

Answering The Call:  
The History Of The  
Port Washington Volunteer Fire Department

Transcript Of Oral History Interview With

Christina Alexander  
Fire Medic Company No. 1

conducted in association with the  
Port Washington Public Library Local History Center

©2006



Text enclosed in a blue box is linked to graphics  
pertaining to the subject being discussed

Q: ... 2004. This is an interview with Christina Alexander. My name is Sally Olds. The interview is taking place at the Port Washington Public Library. Today is September 20th, 2004. Can you please say your name?

Christina Alexander: Christina Alexander.

Q: And which fire company are you a member of?

CA: Fire Medics.

Q: How old were you when you joined the fire company?

CA: It was in 1994, which meant I was nineteen years old.

Q: And did anything happen in your childhood that made you want to join the fire company?

CA: Nobody in my family my immediate family was a member of the Fire Department. But in high school, they ran a program for the community service part of the high school program, wanting to know if any individuals were interested in taking an EMT course, which is an emergency medical technician course, New York State certification. And me and two other high school classmates took the class, and then we joined Glenwood Fire

Department, which was the fire department where I lived, where I became did training as an EMT, and also as a firefighter. And then decided I really wanted to concentrate on being an EMT, and I came over to Port Washington where I could just be doing EMT work.

Q: Were you still living in Glenwood?

CA: I lived in Glenwood. Yes, I was still living in Glenwood when I joined. There was a certain percentage of out of town members that the company accepts. And until I got married in 2000, when I moved here to Port Washington.

Q: What made you decide to come to join the Port Washington ...

CA: Port Washington Fire Department was very well known through the County as being a very well established, well organized EMS [emergency medical services] program, and they had a lot of a lot of they were spoke very highly of. And I wanted to get a lot of experience, and so I came here.

Q: What do you remember about the training that you received? The initial training in high school, what kinds of things did you learn?

CA: Well, what I would do is I would attend my EMT class, which was two or three nights a week, several a couple hours a night. And then I had to do rotations in the hospital several hours of hands-on in the hospital, hours of ambulance time. And then, the program that the high school ran was run on another night of the week. We would go observe the volunteers in the Glenwood Fire Department and see, go through different kinds of drills and training. Whether it be fire or EMS, we would do it over there.

Q: And what emergencies do you remember from those days?

CA: From those days? From those days, it was difficult, because I you know, when you're young, and I I am a part of the membership committee now in the Fire Department. So when I see these young people join, I tell them about my experiences when I was young, because they're young and they see a lot of things out there that, you know, that are rough to see. You see some wonderful things, too. But back then, because it was my very beginnings and I was only in that company for about a year, there was just so much training, I didn't get that much time on the ambulance. Once I joined Port Washington was when I really started to see a lot more. Port Washington is a much larger area, so that the call volume is much higher. So, for there, I don't have many many memorable things, because I was training through my whole first year, really. I really didn't get much out there.

Q: Was the training hard?

CA: The training for becoming a new member and learning to be an EMT and a firefighter is quite extensive. A lot of primary classes on just simply learning, you know, what all the equipment is and the tools are and how they work and what they're used for. And then, the further on you go in learning about I did become an AEMT later on, which is an Advanced Emergency Medical Technician, and or otherwise known as an EMT CC, which is an Emergency Medical Technician, Critical Care. And later on, once you go to that point, you start to learn about drugs and IVs [intravenous feeds] and much, much more in depth, and that training was very extensive. Very extensive. A lot of time in school a year in school, as opposed to the three or four months in the EMT school. So ...

Q: So, can you administer medications?

CA: Right now unfortunately, I've let that expire. So, but I was able to administer medications. Things like Narcan for somebody who has a drug overdose. Or, we were able to intubate. Intubation is when you are directly going to breathe for somebody, going to put a tube directly into their lungs. We've done that several times. We're able to use a defibrillator. We're, as an EMT can only use an automatic defibrillator, we use a regular defibrillator. And all this training is several hours in the hospital, several hours in the maternity ward, in the emergency room, in the OR and the that was about a year and a half's worth of schooling and training for that.

Q: And what else were you doing during that time?

CA: Well, I was going to college. I went to Nassau Community College for my Associate's degree in Liberal Arts, because I still wasn't sure what I wanted to do, and also working. I worked for the First National Bank of Long Island in Glen Head, where I've been since 1996, full-time. And planning a wedding! (laughs). So I was busy. I was busy those years.

Q: Yes. And you're still busy with two children.

CA: Two babies.

Q: How old are your children?

CA: I have a four-month-old, Daniel, and a two-and-a-half-year-old, John. So, keeping busy (laughs).

Q: I don't know how you do it. What kind of child care do you have?

CA: I work three days a week. I work part-time now. And I have a friend who's in the Fire Department, who has a grown son, who helps me take care of my son, so it's good. It's good. Very busy (laughs). But I am no longer the EMT CC. I let that expire. When I got pregnant with my son, I to even recertify that was so much work, and with the baby,

and I was also trying to go back to college, and I just couldn't do it. So I continued on with my EMT certification. So ...

Q: So, what well, going back to the early days, you said that you prepare young people for some of the rough things. What were some of the rough things that you yourself encountered in the beginning?

CA: Well, in the very beginning, a couple of years into being in the membership of the Port Washington Fire Department I don't remember exactly when; I want to say it's '97 or '98 it was a very, very cold winter night, and a call came over for a house fire on Bernard Street in Port Washington. And I will never forget that night. That was one of my that was one of the first nights I really, you know, saw what this was all about. And basically, there was a home where multiple families were living in different rooms. You know, they were we assumed, renting rooms from one person. And part of those rooms included the attic. And I'll never forget her name. Her name was Melissa Castillo, and she and her grandmother passed away that night in a fire that some some I'm still not sure how it started. And just seeing that baby lifeless young child she wasn't a baby; she was maybe four or five years old that's a baby, but she wasn't an infant, should I say young girl. And come out of that house, doing CPR on her and watching the men taking out her grandmother and doing CPR on her, and, you know, you're young.

You're twenty, you're twenty-one years old, and, you know, we come from a world where we don't see that. We have members in the Fire Department now that I've

met that have come from countries like El Salvador and Guatemala and all these other countries, and these war-torn countries that young children see war all the time. We don't see that. And we don't see, you know, this we have sophisticated fire alarm systems and building construction we don't see that like they saw in their countries. And to see this just burning building, and then all of a sudden, all the fire trucks started sounding their alarms, which basically, in our department, that means "get out." It's unsafe; just everybody get out of the building and it's going to have to burn. We're going to have to they call it "surround-and-drowned." Which basically means the trucks from the outside will just try to fight the fire. Nobody in the building. I get chills just thinking about it. Nobody in the building is safe; get out. And those horns started blowing and the snow was coming down, and it was cold, and those lifeless bodies went by, and that's not easy for young people to see.

It wasn't easy for me. It's not easy for an old person to see. But when you're just out of school, and you're you're, you know, you've learned what you're supposed to do, and then you come upon that, it's scary. It's very scary. And, just to elaborate, a couple of years later, in well, there's multiple fires. There's three major ones, if I may, I can discuss it.

After that fire was the second worst fire I had ever seen was Kirkwood Road, and the gentleman's last name was Aiello. I remember because there's an actor out there Danny Aiello. And Mr. Aiello was in his basement on Kirkwood Road, and I don't know if he was cleaning a stove or repairing a stove or something. But propane had leaked, and the basement just went on fire. And I was a Lieutenant at the time, in a class. I was



taking a leadership class on how to be a better, you know, leadership, you know, to lead your company. I was a Lieutenant at the time, on how to be a better officer. And at Fire Medics, we were taking the class, and the call came over for the fire at Kirkwood. And we got there, and I'm firefighter trained also, so my friend Philip and I got in the ambulance Philip Poullada.

And we got to the fire, and the flames were coming out of the basement, and the firemen were trying to get him out. And he was a big man, and we were trying to get him out of the basement window. And I remember Philip and I had our Scott Packs on our air packs to breathe. And we had our Latex gloves on. And we were trying to grab this man's hand, and as we did, the Latex was just melting off our hands, because he was so hot from the fire. And we just couldn't get him out through the window, no matter how hard we pulled that man out. And, as terrible as it sounds, the skin was just coming off. We couldn't get him out. We finally we finally got him out, and the first ambulance took him to the hospital. He lived for a couple of days, but he ended up passing away. Philip took him to the hospital. I stayed back, since I was an officer at that time, to lay out, you know, fire ground procedures for everybody else.

I was engaged to my husband at the time, and he was in the fire. And not only was this fire terrible because the man was so badly burnt internally, and he died, the house was totally engulfed in flames. My husband was caught inside. A flashover had happened, and the fire came over his head, and the Chief ex-Chief [Geoffrey] Cole was there you know, trying to get all the men out. And all I remember was standing outside and seeing my husband run out the front door, and the siding from the house had melted

onto my husband's head. And my husband's whole helmet was just covered in melted house siding. And he just dove to the ground, because he couldn't breathe anymore. And they brought him to the hospital. And they brought, you know, all these other people to the hospital. Now here I am running this fire scene, as a Lieutenant for only like two weeks, and the neighbors screaming and crying in the houses next door, with possible smoke damage to them, and all of this. Finally, I said to the Chief, "I've got to go. My fiancé's in the hospital" (laughs). Someone else took over for me. I ended up going to the hospital to my husband. But again, you know, some of these new, young members seeing that horror and terror of what fire can do was, you know, was really hard to see.

And the last one that I can say was probably, again, one of the worst, was then again in 2000 Thanksgiving night of 2000 where a young bunch of boys decided to like, I don't know what, you know. You can't say what happened. But drive too fast down Roslyn West Shore Road. A bunch of boys in the car. I don't really remember how many I think maybe five. And the young boy his name was, I believe, Justin he died. I was driving home from my father-in-law's house from Thanksgiving. It was me, my husband, and my dog Bella. And I was Captain at the time. And we just drove down Roslyn West Shore Road, and all of a sudden we saw this car hit a pole, a tree. I said to my husband, "Get out," you know, "pull onto the median on the grass." And he pulled on the grass. And I got my turn-out gear on, and I went running.

And there, over here, was a boy lying with his legs bleeding. He couldn't walk. And over there in the bushes was another boy screaming. And over there was another boy running. The driver was pinned into the car; he couldn't get out. And we started

releasing these kids one ambulance took this one to the hospital; the next one took this one to the hospital. The first one, Justin, who died, he was in cardiac arrest; we took him first. The second boy gee, I don't even know; I think they did amputate, ended up amputating part of his leg. He was it was crushed. We took him. Luckily, two of the other boys, they had, you know, minor cuts and bumps and bruises. The driver of the car I don't remember his name we couldn't get him out. We couldn't get him out. We tried every tool there was. We just we couldn't get him out. And we called in Roslyn Rescue Fire Department to come in. I'll never forget this. And the boy forgive me, I'm not sure if he was the driver. He was a front-seat passenger. I don't remember if he was the driver. He was conscious. And we called in Roslyn Rescue.

And a gentleman named Tom Langone, who worked in New York City in the ESU, which is Emergency Services Unit in New York City Fire Department, was an ace on what we call the "Jaws of Life," to get him and so we said if anybody could get him out, Tom could get him out. Tom came. He got him out of the car, and the boy lived. And do you know, Tom died on September 11th in the Twin Towers. And I ran into that boy, and I don't remember his name but I remember his face. And I ran into him at a Chinese food restaurant one night. And I said to him, "I just want to let you know that I was there the night you were in that accident," and he said, "Oh, thank you." And his mother was there, and she thanked me. And I said to that boy, "Do you know the man who saved your life died in the Twin Towers? I just had to tell you that, because I want you to know that, you know, he had a purpose here, and he ..." you know. And him actually Tom Langone died in the Twin Towers and so did his brother. One was a

fireman and one was a policeman; they both died. And I told him that. And I remember he had a he had a tear in his eye.

And, but there again was this horrible accident, and then you come back to the firehouse, and you have young members of the Fire Department who went to school with these kids. Went to you know, knew these kids intimately and how horrible it is to see those things, but how wonderful it was to tell that boy in the restaurant, you know, the man who saved his life. So there are good and there are bad.

My husband and I, together with two other people, delivered a baby on the same night that Flight 800 went down. And I'll never forget her name. Her name was Jasmine Rebecca. Because I called her mother in the hospital in the hospital the next day, and I said, "What was her name? I just wanted to tell you, you know, congratulations. I was with you that night." And her name was Jasmine Rebecca, and she was born the night Flight 800 went down. So there's good and there's bad. But as a young person, to see all that, it's a lot to handle. I talk a lot, I know (laughs). So ...

Q: And you won an award for one of those times.

CA: My unit. My unit won a unit citation at the Nassau County Awards Ceremony for the Kirkwood Road fire. Ex-Chief Cole put a letter into the County about my actions and the actions of my unit. As I ran the EMS during that fire, I was in charge of that. And I received it on behalf of my whole unit that was there for the attempted save of Mr.

Aiello's life. So it unfortunately, like I said, I don't even think he lived a week, but at least his family got to say goodbye. So ...

Q: Back to the accident on Roslyn West Shore Road. There have been a number of single-car accidents along there, haven't there? Has anybody been able to figure out why?

CA: The light that was placed in front of the golf course has been a help. It has slowed things down. But at night, no one's using those side roads, so the light's always green. We just find that it's people, you know, pick that long stretch of road, and they're speeding, and then that turn comes up at top, and then we had a member, Ingrid, who passed away on that road, responding to a call. And she died in the line of duty, responding to help somebody else. And ironically enough, the one, the accident that she was responding to, was an accident by a girl I work with, named Tina, and she always remembers that, "God, I got into that accident, and she came to help me and she didn't make it."

It's a very dangerous stretch of road, and the Fire Department and the Police Department, I know, have been in talks with it for years on what to do. But I don't know if there's ever been an outcome. Many, many, many accidents there at night. It's so dangerous down there that the Fire Department has a rule that you cannot respond in your car to an accident down there. You have to respond in an emergency vehicle. Whereas, if you have an accident or an illness or something in your home, I as an EMT can come straight to your home to start first aid. If there is an accident on that road, you're not

allowed to respond in your car, after Ingrid's death. That's how dangerous it is.

Especially at night. I don't know why. I don't know why.

Q: You said you were a Lieutenant with the Fire Medics.

CA: Uh huh.

Q: How did you come to be an officer? What was your background for that?

CA: Well, I had been an administrative officer for some time. I had been a recording secretary and a board of director, and now that I had gotten my EMT CC, I wanted to use that to help the company, which I did in '99 get elected to Lieutenant and spent a year as a Lieutenant and then became Captain, which I do believe I was the second female Captain in the Port Washington Fire Department, Lori Borelli being the first and me being the second. There is a need for officers in the Fire Department. There's many people that just don't have the time. And so, I felt that my administrative duties I could always go back to that later on. Right now was the time I was either just married or single and I didn't have children, and I had the time for it. I could always do the administrative later. So I went back to now I'm back to administrative. But I took those couple of years to give that, you know, that time to the company.

Q: So what were your responsibilities as Lieutenant?

CA: As a Lieutenant, I was in charge of basically, we did a lot of training for the company. I was in charge of EMS operations, fire ground operations anything that should happen on a fire call, any kind of mass casualty incident, or any kind of, you know, I would be in charge of incident command, which would be notifying other fire departments if we needed assistance for any reason. If we had a multiple car accident, we needed more ambulances. There were administrative duties also, as far as, you know, dealing with the Department of Health. And we are a New York State certified ambulance company, so, as a Lieutenant, part of the things were to make sure our ambulances were up to New York State standards. All the drugs, everything on there, was locked and that everything was done correctly in order to keep our certification.

And then as Captain, you're doing the same thing, except for you're really in charge of it all. You're really in charge of all membership matters and all business matters the President is in charge of, but you and the President together will make decisions on all business matters. But, as a Captain, your biggest responsibility is obviously the welfare of your membership. Make sure everybody comes home off that ambulance, safe and healthy. And just overseeing really most everything that happens in that company.

Q: You said "the President." Do all the companies have presidents or ...

CA: No.

Q: ... just Fire Medics?

CA: No, each company runs their administrative offices their own way. Some companies my husband's company, Protection, has trustees. And the trustees run the administrative part of the company, and the Captain and Lieutenants handle the fire ground operations. Atlantic's and Flower Hill and Fire Medics all have Presidents, Vice President, Secretary, so forth. It's really just a title. It's really basically all the same thing. One side holds administrative; one side has fire.

Q: So the President is equivalent to, in, say, at Protection, the President of your company is the equivalent to ...

CA: The President of my company, to a trustee.

Q: To a trustee.

CA: A trustee. They have five of them, and they're all pretty much equal. They don't have like Number One trustee, Number Two trustee. They have five, I think it's five trustees, and basically a President would be each of them have their own duties. So one of them would do treasurer's duties; one of them would do secretarial duties; one of them will do so it's really the same thing, just different names and it's run a little differently. So, but basically it's the same. So ...



Q: I saw something in the paper that the Fire Medics are celebrating your twenty-fifth anniversary.

CA: This year is our twenty-fifth anniversary.

Q: So you've been in it how ...

CA: I've been in it here I've been in ten years. So and, unfortunately, you know, these days, its membership is down, and people just don't have the time to spend the years and put the years in. And the age the age group of like, say, seven years and above is rare, you know. And we do have several twenty-five-year members, all original members, that were we've been celebrating all year long their original membership in the Fire Department, because Fire Medics came about in 1979, where they used to be a squad. They used to be consisting of a squad of members of the whole Department, from all the different companies. And finally, they decided to organize their own company, and that's when that happened. So, twenty-five years, and we still have around five or six of the original members, still active and riding that ambulance.

Q: Are you mostly women in Fire Medics?

CA: You know, for a while there, it was a good mix. You know, a good half and half, or maybe even more men. But now, I believe the women outnumber the men. Which is

nice, too, because I know for myself, when I joined Glenwood Fire Department in the beginning, I was one of two women. And it was difficult. It was difficult, because I grew up in that town, and a lot of those men knew my father. So I was Joe Marvullo's little girl. And my boyfriend had been a member, so I was his girlfriend, you know. And then when I came over here, it was nice. I was an individual, and there was a lot more women, and it made it a lot easier for me to be, you know, just to fit in there. And now, we I think we outrank the men. I think there's more of us (laughs).

Q: When an alarm sounds, how do you determine who goes to answer it?

CA: Fire Medics has a what we call an on-duty crew. Okay? And our goal, ultimately, is to have people on duty in the building twenty-four hours a day. Now, that doesn't always happen. We have a board where we sign up ahead of time and say, "Okay, Christina is going to be here from nine at night till six in the morning." I'm going to sleep overnight. Or "Christina is going to be here from five o'clock at night till nine o'clock at night." We have shifts, and we try to cover them with an EMT. Minimal, with an EMT and a driver. And so, basically, a call will come over. It'll come over our pagers. It'll tell us where it's located and what type of call. Ultimately, of course, if there's somebody in the building, they respond. If there's nobody in the building, the call will be alerted a second time, and then the members will respond from their homes to either now by listening to the radio, you'll be able to tell whether an ambulance has left the building or not, so you know

whether to respond to the firehouse or to the scene of the call. But not Roslyn West Shore Road (laughs). So that's how we respond.

Q: And you always have your pager turned on?

CA: Yes, we always have our pager turned on. I have we have two types of pagers. We have we have three types of alerting. We have the fire whistle, which is for fires. That's one type of alerting. Our second type of alerting is we have a miniature pager, and the miniature pager is voice-activated from the dispatcher. And then we have a new Sky Tel pager, which is basically a beeper, which you're really able to read the written word of exactly where the calls are. So that's how we're alerted.

Q: What happens if an emergency comes up, both for a fire, in which case your husband would be called to it, and for a fire medic, which you would ordinarily go to?

CA: Right. Because Fire Medics usually have the on-duty shifts in the house, that lessens the amount of people that respond from home. All the firemen respond from home. There are no crews in the building for the firemen. So, when we were without children, we'd both go (laughs) to fires and so forth. Because the Fire Medic company responds to every call, whether it is a fire, a carbon monoxide detector, an automatic alarm, an auto accident, or a man who fell down the stairs. Fire Medics respond to everything. So I would be out of the house more often than my husband. But now, with the children, we

take turns. So, one or the other goes. Before we had children, my husband my husband is a squad member of Fire Medic, so he would drive, and I would be the technician. So a lot of times, before we had kids, we'd be riding around, and if a call came over, we'd go together and get the ambulance out together. But now, we don't have that luxury. If the children are sleeping in the middle of the night and a call comes over and I if it's something serious that I think I need to be there-- I live with my mother-in-law. I'd tell her, you know, this is "Put on the baby monitor; I've got to go." Other than that, it's kind of hard (laughs).

Q: Would you ever drive it yourself?

CA: Yes, I also drive the ambulance.

Q: You still do?

CA: Yes, still do. I still do. And he still does, too, when he has time. But with the situation at home, it's much harder, so he really tries to do most that he can for his company, which is Protection. He's a member of Protection.

Q: Are there special things you need to know about driving an ambulance ...

CA: Yes.

Q: ... as opposed to a car?

CA: We take a course called EVOE E-V-O-C. And that's Emergency Vehicle Operations. And that's learning how to drive in an emergency situation, in emergency mode with lights and sirens. We are to the vehicle traffic law, we are to follow just as if we were driving a car, passing on the correct sides and all that stuff. It's just, you know, how to maneuver in an emergency situation. It's a little bit more involved than just driving a car. Driving an ambulance involves also we require, as a company, that you know how to use some of the equipment, too. Even if you're not an EMT, how to turn on the oxygen tank, how to, you know, get the stretcher out, how to use things like that. Whereas a fire truck, to drive the fire truck, that's all that, plus learning how to pump the truck and learning how to work the ladders. So, that's a little different, too. But, yes, there's more involved than just driving a car. Plus they're bigger, and it's hard to maneuver, and backing up, and, you know, those things to learn are difficult.

Q: Are you allowed to go through red lights?

CA: No. You're supposed to stop at red lights. Most you know, most will our department requires us to stop at stop signs and red lights. Most times, you, you know, not necessarily a full stop, but you should be very cautious at those intersections. The Chief absolutely requires that you stop at those lights, because you read about too many

accidents. And sometimes, it's just not necessary. You get the, you get yourself into more of a jam by speeding through these things, and it's not necessary. Then, you're jeopardizing more than one life. That's in the back yours and the other person. So ...

Q: Who was the Captain when you first joined?

CA: I believe his name was I believe it was Greg Robertson when I joined. Yeah.

Q: And the President? Do you remember who that was?

CA: No. Not off the top of my head, no.

Q: And what was the procedure for being elected to membership?

CA: Basically, you had to come in with two letters of recommendation, preferably from an employer, or maybe, if you were in school, a teacher or something like that. And what you would do is you would bring those two letters down and you'd fill out an application, and you have to go through police background checks, make sure that you haven't committed any felonies. Make sure you have to go through arson background checks, make sure you haven't started any fires in the State of New York. It's all required by New York State. Then, you would begin some a little bit of training. You'd join what we call a work night, on a Thursday night, which is like a drill night, and you'd go down on a

Thursday night and you'd meet the membership, and you'd just start learning about the ambulance and checking drugs for expiration dates, making sure the ambulance is clean and everything's in place. We'd have check lists. We'd go down and make sure everything was there, and that's how you started to become familiar with the workings of the ambulance. And that was a great way to really jump into it, because you'd get paired up with another member, and that's how you'd start to learn. And then, you, you know, the technicalities. You report in front of the membership, and they get to know you by coming around, and then after about a month or two, they vote on you, and you become a member.

Q: Was there ever a situation where someone wants to join and they're not elected to membership?

CA: There's very rare very rare situation. We don't obviously, our application does not allow anybody who's been convicted of a felony, and one gentleman, unfortunately, did and he was not even brought up to be voted on. Very rarely do we, you know we need all the help we can get. We don't turn away we're actually in the process right now, we have an awful lot of members coming in from the high school, which the Health Department up there has done a great job in promoting us and we've gotten a lot of new members. But what's happening is they're coming for a year and then going away to college. So right now, we're trying to work on a section of membership, which would be like college students, where we can keep them for their breaks and their summers and work out a way

for them to give us their free time when they're home. But I've never really seen anybody not get voted in.

Q: Is that the Explorer program at the high school, or is that something different?

CA: No, no. That's something totally different. This is just, each year the Health Department asks the ambulances to come up and discuss what we do. And a lot of people have gotten interested in it from just simply us talking about what we do. We've received a lot of members. Of course, our largest recruitment was right after September 11th. A lot of people realized, gee, you know, we need help. People need help out there, and, you know, "I'm going to help out." And we received a lot of members after that, unfortunately, but fortunately we got a lot of new members.

Q: What was the impact of September 11th on your company?

CA: Our company was sent to New York City. An ambulance was sent to New York City in the days after September 11th. Our department, thank God, did not lose any members. Many of our fellow firefighters in their surrounding towns. In Great Neck, Jonathan Ielpi was very active in our group. You know, Great Neck, Manhasset, Port Washington, we're all very, you know, we work closely together in the surrounding towns. And a young guy, he was from Squad 288, and our Chief, John Walters Chief Walters worked with him in Queens. And he lost his life. He had young children. And that that was kind of close to home. It was very close to home, actually. It gave us all more more



awareness of homeland security, of, gee, just everything. You know, just an appreciation for those people that do this every day for a living and wishing there were more people out there that, you know, thank I guess the biggest impact on us was the appreciation that the town and all our just surrounding neighbors, they appreciate the realization of what we do and how much, if you sit back and think: if your house was burning down and there wasn't us, what the heck would you do? And that's what members of the community would come down to the firehouse in the days after September 11th, bringing food and bringing cakes and cookies and baked zitis and "Thank you for what you do, because if it wasn't for you ..." you know, it would be a different world. And that was one of the biggest impacts, I think, for our company. It was sad.

Q: How did you build your confidence in the beginning when you first joined?

CA: The older members teach the younger members. It's an apprenticeship program. It really is. Just as an electrical my husband is an electrician. He goes in with no knowledge of anything he's doing, and that older electrician taught him everything he knows. And that's sort of the same thing. That older member kind of sort of clings onto you, and you learn from them and your confidence builds from there because you see, wow, they can do it, and you learn from them. That's how I did it, at least.

Q: So is it worked out on a one-on-one basis? You know, like you would almost like a buddy system or Big Sister ... [??] ...

CA: Well, when you sign up when you sign up for your on-duty slot say, my I do five o'clock till nine o'clock every Thursday. You'll catch me at the firehouse every Thursday. *Now* I might have a kid with me (laughs), but every Thursday from five to nine, and I hooked up with two individuals Jane and Philip who are long-time members twenty-year members. And they took me under their wing and out on the ambulance I went. Basically, when you become a member, you try to sign up with those crews of people that are have been, you know, seasoned. And then, it's not it's not specifically done that way, like, "Christina, you hook up with this one or this one or this one." It just kind of happens that way. And you know, for yourself, as you move up, your job is to then, you know, mentor the younger people. So, and that's how you build your confidence, by seeing what they do, and then you follow them.

Q: Do you actually go into a burning building?

CA: I I have been trained as a firefighter. Some of Fire Medic's members have also. It is not a requirement, to be a member of my company, to learn how to be a firefighter. If you choose to, the Department will give you the training, but it's not, it's not required. And no, we usually don't, unless first aid needs to be administered immediately in a building. But in most cases, the firemen can get them out before we need to go in. But in the case of Kirkwood Road, we were the first ones there, and, you know, it just, you know, that happened. We carry air packs on our ambulances for those members who are qualified.

Q: So how do you get over that basic human fear of fire?

CA: I don't think you ever get over it. You really I don't. My husband, caught in that flashover on Kirkwood Road, relives that all the time. And, in pictures that he sees around the firehouse, his helmet is actually in the firehouse with the melted siding on it still, because, obviously, he couldn't use that helmet any longer. He relives it now with his own children, realizing that, you know, running into those buildings, now he is responsible for someone else's life, and "Gee, I have to be careful," and remember that night. And thank God for Geoff Cole; he saved his life. And he'll never he relives it. Even till this day sometimes, he'll wake up and he'll think about it, and I don't think there's anybody out there in this whole Department, in this whole world, that can ever can't combat that human just fear of fire. It's there's no I don't think there's anybody that can. And you just have to face each new fire with, you know, with whatever comes upon you. Everyone is different.

Q: What exactly is a flashover?

CA: Technically? My husband and Geoff Cole, and all those other guys will tell you exactly. But basically, the basic idea of it is basically when a fire oxygen and the fire mix. And, say you're in a fire in a building where like this room has no open windows and then all of a sudden the fire gets so hot and the windows burst, and that burst of oxygen comes in. That feeds the fire, and then all of a sudden, it comes up and over, and it's now engulfed

in the whole room. And it's over your head and on your feet and all around you. There, of course, is more specifics to it, but that's the basic point of it, and that's what happened in Kirkwood Road.

Q: So you're surrounded by it.

CA: Completely surrounded by the fire, from the ceiling to the floor, and all around you the walls and everything. And again, fire is fed by oxygen. So that sudden burst of oxygen will then cause that to happen.

Q: Do you ever dream about fires?

CA: I don't. Personally, I don't dream about the fires. I think often in my dreams and in things about the people that were involved in the fire. One evening, coming home from a class a training class a home in Sands Point was on fire, and I went to the fire. And I think of these poor people; they were away on vacation, and their house was gone when they came home. And, you know, you just think, oh, my gosh, those people. You think about the lives that were affected by those fires. I do, more than the fire. I often think about a family. I think of this mother on Bernard Street who lost her mother and her daughter the same night. I still think of her. I think of the mother who gave birth to that baby when I was there that night. She was cursing at me, pulling my hair, beating me up. I said, "Lady, I didn't do this to you. I'm trying to help you!" And how, later on, how

she probably appreciated did she appreciate what I did for her that night? Because she really didn't appreciate me while she was in labor (laughs). I think of the people. I think of the people more than the actual accidents and the actual incidences, because I don't want them to haunt me. Because they can, to a lot of people. There was an explosion in Sands Point on Half Moon Lane, where a young boy almost lost his hand. And the explosion happened by somebody throwing something into a fire. Now, my cousin, in 1995, was killed, because someone threw a keg into a bonfire. It exploded, and my cousin lost his hand and he died. He was twenty-one years old. I was at that explosion where the boy almost lost his hand, and that haunted me for many years because of the nature of the incident. And that's why I try not to think of the incident, after that, because it hit too close to home, in that case. He was twenty-one, out with his friends. Someone decided to throw the keg into the bonfire. He died. So, that's why you try not to think of that. Too many people do, and I think that that's maybe why they don't stay members too long.

Q: So, when you came to join the Port Washington Fire Department, was your husband already in the Department?

CA: Yes. My husband was a member since high school. Since about '91. And that's how I met my husband (laughs).

Q: I was just going to ask. Can you tell me about that?

CA: I had been dating somebody in Glenwood. And, like I said, I wanted to get more specific into EMS. I heard about Port Washington. I came over to Port Washington. I had a friend who was a member in Glenwood, who had moved to Port Washington, told me about it. And he said, "Come down. Come down to Fire Medics," you know, "meet so-and-so and so-and so." And then, so I did. And my husband was a squad member at Fire Medics. Like I said, he drove the ambulance for the company. And I still had a boyfriend. But he wouldn't leave me alone. He was following me all over the place, and he wouldn't leave me alone.

Q: Who was this?

CA: My husband, not (laughs). So my husband, Donald. And I don't know. Before you know it, we started doing stand-by's together, like we'll have an ambulance stand-by at, say, Hempstead Harbor for the Italian Feast, we'll have an am and he will show up on the fire truck. And what he'd do, you know and then I'd go to a parade, and marching in the parade, and there he was. He was just always around. And he'll tell you the same story. And so we started dating, and five years later well, we've been together for ten years now, since I joined the Fire Department. I met him right away. And his father's a member. His father's a twenty-seven, twenty-eight-year member of Protection, also. And that's how we met. He wouldn't leave me alone (laughs). So, five years. We've been married for five years now. We got married in 2000. So ...

Q: And what was the reaction among the other firefighters while the two of you were dating?

CA: (Laughs). Well, there are quite a few members of Fire Medics that are married to other Department members. So, it really wasn't strange. There just right off the top of my head, there's like three people that are still now, in my company, married to someone else in the Fire Department. So it wasn't strange. They had all done the same thing, too ...  
[END OF SIDE A; BEGIN SIDE B] ...

Q: ... now starting Side B.

CA: I'm sure my husband got a lot of men I don't know if "making fun of him" is the word but, you know, laughing at him. "Oh, you know ..." but it ended up great.

Q: What would you say makes a good fire medic?

CA: Well, dedication. Dedication to the cause of helping other people. And commitment to that cause. Somebody you know, you can know every medical term. I can tell you what drugs need to go into you if you're having a heart attack, what milligrams, how many, dosage, how many times, how many shocks on the defibrillator, how many joules of shocks all this other stuff. But if you don't know how to give psychological first aid, you're not a good fire medic. It's not only the patient that's hurting; it's the family around

them. And you have to learn that. My mother passed away February 20th, 2003 of a massive heart attack. She was never sick a day in her life. And when I responded to the house my sister called and told me, "Get home. Something's wrong with Mommy. She's not breathing" I drove so fast from Port Washington to Glenwood Landing. And when I pulled up in front of the house and I saw the gentleman doing PR on my mother and the police and the firemen and the EMTs all outside, I was in the other role. I was a screaming lunatic, saying "What's going on?" "What's happening?" What what, you know. And the first aid psychologically that those EMTs and those medics over there gave me is what sometimes is needed more than that patient. You need to know how to help those that are conscious and not, you know, watching what's going on. That's a very important part of being a fire medic.

Q: What did they do for you?

CA: Well, I used to be a member there, so the Chief that was there wasn't a member when I was there. And so I said to him, "You don't you may not know me. I used to be a member of your company. Please tell me what's going on." He said, "Christina, I really you know, your mother's critical right now. We're going to get her to the hospital as soon as we can. We have the best technicians available for her. She's getting advanced life support. And we're going to get her to the hospital as soon as we can." And then a young girl who again, I've been not a member there in a long time; I don't know I didn't know all the people gave me some water and, you know, "Let's get down to the hospital.



Take a slow ride in your car." Just just trying to calm me down. My mom my son was not even a year old, and he was supposed to sleep over at her house that night. Thank God he didn't. I don't know what made him not sleep there. But it had been the week of Presidents' Week. My mom was a teacher an assistant teacher. So she was helping me by babysitting my son. And so but it was the Presidents' Day storm of 2003. There were tons and tons of snow, and, you know, okay, we're going to take a slow ride and we're going to go to the hospital, and we're going to check out what's going on. And, you know, I was screaming. My mother was the healthiest woman around. And she'd just turned fifty. And massive heart attack and died. So, for somebody now to be on the other side of the fence, that's what I feel is most to be dedicated to the company, compassionate to the patients, and to know how to render psychological first aid to the family members, because that's what's very important. Because if they're not calm, they're not going to be any good assisting you in finding out information about the patient.

Q: So can you tell me about an experience you had where you had to give this kind of psychological first aid?

CA: I definitely can. There was a young boy who was injured in it's a very awkward thing. He was jumping over a fence, and he caught his testicle on the fence. Now, how embarrassing for a young boy. I don't even know if you want to for me to say this. But he was caught on the fence. And he was torn, and he was in a lot of pain. And he was a

young boy, a young teen, and how embarrassing for him and how embarrassing his mother and he was very -- And just the first aid to his mother, I just, you know, mom what I did was, I let the mother look at him and tell me what was going on rather than me look at him. And, you know, that was just very uncomfortable in that situation. But in another situation the woman who gave birth that one night he, no, I have a better situation. A young man in his early thirties was working for the telephone company or I want to say, I think, the telephone company up on Port Washington Boulevard across from the convenience store. And he had some sort of saw circular saw that he was cutting something. And it flung up and it hit him in the jugular and the carotid vein. And I remember starting two IVs going seventy, eighty miles an hour down Northern Boulevard trying to get fluids in this man and just talking to him. A lot of times the psychological first aid will be to the family; this time it was to him, because he was still conscious. And even though I was starting IVs and I was getting the drugs into him, and I was he was still conscious. He was losing tons of blood, but he wanted to talk. He wanted to tell me that he had children and that he needed to live for those children, and he had a wife and "Please help me" and and he wanted to talk. Ninety percent of the time, the psychological first aid are for the family and those around, but that time it was for him. He wanted to tell me all about his wife and how important it was for him to live. And I really didn't say anything. I just listened, and sometimes that's just as good. And, believe it or not, I got him to the hospital; my husband was driving again. Got him to the hospital, right in the O.R. [operating room], and he lived. So that was great. Never, ever, ever spoke to him again. Don't even know his name or anything. But I know he's got he

had two kids at home and a wife, and he wanted to live till the next day. So, I think that's so important. So important to be a member there.

Q: So in a case like that, have you had to fight back your own tears?

CA: Oh, my gosh, yes. You know, not at the moment. At the moment, your training and your adrenalin know that you have to you have to this man has to live, and right now it's up to you. Once you give it to the doctors, it's up to them. But right now you have to do everything you can to prepare yourself to get the most amount of fluids in him because he's losing blood and the most amount of pressure on his neck. I remember Dawn was on the ambulance with me. And she was leaning on him with all her might, just pushing on his neck. "Don't let go." I said. "I don't care what you have to do. I got the rest. You just push on his neck as hard as you can. Don't let ..." you know, "Don't let go." And that's all she did. But that was part of saving his life. And it's very hard. And when you walk out of that hospital, and you very often break down and cry. But you can't do it right then (laughs). It's very hard. It's very hard. But, the rewards of hearing why people like that live. And the further you move on in your career, you can you can hold back those tears sometimes, because you know there may be a happy ending. So ...

Q: But when you do come out and you break down and cry, how do you get taken care of?

CA: This department has many services for members. We have a chaplain. We have two chaplains now. And they're available twenty-four hours they tell you every time they're in any kind of meeting, "We're available twenty-four hours a day. You call us and we'll find help for you." The night that that young boy almost lost his hand in the explosion. I came back to the firehouse. I couldn't stop crying. And my husband said to me, "We're going to call Tom [Tobin]. So we called Tom. And these people are trained, to some extent our chaplains on how to deal with what we call post-traumatic stress, which is what a lot of us experience after these major incidences. And Tom if it's something he knows is beyond his control will contact Nassau County, where Nassau County has a team of individuals that are on call, that will come to your firehouse within the next hours to debrief you on what has just happened and work through your feelings. And there's many, many services out there available to us through Nassau County and through our own Department, to help us through those situations if we feel we can't work through them ourselves.

Q: So, did you come ...

CA: I did. And a gentleman named Ray Shelton, who is known in Nassau County for his debriefings and working with people during major incidents, like Avianca, Flight 800 all those things that have happened directly on Long Island. He came down and spoke to not only me, but other members that were involved in that call, about their feelings. And immediately after my mother died, the first call I went on after my mother died was a

cardiac arrest. Do you believe it? And I came back to the firehouse; I closed the door to the Captain. And I said, "I'm not ready to ride this ambulance yet. I'm not ready. It's too real for me." And they saw I was upset, and they contacted, and a woman talked to me over the phone right that moment. And she said, "I will be there. I will come right ..." I said, "No." You know, just someone to talk to and get your thoughts out and your feelings out and straightened out. And then, if you need them they'll come down. And if you need further professional these are people that are trained, but they're not professional psychologists. They will then refer you if you really are having trouble with it. Wonderful group of people.

Q: So the time when Tom came I guess that's Tom Tobin?

CA: Uh huh.

Q: Yes. What exactly did this debriefing consist of? What did they say?

CA: First off, they'll ask, "Somebody tell us exactly what happened tonight, from your view. What happened tonight?" And "Is there someone out there who had a different view on the night?" "What happened; what did you see?" You know, and so forth. And that'll start it. And "How did you feel about seeing a body that was burnt? How did that make you feel?" I, for a long time, couldn't get this the Bernard Street fire I couldn't get the sound of the falling snow, the sirens of "Everybody get out of the building," the smell of

the burning out of me. And later we discussed that. "What are you hearing?" Like "Do you hear ... " using your senses, "What did you smell?" "What did you ... " "What did you see?" "How did that make you feel?" And everybody just sort of kind of gets it out, and I think the part of knowing in these small groups and really these groups are only those people that were involved. There's nobody outsider there, except for that mentor. But everybody else was directly involved in the incident. So that there's no outside person saying, "Well, why did you ... " there's you weren't there. And I think the group dynamic and everybody knowing that there's other people that went through it, too, and they're just as hurt, I think that starts to help the healing. So, and that's how the debriefings usually go. Basically discussing about what happened that night and how did it affect you.

Q: So you just said, you know, nobody just said "Why didn't you ... " but do you sometimes say this among yourselves?

CA: Yes. I mean, there's plenty of times where you say, "Gee, you know ... " In that Thanksgiving Day accident, as an incident commander, as a Lieutenant, as an officer, as a fire ground operations officer, what your job is is to know who has to go first. Triage, it's called. Who is the most injured. If you have somebody who is dead, they're not the first to leave. You want to save lives. So, I know for myself, that young boy who lost part of his leg, I the cardiac arrest boy who died, he went first. Then, he went. But should I have sent the boy with the leg first? Should I have sent him first, because this

one's going to die anyway? He was in cardiac arrest. Would it have saved his leg? But you do, you second guess yourself. But you really you know, it's something very hard to talk about, because you don't want that boy to know, "Well, gee, if I sent you first, it might have saved your leg." You might've, should've, could've, would've. Who knows? That boy was in cardiac arrest. I wanted him at the hospital as soon as I could have gotten him there, and he went to St. Francis. Now, you're dealing with a multiple casualty incident, so you can't use the same hospital. You can't send St. Francis five victims of an accident. You have to use North Shore; you have to use Winthrop; you have to use Glen Cove. You have to spread them out so that their trauma teams can pay special attention to that one patient. "Oh, I sent that one to Winthrop; should I have sent that one to North Shore, because that one was closer, and maybe it would have you second-guess, but you can't you do the best you can with the training you have and hope that God and faith get you through the rest. That's how I look at it. What else are you going to do?

Q: Does your faith help you?

CA: I believe that faith has gotten me through a lot in my life. My parents taught me about my religion. I'm Catholic. I go to church, pre-children, much more often (laughs). Infancy, much more often. Toddler years, church doesn't work for us. But when I go to bed at night, my son and I, we say our prayers, and I thank God for being here today and finishing up the day and being alive. And I think that my faith in knowing that in my

mind there is another place and that we'll all meet there again, gets me through those bad times and, you know it's difficult, because you can't bring religion out there, because you don't know what those other people are. But, you've just got to use what you believe in your faith and try to tell them, just say your prayers and hopefully everything will work out. I think it's a big it's a big part of my life all around. So, to me, yes, it is.

Q: Do you ever do anything for good luck? You know, have any kind of good luck charm?

CA: I'm not I am not superstitious. My husband is superstitious. I'm not. My husband keeps a mass card of his cousin John, John Gennusa, in his helmet. John passed away very young. He was a member of the Department also. And he believes that, on top of his head, that mass card follows him around and keeps him safe. A lot of people have things like that. I'm not like that. I sort of respond to each call with a fresh, new look. I'm really not that superstitious. Some people are. "I only step on the ambulance with my left foot and jump ..." you know. No, I'm not like that; not me.

Q: How has being a fire medic impacted your family life since you have children?

CA: I'll tell you, I'll tell you, being an EMT CC, and going out there, starting IVs and intubating people, and defibrillating people, and dealing with all this stuff, it was frightening coming home and, after doing that, and changing diapers, and what did you get on you? And even though you use all the universal precautions there are gloves and



masks and glasses and, you know, it's scary. It's scary to come home and say, "Gee, I hope I'm not jeopardizing my children." That part's scary. The family life everybody calls me when there's an accident (laughs). If somebody has a splinter in their toe, or if my cousin Bobby [Gennusa] recently my husband's cousin Bobby slammed a hammer on his nail, cracked his nail and was bleeding, and, you know, "Christina, come help." That's kind of been my family life that way. My father has muscular dystrophy and has used the ambulance several times. As good as I am with the patients out there, when it's your own family, it's not that easy (laughs). So, you know, pretty much everybody calls me when there's an accident, and that's kind of comforting that I can help comfort people. But it's it's hard to work on people that are close to you. So ...

Q: Does it become a burden? I mean ...

CA: No. No, it's not a burden ...

Q: ... to take care of ...

CA: It's it's, you know, it's nice. It's nice that people entrust you with these things. My aunt and uncle my husband's aunt and uncle -- live next door to us, and in the middle of the night, she was ill, and they called me and I came over and took a blood pressure and checked her out. And, you know, it's very rewarding. It really doesn't take away from my immediate family at all. My son bumps into the table, and I'm screaming if he

bumped his eye. It's I'm not very good at my own children, my own immediate family (laughs). My father, when he, you know, no, not that good. I'm better with the strangers out in the street (laughs). But it hasn't and as far as my marriage, I think that us being in the Fire Department together is one of the greatest things, because we are a great team. He does not like the sight of blood. He says to anyone, "I'm the driver. Just I drive. I get my wife there. She her and the patient in the back, I drive there." And what a great way to bond with your husband. Before my second son was born, my mother-in-law would babysit for my oldest son, and we would spend like a Tuesday night, we'd spend a couple of hours down there. And it would allow us to have time quiet time. We'd talk. Call it a date not really. But it was our time. And it works out, I think wonderfully. A lot of times, it's difficult. Like this Thursday night, we both have an administrative meeting to attend, and then we have to find a babysitter for both of our kids. But it's wonderful. It's wonderful to be both together and a part, a team in this organization.

Q: And talking about bonding: What about bonding with other people in the Department?

CA: These people are my family. They are my family. I went to a wedding yesterday, from I told you, mentioned earlier Jane, who was like my mentor when I joined. I sat at the head table at her son's wedding yesterday, because she is a mother to me and I am a daughter to her. These people attended my son's christening, are a part of my, of my I cried when Jane danced with her son yesterday, as if she was my own family. They are when you read and you see on TV and things about New York City Fire Department, or

any kind of Fire Department, the brotherhood, the sisterhood that they experience, it is absolutely true. We will do anything for each other, because because I don't know why. It's just something. We live together in that firehouse. We sleep overnight together. We experience the horrors of life together. We experience the joys of life together. And just as you do in a family. And we are I can't tell you enough, but those people that I work with there are just as important to me as my own immediate family. I mean, my husband can say to a bunch of the guys we moved "I've got to get this refrigerator downstairs," everybody fifteen people are down there, and in five minutes, he got that refrigerator downstairs, and it's just it's just amazing, the bonding. And the amount of we have a member now whose daughter's very ill with cancer, and the whole department is just getting together and, over the next several weeks, we're going to try to, on our own, you know, just everybody's going to try to donate and give as much as they can or have some sort of fund raiser for her. I mean, just anything you want, you get it in a moment's notice from your members. It's wonderful. I can talk about it for hours. (laughs).

Q: How does being a fire medic integrate with your paying job?

CA: Absolutely nothing, really. I work in banking. I've worked there for almost ten years also. Eight or nine years now. I work in the operations center of a bank. I do all the behind-the-scenes of banking. I do telephone banking, on-line banking, signature verifications, statement rendering. I do all the behind-the-scenes stuff that you that most people don't see, that you see at a branch. You see a teller we do all the processing on

all the work. Really, they're two separate lives. They really are. Other than being, you know, well known that I am an EMT in the building if anything should go wrong, sometimes, you know, a lot of the people there know my qualifications. If a customer or something should happen, I do carry a small bag in my car, a minimal amount of equipment to help. And that's only happened a few times. But other than that, they really are just two separate things. I did, for a short time, do some teaching for the Nassau County EMS Academy. Did some teaching on skills of an EMT at night. But then again, when the children came, it became too difficult to be leaving the family at night. But really, my paying, regular job at the bank – two different things.

Q: Is that here in Port Washington?

CA: The bank? No, it's in Glen Head. Yeah, Glen Head. And the teaching was in Nassau County Academy in Plainview, and the classes are held at night from like eight to eleven, and I just couldn't do it. So, that stopped after about a year.

Q: What are you proudest of in your career with the Department?

CA: What am I proudest? My proudest moments were receiving that unit citation for the Kirkwood fire, and seeing I'll say it once, I'll say it a million times Geoff Cole saving my husband's life. My wedding day, where I was captain and my husband was Lieutenant. I outranked my husband on my wedding day. And ...

Q: Did you wear your uniform?

CA: No, but I have a picture of my husband and I walking out of the church and all our friends in uniform in a line down the other side. And not all our friends, some of our friends. And our friends all brought some trucks there. And how proud I was to have such an extended family and such a wonderful organization to be a part of that day and how they all came to support us. Being Captain was very definitely a very proud year of mine. Very fulfilling. And, like I said, those multiple calls, those times where, you know, you see the people afterwards and you're happy to see that everything turned out okay. Yeah.

Q: Okay. Is there anything that we have not talked about that you feel is important?

CA: No. I just I'm very proud proud to be a member. Very proud of not only the accomplishments that *I've* made, that many of these members have made. The sacrifices that people make. Time away from their home, from their family. To volunteer for their fellow community members. And basically, there's a bumper sticker that the Fire Department handed out one time, and it just said, "What would you do if we didn't volunteer?" And I'd just like people to think of that and, you know, I guess just very proud of what all these men and women do. And, you know, dinner's hot and on the table, but they have to leave. And a lot of people don't sit home at night thinking they're nice and warm in their bed, and it's freezing cold and we're out there trying to save

somebody. And I just would want the community to just sit back and think if we didn't volunteer, what would you do? And that's really it.

Q: Well, just going back a little. What about some of the fun times? Are there particular jokes that or pranks ... [??] ...

CA: Oh, we have big pranksters. We have big pranksters. My husband's one of the biggest pranksters.

Q: Can you remember anything specific?

CA: I'm trying to think of some specific situations. Oh, gosh, there's so many, I can't even imagine. But, you know, we have picnics in the summer, and we're very family oriented. The family comes, and, you know, the fun times, having a barbecue, and running around. Softball games. We used to have inter-company softball games, and the rivalry of who's going to beat who. And just a lot of fun. Pranks? I really can't think of there's so many little ones. Just a lot of fun, you know. A lot of joking around and my husband, who's bald, you know, they have pictures of you know, they'll make photocopies of pictures around the building and draw wigs on them and, you know, just funny things. Just funny things, fun things. And Christmas party, we'll have a children's Christmas party, and my husband and a bunch of his friends will dress up as characters. And just and go visit the

widows, members that died, and see their families, and the sick. And they'll go to the nursing home and to the hospitals. And I used to tag along with them, help them out, hand out candy canes. And -- just fun. A lot of fun. There's a lot of fun in this, too. Christmas time especially, when you see oh, I'll tell you a funny time. I was the elf at Christmas. They were all dressed up in their costumes to go to the nursing home, and I was in my turnout gear, and I was the little elf handing out candy canes. And we had just left a widow's home, and we were driving down Main Street and a fire came over, and it was a working house fire. And Santa, Scott Wood, who was on top of the truck waving to all the children suddenly had to rip off his Santa costume because we had to get in gear to go to the fire. And at the light, all the children were looking at Santa, because he now is ripping off his costume, and there goes Elmo's hat, and there goes Rudolf the Red Nosed Reindeer, and the costumes are flying off, and the men are everybody's getting dressed because they're trying to get to a fire now. And the lights and sirens are suddenly like blaring, and the kids were just [inaudible]. from one moment to the next. That was one of the funniest things. It really wasn't a prank, but it was so funny to see the children's faces and the community's faces, like why is everybody suddenly ripping off all their clothes, you know. Because we have our pager. We know what's going on, but they they just hear a whistle. They don't know what's going on the regular community members and, oh, how funny it was. Santa, why are you ripping like mad with this beard, because it's flying in the wind? And, oh, it was so funny. Those are the fun times. I have good memories.

Q: What do you think the value of this project is, the oral history?

CA: I know, for myself, I like to study my own family ancestry. And I've gotten involved in that in the last couple of years. And I think it's important for the future, to know about what happened in the past. Because I think a lot of life's lessons are learned from those that have started things. Began the you know, those members that are the twenty-five year members of Fire Medics, they're the ones that know, you know, everything. How they started this whole I mean, basically it's a company. It's a business. It needs to be run. And, you know, here's just a bunch of regular old members in the community that just started this, and, you know, I think a lot of by learning from people that have had years in, I think that can only be a benefit to those in the future for problem solving on whatever might happen. And starting your own things, you know. Change is inevitable. You know, look, you would have never seen a woman Captain in the Fire Department in your you'd never think of it. My father would have never thought of that as, you know. And then when he saw me you know, when he saw me rise to Captain my mother, too they were so proud. And I bought a sweatshirt for my father that says "Ex-Captain's Dad." And he wears it all the time. And in the future, who knows what's going to happen? And hopefully from me and the others that contribute to this project can give a good history of what we're all about and where we came from, so those in the future can read it and find out.

Q: Well, people are going to learn a lot through this interview. You were wonderful.



CA: Oh, thank you.

Q: Thank you so much.