ran the buses. Boys on one side, girls on the other, three kids in a seat. Don't talk. They lived up off Church Lane on the lake, and they didn't have any children. I can

remember her calling my mother one day, asking if-- They were going to have a niece come to spend the weekend, and could I come and spend the weekend with them? I thought I was going to die. I was thinking nobody wants to spend the weekend with the principal. But it was a ball.

WOMAN: She was principal at John Adams, wasn't she?

GRONSKY: Then she was principal at Maple Meade. But we got up there, and we got to the house, and she had got all kinds of things, worrying about-- She had these two huge dogs. But we had a ball when we got there. And I can remember that, too. Now, my shoes, my father had taken my shoes to the shoemaker to have them fixed or whatever, and I had to wear my sneakers to school that day. I sat on feet all day because you couldn't wear--you weren't supposed to wear, and they knew. I remember he picked my shoes up at the shoemaker, and I said, "Please bring my shoes over." So he took my shoes. I mean fussy things I remember. But I remember Mrs. Applegate wanting me to come spend the weekend. And she was a sweetheart. As she got older, you realized. I mean she loved kids, and she just wanted the right thing for them. But when you were a kid, you were petrified of her.

GERMAIN: How has the township now different than it was when you first moved in?

GRONSKY: Much too congested, too many people, too much traffic.

GERMAIN: Gotten worse?

GRONSKY: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. Well, where our house is--I don't even know if you know where our house is--there used to be an airport.

WOMAN: Airport Road.

GRONSKY: Airport Road. In fact, shortly after we had moved in the house, one Sunday afternoon we're sitting there. We had company, and we're looking. Said, "Did you hear what I heard?" And we looked out, and a little airplane--it had landed in the field because the runway was still there. They didn't know the airport was closed. But yes.

WOMAN: \_\_\_\_\_.

GRONSKY: Yes.

WOMAN:

GERMAIN: If you were in office, what changes would you make to benefit the town?

GRONSKY: I don't know that I could do it: I would prohibit building. Prohibit apartments. There's too many apartments. And I don't know all the stuff with this Open Space and all this stuff. How many parks do they need? I don't know. Give me a break. Give the kids a ball and go play. And they're trying to take over the Hopkins Farm. When we first were married, like I said, we moved to Metuchen and then moved back to North Brunswick. What we lived in--at the front of the Hopkins property was Adler's. It was a farm supplies store.

The only reason they were still there, because you might remember that, too, back in probably the early fifties, from Adams Lane, on the right-hand side of 130 going south, from Adams Lane all the way up, oh, gosh, almost--I'm trying to think what's there--up to like where Amato's is. I don't know. But on that whole side, there were all houses and everything there. And the Pennsylvania Railroad bought that property and either tore the houses down or people could buy them and move them. But that land was vacant because the railroad was going to build things and run the train lines in. I don't know whatever happened, but they never did it. But that land sat vacant for years and years and years. In fact, while Bob and I were going together--because one of the houses was a beautiful Dutch colonial, and we could have bought the house for \$3,000, but you had to pay to move it. Well, they could have told you it was \$300,000 back then. I saw it. I know where the house is. Somebody bought it and moved it. But anyway, that land was all vacant.

But the only reason Hopkins were still there and Adler's and then there was another family, the Urbans, were there, was because Hopkins property blocked their two properties, and Hopkins didn't sell. I guess they didn't want to lose the farm. So we lived in the little house like right in front of the Hopkins property. Cute little three-room house. Mr. Adler had built it for his parents. It was like a little retirement home. I loved that house. I'd go back there in a minute. It's gone now. It was cute.

WOMAN: \_\_\_\_\_. \_\_\_\_\_. I'm all for that.

GRONSKY: Yes. That's right. Now they've built that Renaissance and all that kind of stuff up there. That land was all vacant for at least twenty years.

GERMAIN: How has living in North Brunswick made you a better person?

GRONSKY: I don't know. I don't know that it has. It's just where I live. I never thought about living anywhere else.

GERMAIN: What have you learned about yourself and about life in general during your years living in the township?

GRONSKY: These questions are getting harder.

WOMAN: That one's a real doozy!

GRONSKY: Yes, right. Well, I learned, I think, about myself that basically I'm a private person, and I tend to stay to myself, always have. I'm not--I'll do anything to help anybody if I can see it, but I won't volunteer, I won't push myself in anyplace to do anything. Like I said, I've lived here my whole life, and I bet there's probably six people that might know me.

GERMAIN: If you could convey one thought or idea to the entire township, what would it be?

GRONSKY: People should probably take time to slow down, that things aren't that important, and just be nice to each other, be kind.

GERMAIN: The end.

GRONSKY: The end, okay.

WOMAN: Is Caroline your first interview for the project?

GERMAIN: Actually, Caroline's are third. Joan, do you have any questions you'd want to ask \_\_\_\_\_?

WOMAN: No, those were excellent.

GRONSKY: You did fine. Don't be nervous.

WOMAN: \_\_\_\_\_. You did fine, dear.

[End of Interview]