

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

Transcript Of Oral History Interview With

Thomas Cychan  
Flower Hill Hose 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: ... November 4th, 2004. This is an interview with Thomas Cychan. My name is Sally Olds. The interview is taking place at the Port Washington Public Library. Can you please say your name.

Thomas Cychan: Thomas Cychan.

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

TC: Flower Hill Hose.

Q: How old were you when you joined the Department?

TC: Thirty-one.

Q: And how long have you been a member?

TC: Let's see, thirty-one. '91, so it would be thirteen years.

Q: You have a nickname in the Department?

TC: Oh, they call me Connie.

Q: Okay. And what made you decide to become a firefighter?

TC: My father was in Flower Hill Hose Company.

Q: And ...

TC: And my two brothers were in it, and one's still in it.

Q: Older brothers?

TC: No, younger. I came late.

Q: Well, what did your father and your brothers tell you about being firefighters?

TC: Well, I just grew up in the firehouse. Like when I was a little kid, we used to go to the firehouse with my father on Sunday and hang around, you know, play on the trucks, and just being kids, you know. So it was always in my blood, I'd say.

Q: Do you have any childhood memories of fires that your family went to or that were in your neighborhood?

TC: Not really fires, but, you know, I'd just go to the firehouse when they had a fire call, if they had a fire, they'd go out, and all the kids would--in those times, they'd have--they'd throw their shoes off the back of the truck, and we'd all put all the shoes together and then, you know, put them in pairs, and wait for them to come back.

Q: You mean when you were kids at the firehouse, yeah (laughs).

TC: Yeah, we'd put all the shoes together, because they'd just throw them into the truck, and as the truck was leaving, they'd take them off so they could put their boots on.

Q: They don't do that anymore?

TC: No, we get dressed before, because we have the pants. Before, they just had long boots--the fire boots--and the coat. Now, we have the pants with the coat. So we get dressed before. They used to go on the back of the truck--ride on the back of the truck, so they were putting their boots on while they were on the back of the truck as it was going. And we drive inside the cabs now. It's a little safer.

Q: Were you in the Fire Department when they made those changes, in terms of ...

TC: Oh, yes.

Q: ...the riding inside?

TC: That was like right after I got in. It was, I guess, around '94 or so. '93, '94--somewhere around there--they changed to bumper pants.

Q: And so how did you feel about those safety changes?

TC: Oh, I liked them. The changes are much better. Because it was--you could still ride on the back of the trucks then, but had to--you had to have your gear on. So, and then that gear is always more protective. With the pants, you don't feel anything. You know, it still gets hot, but it doesn't--you feel safer.

Q: Well, how about the older members in the Department, you know, who were always used to doing it a certain way? Did any of them ...

TC: I think it went over ...

Q: ... you know, have any resistance?

TC: I think it went very smooth for all of them, you know, because everybody got a set of gear, and it was brought in slowly, but, you know, the Department bought everybody gear, so, you know, it was just growing up in the times. It was much safer and benefited

everybody.

Q: So what was your father's name?

TC: Connie.

Q: Connie?

TC: Yeah.

Q: That was his real name?

TC: Constanty was his real name. They called him Connie. And he was a member of Flower Hill. And then, my brother Stevin joined next. He's two years younger than me, or three years younger than me. And my brother Denis is still in Flower Hill with me. Stevin moved a little east on the Island, and Denis lives here in Port Washington. Stevin also is a New York City firefighter, so he still is a fireman, too, but he just couldn't make the calls here. So, at one time, we were all together, in ninety--'91, '92, and, I think '93. Stevin left in '93. But we were all three in the same firehouse.

Q: As far as you know, was that the only time that you had three brothers in the same firehouse?

TC: I think there could have been more, but I'm not sure. Three brothers is a lot (laughs). Most people don't have three brothers, so (laughs). But, yeah, it was--like now I'm the Captain of Flower Hill; my brother's the President of Flower Hill. So we're the two top guys.

Q: And is that unusual ...

TC: I think that's very unusual.

Q: ... to have two brothers, both holding office.

TC: Right. Holding office, but the two top offices. He's President, and I'm the Captain, so that is--I don't think that has happened before, in Flower Hill anyway. I'm not sure--I'm pretty sure. People talk about it, that was, you know, that's a different thing.

Q: Now, how do you work together as you as a Captain and your brother as the President? What kinds of interactions do you have?

TC: Oh, it's so much easier, because we talk to each other all the time, and it's usually about firehouse stuff. You know, as firemen, so we're always getting together, and it's just--it's real easy. It's like, you know, he's the head of the Board of Directors, and I'm a head of

the, well, regular line officers, so what I need for my line officers, or for the men or the trucks and equipment, I can go to him for, you know. And it just works, so much more communication, because we're always around each other. So that does work, yeah.

Q: So, say if you want something--you want a new piece of equipment ...

TC: Right.

Q: ... well, then you'll call him up and ...

TC: Yeah, I call him up and we talk it over. And then we go--then we discuss it with the Board, and either they approve it or they don't. (Laughs). Most of the time, they approve it, because it's usually something we need. So, it's a little bit easier, you know.

Q: Are there any problems with being brothers?

TC: (Laughs). No, being brothers, it's pretty easy. I'm the big brother (laughs), so it makes it easier. But it is, it's different.

Q: And how do the other people in the company feel?

TC: They think it's great, because there is a lot of communication, and, you know, everything

gets done. We help each other out. If he needs something done I can do for him, you know.

Q: Like what kinds of things would he need done?

TC: You know, like people call him up, or, you know, explanations, or something goes on at headquarters and they need something, I can get it for them if he goes out of town. I know where his stuff is.

Q: Wait, I missed something. You said if people call him up or ...

TC: Well, you know, if the headquarters calls and they need some information about Flower Hill ...

Q: What information?

TC: ... you know, I can usually get it, because I can usually get in touch with him faster. You know, like if he's on vacation, I can still get in touch with him, you know, stuff like that, you know. So, very easy. And vice versa, you know.

Q: And what did your father do in the Department?

TC: He was a--when he died, he was a steward.

Q: What does a steward do?

TC: The steward takes care of the entertainment. Meals--if you have meals, like if you have a stand-by or something. Makes sure that monthly meetings, takes care of the food for it. It's like the cook of the firehouse and get-togethers for annual parties. Like the officers party--you know, every year we have an installation dinner, he'll take care of that. And all the--and then all the four stewards get together for different parties, like Christmas parties, or whatever. Mostly entertainment stuff.

Q: And he's deceased now, isn't he?

TC: Yeah.

Q: Was he a cook himself?

TC: No, he was a carpenter.

Q: Uh huh (laughs).

TC: A carpenter who liked to cook.

Q: Oh, but he did do the cooking, though, himself.

TC: Everybody chips--everybody chips in, usually. The firehouse has a lot of good cooks, and everybody likes to lend a hand. Like clam bakes and stuff like that. Activities we have. Everybody likes to get involved.

Q: Did he pass down any favorite recipes to you?

TC: Oh, yeah, a few, you know.

Q: For what?

TC: Oh, like the kielbasi and sour kraut recipe, and (laughs) stuff like just, you know, general. And I've picked up a lot from some other guys from the firehouse, and we used to share.

Q: So, the kielbasi, where did he learn to make this?

TC: He was from Poland. So he came over from Poland. So he asked his mom (laughs), I don't know.

Q: How did he happen to end up in Port Washington? Do you know?

TC: A friend of his, when he first came over, they were living in a--I forget now--in the City somewhere, in Queens somewhere. And he was moving to Port Washington, and there were some houses and work. So, they got a job together, they moved to like a boarding house or something, up in The Terrace. And then, I guess he just moved on from there.

Q: Do you remember who was the Captain of Flower Hill when you first joined?

TC: Don Wilson.

Q: And the Chief of the Department?

TC: I'd have to say John Salerno.

Q: Donny?

TC: John, John Salerno.

Q: John Salerno. What do you remember about your first days in the Department.

TC: I knew a lot of people, so it wasn't, you know, like coming from nowhere. I'd just moved back to Port Washington. I lived in Virginia for a year or two. And I moved back.

Then, I got married, and I didn't go to the firehouse. That's why I came--I was like thirty-one when I came in, so I was a little late bloomer. But I still knew a lot of the people that were in the firehouse from many of the fathers were in the firehouse when we were kids together, and so I knew a lot of people. So it was not so bad. Then, everybody's friendly. Everybody--you just--it's just a good place to be.

Q: Did you have to wait a long time when you were admitted?

TC: Only about three, maybe four months. To get all the paperwork and physicals, and all that. And you just go on from that, you know. Just, I was in the Navy before, so it was kind of like a sub-military thing. You've just to know that when you start off, you're the low guy, and you've got to do what you're told. That's all (laughs) ...pretty easy.

Q: Where did you serve in the Navy?

TC: I was in California. I was on the U.S. Shasta. It's an ammunition ship out of Concord, California. And then, I switched over to an aircraft carrier, the Coral Sea. I stayed on that for two years. And that was out of San Francisco. From Concord, they transferred, they're just around the corner from each other.

Q: And how do you think your Navy service affected your work as a firefighter?

TC: I was a firefighter in the Navy.

Q: Oh, you were?

TC: Yeah, I was--that was my second duty. I was a boiler technician. And they have extensive fire--shipboard firefighting in the Navy training. Then, I went to a helo-crash course, and then I was on the helo-crash team.

Q: The ...

TC: Helicopter crash team.

Q: Oh (laughs), okay.

TC: In the Navy, they call it helo (laughs).

Q: And so what did you do with that?

TC: Oh, we just, well, mostly just waited for it to crash (laughs), but ...

Q: Did you ever have to use what you learned?

TC: ... I never had to rescue anybody. Just one crash, and that one didn't do anything. It was a jet fighter from another ship crashed right next to our ship, and we just launched the helicopters up and picked up--there were no survivors, so, just picked up the wreckage and stuff.

Q: Yeah.

TC: But I used to have to wear the big silver suit--the whole—hood, silver--everything silver in it. They used to wear that. I was supposed to be the pilot rescue; that was my job for the helo-crash team. Pilot rescue.

Q: So what was the silver suit made out of?

TC: It's a fire-retardant or resistant suit. It's silver in color. It's got a big silver hood that goes over your head, goes down till about your elbows. The hood goes all the way down there. So, it was so you can go in a burning helicopter and pull out the pilot.

Q: So, was that the first time you were in an emergency where some--where people were injured or died?

TC: Yeah. Yeah, that would be the first time. That was the only time any accident happened. I mean, an engine blew up one time, but that was put out real fast, and no--no big deal.

But when I was--I was a boiler tech, the whole boiler blew up, and it caused a big fire, and we put that out.

Q: Was anyone injured in that?

TC: Well, I hurt my back, but there were no majors, no nothing, really. It was pretty intense, though. The whole boiler blew up and the boilers are two stories high. So it was like a big explosion and a lot of gas and a lot of fuel. I wouldn't say gas, but fuel. That was burning, and we put it out. Just specifically the firefighters. You know, on a ship, everybody's a firefighter. There is no, "Call the fire department." There's a fast team, it's called, that comes, but everybody else is a firefighter also, so everybody's trained in the Navy. There's no calling the local fire department out there.

Q: So then, when you went into the Fire Department, you'd already ...

TC: I'd already experienced fire and hose handling, and stuff like that, yeah. It's a lot different here than on a ship. It's a lot different, because you have two hose teams. One team's just to cool off the firefighters; the other team is to put out the fire.

Q: That's in the Navy or ...

TC: In the Navy. Here, it's just a one hose team, with three guys, obviously, or four people on

it. And then there's a back-up hose team that comes in and either puts out another part of the fire, or backs you up. So, it's similar in ways, but in the ship, it's super hot. Every fire is super hot, because it's self-contained into that one area. Everything's shut down except for that one compartment that's on fire. So it gets really hot. And here, you've got windows and roofs you can cut, so it cools off a little faster.

Q: Do you remember the first fire that you fought here in Port Washington?

TC: The (laughs)--there was a couple--the first one. I remember one year we had like eight or nine fires where I think I had first nozzle, the nozzle. I had about seven of them, so that was an exciting year.

Q: So what does the first nozzle do?

TC: The nozzle, he puts the fire out. He's the first one there. He controls the water, on the hose team. You're the first one in the room for a fire, and you get down and you just put it out (laughs). You're the one who puts the fire out.

Q: Do you handle the hose all by yourself, or do have other people.

TC: No, you have back up guys. Yeah, you have an officer--now, the hose team would be an officer, with the nozzle guy, the back-up man, and then the third back-up man. So there's

four of us. The officer stays on the side, and everybody else holds the hose. And we go in as a team. Most of the times, the ... [fire] ... gives the orders to the nozzle man, and he's--and you put it out.

Q: What's the hardest thing about being the first nozzle?

TC: Well, sometimes, finding the fire.

Q: Fighting the fire?

TC: Finding it.

Q: Oh, finding it.

TC: Sometimes fires are very tricky. Sometimes they're not burning, because sometimes, with the windows closed, then there's no oxygen down there, and plus a lot of smoke and heat, you can't actually see where the fire is coming from, until you get oxygen in there. And then some--then it will flare back up again. Or into the closet or it's, you know, hiding somewhere and you really can't see, but you know there's a fire because all the smoke and you got all that heat. So, I guess the basement's probably the worst--is the hardest fire, basement fires. Because, usually there's only a limited way in without a lot of ventilation. So everything's like a chimney. So when you're coming down the

basement stairs, all of the heat and smoke is coming right up like a chimney. So you're like fighting going down the chimney to fight the fire at the bottom. That's usually about the hardest one.

Q: Did you ever have to make a rescue from one of these fires?

TC: Not me personally, no. I had a--Kirkwood, 11 Kirkwood Road fire, they rescued her. I was on the first engine. And I was the Engineer--this is when I was Third Assistant Engineer. I hooked up the hydrant and did outside work before I went into the fire, and they--Walter Clark went in the basement. He was inside before we pulled up. He was the Fire Marshal then. And he was in the basement trying to rescue the guy, and they went in with the line through the front door, and they found out he was at the basement window, and one of the other firefighters--Joe Sicuranza--he jumped in the window, and the two Pedersen brothers--Roy and Glen--they were on the outside of the window and pulled him up, and I think Walter Martinek was there, too. Pulled him out of the window. And he lived for a couple of days more, but he died after that, like a week after. That fire was bad. About eleven firefighters went to the hospital that day, from smoke inhalation to exhaustion. From back injuries. I even went to the hospital that day.

Q: What was your injury?

TC: Smoke inhalation. Because I went in afterwards. That was the strangest fire I went to. I

had to make a secondary search of the back rooms, and there was a bedroom with a bed, and all the blankets were on the bed. And I--I thought there was a body there. It looked--like I said, between the darkness and the situation, so I was saying to myself, "Well, I hope it's not a body" (laughs), and I ripped the sheets off, but the blanket, there was just blankets and pillows there. So I flipped over the mattress and checked under the bed. Checked the closet. It was all secure. When I came out of the bedroom and started to make my way to the door, back out of the house, something hit me in the head on my right side and just knocked me off my feet. I cut my--I don't know if my helmet came down and hit me and cut my cheek, but I almost fell down the basement stairs. And there was somebody--it was an angel. For me (laughs), it was an angel, because I almost fell right into the--because there was no wall there. That was the stair case going down, which there was no stair case, only fire down there. And another firefighter. I remember seeing someone grab my arm and pull me back up. And when I caught my balance, he was gone. He was doing something else. And I got out, and I said (laughs), "Wow. I'd like to thank the guy, but I have no idea who it was. But that was like a miracle. So--that was the weirdest fire.

Q: Did you ever find out what hit you in the head?

TC: It was a two-by-four or something from the doorway, a piece of wood. I know it was wood. I remember seeing wood come down and just--I went to duck and got off balance when it hit me, and that's when I almost fell. Someone else grabbed me. So that was an

experience.

Q: Now, you said you had hurt your back when you were in the Navy. Did ...

TC: Oh, that was just a minor back--I got blown up on the second explosion. I ran to get--to shut off the fuel that was still pouring into the boiler that just blew up. And they had this ring you pull, this cable that would automatically shut the fuel off to the whole system. So, I went to pull that, and as I went up there, I was on a small catwalk about five feet off the ground, and that's when the second explosion came in that blew me back. And I went back down on the bench. I got up, did it again, and this time I got the ring. So it was like that was--it was just sore for a while, no permanent damage or anything.

Q: And it doesn't bother you now?

TC: No, just old age bothers me now (laughs).

Q: And you talked about being involved with ice storms? Where was that?

TC: That was in Watertown, New York. Up--we stay at a place called Pennsylvania--or Philadelphia, New York--Philadelphia, New York, that's what it was. Right on the Canada border. The whole county had an emergency. I guess it was like a stand-by emergency--state of emergency. And they asked volunteers to go up for a couple of days,

because they had no electricity, no power lines. They had--working on generators, nobody had heat. It had to be below zero every day. A lot of snow. They had an ice storm that took out every power line, every telephone pole. And a lot of trees were down. So, I think we stayed there like four days, we went up there. And there was a group of us from the Department went up in a convoy, with all the other Nassau County departments.

Q: How many went up from Port Washington?

TC: Let me see. If I remember correctly, it must have been about fourteen or so. And we took up a couple of Suburbans--light trucks. And originally, we thought we were just going there to pump basements and do what we could to help out. But we got stationed down at another firehouse, and it was--it was different. I'll tell you, not like here. We had the generator that ran, and we'd do their fire duties for them, so--because they were doing 24/7 for a long time, and they weren't getting any breaks. And so, when they called a state of emergency, we relieved another Department that was--relieved them, too, so a lot of those guys were in the Army, because the Army base is right there--one of the Army bases up there. Anyway, they were right next to the Army base. And a lot of their volunteers were from the Army. And now the guys had to go back to the Army to do work with the Army, I guess, whatever. They were helping out too, the Army was doing stuff. So, we were up there. We had one big barn fire that we went to. And it must have had three foot of snow, and it's firefighting that we don't--like rural firefighting where

they put a pond, and they've got a pond where they have to draft water out of the creek bed or another pond, and it's like a swimming pool. And they dump this water in with tanker trucks into the swimming pool, and then the engine sucks it out of there and pumps it through the hoses, because there's no hydrants there. So (laughs), it's a lot different. And we must have been about a mile away from--it seemed like a mile (laughs), and because the snow is about four foot deep. And I remember, it was cold; it was windy. And this old barn was just burning up. And we saved the barn. There were some other fire departments there. But it was a lot of work, and I remember I couldn't get my--I had about an inch or so of ice on my whole jacket. My tank--my air tank was on; I couldn't get that off, because it was frozen. I think it was ice. I had icicles on my helmet. It was (laughs)--it was just cold and wet, but, we had fun.

Q: How long were you there?

TC: Four days.

Q: And do you remember what year it was?

TC: '98. I think '98. Yeah, '98. Winter of '98. And then we went back there; they had a-- they had like a reunion, or they had a thank you party, whatever, for the companies. They invited everybody back. A couple of us went back up there for a weekend, and they had a big tent. They had a big barbecue, and it was nice. And it was summertime, so it

was nice to have--and we made some friends up there, too. We had a good time.

Q: Now, how did that work out with your job, that you were able to take four days off?

TC: I just asked for it, and they agreed to it. I had the time on the books; I used my vacation time.

Q: What kind of work were you doing?

TC: I was working for DHL. I'm a building mechanic--facility maintenance mechanic. So they allowed me to go. I put in for vacation time, and they said go ahead.

Q: Do you still work for them?

TC: Yeah. For a couple of months anyway. I'm planning on moving to Florida in the beginning of next year. So, I'm going to retire from the Fire Department.

Q: In general, how does it work out integrating your job with your volunteer firefighting?

TC: In general, it works out easy, because there's always some people here. I know people working; there's a lot of guys that do shift work, like cops and firemen and so if they work nights, then they can go to fires during the day, and when they're working at night,

we go to fires in the night. So it all makes--I'm here in town a lot. I make a lot of fires, you know.

Q: Is your job based here in town?

TC: No, I'm in Inwood now. I was in Long Island City, but now I'm in Inwood. So it's twenty-two miles away, I think, something like that. So it's a ride. I get--well, I leave early in the morning. I start early at six, so that way I get--I am home early, too, so eight hours. Six to eight, so it's--you know, that's why I'm in town earlier. Usually in town about two-thirty, three o'clock. So I make some afternoon fires. But, like, sometimes on a fire that's--I'm running over, like I was supposed to be at work, but we've got this fire working-- they all know I'm a fireman, and I just make a phone call, tell them where I-- usually, they know, if I don't show up, they usually know--and I didn't call yet--that something was going on and it's usually something with the Fire Department. And they allow for that, you know. So it works out fine. I have no problems with it.

Q: What are the biggest challenges of being Captain?

TC: Well, first, you've got to work your way up there. A lot of schools. You've got to get a lot of training. You've got to go through all your other offices first. And, as Captain, you have a very busy schedule, between meetings--make sure--I go to the firehouse every single day, just to do paperwork. Everything's dependent on you for that company, so

you've got to make sure everybody's got the training, the training records are up, the attendance records are up. And if somebody's not in service, or sick, you know, make sure everything's in good operating condition. Plus, you're on the Board of Directors, so you've got to know the financial parts of it. It's time-consuming, I should say. So, I usually go there--I go there at least once a day, just to--because if I don't go once a day or I miss a day or two, then all that stuff is piled up, and then I've got to, you know, get letters out. Whatever comes up. So, but you have your Lieutenants that help you out, and it works out all right.

Q: About how much time do you spend there in the firehouse every day?

TC: About an hour, I mean, give or take. Sometimes it's less, more. But, you know, an hour checking out stuff, just being there making sure things are up for the next week or for training. You know, getting ready for the next training, because we train every Thursday, we train. So, you know, I keep that up. Got to make sure the guys that went to the surgeon to make sure they're back in service and all the medical records are up, because any time you get hurt or go to the hospital or anything, you've got to out of service, and then the surgeon's got to put you back in service. So, you've got to see him, even if you go to your own doctor, you've got to see him to let him back into the Fire Department. Make sure you're fit for that duty.

Q: The surgeon works only with the Port Washington Fire Department?

TC: I don't know how many fire departments he does. It's Dr. Levin.

Q: And where is he? Here in town?

TC: No, he's in--I guess that would be Great Neck. Great Neck, Manhasset, right over there by the sixth precinct ... [??] ...

Q: But he's the official ...

TC: He's the Port Washington Fire Department surgeon, yeah.

Q: Do you have any issues about maintaining morale among the firefighters?

TC: Morale's always--it's always hard to get guys to go. Morale sometimes is bad; sometimes it's good.

Q: Hard to get guys to go? You mean, to go to the fires?

TC: The fires--a lot of time, you know. It takes a lot of time out of people's lives. You know, sometimes you don't see your kids, whatever. If you have kids, it's harder. Just to, you know, want to come and to help out. And sometimes, you know, you could either say,

"Well, this is my only time off, and now I've got to go to the firehouse." Just to bring that--break that up, you know, and brings guys too. Most of the guys are good, you know. There's some, you've just got to talk to them. Ask them what the problem is, and, you know, maybe you can help them out. It's like a brotherhood, so, you know, if you have something going on in your life that, you know, you need a little hand with, you know, let us know ...

Q: Like what kinds of things could you help somebody out with?

TC: With any kind of problem. Any, you know ...

Q: Can you think of anything in particular, you know, without mentioning names?

TC: Oh, well, like if they have a drinking problem, or financial problems, or they're getting divorced, or, you know, all that, your just everyday life stuff, you know. Sometimes you just need somebody to talk to, and so we always--my door's always open at the Captain's office, to come in. And if I see somebody down in the dumps or something, and some of the older members that are, you know, got thirty, forty years, and they're up in age, you know. You call them up, you tell them, "Do you want to do something?" you know, or come to the firehouse, you know, if they can't drive anymore, whatever, you know. Things like that, just to keep their--their morale up, too. So, and if they don't drive, going shopping, you know.

Q: Do you have a family, yourself, with kids?

TC: No, I just have my wife--just me and my wife.

Q: But you have to be away from your wife for a while, too.

TC: Yeah.

Q: How does--how does she feel with that?

TC: Well, when we met, I was in the firehouse already, so that's kind of like the deal (laughs).

Q: So, she knew.

TC: She knew what she was getting into.

Q: You also mentioned that you had worked in wildfires out East.

TC: Yeah, when--it was like '94, when the end of Long Island was burning up those--they had those big fires out there in the--what was the name of those lands, wetlands, whatever it is there, south of Sunrise Highway there. But all those forest fires were there. We went

out and participated and helped put those out.

Q: Was that the Pine Barrens?

TC: The Pine Barrens, right. That's what I was thinking of. Yeah, we went there for like almost three and a half, I'd say, we were out there for. That was another different kind of firefighting.

Q: And what was that like?

TC: That's so unpredictable. The fire doesn't--doesn't have any walls to hold it together (laughs), so it spreads everywhere. One minute you think that this, and the wind changes and then it's going the other way, you know, and--and it's loud and it's hot. And that whole Long Island pulled together there--I mean, from civilians to firefighters to federal government, whatever. I thought that was--that was just--when you see everything go together that way, it was--it was impressive.

Q: And how do the different companies work together?

TC: Oh, we work side by side. So, especially now. It used to be more competitive. Because, you know, if you were on the truck company, which is Atlantic, or the other engine, you'd compete. We still compete a little bit, but not--because now, we're--we're all one.

We do--like there's days that I'll be on the ladder truck, on Atlantic's truck, be a Captain there. As a Captain, you're a Captain of the Fire Department. So, you have to respect those men under you--everybody's men under you at a fire scene. So we work hand in hand. We train both ways--do truck work or engine work. The difference is truck work is ladders and rescue, and the roof and cutting holes and ventilation; and engine work is hose work, is to put out water on the fire. So, but we work together pretty good. Our great--the other Captains are great, and so we all get along. We've been friends forever, so it's really easy to make--in my view--because I know everybody there, you know, and we've been friends for years. So, you know, that makes it so much easier when you can rely on somebody or borrow something from that company or this company, you know. Or I need a hand doing this, can you send some guys up to do that. Or, you know, it works very well. It's come a long ways.

Q: How long have you been Captain?

TC: I'll be--this is my second year. But, actually Lieutenants--you're Second Lieutenant and First Lieutenant, then Captain. So that's six years. So, I've been--in those three spots, that's the highest spots. You get to--everybody knows you, and you get to work with everybody that way. So it's like--and they alternate. Captains are alternated. So like I--it's a two year job, so I'll get out this year. But the other Captains that are in now, in Atlantic's and Protection, it's only one year as Captain. So, I'm a senior Captain. Last year I was baby Captain, because the other two guys had had two years, and they got out

as Captain, and then--but we had, we've always had a great time.

Q: Do you think you might want to stand for Chief?

TC: I'm moving. I would if (laughs)--I would if I wasn't moving.

Q: That's right, that's right.

TC: That was what my wife decided. I told her I'd stay for Captain. She wanted to move a few years ago, but I said, no, not till I'm Captain. And then I'm--it's going to work out. I'll miss it a lot, but--but I'll probably join down there. Where I'm going there's fire departments, volunteer fire departments there, too, so-- I'll probably--it's in me, so I can't, you know, just let it go.

Q: What do you do to attract new members?

TC: Most new members come from word of mouth. We have some members--members are different. A lot of people come when they're young, and they think, you know, it's a whole different--it's just a lot of--that it's not a lot of work; it's a lot of--but then when they start going to this training, then they find out that it's not all fun and games (laughs), but it is fun. You can make it fun; even the work is fun. We fool around. We have, you know, just doing stuff, training people. Every--the way I look at it, everybody wants to--

would love--likes to teach people, somebody new. So, the way I do it is, I have other people teach, you know. The younger guys teach, and then they teach the young guys, so that when a new person comes in and the older guys teach the younger guys and teach that young guy, and then--and it just works down, so if you get into that, then you get into the--that's my theory, anyway. I don't know if--and it works--it seems to work, because everybody wants to teach somebody. You know, show them that what they know, so that's how firefighting is mostly.

Q: So, do you assign a particular person or ...

TC: No, not assign, but just ...

Q: ... to your younger fire ...

TC: I mean, every Thursday night we have drill where we take care of the firehouse and the fire apparatus first. Make sure the equipment's--check all the equipment on Thursday night. And then, at the last half hour--forty-five minutes to an hour--we'll do a training period. And I'll say, okay, I'll just take a piece of equipment off the truck, you know, that we use everyday or whatever ...

Q: Like what?

TC: Say, the portable pump. It's a pump that comes off the truck, and we can put it in the bay. It's for boat fires and stuff, where the engine can't go. And we put it in the water, suck the water out of it, and we can put the fire out with that. So, I'll have one of my junior guys, that has been trained on it, teach the newer guys. And, you know, I'll supervise what's going on, and then they teach. So they're learning, really as they're teaching, and they're teaching the new guys, you know. So, and it works out pretty good. So, anything you can pull off a truck, even if it's a shovel. Or an axe. There's different ways to use an axe. There's, you know, different ways to use all the tools, and there's a right way and there's a wrong way. And you can pull off anything on it and have somebody teach about it. Even if it's a newer guy, he can teach about an axe or a hydrant—how to hook up the hose to a hydrant. There's all different ways. So that's--and then everybody gets involved, and it's more interesting that way. That's the way I feel. That's my point; I don't know.

Q: Sounds like a good system.

TC: It seems to work so far (laughs). Last couple of years, it's been working good.

Q: Did you institute that yourself or ...

TC: Oh, it's probably, I just watched somebody else do it and picked up and said, well, that's pretty good, you know. Let's try it that way. Because if you hear the same guy teaching

over and over, everything, it gets boring. I know when I was coming up, and you hear the same guy talking about this stuff, you know, whereas somebody else could have a different outlook on it, or, you know, the way he speaks is different, you know. And it's not so boring or whatever. But, like, we do practice. Everything is practice, practice, practice. Because the one day then when you come to that situation, it doesn't--it's not hard. It's just like, you know, it's just like an everyday thing. Just like walking the dog (laughs). You're going to go put out that fire now, and this is how I'm going to do it, because I've been trained to do it this way, and it just comes natural, where you don't have any stumbling blocks, where you would if you didn't train and practice. So, a lot of times practice is, you know, "Oh, we're going to do this again," you know (laughs). "We have to do this again, Cap?" and that's what they tell me, you know. I said, "Yeah, but you'll see." And sure enough, they'll come back to you after a fire and say, "Wow, you know you were right. It's so much easier (laughs). This is easy!" I say, "Yeah, because you practiced it. Now you know it, back of your hand." And that makes--that's rewarding, too. You know, when somebody comes back up to you and says, "You know you're right. It was--this was--now I know why we do all that." Now, it comes together now. And I learned that from coming up the line, practicing, practicing. And I still train right along with everybody else. You know, everybody trains. Because if you don't, then you get lax in it, and there's always new things coming, new ways to do things. And that's a little hard in the Fire Department sometimes. You know, "This is the way it goes. This is the way it's supposed to be," and there's hard guys that have twenty years and so on, they've been doing--"I've been doing it this way for twenty years." Well, times have

changed (laughs), you know.

Q: Well, what are some of the things that you're doing differently now?

TC: Just basic stuff has changed, you know. Like bigger hoses, and we don't need all that hose, don't need to do it, you know. And the engines are bigger, so they don't have to do a lot of this other stuff that they used to do because the engines were smaller.

Q: Like what kind of stuff?

TC: They way you hook up a hydrant, because now the hydrant--water mains are bigger, so you don't have to put like two engines on one hydrant. And just things like that. Just, you know, you know, "But we always did it this way." But, yeah (laughs), we don't have to do it this way, because these engines are bigger. They're 1750--seventeen hundred and fifty gallons per minute--pumpers, where they used to be a thousand gallons in there. And that's almost double. And everything's computerized on it. You know, the computer takes care of most of the stuff. And like we just got an engine this year. I just bought one. And everything is electronic. There's no pulling, opening wheels and turning wheels. You just push a button; it's completely different. You know, now I've got to train the new guys back. It's simpler, because it's just pushing a button. And the computer does a lot of the stuff--governance, and so it's low. But you still have to know basic stuff. It doesn't do the job for you. It doesn't (laughs), you don't pull up and it does

everything. But, you know, maybe some day.

Q: Do you ever get computer glitches?

TC: Not so far. Knock on wood. But there's bypassing ways. Like everything--anything mechanical can go wrong, so when you're in a fire, and that's why we train mostly on-- but it's for what happens if this happens. What would you do if the hydrant just came out of the ground or whatever. Broke. And you ain't got no water.

Q: What would you do?

TC: Well, we'd call everybody out, of course, because the house you can lose, so whatever you're fighting can lose, as long as it's--and, but we have a tank. There's five hundred gallons of water in that tank. Well, five hundred gallons is a lot ... [END OF SIDE A; BEGIN SIDE B] ... you pull out the people, and--and then you work your way back out with just the tank water. You know, you wouldn't just keep on fighting the fire. You'd use that tank water to get out of the building safely. And then, you know, once you're out of the building, then you can go to step two. Have another engine come from wherever and get another hydrant and start all over. Then, you have to start all over again.

Q: So, when you say you pull out people, you mean, you pull out ...

TC: You pull out--the firefighters out of the house. Everybody out. And then regroup and then attack it again, you know. You run out of ammunition when you're in a battle, then you got to come back and get some, and then we'll start all over again. Right? It's the same principle, I guess.

Q: What are the biggest changes you've seen in the Department, as long as you've been in?

TC: The biggest changes is-- it's the combination where engine guys and truck guys work together. You're trained at each other's jobs. Before, when you were an engine company, that's all you ever did was engine work, and that's what you got trained in; that's what you did. Now, you're trained in everything--engine and truck work. And that's the biggest change. That was probably the biggest, you know. Well, I'm an engine guy. What do I need to know that for? Because nowadays, you can go to any firehouse. I don't have to go to Flower Hill; I can go right here to Atlantic's and jump on their ladder truck. And, but now I've got a new hat on. I'm a truckie (laughs). So, yeah, the training part is the biggest. And the equipment, I think. Just so much new stuff coming out all the time. New, improved. Like the thermal cameras is just, like, amazing.

Q: What is that?

TC: Thermal camera is a camera that picks up heat. Like if you're looking for--it's a heat sensor, so if you--if there was somebody laying on the floor in the dark smoke, that

person would glow so you could see in the dark. And it's hand-held. It's small; it's about this big, you know. And it's like a--it looks like a gun almost, and you just ...

Q: Have you ever found anyone, using that?

TC: No, I haven't.

Q: How long have you had it?

TC: We've had them for about three years. Matter of fact, I just bought one for the new truck, so we'll have it on that. Just in case that's the truck that gets there first, or whatever. Used to be only on the rescue trucks, because it's a rescue equipment. Now, we're putting them on the engines. But not only that, it's--you could see through walls. Say, if there was a fire behind the wall, you could see if it's spreading if there's a fire there, without ripping the wall apart. Before, you'd feel it, and if it feels warm, we'd better check it, we'll tear out the wall and see behind there. Now, if there's no fire, now we got the wall busted up. But that's how you did it, and that's, you know, the only way you can check it inside the wall. But now you can check different things. And the spread of fire. Like if you had a fire down here, sometimes fire goes from the basement to the attic and skips the whole rest of the house. Now, you've got a fire from the basement to the attic; now you've got two fires. So you could see it through the wall as it's--fire travels up, just like a chimney. And it'll go right up into the attic, where it opens up where this wall comes

together at the top of the wall. And then it'll start burning the roof. So, things like that.

Q: Well, how would it skip the--say, the first floor?

TC: Because the sheetrock or whatever you have on the wall will hold that fire in. So it'd be like a tube. You know, just go right up the pipe and into the attic, since the attic's open now. And that's where your walls come together here; on top of it is your attic. So you have the fire from where it started at the bottom of it, run right up the wall, and skip.

Q: So the thermal camera ...

TC: Can see through the wall and pick up the heat on that wall, just like--if it's glowing with white, that's when it's either--it's in black and white, so when it glows white, that's a hot spot.

Q: Have you found things by using it?

TC: Yes. That's ...

Q: In houses?

TC: And we know, like I said, figured out it was smoldering. You know ... [??] ...

Sometimes, it's just the wire in the outlet and that's as far as it goes. But, then if you look through it, then you can see this hot wire going in. And so then you have to open the wall up and get to that hot wire and fix the trouble. You know, put out whatever's there. That way, we've found it a couple of times. I mean, it's so--if I put my hand on this table like this, just lay it on there, pull it away, I can see my hand print on that table with the heat. That's from the heat of your hand. The difference--shows how much different. So it's really accurate. It's a great tool.

Q: Well, how do you think the equipment that you have here--or that we have here in Port Washington--compares to the equipment in paid firehouses, you know, fire departments?

TC: We have better equipment. We have the best equipment money can buy. Our engines are bigger, better. And the equipment, just like the cameras and stuff, only certain companies have that in the city, like New York--I'm talking about New York City because it's the closest paid fire department. They don't have that on every rig. They have it on some, but not on others. Response time is probably equal, because we're out within three minutes or so, and they are too. And they're sitting in the firehouse. But they have longer to travel and busier streets. So, a lot of times, like that is--but our equipment is top of the line, you know. And it's worth every cent of it. There's no doubt in my mind. You know, we don't buy garbage, because it's--you know, in this profession, you can't. You need the best.

Q: Were you involved on the 9/11 attack?

TC: 9/11, I was at Ground Zero when the first--when the second plane hit.

Q: Well, how did you happen to be down there?

TC: I was working down there on that day for DHL. Right after--I was parking my van. We had a sales office there, and I had to fix a plumbing problem. That's what I went there for on that day.

Q: And that was in the tower?

TC: No, it's next to the towers. It was in 61 Broadway, which is down there. And I seen the smoke was up, so of course, when all those engines were coming out, I was looking up, but on those streets, you can't see the top of the towers where the plane hit. You could only--you can't see it, because all the other buildings are blocking it in the street. So we walked to the towers. And ...

Q: You say "we." Who ...

TC: Oh, me and my partner I work with. We ...

Q: Is he a firefighter, too?

TC: No. He--me and him took a walk, so we looked--I only had to fix a little pipe, so we said, "Oh, let's take a little time off and check this out." So we went there, and somebody said--I think I asked a cop, and he said, "Well, a plane hit the tower." And when he said, "A plane hit the tower," I said to myself must have been a single-engine prop job and somebody had a heart attack and smashed into the tower. No big deal. Then, I seen the fire coming out. And we went up to it, and we were watching, and that's when we started--we were watching, and then people started jumping out of the tower.

Q: And you saw that?

TC: Yes. And it was--I couldn't believe my eyes. At first I--you know, my brain said, "That's not people," you know. And then, as you--as more come out--like the first one--"Did I see what I thought I seen?" you know, because it happened so fast, you know. And then more and more. And I said, "Oh, I can't believe these people are doing that." And at the same time, more and more fire trucks were coming in and equipment was coming in. And then the second jet hit. That was on the far side, so I didn't even hear it come in. I remember seeing where it came out the other side. And instinct said you've got to get in. There's a hundred people in the street in front of me--or it seemed like a hundred people. I opened the door to this building, and I was yelling at people to get in because the stuff--debris was coming down. So people were listening. They were reacting. You had to go

all the way to the back of the building. And then a cop came, and he opened the other side of the door, and he ... [kind of let] ... everybody get in. So then we both went in and stuff just hit the street right out--right where we were standing. Debris and stuff. And then that cleared up. And we started walking--and we walked down towards where we were supposed to be. And we were watching--I looked in the hole where the first jet went in. It was the first or the second--well, anyway, where the first ... [one] ... came out. And there was a police helicopter went right in the hole a little bit and then came out, went around the corner. As soon as it made that turn, I seen the top half fall into the hole. Top half of the building went like this, and then da-da-da, and then we started running. And I was running, and then that big cloud that you seen on TV, it was right behind me. And people were falling. And I was picking people up and telling them, "You've got to get up. You got to get up! You've got to go," you know. And then, in the back of one of those small restaurants or deli or whatever it was--maybe it was a diner or something--you couldn't even tell there was a door there. But, all of a sudden, the door opened, and the guy said, "Come inside. Come inside." So we ran inside. And everything went black. It was like somebody shut the whole world off. And maybe thirty-five minutes later, you could start seeing little--started dying down a little bit. And, maybe not even that long. But seemed like forever. So we went outside, and I said--I told my partner, I said, "I think I--I've got to go help." And he said, "You go help, but you've got to get me out of here. I've got kids. I've got this. I've got to get home." So, we went--I said, "Okay, you've got to be out." Because he goes, "If you go, I'll go in, and I don't think we should go." (Laughs) I said, "But, you know, maybe I could help somebody. I know

I've had training." And he goes, "You aren't going to help anybody. Let's just go. You can help me." So he talked me into going with him. And then we got in the van, which was parked about eight blocks away. We got in the van and tried to drive away, and we got to-- I forget what street it was--because they were just sending us different--there was police out telling you to go this way and go that way. So--and the same thing. The second tower came down. The van shook all over. And then it went black again. We stopped right there in the middle of the street and just waited for whatever was going to happen was going to happen (laughs). And nothing happened, and we got going again. And I guess I got back to Port Washington around eight-thirty that night. But there were no telephones. I couldn't call anybody to tell them that I'm still alive. My wife called my work. And the girl on the other end, she couldn't even talk. Because I was--we were the only two missing. And we couldn't call, couldn't get no communication with them. And they knew we were right there. And they said, "We don't know where he is. So, they got her all upset. Then, finally, I got a hold of her. I got a hold of work, and work called my wife. So--but we were still stuck in the City. But we were safe. A little dusty and a little dirty, but safe.

Q: Did you go back down?

TC: No, I went--I went that night. When I came home, I took a shower, told my wife I'm okay. I got to go to the firehouse. So I came down here. And then a crew went. I stayed--I was--I was on minimum service. I had a lot of stitches, and I couldn't go in

fires or anything, so I stood here and we did that food drive and the goods drive we had held up at the firehouse. And I went down with-- to Ground Zero and dropped all that stuff off with the two--a couple of trucks, and made a couple of trips over there. So that was--and I really haven't been back since.

Q: How do you think 9/11 affected the Port Washington Fire Department in either attitude or ...

TC: Oh, attitude. Well, we had an influx of volunteers. I really couldn't say how many stayed after a year later or whatever. A lot of them were kids. So, like Flower Hill got a member from that--a couple of good members--right off the street, and are still good members now. So that way. I think people of Port Washington realized that--well, I think that the people of the world realized what firefighters do, I would say. And they still--because you go to houses, and people still appreciate what you do, you know.

Q: How do they show their appreciation?

TC: Oh, they tell you, usually. They say, oh, you know, "You didn't have to bring all this equipment," you know (laughs). And it's like, "We're really sorry." "Hey, it's not your fault, you know, if, you know, things go wrong, you know." But a lot of times, yeah, it's good to hear when they say, "Oh, I can't believe how fast you got here. You guys were at the firehouse?" "No, I was home in bed" (laughs), you know. But it's--sometimes it's

well worth it.

Q: What was your best day as a firefighter?

TC: I guess making Captain. That was my best day?

Q: And is there a ceremony ...

TC: Oh, yes.

Q: ... whenever you got installed?

TC: Yeah, they installed us. There's a party. There's an installation dinner. And there's a lot of friends there from--family and friends. So it was real nice. And all my friends in the firehouse. So ...

Q: What was your worst day?

TC: Hmmm. There're not really bad days (laughs). The worst day as a firefighter. I really don't know. I always loved every minute of it. (laughs). Oh, when I got sick and I was out of service. That was probably my worst time.

Q: You got sick at a fire?

TC: No, no, no. Just on my own. And I had to go out of service, so I couldn't go to fires. And I was home in bed, and, you know, and I listened to my radio, and you hear everything going on, and I can't be there. That's got to be the worst part. Yeah. Missing--missing out.

Q: What would you say makes a good firefighter?

TC: I guess dedication would be one of the top things. You got to be dedicated to it. Easy, patient (laughs). Patience has a lot to do with it. Because sometimes you go and wait, you know.

Q: What do you mean, patience?

TC: Oh, you know, just--sometimes you go out on a call, and it takes forever. And it's a nothing call, but you've got to be there, just in case. So, like for gas leaks or something like that sometimes, then you've got to wait for LIPA to come, and they could be hours away. And you can be sitting around. Or you could be home in a nice warm bed (laughs) or something. And, you know, stuff like that happens in the middle of the night when you have to go to work at five o'clock in the morning, you know. So, patience has to do with it. You've got to be friendly. You've got to care. That's basically it.

Q: Do you ever do anything for good luck? Do have any kind of thing you carry, or...

TC: No.

Q: Do you ever dream about fires?

TC: No, uh uh. I've got to say, when I sleep, it's--I get that little bit of time (laughs). It's all business, and I want to sleep. I don't dream that much, no.

Q: When--you talked about how, you know, people get along in the firehouse. What kinds of funny things happen in the firehouse?

TC: Once I was Lieutenant, when I was Lieutenant, I started a--I made every Memorial Day, we get everything ready; the trucks are all clean; every piece of equipment is spotless. And--because we get inspected for the year. It's--I don't know, it's like--it's more like tradition than anything else. Memorial Day parade, and a new year starts, and we get all that ready, so we have extra work nights. And work days on weekends, we, you know, polish and clean and oil and grease and everything, getting ready. So, I had one night in front of the firehouse ... [that night] ... And new guys that just came in in between Memorial Day--last Memorial Day and this Memorial Day. So "We have to take a picture of you guys," you know, so I stand them out in front of the firehouse. I get ready

on Haven Avenue, and I sent a couple of guys up to the roof with buckets of water. And so while they're waiting for their picture, they throw the water on them (laughs). And they get drenched. That's ...

Q: So they're in their uniforms?

TC: No, usually it's just in clothes--you have t-shirts and shorts or whatever, working there. But, you know, they get drenched and they don't know what's going--and then we take the picture. But sometimes there was no film in the camera. And they're standing there, and they're posing and they got guys there making muscles and sucking in their chest and, you know (laughs) looking good for this picture in front of the plaque, and we splash them with water. That's one of the funnier things there. And just goofing off on guys, you know. Just, you know, we have water fights with the other companies. Stuff like that, you know.

Q: And they take it with ...

TC: Oh, yeah. You got to take it. That's one of my main things in my new guys' speech. If you think the guys are picking on you, they're not. You just didn't get it. Every guy gets picked on. You know, they say something, you know. It's all in fun, and I always tell them, "The only time you have to worry about guys picking on you is when they stop picking on you. If they stop picking on you and leave you alone, then there's something

wrong. But if they're picking on you, making fun of you, they--that's all in fun. And you'll see what I mean. Because when they're first new, they don't know it's when they stop picking on you and making you do stuff and calling you a rookie, and "You got to do this," and "You got to do that." And that's--when they stop doing that, that means you can't take it, or they're just going to leave you alone. And then they realize that within a couple of months, you know, that--then the new guy, next new guy comes in or something, and they're doing the same thing to him. So it's just, you know, so that's more tradition than anything else, I guess. It's more how it works.

Q: What else do you tell the new guys?

TC: Go to fires. Listen up. And don't talk a lot. Because you don't know nothing yet. Absolutely listen. Don't be a know-it-all. Because if you know something, you probably don't know nothing. And it's really what we tell them. And I do talk to all my new members prior to coming in. I tell them, "You've got to--this is ..." I lay down the rules, the laws, that first priority is-- We have three priorities. The priorities are family first-- your family. Because if your family's not--if you're not happy at your family or something's going on there, you're not going to be a good firefighter. So you straighten that out; that's a priority. Your job. Because if you don't stay with your job, you're not going to have a good family situation. And then--then comes the Fire Department. And it you're going to school--college or something--it's college or something, you know, do that first, and then worry about the firehouse. And that's what I tell them. But when you

do the firehouse, you got to put in a hundred and ten. You got to make your fires; you got to make your quotas. And help out is what--you know, and listen. Don't do a lot of talking; listen. That's the main thing. Because if you're talking, you can't listen. And if you think you know it, you really don't. And you'll see what I'm talking about in a couple of years, or when you get trained and you start doing it. Then you'll realize that I was right. So, just let it all sink in and just go about it, and you'll have a great time of being a firefighter. That's usually my big speech. My Captain's speech.

Q: What about the social aspect of being in the Department. You know, do you see the other firefighters socially? Are they friends or ...

TC: Yeah, pretty much so. You have the--you know, not everybody, but I think it's like everybody has their own people, and even at the firehouse or at a fire, like sometimes I don't see people from the other companies as much. And then I'll see them and we'll talk, you know. So then, it's like a big happy family anyway, so and we have the picnics and stuff that we do together. But--and there's guys that I invite over and we do social stuff. Yeah. Yeah, so it works, you know; it's just like any other place, you know. You don't invite your whole corporation over (laughs), but, you know, a couple of the people that you're close to, you do. Yeah. So ...

Q: But it's more of a sense of bonding in the Fire Department than in a corporation. Right?

TC: Right, right. Bonding is, you know, it's there. And we do. At the firehouse, when you're in the firehouse, it's a whole different setting; so it's like a different family, you know. You have your home family, and you've got your firefighter family, you know. So ...

Q: The *Reader's Digest* used to have a special feature called "My Most Unforgettable Character." So, can you think of anybody in the Fire Department that might fit that description for you?

TC: Hmmm. Most unforgettable. I remember situations, and it's--one person? There's a lot of clowns, so it's hard.

Q: What situations do you remember?

TC: Oh. Well, you know, it's just a fire that this one guy (laughs), it was just the face--his facial expression. There was this big guy--he's not in the Fire Department anymore. And he's a City fireman. He moved to Manhattan, and he's a City fireman. He was a city fireman then too, but we were all at a fire and the fire was out, and this new kid comes in. And I guess little things were burning in the closet. You know, little--and we'd just toss them out the window, and they'd burn out on the ground, so we were cleaning up the fire. Overhauling, it's called, when you take stuff. We were overhauling the fire. And the new guys come in and they help out with stuff, and, you know, we're pitching stuff out the windows, like beds and stuff, and put it outside so--and then they soak them down,

you know, with a smaller hose. And there was one big guy--he's football player size--and he comes in (laughs), he tells the one new kid. He goes, "You don't have to wear your mask." He had his air mask on. Everybody else had theirs off. Maybe there was a little smoking, but it wasn't bad. "And you should get a taste of that, so you get used to--if something happens to your mask, you can survive without it," you know. It's probably not the best thing to do, but it gets done. And in a perfect world, you'd probably have enough air forever, but you don't. So he takes his mask off, and he tells him to do something. Next thing you know, "Where'd he go?" The new guy disappeared. Well, we weren't worried about it. You know, we went outside, and everything's safe, so there's no--no problem. He must have went outside. And he was (laughs)--we walked back to the rig, and he's sitting (laughs) by the ambulance, on the step, sucking oxygen down (laughs). And the big guy goes to him, "You've got to be kidding me!" He goes, "When there's work to do, you're sucking oxygen!" He was--just these big eyes, like "What, are you crazy?" (laughs). How can he be out here sucking oxygen. We were in the same room. We were all in there for about two hours longer than you were. You were there fifteen minutes, and you're sucking oxygen. And it was just--his face was--because he had--his coat, it wasn't his coat. He had somebody else's. And it was like busted on the seams--his fire coat. So he was like, here's this big giant talking to this little guy, and it just seems like a cartoon character. It was pretty funny. There's another guy, Charlie Lang, always has the jokes. That's--with anybody, Charlie's like--every time you see him, he's got a joke, you know, and I don't know how he comes up with them, and it's just great, you know. So, but that's probably about it.

Q: Have women come into your company since you've been in the Department?

TC: Uh huh. Four girls came so far, since I've been in. They've been in and out. Matter of fact, my first Lieutenant--or my first Assistant Engineer just left the first of this month. She moved to Colorado. But she was the first officer--a line officer.

Q: So how did that affect the company?

TC: Not--for me, it didn't affect at all. I thought she was a great firefighter. She could handle herself. I went in to two or three fires with her, where she was my back-up. And, once I was an officer, she was a novice, you know, and she did everything that anybody else could have. I have no complaints. In other words, no--she did everything we did, without a problem. And she wasn't big. I think she was a small girl.

Q: And how about the other guys? How did they feel?

TC: I think at the beginning, it was a little tight--it was a little harder. But once you got to know her, she was one of the guys. And she acted like one of the guys sometimes. Yeah, she had her little girly things, you know, and her little purse, you know. And she had the--but fooling around, and, you know, just joking around and stuff, it was like one of the guys.

Q: What's her name?

TC: Her name was Shari Gerson. And she was on the racing team. So, she was in real like, one of the guys. She was really into the racing team--the Road Runners.

Q: Were you on the racing team?

TC: When I first got in, yeah. I was for about two seasons, I think. I was older, so it was essentially a young man's sport (laughs). And you've got to be a little crazy. Your bones got to be working all right too, so, and I was a little--I was thirty-one when I got in, so, you know, already I was a little past prime there.

Q: What are you proudest of?

TC: Being in the position I am now. That's--you know, that was my goal, and I made it.

Q: You mean, making Captain?

TC: Making Captain, right. My position now. And I'd probably would have made Chief if I wasn't moving. I would have went for Chief if I had--I'm sure I would have made it. I don't think there's anybody else running behind me, you know. So ...

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

TC: I think any history is great. I think history is what everything's about. You know, if you didn't have a history of things--I'm a big--I love history. I watch history on TV--you know, the History Channel. That's all I ever watch usually. That and Discovery, or something like that. Because, you know, I'm a buff, kind of guy, you know. I like that stuff. And it just amazed me, you know, how you can just watch things grow, you know--like the country grow or, you know. I think it's--I think it's great. Like they're doing our Flower Hill history, too, because Flower Hill's a hundred years old next year. So--and just going back to all the old papers, and that is amazing.

Q: So, is there anything else that you think we haven't talked about, that we should?

TC: No, I think that's it. Just that ...

Q: Okay. Well, thank you very much.

TC: Thank you.

Q: This was a great interview.