

Mary Kramer

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Interviewer: Paula Bruno
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Abstract: Mary Bender (Mayo) Kramer (1901-1982) was the daughter of Benjamin J. Mayo and Mary E. Mayo and was born in Pennsylvania. The Mayo family, which included a total of seven children, moved to Fords Corner in Raritan Township around 1906 before moving to 52 Jonesdale Avenue within Metuchen in 1914. Her father, Benjamin J. Mayo, joined with his daughter Irene (Mayo) Meyers and her husband Herbert C. Meyers to open the Meyers-Mayo Hardware Store around 1920. The store was renamed “Metuchen Hardware” in 1946 when it was taken over by Ms. Kramer’s son-in-law, Donald Hume, and Richard Hecht.

Ms. Kramer studied at the Menlo Park Schoolhouse, the Bonhamtown School, and Franklin School in Metuchen. She married Harry Kramer in 1924 and they had three children: Ruth, Mary Lou, and Harry Edward (commonly referred to as “Peter”). Her husband became the borough’s postmaster and he was the first Democratic councilman in Metuchen in thirty years. He was the son of Edward Kramer, who was a local peddler that worked for Thomas Edison at Menlo Park and established the Kramer’s Department Store in 1880. The store, which was located at 441 Main Street, was sold to Louis J. Kahn in 1947 following Edward’s death in 1946. Ms. Kramer, who lived at 47 Carlton Road, was a member of the First Presbyterian Church and was involved in the American Legion Auxiliary. The Mayo and Kramer families are buried in Hillside Cemetery.

In this interview, Ms. Kramer primarily discusses the Mayo and Kramer families and their respective businesses: Metuchen Hardware and Kramer’s Department Store. She also touches upon her town remembrances including her education, the construction of the new post office, the World War I Community Club, and the 1929 movie about Metuchen.

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P. Bruno: Today is March 9, 1978 and this is Paula Bruno and I’m interviewing Mrs. Mary Kramer of Metuchen, New Jersey.

I’d first like to start with you telling me a little bit about the Mayo family, your family, and when they first came to Metuchen.

M. Kramer: The Mayo family moved to Metuchen from the then Raritan Township (and the name was changed to Edison) in about 1914. In 1920, my father, Ben Mayo

[Benjamin J. Mayo], and my sister Irene [J. (Mayo) Meyers] and her husband Herbert [C.] Meyers, opened a hardware store [at 12 Pennsylvania Avenue] on the Railroad Plaza where the taxi office is now located, moving later to Robins Hall [at 401 Main Street] to occupy the south side of the building, which had been a grocery store run by Dan La Forge [Daniel D. La Forge].

P. Bruno: Now they moved because they wanted a larger location?

M. Kramer: A larger location. And the location that they moved to was Robins—I did say Robins Hall, didn't I?

P. Bruno: Right.

M. Kramer: The north side was rented by Frank [B.] Smith, a barber. The hardware store name was changed to Metuchen Hardware¹ and is now owned and occupied by Donald Hume, my son-in-law, and Richard Hecht in 1946.

P. Bruno: Let's get back a little bit to your family now. You have your daughter Ruth [who] is married to Donald Hume. And you have two other children, and would you tell me about them?

M. Kramer: Well, Ruth [(Kramer) Hume] is my older daughter and she's of course married to Donald. And one thing about Donald—he's very happy in the hardware store, of course—but one thing about him, he donated a kidney to his brother Robert Hume in Norfolk, Virginia. And that's around five years ago, which I think was a very nice thing to do.

P. Bruno: Oh wow. Yes. And your other children?

M. Kramer: Then, of course, I have Mary Lou, daughter Mary Lou [(Kramer) Brandfass], and she's in Wheeling [West Virginia] and her husband [Dr. Robert Bandfass] is a doctor and she has five children.

P. Bruno: Oh, big family.

M. Kramer: Yeah, three boys, two girls. And then I have a son, Peter [Harry Edward "Peter" Kramer]; his name around Metuchen was Harry, Harry Edward. But we mainly call him Pete and everybody knows him as Pete too. So he is now in little town of Washington, Virginia.

P. Bruno: And he had The Hitching Post in Metuchen?

M. Kramer: That's right, he had The Hitching Post [at 414 Main Street]. He bought that from Ruth Eigenbauer. When he was in high school, he always wanted that Hitching Post and he went in to see Ruth Eigenbauer and finally he did get it. Well, he had two quite bad fires, but still it didn't daunt him. He still kept it. But then he had the urge to make furniture, which is a different type; it's a very good type of furniture. So he moved to Washington, Virginia. He bought an old cider mill and fixed that all up and he has his workshop there. And he's doing very nicely and

¹ The hardware store was originally known at the Meyers-Mayo Hardware Store before changing its name in 1946.

he is very happy in what he's doing. The house that he lives in is quite a large house—he fixed up a lot. It was a Union hospital for the [Civil War] soldiers; it was a hospital for Union soldiers. And it is different. It's really very nice.

P. Bruno: It must be quite old.

M. Kramer: Well it is. That's right, it is quite old. I don't know how old because see that was—I probably could find out more about that.

P. Bruno: But this was during the Civil War then?

M. Kramer: That's right, right, yeah. Down there, they have a lot of landmarks like that from the Civil War. But he loves it very much there.

P. Bruno: Was your family—before they moved to Metuchen—was your father interested in hardware before that?

M. Kramer: No.

P. Bruno: How did he come into the business?

M. Kramer: Well, my dad was—he worked—he was a plater [electroplater]. That is he, if there's any—well I don't know how to explain it—when they have those fixtures in there, they're bound around with brass, bronze, or anything like that.

P. Bruno: Yeah, uh-huh.

M. Kramer: He did that, which really was an art in itself, and he did that on the different fixtures. My sister has a lamp and it would really explain it all to you. So he did that and then he was there. And then my brother-in-law [Herbert C. Meyers], he was up in Newport, it was during the war [World War I] and he came back and wanted something to do. So he thought, *Well, hardware*. Hardware never goes out of style like some other things.

P. Bruno: Everybody needs it.

M. Kramer: Everybody needs hardware. So he started, and then of course my sister and then my dad wanted to go in with him, and that's how they did. And my dad had fifty-four hives of honeybees.

P. Bruno: Wow.

M. Kramer: Yeah, and you know he loved those bees. He used to smoke a pipe and he used to squat down by those hives, watch those bees. And if there happened to be a bee that would get into the house or anywhere near you, you wouldn't dare kill that bee because he loved the bees!

P. Bruno: Did you have all these hives in your backyard?

Mrs. Kramer: Yes, fifty-four. And then they had an extractor, which is a big cylinder that you cut the wax off the front of the frame. You put it in the extractor, and you turn it

and it throws the honey out into this extractor. And then my mother [Mary E. Mayo] would put it in quart jars, and of course he sold the honey. But he loved bees.

P. Bruno: Just from bees in your backyard?

M. Kramer: Right, right. That's right.

P. Bruno: Wow, I guess you couldn't be afraid of bees—or anybody in your family.

M. Kramer: Oh, we didn't dare. And even to this day, I think, well I wonder if that's one of my dad's bees. [laughs] But he really, he loved them, yeah.

P. Bruno: That's a unique hobby.

M. Kramer: It is, right, yeah. Well of course, with bees, with honey, you get different tastes around the country like what he had was from mixed flowers. You go to a place in the farm where there's alfalfa, that tasted—that's from alfalfa. And different sections have different tastes of honey.

P. Bruno: That's really interesting. Where did you grow up in Metuchen? Where did your family live?

M. Kramer: We lived down near Fords Corner. It's near where Clara Barton School [present-day Heritage at Clara Barton] is now, only it was up on the hill. And the turnpike [New Jersey Turnpike] goes past there now. And we really had a very nice life; we had a cow and chickens and dogs.

P. Bruno: Is that the cow in that picture?

M. Kramer: Yeah. That's the calf from the cow.

P. Bruno: Did you name all the animals?

M. Kramer: Oh yeah, and you know it's funny with our cow, our cow was Bessie [phonetic], but we looked at that cow's face like we loved her. She'd look so gentle as everything. [laughs] She was really so nice. We had a nice—

P. Bruno: And what was the calf's name?

M. Kramer: I don't remember what that one was, and I don't remember how we come to take that picture.

P. Bruno: And that's you right in front [referring to photograph]?

M. Kramer: That's me in the middle with my dog Teddy there. He was always with me. And I don't know what happened to Teddy, but anyway he was gone one day.

P. Bruno: And your sister?

M. Kramer: This is my sister Dot [Dorothy C. Mayo] and my sister Clara [G. Mayo]; they live in Jamesburg now. And of course, my sister Irene is with the Allied [Air] Conditioning place; she owns that.

P. Bruno: Well, this is a beautiful photograph.

M. Kramer: Isn't that nice though. I think it's so nice, I love that.

P. Bruno: And this was taken by the area by your home?

M. Kramer: Yeah, yeah, our house was here [referring to photograph]. There's a big field here, and of course the trolleys ran here. And we had to walk maybe from here to the next street. We had that big field in front of the house and we had a lot of woods in the back. And so there was a trolley switch down where the cars were running and when it'd snow, the trolleys would get stuck down there. And my dad would have my mother make coffee and take coffee down to the [unclear].

P. Bruno: Oh, how nice.

M. Kramer: So this here [referring to the photograph]—then this came up a hill and another little hill, and over here was the house. And in the back, there was a woods.

P. Bruno: It looks so lovely and fun.

M. Kramer: I just love it. I think it's really great. And then my sister told me that they had published it in a magazine, which I didn't know. But you know, isn't it funny how you can amuse yourself with something like that? Isn't it?

P. Bruno: Yes. It's really lovely. So where did you go to school?

M. Kramer: Well, I started out—there was a little one-room schoolhouse where the Menlo Park Shopping Center is now. And it stood about where the gas—well, it isn't there anymore—the gas office was there. And it was a little sixth class, six-grade schoolhouse—one maybe in each grade. I had one, two in my grade that I was in. So we went there and we had Miss Dillie [Freeman] Thornall, which I think somebody's going to have something on her because there's a Thornall family here that's an old family. Leslie [Manning] Thornall just died not too awfully long ago, but maybe there is somebody that—

P. Bruno: There's a Worthington Thornall.

M. Kramer: Yeah, now I think that's his nephew or somebody like that. Yeah, are you going to have him too?

P. Bruno: We're trying to.

M. Kramer: Yes, very good. Well anyway, Dillie Thornall—and she was a dedicated teacher. Their home was up maybe like where Alexander's [Department Store] is now, an old-fashioned home down near Menlo Park there.

P. Bruno: Menlo Park Shopping Center.

M. Kramer: And she had an organ in the living room, all old-fashioned things, you know. There probably couldn't have been any more than eight or ten of us in that thing. [laughs] So we'd walk up to her house and have a songfest and sing and like that, and it really was fine. And then of course, I went there, and I guess when I got to the third grade, I suppose they had that no more. So then [I] went to Bonhamtown School there in Bonhamtown where across from the arsenal [Raritan Arsenal] was, where the arsenal was. So then from there over here to Metuchen.

P. Bruno: Did the little schoolhouse have a name that you went to originally? Or you can't remember?

M. Kramer: No, I can't remember. They had a pot-bellied stove.

P. Bruno: Oh wow.

M. Kramer: And I can remember one time—she taught different ones at different times naturally—so I remember I was in the second grade and this boy was too, so she said that we should draw an American flag in crayon on the board. I can remember that. And then she wanted to know who thought whose was best, and I don't remember. But anyway, that was our way of—but we really—she was very good.

P. Bruno: It must be. I can never understand how they did that with so many grades and everybody in one small room.

M. Kramer: Yeah, yeah. Well, Don Hume's daughter [Kathryn Arn] teaches in Virginia—she's down there [with] my son Peter [Kramer]—and she says that the classes down there are much different than they are here. They learn just as much, but they're not as forward, may we say? Well, she teaches the first grade or second—I don't know whichever—they have parties and things like that and the kids all have a great time. It's the way it used to be over here at Washington School because I was a class mother and we'd have, you know, every time there was a holiday and like that. And that's what I like.

P. Bruno: So it seems like you had a really happy childhood and growing up around here.

M. Kramer: Yes, oh yes, yeah. There were seven children in my mother's and dad's home. Yeah, we had a good bringing up, really, yeah. So I had a brother Ben [Benjamin J. Mayo Jr.] who lives—lived, he died last year—in Lexington, Massachusetts, and he was a smart fellow. He was chemist and he made out very well.

P. Bruno: Okay, I think we can start now and talk a little bit about the Kramer family, your husband's [Harry Kramer] family. And maybe we can start by talking about Edward Kramer, his father, and how he first came to town and started his store. Did he start as a peddler?

M. Kramer: Yes, I understand he started, went from door to door, and they also worked for Thomas Edison. And the story I heard was that Edison gave him two dollars to start in business, and that was really back quite a ways. Oh, I don't know—

- P. Bruno: What did he do for Mr. Edison? Do you know what kind of work he did?
- M. Kramer: I don't know what he did for him. I only know that he worked for him. And he [Thomas Edison] was really, he said, a very nice man. Then he [Edward Kramer] started the store [Kramer's Department Store] here and he had the store not where it is now [at 441 Main Street] but it was, I guess, in the middle of the block before you get there². Before the Chinese restaurant [Meiling's Shanghai Restaurant at 435 Main Street], I suppose, I don't know, they had one in there because all the family was born upstairs in that building there, all the Kramer family. And then he moved up there. And he was really a self-made man. He came from Bavaria, Germany.**
- P. Bruno: Do you know how he just came to settle in Metuchen? Or he just sort of thought of it as a nice place to settle down?
- M. Kramer: I really, I don't know. I only know that he came here and at the time that I came into the family, there was only one other relative that he had—it was a cousin that lived over in, I think, Staten Island or somewhere over there so that there weren't—then he had a brother in St. Louis [Missouri]. But other than that, I don't really know. They're really a hard-working family, nice family. No complaints.**
- P. Bruno: He really built up quite a business in Metuchen.
- M. Kramer: He certainly did, he certainly did, yeah. He came over with just about nothing and when he died, he really had accumulated a lot.**
- P. Bruno: So it was a dry goods store? Is that what they had?
- M. Kramer: Dry goods, yeah. And that took in everything, practically. But he worked, he never wore an overcoat. You'd see him on the coldest day in winter, no overcoat. Everybody would feel sorry for him. And he worked sometimes till late at night.**
- P. Bruno: And he became quite a reputable man in town, and he was on the Board of Directors of the—
- M. Kramer: The National—First National Bank [Metuchen National Bank]—when they organized. And I don't know, but I know with the [Metuchen] Building and Loan [Association], he was treasurer. [phone rings and recording paused]**
- P. Bruno: Now he was on the Building and Loan, Mr. Kramer?
- M. Kramer: He was treasurer of the Building and Loan for years. And of course, that is defunct now. But he was really very well liked in town; everybody liked him. He was a very honest man. And in the Building and Loan, if people came and they**

² The original location of Kramer's Department Store was located along Main Street near the corner with Middlesex Avenue. In 1884, Kramer moved the store to a larger location next to the site of the existing store building, which was built in 1907, at 441 Main Street.

couldn't pay their rent or their whatever they had to pay, had tears, he would pay. He would take care of that, ask for nothing in return.

P. Bruno: Now I guess the Building and Loan must have had difficulties during the Depression and that's when it closed.

M. Kramer: I'm trying to think when it did, yeah. Let's see. I don't know, we had something in—I don't have those papers—we had something in and then they were—they sent us the money we're supposed to have.

P. Bruno: What else do you remember about Mr. [Edward] Kramer, just anything in general? Was he a friendly man, easy to talk to?

M. Kramer: Yeah, he'd go down street and he'd touch little children on their head and, "Hello," have something to say, you know. He really was great, he really was.

P. Bruno: I guess Metuchen really needed a store like that too, in the area.

M. Kramer: Very fortunate because [they] had everything there. And then of course, charge accounts [for] people, you know, galore. And they made deliveries. They had this horse; it was brown and white and it was "Pinto." They called him "Pinto." Maybe it was a pinto horse, I don't know. But anyway, they used to make their deliveries on—anybody could have their things delivered like that.

P. Bruno: Oh wow.

M. Kramer: Yeah, yes, they had material and shoes and patterns and all kinds of clothes and stuff. No, he really was okay.

P. Bruno: Did he run the store by himself? Or did he have help?

M. Kramer: Yes, he ran it by himself and then as the children grew, then they worked there; they worked in there. His oldest daughter that he had, Tresa [Theresa Kramer], she—well, they were all very nice, but she was really outstanding. She was so philosophical. No matter, she'd have some nice word or some comforting word.

P. Bruno: Tresa. That's a really pretty name.

M. Kramer: Isn't it pretty? Yeah. It's really spelled T-h-e-r-e-s-a, but she spelled it T-r-e-s-a. And I think—well now, of course most everybody's gone, but before that most everybody would really know her. And her sister Bert [Bertha Kramer] taught home ec [home economics] in the school.

P. Bruno: And so your husband is Harry Kramer and that's Edward Kramer's son. And did Harry work in the store?

M. Kramer: Yes, he worked in the store. Yeah, he worked in the store, and then of course he was postmaster, but he still went and helped when they needed. And when he left the post office, and then he went back and worked with his dad.

P. Bruno: I can remember the articles that you gave me, everybody congratulating Harry Kramer when the new post office was built. Was he instrumental in getting it built—the post office?

M. Kramer: Yeah, well they had to look around for a site. And they—different people would come along (the post office people, postal people)—and they'd come to look for a site and they looked at this and they looked at that. And finally, he came home and said they were going to pick this over here [at 360 Main Street], the corner of Woodbridge Avenue and Main Street. Oh, I was so thrilled because you know it was so easy to come home [at 47 Carlton Road] in a couple of minutes and everything else. And there was a house standing there and they divided the house in half, and the one half of the house is still there. That's where Mrs. Thompson [phonetic] lives, by the post office there. The other [half of the house] was moved around, but that's gone now. But I had a picture of that house, and I don't know, it's gone. The tree in the backyard, that big tree, Harry brought it home from when they dug—that big one right there [referring to her yard]—when they dug, and the tree was about this big.

P. Bruno: And he planted it?

M. Kramer: Yeah. [laughs] Yeah, he planted it.

P. Bruno: Oh wow. It's really huge

M. Kramer: Yeah. Oh, it's awful big really; looks bigger when it has leaves and everything on.

P. Bruno: And he was a councilman in Metuchen?

M. Kramer: Right, he was a councilman, yeah.

P. Bruno: First Democratic councilman in thirty years?

M. Kramer: Thirty years. Oh, and it was so thrilling because everybody calling up so thrilled that he got it. Now that's something from the other party, you know.

P. Bruno: The Republicans would call and congratulate him?

M. Kramer: Right.

P. Bruno: And do you remember any of the pressing issues of the day when he was councilman or things that he was faced with that he did. I think you mentioned that he—

M. Kramer: The sewer, yeah. The sewer line, yeah. I'm trying to think because I think on some of them, it had that he was on this other committee and like that, but I don't remember.

P. Bruno: But if anybody, also if any of the residents had problems, they would call him.

M. Kramer: Yes, that's right. We got many a call that way. And likewise, he was service officer for the, I said, and did a lot of rehabilitation work for the American Legion [Fugle-Hummer Post 65]. And you haven't seen that now, but so many

times I guess the people, some of the men that were in the service, they weren't making out so well from all over the country. And they'd stop at the police station and they'd want something to eat. Golly, about seven o'clock in the morning sometimes the doorbell would ring, there'd be standing some fellow that was going on through with a hard luck story. And so we gave him breakfast and on his way, you know. It was really very nice. I think times have changed. I don't think you'd find anything like that anymore.

P: Bruno: No, no.

M. Kramer: I don't think so.

P: Bruno: And he was postmaster for a number of years after the new post office was built.

M. Kramer: Yeah. And I don't remember just when he got out; I really don't. I probably should check back on the papers there.

P: Bruno: Well, the dates really aren't important. Okay, let's see. I think we are up to town remembrances. Did you leave anything out?

M. Kramer: No, you didn't. And you know I happened to find—remember I was looking for the list? And I happened to find it and it was everything that I had told you, everything. [laughs]

P: Bruno: Great!

M. Kramer: Well, town remembrances, one of the main things was Mr. [Gregory] Costa, down in where Costa's Cottage [along Main Street] is now. He started—the ice cream man, you know—he started that, come over from I don't know where, Greece or one of those. And he had this peanut machine and he'd have to heat them up. And he'd sit there and stir the machine so it would roast the peanuts. I remember that.

And then the trolley car would go through from Perth Amboy to New Brunswick. But if anybody was going to the other end of town, like Christol Street there, there's a little dinky car, we call it, and they could transfer right on to that little dinky car and go on down to the end of Main Street so they wouldn't have to walk down.

P: Bruno: That's incredible. And there was a World War I Community Club [Service Club] in Metuchen that you mentioned.

M. Kramer: Yes, World War I, they had it over where—right next to the corner store there—has an electrical business. And they had that as a social [club]. I think it was once a week, they had dances for the fellows from the then Raritan Arsenal.

P: Bruno: You have that picture of the parade. I'm trying to find.

M. Kramer: Oh yeah, I think you put that in there.

- P. Bruno: Oh yes, here it is [referring to photograph]. This was a World War I Parade on Main Street.
- M. Kramer: Yeah, and I believe you could say it's July the fourth because that was the biggest day! They had come home, and everybody—it was thrilling. And I imagine the trolley—if anybody had a real big [magnifying] glass, they could recognize some of those—a lot of them were passed away, of course, a lot of them.**
- P. Bruno: But the Community Club was sort of like a resting point or a stopover for them?
- M. Kramer: No, they would have records and then the girls of town—in fact I went there—and you could dance for an evening with the fellows from the Raritan Arsenal. And then they also had that down at the Old Franklin School down there where the BIL [Borough Improvement League] place is [at 491 Middlesex Avenue]. They had the same thing there. So that was one nice thing for the fellows.**
- P. Bruno: Yes, and for the people in town.
- M. Kramer: Right. Right, yeah.**
- P. Bruno: And you mentioned last time about the Metuchen movie³ that was made.
- M. Kramer: Jean Humphries⁴ and Dick—oh, it's a long, long time now.**
- P. Bruno: Well anyway, maybe the name will come to you.
- M. Kramer: It will probably come, yeah. They married [in 1934], but they divorced.**
- P. Bruno: They married in real life and they were the couple in the movie?
- M. Kramer: They got married, right. Yes, right.**
- P. Bruno: Oh wow.
- M. Kramer: Edgar, Dick Edgar⁵ [Richard R. Edgar].**
- P. Bruno: Right. Can you tell me a little bit about the movie and what you remember?
- M. Kramer: Well I don't remember too much about that. I remember showing them going into Oak Hills⁶, and sitting down and holding the menu and ordering.**
- P. Bruno: Now Oak Hills is where Perry's [phonetic] is now?

³ The 1929 film titled *Metuchen...THE MOVIE* by Charles Salaki Sr.

⁴ Jean Humphries graduated from Metuchen High School in 1930. She is the daughter of Rev. George Humphries, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, and the sister of Bertram "Bud" Humphries, a baseball pitcher.

⁵ Richard "Dick" Edgar was the son of David Raymond Edgar, former president of the Edgar Plastic Kaolin Company.

⁶ Movie shows the couple eating at Otto's Diner, located along Middlesex Avenue near the present-day Friendly's restaurant.

M. Kramer: That's right, where Perry's [phonetic] is now.

P: Bruno: So it was like a little love story?

Mrs. Kramer: Yeah, and then they went into the different stores and they picked something up to look at it, to purchase it and like that. It was really, I guess, more of an advertising thing, commercial thing, but it was fun. They showed that at the first—down here—the first [Metuchen] Country Fair and it was kind of beat. [laughs]

P: Bruno: Right. I would love to see it, but I was told that the movie is just in bad shape.

M. Kramer: It is in awfully bad shape, but it's a—

P: Bruno: It's just too bad.

M. Kramer: It is.

P: Bruno: Something like that done at that period of time in a small town is really something.

M. Kramer: It is. It is. Everybody knew everybody and like that.

Well, my daughter Ruth and Mary Lou, they were taking dancing lessons—here I am on another thing—they were taking dancing lessons and they had a benefit show down here for something. I don't know what it was.

P: Bruno: This is when they were small?

M. Kramer: When they were tiny. Mary Lou was a tiny thing, and Ruth wasn't quite so tiny, but Ruth was about four and Mary Lou was about two. And they did *The Sidewalks of New York* [song] thing. Do you know that one? Well I tell you, when Ruth went to hit her, she hit Mary Lou (the little one) so hard that she took a bounce down. And everybody, they laughed so hard, they didn't know that it really wasn't supposed to be, but it just struck me. [laughter] Oh, people just roared! It was awfully funny. But you know, it was a smaller town and really it was just a nice country town.

P: Bruno: Yeah, you could walk down the Main Street and you would recognize everybody.

M. Kramer: Know everybody. Right, right, not any more now.

P: Bruno: And how about the circus—the Hunt Brothers Circus⁷?

M. Kramer: Oh yes, that was a big thing too. We thought it was quite big, but it was small compared now to anything. And my dad, in the hardware store, they would go to the hardware store to get something. This one time, this one fellow was doing some kind of an act, I don't know what—young fellow—and he broke his arm. I tell

⁷ The Hunt Brothers Circus was founded by Harry T. Hunt Sr. in 1892 as a horse-drawn traveling show that performed in numerous towns along the East Coast. It operated for more than sixty years by Hunt and his three sons.

you, you'd thought my dad broke his arm. He was such a nice fellow and like that. But it was just so country-like and you know.

P: Bruno: And would they come to town like once a year?

M. Kramer: Once a year they would come to town.

P: Bruno: And where would they stay ... [recording ends]

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1]

M. Kramer: Well, I said they came once a year.

P: Bruno: The circus did? And everybody from Metuchen would go out and see it?

M. Kramer: Yes. Is this on now?

P: Bruno: Yeah. Can you remember any of the acts that you liked, or did you like the clowns?

M. Kramer: Well, they had clowns. But they didn't have many, but you know at that, they were funny. They were funny. And I do remember too, the tightrope thing there, and walking on there.

P: Bruno: That's always so scary.

M. Kramer: Oh, I don't particularly go for it. I don't particularly go for it, but they seemed to manage, yeah. It was a town that helped everything. They joined in on everything. Really, it's a good town now.

I was president of the American Legion Auxiliary, and we started out and we needed money. So we thought, *Well, we'd have a turkey dinner.* And so what we did—when I think of it, you couldn't do it now I don't think—we had it down in St. Luke's Parish House, and we all worked hard on it. Well, we sent tickets to every doctor, every lawyer, every prominent person in town, just sent the tickets and sure enough, every one of them came and paid at the door and just seemed to enjoy a good spirit. I'm just trying to say how wonderful the town was, and it is too. It's still a very nice town.

P: Bruno: Even though it has grown so much, it has a small-town atmosphere that you don't find in too many places. And I can just imagine how it was like years ago.

M. Kramer: It really was, it really was, yeah. It really was a very nice town. Everybody knew everybody. It really was.

P: Bruno: And everybody seemed to help out when some family was in need or something.

M. Kramer: That's right. That's right, no matter what came along, everybody would join in on it really.

P: Bruno: Okay, well thank you very much, Mrs. Kramer. I really appreciate you doing this.

M. Kramer: **Oh, you're nice!**

[END OF INTERVIEW]