

Oral History Interview
Dominic Ragucci
WH054

(written transcript and digital audio)

On July 7, 2009, Dominic Ragucci was interviewed at the Woodbridge Main Library by Brenda Velasco at 11:00 A.M.

Brenda Velasco: I have with me Dominic Ragucci of Port Reading who used to work down on the Reading Railroad. We also have his son, Joe Ragucci, who has accompanied Dominic. So I want to get both of you to speak. Joe, we're going to have you speak first.

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

Joe Ragucci: I'm Joe Ragucci. I grew up in Port Reading and lived there until I got married and now I live in Edison and attend church in the Colonia section of Woodbridge.

Brenda Velasco: You're the Deacon of St. John Vianney and now we're going to get to you father. He's the one we want to interview.

Dominic Ragucci: My name is Dominic Ragucci and I am from Port Reading. My date of birth is September 28, 1918.

Brenda Velasco: Wow! So you're about ninety-one years old.

Dominic Ragucci: I'll be ninety-one in two months. I'm starting to forget. That's why Joseph, my son, is watching.

Brenda Velasco: Talking to you just before this interview you remember quite a bit.

2. How long have you lived in Port Reading?

Dominic Ragucci: I'd say about eighty-five years.

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

Dominic Ragucci: Because they are all from Italy and what happened is when they went home they probably told the neighbors that Port Reading is a good place. They had a coal dumper there, see. So, it was coal dumpers it was just overhead shoots. So anyway, all the relations come to Port Reading. That was their livelihood. All Port Reading was mostly Italians. They didn't know how to speak English or nothing.

Brenda Velasco: It was an Italian enclave within Woodbridge Township.

Dominic Ragucci: And also up in the camp, they had a camp built up there for the people that come from Italy. He would give them a job on the railroad and this way they had milk and different things they'd buy in the store.

Brenda Velasco: So it was like a company store.

Dominic Ragucci: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: There was one person in charge.

Dominic Ragucci: The name was DeSantis that owned that place.

Brenda Velasco: Was that a store or was he the overall contractor?

Dominic Ragucci: No, he was a store. They must have hired him because he knew how to speak English. The rest of them didn't.

Brenda Velasco: Now, when you say they came from Italy what area of Italy or what city or village?

Dominic Ragucci: There are a lot of areas. Number one is Foggia, that's where my mother came from and father.

Joe Ragucci: Naples was the other area.

Brenda Velasco: Naples as well then.

Joe Ragucci: Yes.

Dominic Ragucci: All areas there. Rome, they come from Rome. They come from Naples.

Joe Ragucci: There was a large group from Naples, Pietrastornina and then the other large group was from my father's town which was Monte Sant'Angelo.

Brenda Velasco: And that was out of the Foggia region?

Joe Ragucci: Yes, Monte Sant'Angelo is in Foggia.

4. *Did any of your family members work for the railroad? What jobs did they perform?*

Dominic Ragucci: My father came here working on the railroad and what happened is, after maybe a year, he got sick and he died and my mother was here all alone with the four of us.

Brenda Velasco: So your Mom became a widow at a very young age?

Dominic Ragucci: Yes, because my father was here a little earlier than her. So I don't know but I know he died and I was about four years old at the time when he died and some people knew English and my mother couldn't speak English either. She had to learn see, so we had a couple of people in town, Schiavo, he was a barber; he would take care of all the people from Italy that had trouble and they'd give a little milk and stuff like that. So that's how we got along.

Joe Ragucci: And actually, just a detail, our name, when we came from Italy, was called Racucci and then it changed to Ragucci because there was a family in Port Reading called Ragucci. The teacher said, you're spelling your name wrong.

Brenda Velasco: So it became what the other family's name was?

Joe Ragucci: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Were they from the same area?

Joe Ragucci: No.

Brenda Velasco: Totally different.

Joe Ragucci: Totally different.

Dominic Ragucci: See, he went through the computer and he found all my family and his mother's family. He's got everything on the computer now.

Brenda Velasco: That's great.

Dominic Ragucci: Oh he did a terrific job there. You should see. I didn't even know that I had that many relations. Then we went to Italy a couple of years ago and I saw where my father and mother lived. I figured there were some relations

would know him, and I was going to find out about my father, since I can do everything I figured the genes must have come from him. I had a good time there.

Brenda Velasco: Because you're living to ninety-one years old.

Dominic Ragucci: All my sons are like me. They can do everything. When they were kids I used to give them a brush to paint my house, I bought my own house and all that stuff.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, when your father worked for the railroad what did he do for the railroad?

Dominic Ragucci: At that time there were thistles to handle the dumper you got there.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Dominic Ragucci: They had the thistle. You go up there, they had cars go up there and when they froze they'd have to go up there and thaw out the cars and then shovel downstairs.

Brenda Velasco: Thaw out the coal in the cars then. That was his job on the thistles. What year did he come over? Do you recall what year he came to the United States?

Dominic Ragucci: My father?

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Joe Ragucci: He came here around 1922 or 1923.

Brenda Velasco: Right after World War I then.

Joe Ragucci: Right. His brothers had come earlier and his brothers never stayed in the United States. They all went back.

Brenda Velasco: This was quite true of Italians at the time. You worked a little but your family remained behind. But your dad stayed permanently.

Dominic Ragucci: Yes, well because he died.

Joe Ragucci: One of his brothers came here like four times, each time bringing a different brother.

Brenda Velasco: This was characteristic of southern Europe especially Italy and Greece going back and forth.

Joe Ragucci: And they all ended up working on the railroad but not all in Port Reading, some in Elizabeth.

Brenda Velasco: Oh!

Joe Ragucci: On the Central Railroad in Elizabeth.

Brenda Velasco: Because there was a big Italian section in Elizabeth.

Joe Ragucci: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Peterstown.

Joe Ragucci: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: And that had all the local meats and food and everything because my father is from that area.

5. At what age did you begin work for the railroad? How many years did you work for the railroad?

Dominic Ragucci: I don't know exactly but it had to be either before the war or after but I think it was after the war. It was 1944.

Brenda Velasco: That's in the middle of the war so were you in World War II at all?

Dominic Ragucci: What?

Brenda Velasco: You were in World War II then?

Dominic Ragucci: I can't.....

Brenda Velasco: You were in the Marines?

Dominic Ragucci: I was in the Marine Corp.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Dominic Ragucci: I was in the Pacific fighting the Japanese.

Brenda Velasco: What year did you go into the Marine Corp?

Dominic Ragucci: 1942.

Joe Ragucci: Before that, did you ever work in the railroad before that?

Dominic Ragucci: At times yes, but not permanently. We used to go in the railroad there. They used to have it in town in the wintertime. People in town, their children would work there shoveling snow off the tracks so the engines would come in. So we have done some of that. There were little jobs I used to do before that.

Brenda Velasco: So it was after or at the end of the war when you got out of the Marines in '44 or '45.

Dominic Ragucci: That's it.

Brenda Velasco: How many years did you work for the railroad?

Dominic Ragucci: Sixty-one years.

Brenda Velasco: What year did you retire then?

Dominic Ragucci: 1979.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, wow!

Joe Ragucci: Yes, September of '79. So thirty-three years he was there.

Brenda Velasco: Thirty-three years. That's a long, long time.

Dominic Ragucci: You're not kidding. If I knew I was going to live this long I would have stayed longer.

Brenda Velasco: That was hard work though.

Dominic Ragucci: It was but I enjoyed it. I still do things, ask him. I do everything now.

Brenda Velasco: You look great. Nobody would know you're ninety-one years old.

6. What were the hours you worked? What was your pay?

Dominic Ragucci: Well most of the time it was eight hours but I used to work sometimes ten or twelve hours when they needed me there and sometimes around the clock doing different jobs, you know.

Joe Ragucci: Seven to three.

Brenda Velasco: Seven to three, okay. Were you paid overtime, extra money, when you worked overtime?

Dominic Ragucci: Regular salary, that's all. Later on the law changed and they gave us overtime.

Brenda Velasco: Do you recall what your pay was?

Dominic Ragucci: Starting off I think it was thirty-nine cents an hour.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Dominic Ragucci: But don't forget you'd get food as cheap as anything.

Brenda Velasco: It was a different time.

7. Was there any benefits provided for the workers?

Dominic Ragucci: Nothing at that time. I think the pension started later on. Now I get a pension but money we paid in. Instead of being social security they have the railroad retirement so we get that.

Brenda Velasco: Did you get any medical too?

Dominic Ragucci: No, we got to pay for our medical.

Brenda Velasco: And you got vacation?

Dominic Ragucci: In them days you laid around. Not in the beginning. In fact, with my first wife I had no vacation day at all. I had a good boss at that time. I said I have to take her to New York because she had cancer and get her treatment and he would say, go ahead, go, and I'll cover you up, my boss, and they covered me up at that time. So, he realized how bad she was all because of what I did and everything.

8. What jobs/duties did you perform while working there?

Dominic Ragucci: I did electrical work all over in the yard and in there.

Brenda Velasco: When you say electrical work in the yard.....

Dominic Ragucci: That's all type of electrical work, climbing poles and everything. On the dumper, repair the dumper, machines and all that stuff.

Joe Ragucci: What type of electricity did they have?

Dominic Ragucci: I worked in the boiler room, that's the place where they have the steam I used to work in there. That was rough though.

Brenda Velasco: You had to shovel the coal in there that was hot.

Dominic Ragucci: You had a thing there and you just take it out and throw it in. That was that. Then I worked also up in the heating house in the wintertime when it was frozen. You go there and put, what you called lances, more pipes with steam coming in into the coal and the cars when they were frozen solid and let that stay in sometimes eight or ten hours and thaw it out so they can dump it.

Brenda Velasco: So they had special steam pipes then?

Dominic Ragucci: Yes, they had big pipes going all over the place then.

Brenda Velasco: What type of electricity did you use in that area?

Dominic Ragucci: We used bolt area. The main thing in the dumper was DC power. We had also AC power and that was for different things.

Brenda Velasco: Do you recall what the AC power was used for?

Dominic Ragucci: Yes, on machines. Like they said they would feed the big transformers they had there and from there they would shot it DC and change it to DC power. I also worked in the house that moves the cars back and forth. I operated that machine. I operated this machine here. That's to bring the cars up. I operated that. I operated a telescope here to bring it down and do all that. I did everything. There ain't nothing I didn't do.

Brenda Velasco: You were all over.

Dominic Ragucci: Also, I told you, I worked to set up tug boats with the loaded boats to New York because the man went on pension and who's going to do it. So I did. I just open the books, see what the boat is, figure the tonnage and set it up. I had no trouble.

Brenda Velasco: So you worked in the office.

Dominic Ragucci: Yes, for a while.

Brenda Velasco: You worked in the yard.

Dominic Ragucci: Right.

Brenda Velasco: You worked on the docks.

Dominic Ragucci: Right.

Brenda Velasco: You worked in the machinery room.

Dominic Ragucci: Right.

Brenda Velasco: You were all over.

Joe Ragucci: And he repaired the machines there.

Dominic Ragucci: Electrical when the DC power would go out and everything. I used to get called out to the railroad at night when the power would go out. I had to go out and sometimes climb the poles and get the power back on or otherwise it was bad. Our boiler room then would be in trouble because the steam, we would have no steam, you see.

Brenda Velasco: And then the coal would stay frozen.

Joe Ragucci: So everything needed to be running.

Dominic Ragucci: But I enjoyed it. Anytime there was real trouble, some like someone side, we had a boss on the side, Pat Feeney was his name. I figure he's dead by now. He was a general manager. Then like I said, with him any time something would break down the guys would say we'll try and fix it. Keep away, that's *Min's* job, he said, *Min's* going to come in, he'll be here and he'll fix it. So he'd wait and I'd go there. Then he'd say put whatever time you want on. So I'd just take the right hours, only two.

Brenda Velasco: Now you didn't live far from.....

Dominic Ragucci: No, I lived about five minutes away from there.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, did you walk or ride a car?

Dominic Ragucci: Well, at first I walked because I had no car. Then I moved to Carteret and I was in Carteret for a while, before the war.

Brenda Velasco: You used your nickname.

Dominic Ragucci: *Min.*

Brenda Velasco: *Min.*

Dominic Ragucci: I'll tell you why I had that nickname.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, how did you get that name with a name like Dominic?

Dominic Ragucci: My sons or my brothers and all didn't know how to say Dominic when they were babies so they would say *Min* and it stuck with me.

Dominic Ragucci: Because what we had found out in these interviews that you all had special nicknames.

Dominic Ragucci: Yes, that's true. Well, they say that my sons and brothers and all didn't know how to call Dominic, they were too young.

Joe Ragucci: But a lot of the names were very strange. You know like *Werpor* and *Tat*.

Brenda Velasco: Tat, that's Dominic Coppola.

Dominic Ragucci: His brother died, *Werpor*

Brenda Velasco: Okay, there was no relationship to the name. At least with your name there's a *Min* in Dominic.

Dominic Ragucci: Yes, that's the reason I got that.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, can you recall.....

Dominic Ragucci: Wait, before that, we had a man working on the dock at that time and he became general manager on the dock. His name was Sam Vernillo.

Joe Ragucci: He still lives in Port Reading.

Dominic Ragucci: They offered him the job but I don't want to put this in there because otherwise it seems to sound bad. He would say I'll take it if you help me; so I said, I'll do it. In fact, I met him last week.

Brenda Velasco: So he's still alive too.

Joe Ragucci: Yes.

Dominic Ragucci: Yes and I met him last week and his wife. His wife thought the world of me. And he's telling her, if it wasn't for *Min* there I would never do that job. So he was happy.

Brenda Velasco: So he was happy to see you too.

Dominic Ragucci: He was a plumber, you know, and we.....

Brenda Velasco: But this was a dangerous job.

Dominic Ragucci: Oh, definitely. People were killed up there.

Brenda Velasco: Do you recall any accidents?

Dominic Ragucci: No, I had my father-in-law though, I wasn't there when it happened. He was a carpenter and what happened as he was working a railroad car was coming down and it caught him and his whole face was ripped off. In them days you got nothing for it. Remember when we had all black marks from the coal digging right in there see, because it was dangerous. You see, over there were only a few men who knew what the danger was. The rest were just doing what they were told and they would get hurt very easily.

Joe Ragucci: The majority of the people there were laborers because there was a lot of really hard labor to be done. You know, shoveling coal, moving coal around and moving the barges up and down. A lot of really hard labor.

Brenda Velasco: A lot of physical hard labor.

Joe Ragucci: A lot of physical effort.

Dominic Ragucci: Everything was dangerous there, believe me.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Dominic Ragucci: The heating house, you had to walk in that heating house, there was steam going in there, into the cars. You could get hurt there. That's when I pulled my back again down there because you hit a hole with your foot and you're in trouble, things like that.

Brenda Velasco: When was the busiest time of the year at the Reading Railroad?

Dominic Ragucci: Busy? Oh, all year long.

Brenda Velasco: All year long.

Dominic Ragucci: Well yes, winter was a different system. Like I said, they had to steam the coal but it was busy from morning until night. That's why I say, in the wintertime we would get a lot of fellows in college or in women's high

school. We would come down to work and we used to use extra help in the winter because of the steam, you understand, see. In fact, there is the two Zullos from Port Reading. Eddie Zullo was one of them. He was a dentist. I don't know if he's alive or not anymore. He would be there. Joe Zullo used to operate and all that. The other one was I forget the other one's name. Well they used to come to the railroad, they were going to college and they had to make money and they worked there and they worked at night.

Brenda Velasco: How many barges came in?

Dominic Ragucci: At first it used to be small barges maybe that would take about eight or ten cars, that all it would take of coal and coal had about a hundred tons in a car. Then in the summer they had the bigger boats, the Tracey boats, in fact I have a picture of them here.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, because we have a few pictures and that is what you are referring to. For the previous questions we referred to letter A.

Dominic Ragucci: See these here boats here. Now the boats are lying against the dock here. From here the operator would put a cable hook on it and pull it underneath the boat and as they were dumping, he would have to move it with the controls. That's how I learned how to do that, move that and fill it. Then the man on the dock here he would be there giving a signal to this man up in the telescope there to move to the right or to the left. This thing here would move.

Brenda Velasco: This was the time before cell phones, and such, so when he gave the signals for the boat to move.....

Dominic Ragucci: He would move it.

Joe Ragucci: They would use hand signals?

Dominic Ragucci: What.

Brenda Velasco: Hand signals?

Dominic Ragucci: Yes, hand signals.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Dominic Ragucci: He'd be on the dock and I'd be up there watching. Everything had glass. I would watch; if he would go this way I'd move the telescope a little this way and if he'd go this way, stop. See, things like that. That's the only stuff we had there.

Joe Ragucci: A lot of the movement was used pulling, see.

Dominic Ragucci: Also when you're bringing these cars up here now there's a glass underneath there and they didn't want to break that so with the piggy you'd hook it up, there's a cable on it, and you bring it up and you look at this car and when it hits this car you have to be able to stop it. So you judge it how fast you should be coming up, and then you hit that. That's when I told you the other fellow was killed; it was because both cars went together and weren't cleared.

Joe Ragucci: So each car pushed the next car out is what happens. So they use the piggy which is really a clamp that goes underneath the car which then by the pulley was pulled up and you had to stop it when it got underneath the dumper.

Dominic Ragucci: Yes, there's a cable on here, you'll see it here, now this here is a machine with a big head on it where it would grab the car on this knuckle here and it would just hold it against there, understand, and then the cable will pull it up there and it pulls both cars up there.

Brenda Velasco: I just want to make sure when we hear your son Joe talking he also was familiar with the railroad.

Dominic Ragucci: Yes, he's familiar with it.

Joe Ragucci: I never worked there but I did go up there many times with my father.

Dominic Ragucci: Yes, many times. You see then they used to hear me talking to the kids and all or when I came home from work and told them what I was doing. Then, like I said the power would go out, they would come with me at night. They were afraid something would happen to me. I got to climb poles at night and put power on and put new fuses up there.

Joe Ragucci: Did you have an accident when you did that once?

Dominic Ragucci: Yes, I was putting one up on the top of the pole and what happened is on top there was a platform and as I touched the clock there was a switch and the juice went right through me. I got shorted, I fell backwards and I was lucky that when I fell backwards there were about five wires were underneath. I hit that with my back and on the bottom there were coals on the ground, a lot of it, thick, you know, and it stopped my fall. Then my boss wanted to take me to the hospital in Rahway but I told him that I was alright.

Joe Ragucci: It was 440 volts that he got hit with.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Joe Ragucci: And he was out of work for a little bit, but.....

Brenda Velasco: And he survived it.

Joe Ragucci: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: How many sons did you have that you would bring down?

Dominic Ragucci: What?

Joe Ragucci: Sons? Three.

Brenda Velasco: Three sons that would keep you company.

Dominic Ragucci: Yes.

Joe Ragucci: My brothers are like ten years younger than me so most of the time it was me.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, so we're happy you're here for the interview then.

Dominic Ragucci: My other two sons would come up there at night. Michael and Ricky they were my other two sons and then he would come.

Brenda Velasco: Now you mentioned that eventually you had the people stop coming from Italy.

Dominic Ragucci: No, I don't think they ever stopped because their relations would come down there and then they were starting to get people from Pennsylvania coming down to work on the cars. There was Frankie Matsko and all; he died since then.

Brenda Velasco: What were those people called? Did they have a special name? Ganders or something. (gandy dancers)

Dominic Ragucci: Car riders, that's all they were.

Brenda Velasco: And they came in from Pennsylvania.

Dominic Ragucci: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Were they single?

Dominic Ragucci: We used to have a big line. A lot of them would come from there because they had no work out there. They used to work on the mines so they called Port Reading to see if the railroad needed any help car riding. They were the ones that would bring the cars up and then they would bring big loads in. Then they would ride them up there and leave them there and then we would pick them up.

Brenda Velasco: These were single men then or families that were coming?

Dominic Ragucci: Most of them were single and then after a while they would marry people in town. Like the Matsko family I remember that. There were three, Frankie Matsko and two other brothers were there. Then they went back after years but he stayed there and got married to a girl in town. He died now since then.

Brenda Velasco: Where did they live when they came?

Dominic Ragucci: I don't know. There were mining towns where they all would mine coal and different things there.

Brenda Velasco: And the mines were closing by that time in Pennsylvania. But when they came to Port Reading.....

Dominic Ragucci: Yes, they were still open.

Joe Ragucci: Were the camps still there?

Brenda Velasco: Were the camps still there where they lived?

Dominic Ragucci: Oh yes, when I was there, yes, for years. Then after a while, years later, they shut them down.

Joe Ragucci: When I was growing up there were no more camps.

Brenda Velasco: So you were growing up during the.....

Joe Ragucci: '50s.

Brenda Velasco: '50s, there were no more camps.

Joe Ragucci: There were no more camps.

Dominic Ragucci: They used to have houses built up there, oh they were actually four room homes but they were all made of tar paper and all that. In fact, my uncle lived up there. He was on the Central Railroad and his house burned down over there. Then somebody else's house burnt down. Wait a minute, my second wife, I got married again after my wife died, her house burnt down. Her father used to work up there. It burnt right down, no house. It was very dangerous up there. See they used to have the place open and people from town used to go buy bread, the used to have a bakery shop up there, and that's what kept them going, the Italian people. They would also, in the camp, give them credit because they had no money because they would come from Italy. And then when they'd get their pay, they would get their money from the railroad.

Brenda Velasco: How did you mother ever make it with all of you as a widow?

Dominic Ragucci: We had some good families near where we lived. In them days, we had to have different food. They'd give us fifteen dollars a month to live on so what happened is, like I say, my mother would bake bread. She'd buy flour by the hundred pounds and the neighbor would let her use the oven and she would bake bread and we would have to live on it. After about two weeks that's hard but it didn't bother us we were used to that. That's all I ate until I started to work

about sixteen. That and we used to get bread and put sugar on it and wet it and that used to be our meal. We never had meat but we were used to it.

Brenda Velasco: And you're almost ninety-one. Let's get back to working at the railroad. Not only was it a dangerous job as you described.

Dominic Ragucci: Oh, it was very dangerous.

Brenda Velasco: It was also a filthy job.

Dominic Ragucci: Yes, but see it wasn't so to me because, well some of the times it was dangerous, like I said, I remember being in the boiler room, I had to get some wires off on the top of the pole and everything went up in flames. But it was a good thing that I got down fast. Things like that for me see because I had a lot of dangerous jobs. But it wasn't that bad for me, I enjoyed it. I wasn't afraid or nothing, that's the main thing.

Brenda Velasco: Let me ask your son now. Joe, you saw how your dad, the situation where he worked, how did you react to that or did it influence you?

Joe Ragucci: To me it was normal. Everyone in town did that. That's was what the town was about. So the railroad was the only industry in the town for sure. He'd actually take a shower at work because he was so filthy and then he would change his clothes and come home. Lots of time he would be called out at night to go and do things. Usually what would happen is that the power would go out and everything would be in trouble if the power went out.

Brenda Velasco: The operations would come to a halt.

Joe Ragucci: Also, the other things a lot of time that would happen, a lot of the water they got from pumps through wells was throughout the property so they needed that water.

Dominic Ragucci: I had the job there also of taking care of bringing the water from the ground, the wells, and I used to go there and fix them wells and sometimes I would pull them out and fix them. I had that job too.

Brenda Velasco: So you were a jack of all trades then.

Dominic Ragucci: Yes, well I was about the only guy that I can remember who knew how to do everything. They all knew just the little job they had. That was as far as they would go.

Brenda Velasco: But you knew a lot of jobs.

Dominic Ragucci: All the way down to the property knowing where the wells were.

Joe Ragucci: An interesting story that I remember was, do you remember when the tugboat had trouble and you worked on the engine?

Dominic Ragucci: Yes. The tugboats had trouble. They would bring the coal up to New York and I would work all day and night fixing, just like an automobile, the motor. I had to fix all the motors up to get them going. I did all that job too.

Joe Ragucci: So anything that would happen, my dad was the kind of person who wasn't afraid to try it. Even if he didn't know, he still would try it.

Brenda Velasco: But he didn't even have a father as a role model.

Dominic Ragucci: Well like I say, I still do that. That's why I get hell from Michael, my son, he'd holler. There ain't nothing I won't do. If I was doing something and I ask him to help me, if he don't do it right away I'm going to do it.

Brenda Velasco: Sometimes you have to listen to them. I think we covered about a lot of the jobs you performed.

9. Did you work on the McMyler coal dumper?

Brenda Velasco: That came out in the previous conversation.

Joe Ragucci: Yes, but there are multiple jobs, right, that you did on the dumper.

Dominic Ragucci: Yes, a lot of jobs. See, like I said, this is the dumper here. Up here also the dumper there. Up here bringing the cars up. Even repair it, you understand, we used to do that. Sometime when he wore out, we would get in there and repair the bottom and put a new part on there.

Brenda Velasco: So you knew it very well.

Dominic Ragucci: Oh yes. I could do it now after all those years.

Brenda Velasco: We're not going to let you do it.

Joe Ragucci: What was underneath the dumper, dad?

Dominic Ragucci: Underneath it is where the coal would roll out.

Joe Ragucci: Is that where the motors were?

Dominic Ragucci: Oh, yes, there were some motors there. I had to repair them there and filter inside. Then we had a little cart, we used to get that, drive it underneath there, load it with coal and take the coal away because it was underneath the dumper. We used to get about five or six feet high from underneath there.

Brenda Velasco: That was quite an operation. It supplied almost half of everyone's homes.

Dominic Ragucci: I got along good with everybody because when they had trouble at home they would call me and I would go there and fix theirs. They would say, Dominic. How many times I would put plugs in there. I go to his house and this is how stupid they were sometimes, I hate to say that. But the sink was leaking water, sink hole, and I would say don't worry about that. They'd go and force the handle and it made a hole right through the wall. So I had to put a new faucet in for them because they didn't know better to stop when it stopped leaking.

Brenda Velasco: You had that experience that you learned that was self taught.

Dominic Ragucci: Myself, nobody would tell me. I had a lot of books I used to read: everything. I know how to sew on a sewing machine. I got three sewing machines down in the cellar.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Joe Ragucci: And he used to cut everybody's hair.

Dominic Ragucci: When I was in the Marine Corp. I was overseas I had a scissor because I used to trim my moustache and one of the officer had a clipper he used to use. I said okay we're going to learn to give haircuts. I was there fourteen months on one island, and the officers and Major used to come there and I would give them haircuts.

Joe Ragucci: But you used to do that on the railroad too, right, to some of the guys?

Dominic Ragucci: Yes, right, and overseas I used to give a lot of haircuts. Even Joe's I did.

Brenda Velasco: When did you stop working on the McMyler coal dumper?

Dominic Ragucci: 1979.

Brenda Velasco: 1979 was the McMyler coal dumper.

Dominic Ragucci: Yes, I got a pension.

Joe Ragucci: But it was still running.

Brenda Velasco: It was still running that's what I wanted to check.

Dominic Ragucci: It didn't run for long after that though.

Brenda Velasco: Because there was a fire in 1956 or 1957.

Dominic Ragucci: Yes, well I was in there at the time. No, there was another fire before that. I don't know which one it is. Yes, there was a fire there and I was working there at the time. Then they shut the dumpers down for six months at that time. Then I said, well I got to work I got four kids; so I learned to do upholstery work. I went up to a company to learn to do upholstery work since I knew how to sew and that kept me going until they opened up again.

Brenda Velasco: So there was no compensation for you for six months?

Dominic Ragucci: No, nothing. They didn't give me nothing. We had no hospitalization in those days.

Joe Ragucci: Was there a union there eventually.

Dominic Ragucci: We finally got a union and what happened is there was one man, remember I was telling you, he used to get dues from each man, there used to be a bunch of men coming in from Philadelphia. Now there was a lot of dues that they got paid and so they said there was no dues, you know what I'm saying, so finally they got tired of that that there was never no money in the treasury so they voted me in and then after that we had a lot of food. I used to have scungilli, remember, I used to make scungilli, I used to make them and cook them and we had the time of our lives then. Never a nickel, it was always with them. We'd get enough of money, spend it for the men.

Brenda Velasco: So you were a union representative.

Dominic Ragucci: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: About what year did the union come in? Do you recall?

Dominic Ragucci: Maybe I would say ten years after I was there.

Brenda Velasco: Okay in the 1950s then.

Dominic Ragucci: Yes, then they made me treasurer after a while. In fact we had Stiemle who was in charge of the mechanic gang on the dumper. Repair it and everything. So what happened, like I said, when I would be there I would be a representative on the dock, that's a different group. So what happened when something would break down and he needs help one bunch don't do the other bunches work. So he'd come to me and say, *Min*, how about helping us. I'd say Jake that's your job the men won't listen to me. So finally I got all the men to go there and at the end when he went on pension, believe me, he was a smart man. German, oh he was smart. I remember the day he was going on pension he said, *Min* I want to shake your hand. It was great working together but he wouldn't say nothing to anybody else. He had buddies that he wouldn't bother with because I used to help him when he needed it, but I wouldn't do nothing dirty. In fact, he offered me one time as a representative, he says, I can let you take days off and I can cover you up. I said, no way. I would never take that.

Brenda Velasco: He was lucky to have employed you as a worker. You were an exceptional worker.

Dominic Ragucci: Not only that he's the one that also when my wife was in the hospital and had cancer we had to go to New York to get operated on and also get treatments there he would let me go and he said, when you finish come back here, we used to come across with the ferry, take her home and he'd pay me for all that because in them days I had nothing. No hospitalization and then it was good that when I got her in the Memorial Hospital after her operation, they called me in the office and they said you know we'd seen the operation your wife had there at, what hospital was that cancer hospital in New York?

Brenda Velasco: Sloan Kettering Memorial.

Dominic Ragucci: He called me in the office and said, I'll tell you what, can you afford ten dollars a treatment. Now that was great. You see, they took good care of me there. But none of these organizations there would do that because they knew the way it was. None of my family had any money or would offer me any money. But we got through it alright. But too bad she had to die.

Brenda Velasco: That was unfortunate. Before we conclude we know that your son, Joe, who is here with us lives in Edison not too far from Port Reading, where do your other two sons live? Because you stayed in Port Reading.

Dominic Ragucci: One lives in Monroe.

Joe Ragucci: He lived in Carteret most of his life.

Dominic Ragucci: He should know more than me, I don't remember things.

Joe Ragucci: So Michael lives in Monroe right now. He moved there about five years ago from Carteret.

Brenda Velasco: Alright.

Joe Ragucci: And my other brother, Rick, is now in Toms River. He lived in Howell for a long, long time

Brenda Velasco: So you're it for Port Reading.

Joe Ragucci: But his bother.....

Dominic Ragucci: Well you know how kids are they want a better place, God bless them, but they all still take care of me.

Brenda Velasco: Good.

Dominic Ragucci: If I want anything done, I can just call Joseph or Michael. If I call Michael and he can't do it, he calls Joseph up to get down there. I have wonderful sons.

Joe Ragucci: So he has a brother, Anthony, who still lives in Port Reading.

Brenda Velasco: Did he ever work for the railroad?

Joe Ragucci: None of his brothers ever worked for the railroad. Mary, who still lives in Port Reading and Angelina, who just died a year ago, Angelina Ciuffreda, they actually used to own the Ciuffreda Insurance Agency right there.

Dominic Ragucci: We must have good genes. My sister, Angelina died when she was ninety-one. I'm going to be ninety-one and I'm alive. My other sister is eighty-nine and my brother is eighty-seven.

Brenda Velasco: You sure have good genes.

Dominic Ragucci: We have, that's what I said. So I told my sons don't worry about it, they're going to outlive me. But they're smart. Every one of them.

When I was old enough I told them, I said, they're not going to do what I did working like that. I sent them all to college, Michael, Joseph and Ricky. They all have college education and they all have good jobs now. Thank God.

Brenda Velasco: Good. Okay, now we're going to conclude, finish up, but is there anything else that you want to tell the people about Port Reading? Did you like Port Reading?

Dominic Ragucci: Port Reading is a good town. Always was before because we lived in it and it was our home, do you know what I mean? I was living in Carteret back a little while during the war but I came back to Port Reading. That's what I say about Port Reading. It's a great town.

Joe Ragucci: After the war he actually lived in the barracks. They were built for those returning from the war on Birch Street in Port Reading.

Brenda Velasco: Oh!

Joe Ragucci: They lasted about twelve or fifteen years, something like that, before they got torn down. Then they built his house after that on Larch Street. But there were a lot of people that lived in those barracks. That's where I grew up.

Dominic Ragucci: He's in Port Reading all his life.

Brenda Velasco: But now we have him. We can't have them all.

Dominic Ragucci: No, he's good. Then I always have this here, maybe sometimes it may sound stupid but I say, not because he's here, when I'm in trouble I always pray to my first wife. I go to the cemetery every week to see her. She was an angel, never hollered at me. Anybody who hollered at me she would say, leave my husband alone. She was great.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, we're going to conclude the interview. I thank you very, very much. I enjoyed it tremendously. Both of you, so thank you.