



## **Interview with James Perkins**

**Under the Auspices of the  
Monmouth County Library Headquarters  
124 Symmes Drive, Manalapan, NJ  
Flora T. Higgins, Project Coordinator**

### **Remembering The 20th Century: An Oral History of Monmouth County**

**Date of Interview: November 2, 1999**

**Name of Interviewer: June West**

**Premises of Interview: Power Lodge Senior Citizen Home, Wall, NJ**

**Birthdate of Subject: August 13, 1914**

**Ms. West:** Mr. Perkins, could you tell me how old you are?

**Mr. Perkins:** I'm eighty-four. I was born on August 13, 1914.

**Ms. West:** Were you born here in Monmouth County?

**Mr. Perkins:** I was born in Gorham, Maine, a little town outside of Portland.

**Ms. West:** How old were you when you came to New Jersey?

**Mr. Perkins:** I imagine I was about three years old and my sister was two years old.

**Ms. West:** And how long have you lived in Monmouth County?

**Mr. Perkins:** I've been living in New Jersey for eighty-one years now. When we first came, it was to Ocean Grove, and then we went to Asbury Park and Manasquan.

**Ms. West:** Were educated down here?

**Mr. Perkins:** In Bradley Park School for my elementary grades for one year, then Belmar, and then High School.

**Ms. West:** When you left Maine, did you come to Asbury Park to live?

**Mr. Perkins:** Yes. Well, Ocean Grove first off, for a while. Then my father got a place in Bradley Park, which is part of Neptune I guess. I came down here I think to 10th Avenue, 128. It was just south of Corlies Avenue in Neptune, and he went to business in Asbury. He was a painting contractor and decorator, he did all the fancy work.

**Ms. West:** What school did you go to in Asbury Park?

**Mr. Perkins:** I went to Bradley Park.

**Ms. West:** Bradley Park what school?

**Mr. Perkins:** Bradley Park 10th Ave. I don't know what the name was.

**Ms. West:** That was grade school?

**Mr. Perkins:** Grade school, yes.

**Ms. West:** What high school did you go to?

**Mr. Perkins:** Manasquan High. I went one or two years at Belmar and then I think in the fifth grade I went to Manasquan Grammar, and then from there on I went on to high school.

**Ms. West:** Did you attend college after you graduated from high school?

**Mr. Perkins:** It was Monmouth Junior College.

**Ms. West:** How would you describe Monmouth County when you were a child? How were things then in relation to the way they are today?

**Mr. Perkins:** Oh, peaceful countryside, slower, you know, no racing around in cars. The old Model A Fords and all that stuff. Wagons and gravel roads. The water wagon would come around and spray the gravel streets. We kids used to

run out and go in the water because we were kids. Then an old man with a monkey came around with a grinder begging for money.

**Ms. West:** What was he called?

**Mr. Perkins:** The monkey man, or an organ grinder. He would come around and beg for money.

**Ms. West:** What game did you say you liked to play as a kid, baseball?

**Mr. Perkins:** Baseball, yes. Of course you also had tag, and hide and seek, all that stuff you know.

**Ms. West:** Hobbies, what about hobbies?

**Mr. Perkins:** I like to draw. I've done paintings of local rivers and ships mostly.

**Ms. West:** Do you do any of that now?

**Mr. Perkins:** Not lately, but I have done some not too long ago.

**Ms. West:** You mentioned you were married; do you have any children?

**Mr. Perkins:** One girl. I didn't get married until I was thirty-five because I was helping my mother, and my wife was helping her folks, too. My stepfather died, and I had to help out.

**Ms. West:** Now you were born in 1914. Who was president when you were born?

**Mr. Perkins:** I don't know. It seems like it might be Roosevelt, the other Roosevelt, not FDR, but Theodore.

**Ms. West:** Was your father in World War I?

**Mr. Perkins:** No, but he was liable for either country because he was born in Canada, but he's of American parents, so he was liable for here and for Canada. He was in the Maine militia. After the war, he was Head Guard for the Morgan Ammunition plant. We moved just away from there before it blew up. He said it's going to be hell because men would go around with cigarettes and all and he was afraid of something. And the house that we lived in, there's nothing left of it but the chimney. That was in Morgan, New Jersey, outside of Amboy.

**Ms. West:** You say you spent most of your life here in Monmouth County.

**Mr. Perkins:** My mother was still an Alger; they had a lot of land in Wall Township. They had this big farm here and part of it was Fort Evans.

**Ms. West:** That was part of your mother's land.

**Mr. Perkins:** The grandparents more than that back to James Alger. When somebody died, they'd give each one the property. And now on 18th Ave. there's houses being built there called Old Mill Pines Village, that's part of it.

**Ms. West:** You mentioned your hobby. Do you have any heroes?

**Mr. Perkins:** I never thought much about it, because I like all people different ones. Of course, Babe Ruth...

**Ms. West:** You were a Yankee fan?

**Mr. Perkins:** Yes.

**Ms. West:** Are you still a Yankee fan?

**Mr. Perkins:** Yes, more or less. I don't go much for sports anymore.

**Ms. West:** You didn't watch the World Series on television then, did you?

**Mr. Perkins:** Well, the way I worked I never had a chance to follow them through. I worked nights in the post office and then when I got in working for the lumber company. I worked for two lumber companies and the last one was Linden Lumber. I'd work three nights a week till nine o'clock. That was a good job.

**Ms. West:** What would you describe is your most important legacy to your family, friends, and society?

**Mr. Perkins:** I never thought of that.

**Ms. West:** What concerns you most in the world about the world today?

**Mr. Perkins:** There's too many militants, for one thing. Wars are everywhere and fighting and people not getting along. I think people should get to know each other better and be better.

**Ms. West:** Well, what part of your life would you like to relive, if you'd like to relive a part of it?

**Mr. Perkins:** Oh, I don't know. All of it was pretty good. It was hard and everything. I had all kinds of challenges as a kid. Newspaper route and working

in markets and so. Like one job: I had the owners of Shop Rite before Shop Rite was made; I worked for a dollar a day. They had me chopping wood, polishing the car, waiting on people, sweeping the store, and cleaning chickens.

**Ms. West:** But a dollar a day was good money back then, wasn't it?

**Mr. Perkins:** Yes. It went up to two dollars a day later on, and I had one summer I worked for two dollars a day and two dollars a night. I had a job for a tinsman in the daytime, working on roofs, tin roofs and then slate roofs and gutters. And at night, I had a vegetable market, so when the trucks came in I would have to help unload and fix the counters and wait on people that came in. I didn't fall off the roof. In fact, one time, we were painting a shingle roof staining it with red stain, and the man up above me on the ladder kicked the bucket over. It spilled all over me. I had my fake skin for about three weeks.

**Ms. West:** Oh, my heavens! What location in Monmouth County means the most to you? Is there any particular area in the county?

**Mr. Perkins:** I like it right where we are. My father lived with his brother for a while in Spring Lake Heights, I think it's nice over there.

**Ms. West:** Well, you say you also lived in Spring Lake Heights.

**Mr. Perkins:** I lived across from the golf course and I got a job caddying there. That was the best job I had when I was a kid.

**Ms. West:** And so you went to Monmouth Junior College.

**Mr. Perkins:** I drew the first school shield.

**Ms. West:** You made a what?

**Mr. Perkins:** The emblem for the school.

**Ms. West:** You made that?

**Mr. Perkins:** The first one, not this one now. It was like a fan with a torch and so forth.

**Ms. West:** What was it supposed to symbolize?

**Mr. Perkins:** Well, education, you know; study and industry.

**Ms. West:** And what year was that?

**Mr. Perkins:** 1935. They used it on the school paper in the front and for different things.

**Ms. West:** If you could choose a symbol for your life what would it be?

**Mr. Perkins:** I don't know. What do you mean by symbol?

**Ms. West:** You said you've made a torch. You could be a torch. You can light up the world.

**Mr. Perkins:** Oh, I never thought of myself as a leader, but I'd like to have been a writer, an artist. I'd like to have done a little of both.

**Ms. West:** You wrote songs, played a little music. You said you drew a lot.

**Mr. Perkins:** I've done a lot of art, and I've given it away.

**Ms. West:** What has been your greatest achievement in life?

**Mr. Perkins:** Well, family, I suppose, mostly.

**Ms. West:** You said you have a daughter. Do you have any grandchildren?

**Mr. Perkins:** Two boys, yes. And they're doing well. One graduated from Junior College, and he's got a job with IBM, and the other one is still in school and he's doing well in music. He has a guitar and he plays at social affairs, churches, and everything. He was in one contest down there in Florida where they had eighteen baby grand pianos playing at once and he was only sixteen years old. I've been able to get a house of my own even now I'm here for about \$400 dollars a month I believe.

**Ms. West:** How long have you been at Tower Lodge Senior Citizen Home?

**Mr. Perkins:** About eight or nine months.

**Ms. West:** Oh, you just came here.

**Mr. Perkins:** Yes. Soon I'll have to sell my house or something, probably. I don't want to tie myself down in a place like this. I want to be free. If I can only walk again, I'll get around.

**Ms. West:** What happened?

**Mr. Perkins:** I fell and broke my hips. This leg was bad. I could walk, and nobody knew I was crippled, because my feet were out straight and all, and now it goes like this, like a Z. It's hooked up wrong with my hip some way. I'm in pain all the

time. Same with here. I don't know what he put on here. It made a big bulge here, and my foot goes like that; see how it's sideways. I'm walking like on my instep. The knee doctor says I need a new hip operation. That means new legs too. I don't know.

**Ms. West:** What are your favorite TV programs, or do you have any?

**Mr. Perkins:** Well, I don't watch too much. I like the news. I like *Matlock* and *I Love Lucy*. My wife likes *Jeopardy*. I like *Wheel of Fortune*. Of course, the news.

**Ms. West:** Do you ever listen to the radio now?

**Mr. Perkins:** My roommate has a TV, but I have a little radio, and I like the music. I like WJLK. I like the Asbury News.

**Ms. West:** What would you say is the most unusual thing about yourself?

**Mr. Perkins:** I don't know. Well I never pushed myself. I just go along if people like me. That's why I may never be a leader I guess.

**Ms. West:** What are your deepest values?

**Mr. Perkins:** Family values are important: honesty, and being liked.

**Ms. West:** And what are your personal strengths?

**Mr. Perkins:** Not very much now, I'm about half dead from my hips down; I'm no good at all.

**Ms. West:** Your mind.

**Mr. Perkins:** What good is that if you can't move around?

**Ms. West:** Well, you and I are speaking now: the wisdom and the knowledge that you can pass off to me. You don't have to walk to tell me that. I mean you've seen a lot of changes in your lifetime.

**Mr. Perkins:** I've always been active. Of course I had to be. When I was a kid, I worked when I should've been playing.

**Ms. West:** What are some of the changes that you've seen in your lifetime?

**Mr. Perkins:** It's hard to say. Let me think. I think people are getting wiser and maybe a little more considerate of one another, I hope. Like you see in here, the Blacks and the Whites get along good in here. It's silly some of the stuff the way people at work act.

**Ms. West:** You mentioned that people get along here. That's fine. What advice would you give to young people today?

**Mr. Perkins:** My daughter taught her two sons to get their education. Study, and it will make it easier for them later on. I could've used some of that advice too, because I didn't study as hard as I should have. But I made out pretty good. I graduated from high school with 117 and half points. I only needed eighty-four, but that's because I was taking two courses, commercial and college, because of journalism, typing, and commercial law.

**Ms. West:** You said journalism was your major in college?

**Mr. Perkins:** High school. And college more or less was on my mind, but when I got out, it was right at the Depression and I couldn't afford to go. I had two chances: to go to West Point, which I'm sorry I didn't try, but I wasn't good in math and algebra and all that, and I didn't have any calculus and all that. I went to college at a Junior College and I took up mathematics. I shouldn't have taken the advanced two weeks course, I should've pulled out of it, but I didn't. It was over my head.

**Ms. West:** So your working life you spent pretty much with the post office and the insurance company.

**Mr. Perkins:** And the lumber companies. I spent over twenty years in the last lumber company, and I've been retired for over twenty years.

**Ms. West:** How many years were you with the post office?

**Mr. Perkins:** Fifteen.

**Ms. West:** What are your feelings as we enter the new millennium? There's not many days left in the 20th century, you know. Did you ever think that you would live to see the turn of the century?

**Mr. Perkins:** No, I never thought I would live to be eighty-four years old. Since I was sick, and you know, weak. But I did heavy work in the lumber company. I had muscles. I did a lot of repair to my house. I like carpentry.

**Ms. West:** Did you go to the movies on Saturdays and watch the serials and all?

**Mr. Perkins:** When I was in Belmar School we used to go river there and behind the river they'd drop the tickets. We'd pick up the used tickets no matter what color they were, and the usher was in the dark, and we passed them to him. We went for nothing, and on Saturdays you could go for ten cents anyway.

**Ms. West:** Kids are always amazing. Always trying to find a way. Okay if you could describe your life as a road map how would it be? Smooth, rocky, rough, sort of in between?

**Mr. Perkins:** Sort of in between. It was rough at times. But I was lucky. I married a good woman and we made out pretty good. She was willing to go anywhere; she didn't want everything at once. I didn't know about her family history until after we married and we went on a wedding trip and went to her people in Georgia. We went to see this old cousin, and she gave us a map of the family genealogy. Mary Clay, who was the Third Post Master General and the Third Attorney General in the United States was her ancestor, and she was related to President Monroe. Alice Roosevelt's daughter had married into Mrs. Perkin's family, people named Longworth, and we got some of the Longworth's silver. So there are relatives there. There are some very interesting people in our family, some famous people, too.

**Ms. West:** Oh, that's interesting.

**Mr. Perkins:** Songwriter Johnny Mercer's aunt, Caroline Klide, was also my father in law's cousin.

**Ms. West:** Really! Oh, so you were rubbing shoulders with Piggy Lee.

**Mr. Perkins:** My wife's first husband, Joe, went to Wilmington; they thought I used politics to go down there but I went on my own. But I just remember that her cousin was counselor of Delaware, and her uncle was a city clerk.

**Ms. West:** Did you ever get involved in politics?

**Mr. Perkins:** No. I wouldn't say I was. I was in the Eagle Lodge and I was a recording secretary and then I became the grand master of The Eagle Lodge in New Jersey.

**Ms. West:** In what lodge?

**Mr. Perkins:** Nights of the Golden Eagle and I could be in the lodge in Pennsylvania but I refused it.

**Ms. West:** Okay. Is there anything else you want to tell me?

**Mr. Perkins:** I don't know of anything. Except I knew my mother had these relatives that she could've gone to for help. The president of the bank in Belmar had land right next to us on the farm. He was head of the bank, different ones.

**Ms. West:** I know you can't walk, but there are lots of things you need your mind for; you don't always use your legs for everything. So do you feel that there is still something that you would like to accomplish?

**Mr. Perkins:** With all these songs that God gave me, I'd like to get someone to make a tape of maybe ten or twelve songs on it and give it to someone to play them.

**Ms. West:** A tape of what?

**Mr. Perkins:** Music.

**Ms. West:** You want to write some more music.

**Mr. Perkins:** I did write a couple of new songs recently. They're religious ones, and I wrote the words in about ten minutes. It just seemed like God gave it to me. And I would never want to make any money on them. In fact, I gave one of them away, I had not completed it yet, I gave the song. I want to give them the copyright.

**Ms. West:** What's your religious affiliation?

**Mr. Perkins:** I'm Protestant, but it's a mixture with Catholic, too.

**Ms. West:** So the song is just a universal type song.

**Mr. Perkins:** Yes. The idea is that the business of Christ coming down earth for us, Savior of our sin. And I wrote, "Thank You, Blessed Savior," and the other one was I Find the "Old Rugged Cross." I emphasize that blood and the cross.... (Singing) "My Jesus crawled his way to Calvary." That's all. I haven't got a copyright. The other one's copyright is "Thank You for the Blessed Savior." (Singing) I thank you for my family, my friends and neighbors, too. I thank you for my health and wealth of days on earth lived through. I thank you for the birds and trees, spring flowers, fruit, and grain. All bounties on this life I lived till you come back again. Oh thank you blessed Savior for your guidance and your love, for coming down alive from above. To tell us of that Heaven, and your Father who sent you, to save us all from Hell for life anew. In everlasting heaven, oh, thank you blessed Savior and your hallowed fellow too. How gratefully I'll live my life for you.

**Ms. West:** And you wrote that. How nice.

**Mr. Perkins:** If you turn it off, I'll sing the other one.

**Ms. West:** Why must I turn it off?

**Mr. Perkins:** Because I don't want to share my copyright.

**Ms. West:** Okay. Then at this point, I say thank you for letting me speak with you this afternoon. We really appreciate it and now I will turn it off so you can sing me the song.