

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

Transcript Of Oral History Interview With

Frederick Falconer Jr.
Flower Hill Hose Company No. 1

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

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Interview with Frederick Falconer Jr.
pk

Sally Olds
October 12, 2004

Q: This is an interview with Frederick Falconer Jr. Today is October 12th, 2004. The interview is taking place at the Port Washington Public Library My name is Sally Olds. Can you tell me your name.

Frederick Falconer Jr.: My name is Frederick Falconer Jr.

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

FF: Flower Hill Hose Company.

Q: What year did you join the Fire Department?

FF: I joined the Fire Department June 3rd, 1968.

Q: And how old were you?

FF: Twenty-two (laughs). Twenty-one. Excuse me. Twenty-one, yeah.

Q: What made you decide to become a firefighter?

FF: I wanted—my father was in the Fire Department, and I wanted to—I wanted to join and keep the family tradition going. Plus, I just—I was very interested in the Fire Department, serving the community and working—working with the rest of the guys. I'd just gotten out of the service. I was in the Army for two years. And I thought it was a good way to keep up with

the guys.

Q: What had your father told you about the Department?

FF: Well, I was pretty active as far as hearing about the Department, and being in a firefighter family, you're always connected to the Fire Department through his responding to alarms and calls, so it wasn't—it wasn't anything new to us, you know, to the kids. We always knew. And plus, we were raised around the firehouse. Sundays, Thursday nights, parents—our fathers used to take us over there, and all the kids would join together and have fun. It was ...

Q: And was ...

FF: ... it was more of a family. It was more of a family tradition, you know, where all the kids would get together—the second generation, the third generation or whatever it would be.

Q: At what age did you start going to the firehouse?

FF: Maybe five, six years old. Seven years old. Sundays, I would go Sundays on and off. And there was family picnics, the parades, all kinds of—all the different functions were family functions, so it was like a big family. It was very family oriented.

Q: And did you march in the parades yourself as a child?

FF: No. No, that was not allowed. That was only just for the members. That was it. And they didn't—and at that time, they didn't have the Explorer Post, which they have now,

which was for the junior firefighters. They didn't have that. No, we didn't—we weren't allowed to march. And what we did, after the parade we could ride on the trucks and things like that. But normally we were not allowed.

Q: Do you remember any of the stories your father or your grandfather—who was also in the Department, right? ...

FF: Right.

Q: ... Do you remember any of the stories they told you about fires that they went to?

FF: There was quite a few. My grandfather—my grandfather, William Hamm, was in Protection Engine Company. He and his brother saved most of the things out of the fire at the Methodist Church which was right here where the library is. The original church. Year-wise I don't know; I have no idea when that was. That's pretty much the only one he—I remember him telling us about. My father, though, was in quite a few different fires. The Bradley fire on Main Street. I remember my mother taking us down there the next morning. It was in the winter. All the trucks were—everything—the hose in the trucks, everything was frozen into—in the ground from the water. The building was totally lost. Bradley's was a restaurant on Lower Main Street across from the town dock. He told us about the Berg, the Berg oil fire when the oil tank exploded down on Manhasset Isle. I'm trying to think. There was—I think that those are two major—well, one house fire on North Maryland Avenue that he always told us about. There was, I don't know, three or four children lost in that fire; it was a very bad fire. I think those are the worst and biggest of whatever is standing out from—that I got from him.

Q: You said you joined as soon as you came back from the service?

FF: Right.

Q: Where—where did you serve?

FF: Okay, I was in the Army. I was drafted into the Army. I served in Germany for nineteen months with the Army, with the—I was with the 155 Howitzer Battery. And then was transferred down to Frankfurt and I was a driver for the USAR [United States Army in Europe) Commander of Germany.

Q: What was it like for you—I mean, was it a plus or a minus—having so many relatives in the Department when you applied?

FF: Oh, it was a plus. Because, I mean, like—I mean, when I applied, I knew most—most everybody in Flower Hill. I knew most of the people in Flower Hill. They knew me, you know. It was not—it wasn't like a stranger coming in. Nowadays, it's very difficult. Not too many sons coming in. One of the problems, they can't—people can't—the younger generation can't afford to live in Port Washington, which is a very big problem. But, as far as myself, I mean, I waited six months to get in. We had—we had full membership in the company with a hundred members, and that was all that was allowed. I waited six months on the list to get in. My father wanted to go exempt so I could join, but I, you know, we wouldn't—I didn't want him to do that, because he was—you know, he was working on fifty years. So ...

Q: What does that mean, "to go exempt"?

FF: To go exempt so you—you'll retain membership in the company, but you don't have voting rights. You can't go to fires. You can't—you're not covered by insurance. But what it does, it opens up the space for somebody else. But I didn't want that to happen. So, I just waited. I waited my—I waited like six months before I got in.

Q: What made you choose Flower Hill when your grandfather had been in Protection?

FF: (Laughs) My ...

Q: Was it your father? Which company was ...

FF: ... my father was Flower Hill.

Q: Oh.

FF: My father was in Flower Hill. I joined Flower Hill because I knew most of the guys in Flower Hill. And, plus, my father was in Flower Hill. My grandfather was in Protection. His son was in Flower Hill. My uncle's son was in Protection (laughs). I have no idea why everybody switched back and forth, but it was just the—it was just—it was just what they did; I don't know why. But I—I joined where my father was. And, because I knew most of the younger guys from Flower Hill.

Q: Was there a rivalry between the companies?

FF: Oh, yes. There was a big—there was a big rivalry. Who would get there first, and who would do most of the work, and Flower Hill always seemed to come out on top. We were always—even to this day, we normally roll most.

Q: And do you think the rivalry is still there?

FF: I think it's still there, but not as strong. It's not as—it's, hopefully, we're working more towards Department instead of just company versus company. Which I think within a few years is going to be—it's going to be one—it's going to be one department. I mean, it is a department right now, but I think it'll be operating more—more as a department as far as everything.

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

FF: When I joined Flower Hill, when I got in, it was Thomas Chodkowski. C-H—I think it was C-H-O-W—I'm not sure. C-H-O-W-S-K-I. Something like that.

Q: Well, I can check it.

FF: Who since has passed on. Nicknamed "Tiny." Because "Tiny" weighed about two hundred and fifty, three hundred pounds. He was my Captain for a year. And then, after "Tiny" was Fred Smith—Captain Smith was my second year Captain.

Q: And do you remember who the Chief of the Department was then, when you joined?

FF: No. God, I feel bad; I don't remember. '68. I'd have to look it up.

Q: It's okay.

FF: I'm not sure. Yeah.

Q: What were your early jobs in the company?

FF: Well, as any probationary member, you learn from the bottom up. You packed hose, washed trucks. It was a little bit different than it is nowadays. The officers worked with you. Captain and Lieutenants and everybody, on a work night, on a Thursday night, would all come out and work with you. Well, actually, there was only three probationary members. Myself, Don Nelson, and Walter Martinek. Don got in in '67; I got in in '68, and Walter got in in '68. We were the only three rookies at the time. And we wound up doing the majority of the work (laughs), but it was very—it was very good, because the officers did help us, and the other members worked with us. Training-wise, you pretty much got on-the-job training. There was—we went to fire school, but it was—the training was nowhere near what it is today. It was more or less on-the-job training. I remember my first—my first working fire. I think, at the time, Freddy Smith who was Lieutenant took me into—took me into a burning fire with a mask, and told me to put a mask on and that was it. "Let's go. We're going." And that was my first. From then on, it was just that's what you did. So it was pretty much training on the spot, kind of, and it was very kind of scary, but it was a way to learn.

Q: Was there one officer in particular who would take you under his wing, or just whoever happened to be there?

FF: Generally, the Captain or Lieutenants would, you know, would take you in, depending on who was there first and who was there and where—where you were. I pretty much made the first due truck, because I was close to the firehouse.

Q: You made the first ...

FF: The first truck out. So we were—generally had the first—what they call the first due truck at—at the scene. Which was good, very good experience (laughs), because it was ...

Q: How did you manage to get to the first truck?

FF: Because I lived right around the block from the firehouse, so I was close. I was very close. And it was—it was a—yeah, it was one of those things. If you—the closer you lived to the firehouse, the faster you got there.

Q: What can you tell me about that first fire, when you put on the mask and went in?

FF: It was—hmm, yeah.

Q: Do you remember where it was?

FF: I really can't remember where it was. It was ...

Q: A house fire or a brush fire?

FF: .. it was a house fire. Oh, it was a house fire. It was a basement fire. I don't know exactly where it was. But I remember Freddy Smith—Captain Smith at the time—took myself and Walter, and I can't remember who else, but another younger member, and told us "This is it. We're going to go, and we're going in." You know, we're going to take it down, took the line in. He was very—he was very confident and very, not casual about it, but, you know, he was very protective of us. Because he knew we were—that we were first-timers, and it was—it was good training. And it was. It was very good training.

Q: Were you scared?

FF: Oh, yeah, definitely. Very nervous. It was not a—that's something, you know, I—I have not a fear of fire, but I respect it. I respect it very heavily. It's something you don't take lightly, and you don't try to make mistakes. You try not to be stupid.

Q: Well, how do you get over, though, that initial fear?

FF: You just do it (laughs). You just do it. You go in, and that's it. You go in and that's it, and find out that it's really not that bad. Also, too, having confidence in the officers, where you know your officers aren't going to take you into a situation where you're going to get in trouble, which most of them are very good. Nowadays, it's extremely safe nowadays, because they—they tend more to the safety side than bravery. I mean, unless you have a rescue involved or something like that. But, right now, I'm not a—I'm not an interior firefighter anymore, so I just try to help with the hoses and things like that. I did my time (laughs).

Q: After your probationary period, did you have like a specialty—special set of skills?

FF: No, just general—general all-around firefighter. I did, after a year and a half in the company, I took—I took first aid training, and I became very active on the ambulance—on the original ambulance. It was an old Cadillac. From there, I did EMT [emergency medical technician] training over in Nassau County Medical Center. And followed that up by—that was myself and two other guys, two other members, were the first EMTs in the Port Washington Fire Department. Myself, Gary Elbert, and Dennis Maloney Well,

we were the first EMTs.

Q: And that was before the Fire Medics?

FF: It was way before Fire Medics, right. That was back in the early '70s. That was before Fire Medics was formed. We did our training at Nassau County, between Nassau County Medical Center, North Shore Hospital, emergency room at St. Francis. We had to do all kinds of night—night training and training in the—you know, training in the emergency rooms. Trained on the Nassau County ambulances with the police.

Q: Are the ...

FF: And then from there went on to AMT [advanced medical technician]. So we were all, the three of us, were the first EMTs/AMTs with the Port Washington Fire Department.

Q: AMT is ...

FF: Advanced medical technician.

Q: And do you remember any particular emergencies that stand out in your mind?

FF: No, between just a lot of—a lot of assorted aided cases, accidents. Nothing really. Not one particular instance, no. But I know there was just quite a few at the time. We revived a couple of people. Revived one fellow from a boat down in Manhasset from Capri Marina.

Q: What happened to him?

FF: He had a heart attack. He was—he was not breathing when we got there, and we revived him. We revived him.

Q: Did—how?

FF: CPR [cardiopulmonary resuscitation]. We did CPR. I mean, there was three or four, five, six. I really don't know exactly how many of them. After—after they—after they started Fire Medic Company, I kind of took a back seat, and I didn't keep up with my training. I didn't keep—my certification lapsed. I just never went back.

Q: Can you tell me about the offices that you've held?

FF: Okay. I've been on the, let's see, Board of Directors of Flower Hill. Probably the Board of Directors I've been on for fifteen, twenty years. Corresponding Secretary. I was Vice President. I was President of the company. Actually, I was President of the company when Bobby Dayton was killed. That was a very devastating time for us all. I was very good friends with Bobby and ...

Q: But did you work that fire?

FF: Yes, I—yep.

Q: Well, as—as President, how did his death affect you?

FF: Well, it was, I mean, besides being personal friends and everything else, I had—had to handle the arrangements myself and a couple of the other members. We handled all the arrangements for the funeral and everything else. And it was just very—it was a very difficult time. It was a very, very difficult time. I'd never been involved in anything like that, and it was really, just very difficult.

Q: On the Board of Directors, what kinds of issues have come up before you? Especially, were there any controversial issues?

FF: Mainly with the Board of Directors it's running the company, the business affairs of the company. Yes, you do have membership problems at times. As far as anything really controversial, no. We didn't have any major problems. I mean, just mainly membership problems, members acting up, problems with members on and off. I mean, it's when you get a hundred members or even eighty members, you're going to have problems. You're going to have conflicts here and there. No major—no major problems. Nothing—no scandals (laughs), not like that.

Q: Did you ever have problems with drinking?

FF: For the members?

Q: In the firehouse?

FF: Not really. Not really. I mean, there were some members that had problems. But you kind of knew those members, and you kind of dealt with it. There was no—there was no real problem that way. But, in any organization, there's always going to be a few you're going to have problems with. But, it was pretty well known and they—they kind of took

care of themselves. No, we didn't have to—didn't have too many problems to start having to take action that way.

Q: Did you ever think about standing for, you know, officer like Lieutenant, Captain, or ...

FF: I never went for the line office. I never went for any of the line offices. Basically, I was involved in the ambulance, and that kind of took up a lot of time. And I'm thinking about—I've thought about it. In fact, my son has asked me a couple of times how come I never went for line office. I really just didn't have any interest in it. You know, it was—I was very—it worked out very happy doing the administrative end. And it's—some people have to do the administrative and some have to do the line. And I think I've contributed a lot to the company doing—you know, doing administrative work. Like I said, I was on the Board probably more like twenty-five years or more. I've been in the company thirty years. Thirty, thirty-three years, so ...

Q: So was it hard to make the move from being a working firefighter to going into the administrative aspect?

FF: No, I was a working firefighter and administrative most of the time. It was only just up until the last six, seven years when I couldn't—couldn't get active—I couldn't be an interior firefighter. I'm still an active firefighter, but I can't, just can't go inside. I'm not allowed to go inside anymore.

Q: Because ...

FF: Because I couldn't pass the breathing part of the physical (laughs), which—which I, you

know, which is, you know, there's a lot of us now that are older, and we just can't do it.

Q: So that's a relatively new requirement ...

FF: The physical, yeah.

Q: ... isn't it?

FF: The physicals. Well, the physicals have been around for about fifteen—fifteen years or more.

Q: Do you feel that the administration is appreciated by the company, by the Department?

FF: Yeah, I think it is. I think it's—I mean, we actually run the company. We do the—you know, we're the end—the end result, the final decision. The Captain runs the company, but we are—the Board of Directors—are the final say. Any problems, any member problems, any disciplinary action problems, that's all handled by the Board. Well, the Captain does have certain power, but then it comes—it generally comes back to the Board for its final ...

Q: What kinds of decisions have you had to make recently?

FF: Really not—not very—anything really earth shattering or large. It's really been pretty much basic monthly bills and monthly going to new computer programs and things like that. Nothing—nothing really earth shattering. I mean, we did remodel the firehouse five years ago. So that was five, six years ago. And that was quite a—quite a feat doing

that. But other than that, we really—it's pretty—been pretty—it runs along pretty smoothly. There's not—not too many problems.

Q: On going to a new computer program, do you have to be technically expert yourself, or do you hire somebody?

FF: Oh we hire—we hire people for that. I mean, this was actually the decision the Department was—Port Washington Fire Department was putting in a new program for compiling points and information and things from all the companies. And it comes back to the companies for our approval that we're going to go along with it. So the Board recommends to the company that you would—you know, this is—this is a good program; it's what we should do, you know.

Q: Can you tell me about the point system?

FF: The point system is: you get a point for every call. And it depends upon how long you've been in the company; it's a prorated—one to ten years you have to make so many percentage of the points. Each company in the Department is different. Flower Hill has a percentage points for members one to ten years, ten to twenty, twenty to thirty, thirty to forty, and forty to fifty, and over fifty. Basically, it's to keep people active and involved in the company. So you do—you know, it puts a little more pressure on people that they have to maintain their point average. You get points for meetings; you get points for fires; you get points for work nights. Flower Hill, we do have categories where you have to have so many work-night points; you have to have so many fire points; you have to have so many meeting points. You have to make so many meetings without missing, without being excused or whatever.

Q: And what happens if a member does not make up that minimum number of points?

FF: Well, on the—on the—what we do now, quarterly we keep track on all the points quarterly. So if a member is kind of short, he's brought up before the Board where the Captain talks to him and says, "Oh, you need to make up some points here for the—your fire points for the rest of the year or something needs more points." The end of the year, point year, if members are short, we call them before the Board. They're brought up on charges for missing, being short of points. If they're really short on points and they've showed no interest anymore, then they can be dropped from the company. And it doesn't make sense to keep a member that's not participating in fulfilling his duties. So we are, you know, we do—we are pretty strict that way.

Q: Are there ways that they can make bonus points?

FF: Oh, they can make up work nights. They can make up—the Captain has different—different make-up things that they can do. So, yeah, there are things. But they can't make up fire points. Fire points are fire points, and that's it, because we do have to abide by that.

Q: And fire points means answering the calls ...

FF: Fire calls, right.

Q: ... going to a fire.

FF: Right. Right.

Q: Yes, yes. Which fires that you worked at do you remember most intensely?

FF: Well, it's very strange. We were talking about this a couple—couple of weeks ago. My son was home and we were talking. All of us sitting around one night at the firehouse, talking about it. The—it seems like when we were younger, coming up through the company, we had a lot more what we call working fires, larger fires. We had a lot of—over one period there, we had an arsonist running around the boatyards. So it was like every week or every couple of weeks, we had a major, major boatyard fire. I can pretty much remember every single one of those, fighting those. We had the Sands Point—Sands Point Golf Club Easter Sunday morning. I remember that, it was like two o'clock in the morning, we lost the whole building down there.

Q: So what did you ...

FF: Port Washington Lumber Yard.

Q: Well, I guess—can you just tell me, like in one of those fires, kind of walk me through when you first found out there was a fire, then what you did.

FF: I think on the—let's see, on the Purdy boatyard fire, again, I was on the first due truck in. And we laid hose lines in. And we took hose lines off the truck to fight the fire. I was on a two-and-a-half-inch hose line. Around the back of the main building. Myself, and there was two older members—Bob Failey and Robert Johnston. I was on the nozzle and they were backing me up. We were just pouring water. That's pretty much all we had to do on this fire, just keep pouring water from the outside. Nobody was allowed inside.

Q: What time of day was it?

FF: It was at night. It was probably, I guess it was probably maybe ten, eleven, twelve o'clock at night.

Q: How did you know it was an arsonist?

FF: Oh, because we were told. The Fire Marshal had said that this was what was going on. Because it was—there was quite a few fires in a row. And they were in boatyards. I don't know if they ever caught—I don't think they ever caught him. He just kind of—kind of just disappeared. But then, after that, we had the lumberyard. The Sands Point Golf Club, that was just a kitchen—it started as a kitchen fire. Lumber yard, have no idea—I never found out how that started. But that was—it was a Valentine's night. I remember going home, and it must have been midnight, one o'clock when the alarm went off on that one. And that was right at the heart of South Bayles Avenue there in town. We were there pretty much all night on that one.

Q: So what was it like for your family, while you were being called out Easter Sunday morning, Valentine's Day and ...

FF: Well, Easter Sunday I was still—I was still single (laughs). Actually, I had just finished working. Had finished working at the shop at about midnight. Next day was Easter. And went home. I think I was just about ready to get into bed when the call came over. And so I was up all night. And then was back to work the next morning. Yeah.

Q: And the shop is—can you give the name of the shop?

FF: Oh, I'm sorry. Falconer Florist. (Laughs) I'm sorry.

Q: Your father started the business, did he?

FF: My grandfather started the business in 1924.

Q: And do you have any other relatives who are in the business?

FF: No, only myself.

Q: What about your son?

FF: No, my son's in University of New Hampshire right now (laughs).

Q: Is he a member of the Department?

FF: He's a member of Flower Hill. He's third generation in Flower Hill.

Q: How did you happen to be involved in the hundredth anniversary celebration of Protection Engine Company, since you're a member of Flower Hill?

FF: We—they had asked for help. The Protection members asked for help. It's a big—it's a big undertaking. And they needed help from the other companies, so they had asked certain members of other companies to do certain—you know, to help them with certain parts of their celebration. Like myself and a couple of the other members. Myself, Donny Kurz, and, I think, Tom Murray worked on the parade committee for them.

Q: And what did you do for that?

FF: Well, we helped organize the parade and the day of the parade, and, you know, kept it—kept it running. Kept the whole thing running. You know, set everybody up where they're supposed to be and everything else. That was pretty much our—our part of Protection's hundredth anniversary. And we're working on Flower Hill's hundredth anniversary now.

Q: When would that be?

FF: It'll be starting next year.

Q: And ...

FF: 2005.

Q: ... and what are you doing for that?

FF: Right now, we're in the planning stages. We're going to do a, of course, our dinner. We're not going to do a parade.

Q: Why?

FF: We just felt the parade was too involved. We don't have the members to run a parade, and Protection's parade -- We had a lot of feedback from the business community that we shut down the town for four hours one night on a Saturday night. Which is, I can

understand. That I can understand. But we're going to do a couple of different celebrations, as far as the company goes. We're going to have, you know, like an open house for the community. Instead of doing a parade and all the formal things, we're just going to try to do smaller—smaller, lower keyed things.

Q: I saw some signs around town with—last week I guess it was—it was Fire Protection Appreciation Week for the Port Washington Fire Department?

FF: Fire Prevention Week. Right. Fire Prevention Week.

Q: Oh, was it ... [INTERRUPTION] ... Okay. Actually the sign was down in Manorhaven. It said ...

FF: Oh, that's the ...

Q: ... appreciation for the fire—Port Washington Fire Department.

FF: Actually the month of October is Fire Prevention Month, and the Village of Manorhaven does a day or a week of appreciation for the Fire Department. And that's a separate thing that the Village of Manorhaven does.

Q: What do they do?

FF: They just—they have one day that they name as Fire Appreciation Day. I think they record it in their minutes at their Board meetings. Things like that.

Q: Can you tell me what you've done for the block parties?

FF: The old Road—at the old Road Runner block parties, I've cooked. Helped set up, cooked. Pretty much everything, and the whole thing on that. I've done the cooking. I've cooked with them. We did the set-up, cooking, cleaning, clean-up. And again, that was a lot of fun. Everybody was a good—it was real good involvement for all the guys.

Q: What are the Road Runners?

FF: The Road Runners was a racing team. In fact, what it actually was, the Road Runners was the combined racing team of all three companies—Atlantics, Protection, and Flower Hill. They used to have their separate—each company used to have their own racing team. But then, again, when members got short, they just combined everybody together and made it the Road Runners.

Q: Did you ever race, yourself?

FF: I never raced. I never raced. I tried—tried once, and it just was not for me. My legs were just too long. I just couldn't keep up with running. Same with my son. My son tried it, and he just couldn't—couldn't do it. He just could not, you know—it was not for me.

Q: Now, the block parties, were they limited then to the firefighters, or were they open to the public or ...

FF: No, the block parties were open to the public.

Q: And where were they held?

FF: Block parties were held down at Protection's annex on Channel Drive. But it was a way to raise funds for the team, for the racing team. Generally, they were held Friday, Saturday night—two nights. And they'd bring carnival rides in and things like that. So it was more—it was more of a carnival atmosphere. and we would sell food.

Q: Do you still hold them?

FF: No. No, we haven't had a block party—again, that's something that just—you just can't get the manpower to do it anymore. So it's just very, very difficult. It takes a lot of—it takes a lot of manpower.

Q: And all volunteer?

FF: All volunteers. All volunteers. Nobody gets paid.

Q: What do you think is going to happen as far as the Fire Department's volunteer status?

FF: I would guesstimate maybe within the next ten years, we'll have a paid department in Port. I hope not. We may—may have some paid members by then. I'm not sure. I really can't—oh, I hate—I really hate to see it, but it looks like it's going in that direction, because the membership is shrinking and it doesn't look like we're going to get too many new members. Have membership drives constantly, trying to get new members, trying to bring new members in. My son joined, and he's got three of his friends to join Flower Hill. But now it's the same thing. I mean, they're off to college. When they come home,

they're very active when they come home. But, then again, after four years of college, they're not going to be able to afford to live in Port Washington. And so I don't know what's going to happen. You know, it's just one of those things. It's just—and we do lose a lot of members because they just can't afford to rent an apartment or buy a house or anything here. And it's a real—it's a—it's a dilemma. It really is.

Q: Did you ever consider being a paid firefighter?

FF: No, I think because I had the business, I was working in the business, I don't think I ever thought of being, you know, being in a paid department.

Q: And how did that work out? How were you able to integrate all the volunteer activities that you did with the Fire Department with running a big business—a major business in town?

FF: It was—I think it—Don—Don Kurz —and myself talked about that most—a lot, because he had Kurz Oil Company. And we always came up with the—with the adage: “If you need something done always ask a busy person.” And we always seemed to—always seems that we're the ones, or that a small nucleus of us that are the ones that do most of the work and always find the time to do it. There's always—I mean, no, we don't make—probably don't make every single call we should. But we make everything we can. I mean, if I'm in the middle of—like if I can't leave the store, I can't leave the store. Because that's just—that's a given. But most of the time, there's enough people around that were home or available to go. Nighttime a different story. You just gave up; you just went.

Q: Did you talk—did you talk about the firefighting with your family?

FF: Yeah. I mean, growing up, I mean, I always had—I think growing up was the same thing. I had my kids over to the firehouse all the time—Sundays or Thursday nights or whatever. And I think that's the way they got interested. My daughter's not interested at all. She had no interest in it whatsoever. But my son was always very interested in the Fire Department. And he was in the Explorers. And by the time he turned seventeen, he was ready to join. He was ready to join the company.

Q: How do you think the entry of women has changed the Department? Or has affected the Department?

FF: I don't think it's affected it. It's been very good for the Department. Flower Hill, we've had one woman—Shari—Shari Gerson—is very—very capable. A good firefighter. She's an officer now. Sad, though to say, she's leaving us. She's moving out West in November. So it's a—it's going to be a loss. And I don't think anybody ever looked upon it as negative, because they did their job. They really—she's been a very good firefighter. I've worked with her in some fires.

Q: There was no resistance from the members at first?

FF: Oh, maybe some of the old-timers made comments, but most—mostly everybody accepted it and said, you know, "If they can do it, they can do it." That's it. And they did. We haven't had that many. More so in the Fire Medics, because a lot of the women have gone to Fire Medics, but they haven't been in the line companies. And we were kind of hoping that Shari would be our first female Captain. But ...

Q: And you've been active in other ways in the community, too.

FF: Yes.

Q: What are some of the other things you've been doing?

FF: Chamber of Commerce. I've been on the Chamber of Commerce. Lions Club. Business Improvement District. PYA, PAL, Methodist Church, my own church. Been on the Board of Directors of that. Official Board of the church. Cancer Care. Red Stocking Revue.

Q: That's a lot (laughs).

FF: Oh, yeah. Quite a few things. I'm sure there's plenty more, but I just ...

Q: And how much time would you say those various activities take?

FF: Well, it depends. It depends upon, you know, like the Chamber of Commerce, what is going on or whatever. I was on the Board of Directors for Chamber of Commerce for a little while. I was on Board of Directors of the Lions Club. Right now I don't commit too much time because I'm mainly tied up in the business right now. Business and family. I do commit a lot of time to my family, my children. Not so much my son anymore, because he's in college. Now—now my daughter. My daughter and I share—share a love of riding horses. So we do quite a bit of that. She does shows. She's been riding since she was four. So, she's fourteen now. And that's the love of her live is horses. She just absolutely loves them. And I share that with her, because I used to ride for over

twelve years. And I started riding again this summer. So, but otherwise, Red Stocking Revue is a good month and a half in the—in winter. Winter-spring, for the show.

Q: Were you involved with the Lions Club tribute to George Mahoney last night?

FF: I couldn't make it last night. I had another meeting last night (laughs). But we will go tonight for the Fire Department service. I've known George my whole life.

Q: And how does the Department honor a deceased firefighter?

FF: Well, we do have the—like tonight, we'll have—tonight we'll have the service. Chaplain, Tom Tobin, will lead the Department in the service—Fire Department service—which is not religious, but it's just a kind of general service from the Fire Department. And all the members attend in full—you know, full dress uniform. Hopefully, we'll have a good turnout. We should for George, for Sarge. I know when my father died, I was overwhelmed. We had, I don't know—can't even remember—how many members were there. It was just a tremendous, tremendous turnout.

Q: Is there a difference in the service when a firefighter dies in the line of duty, or, you know, from some other cause?

FF: Oh, yes. It's—it's—a line-of-duty death is a lot larger. You don't just have Port Washington Fire Department. We have departments from all over Long Island. New York. Out of state. When Bobby was killed, we had departments as far as Maryland sent people. People came from Maryland. And it's a lot larger. A lot larger funeral service and burial. It's tremendous. A regular member, like for George, it's a nice service, but

it's not—it's not something we do—you know, we do use the fire trucks for his funeral procession. Things like that. But not—not like a line-of-duty death. That's a tremendous turnout.

Q: Did you supply the flowers for George Mahoney's funeral?

FF: Uh huh. Yeah. We do most of the—we do a lot of flowers.

Q: What—what would you say makes a good firefighter?

FF: Hmmm. I think looking at some of the younger members we have—not bragging, but my son, as an example, and a couple of his friends—they're—some of the younger members, some of them are very, very well educated. Very interested. And really very welcome to learning and very open to criticism. Also, too, they're just very attentive members. Very, very attentive members. Sometimes you don't get that. Sometimes you get, you know, some people with attitudes and everything else. They know everything. But we have a good—we have a good cross section of younger members right now that are very willing to learn and very, very adaptable. Very, very adaptable. And just generally all-around good kids, which is great to see. I mean, a lot of the older members have made comments about it, you know, "even better than when we got in."

Q: What's your son's name?

FF: Scott. Scott Frederick.

Q: And how many of the members who joined when you did are still members? ... [END OF

SIDE A; BEGIN SIDE B] .. Oh, probably right now there's maybe ten, fifteen. About—maybe about fifteen that are still members since I was in. We all kind of joke about it, because I'm—I'm in a picture—a big pictureboard of members, and when we first got in, we were down in the bottom row of the second board, and now we're almost to the top of the board. So it looks kind of—to see the progression going up, it's like it's really kind of scary (laughs).

Q: How do you feel your military service helped you in your firefighting career, and vice versa?

FF: Well, I think military—I mean, Fire Department is quasi-military, even though it's not looked upon—looked upon as that way. But it is. It's a regimented organization. You have the same basic chain of command. And you have to, because you're dealing with situations where you have to have that control. You can't—people just can't go off doing what they want to do when they want to do it. There's got to be one leader making the decisions. And I think, as far as being in the service, being in the Army, being in the service, I feel that the service gives you a little more respect for command, for officers and things like that. Which I think is a good—you know, a good plus for some people. I'm not—I'm not saying that everybody should go in the service, but (laughs) ...

Q: In going back to your firefighting days, when you were internal, did you ever do anything for luck, as a charm or anything?

FF: Not really, huh uh. No, I never had any—never had any good luck charm or anything like that. Never really—never thought I needed it, no.

Q: Did you ever make a rescue yourself?

FF: We did one on Bayview Avenue. I got a commendation for that one. On Bayview Avenue from a basement.

Q: Can you tell me about that?

FF: I don't know when it was. Back in the '80s. Pulled one fellow out of a basement fire on Bayview Avenue on the curve. We worked on him, but it was too late.

Q: Was it the smoke?

FF: Smoke inhalation, yeah, smoke inhalation and heat.

Q: But you said you received a commendation from whom?

FF: Yeah, the Department. The Department, the Chief.

Q: How do you think the Department, or what do you think are the biggest changes that have taken place in the Department over the years that you've been a member?

FF: I think the biggest—I think the biggest changes are pretty much what's going on in every walk of life right now. The rules, regulations. Everyone's afraid of law suits. Insurance. The—I feel the officers, the Chiefs now have more—have a lot more responsibility on their head. Not that they didn't have responsibility, but there's more agencies overlooking everything that's going on. Training is very time-consuming for a new member. It's just tremendous. It's a very—it's a very big commitment. It's a tremendous commitment

nowadays. I watched my son go through fire schools from one whole summer. He went two days a week. He really—I mean, he really wanted to do it, but in the summer instead of going through all winter. And they put in a lot of time now. It's a lot—a lot of training. There's a lot of demand on training time.

Q: Do you think that's another reason why people are not volunteering to ...

FF: I think so. I think there's a lot of time—time demanded of people now.

Q: More than there used to be.

FF: Yeah. And I don't know, but I just think every organization's having the same problems, getting members. Any volunteer organization's having problems. People just don't want to give up the time. And I don't know what's going to happen, but it's very, very common nowadays.

Q: And what about the differences in equipment and in clothing?

FF: Oh, the gear, the gear is a hundred times—a hundred percent better. More safety oriented, all the gear. The Scott packs, the masks. The vehicles are bigger, more advanced, more automated. Everything up and down the line is very—very safety-oriented. Even procedures at fires are very, very safety conscious. We have a safety officer now at a fire.

Q: Has the Fire Department ever been sued by anybody? Have there ever been complaints from individuals that maybe you went in and you—you ruined their furniture or

something. Has that ever come up?

FF: Not that I know of. Not that I know of. I don't remember any cases, at least, of, you know, I mean, generally there's a fire, there's a fire We do try to protect everything. Our Department's always been very safety conscious and very personal property oriented. We don't just go in and just wreck the whole house, no. I mean, try to find the fire and put it out, contain it to that one area We're not—we don't—there's really no need to destroy the whole house if it's a pot on the stove burning.

Q: How do you protect the personal property?

FF: Oh, Atlantics has tarps and things like that. I mean, if it is a fire like on the second floor or something like that, while they're fighting the fire upstairs, they'll come in and cover the furniture and things with tarps and so the furniture and things are protected, so there's not anything ... [inaudible] ... If need be, sometimes we'd carry things out of the house, got things out of the house, so there's not ...

Q: What kinds of things have you carried out?

FF: The furniture and things like that and whatever, whatever valuables or whatever people had they want to ...

Q: But people have asked you ...

FF: Yes.

Q: ... said, "Would you go in and ..."

FF: Right.

Q: "... and get this."

FF: Right, right.

Q: Do you remember any particular case?

FF: Nah (laughs). No.

Q: What are you proudest of in your firefighting career?

FF: I don't know. I think being President and being on the Board for such a long time. Seeing my father make his fifty years. Seeing my son get in. Wishing—wishing my father was still alive when he got in, but-- there's quite a few things, you know. And I think that being—being able to be in an organization that I'm very, very proud of, very happy with. It's a real good bunch of guys.

Q: Are the social aspects of being in the Department a big plus for you?

FF: They used to be. I don't think it's as much as it used to be. We don't have that many social functions anymore. And we still—we go to work night on Thursday nights, and we'll hang out together on Thursday after we finish. But not as much as we used to (laughs). I think the problem is we're probably all getting a little older, and it's just not—

we just don't do that anymore.

Q: Well, what about the younger guys?

FF: The younger guys, it's very good. I think it's very good for the younger guys. They all, they seem to hang out together. I know my son, when he was home over the weekend, he was a couple times down at the firehouse at night with the guys. And that's not just Flower Hill. It's more like Protection, Atlantics, Flower Hill—the three companies. It's with all the guys. All the younger guys stay together, which is nice. Which is very nice.

Q: Well, what ...

FF: It's very ...

Q: ... oh, I'm sorry.

FF: ... a very enjoyable, you know, experience for them.

Q: What about the family aspect? You know, family events.

FF: Oh, we have the picnics. We still have a yearly picnic. Which is nice. I mean, everybody gets together. I mean, that's still nice. It's always nice to see everybody. Christmas party, we have that. But there's not a lot like it used to be. We used to have a lot more Sunday get-togethers or whatever, or just, you know, family get-togethers. But, again, I think it's because the time—time constraints.

Q: Well, would you say that you have made good friends in the Department? People that you're socially friendly with now?

FF: Oh, yeah, definitely. We do have a very tight circle of friends from the Fire Department. And have had them for many, many years. I mean, there we are, oh, there's probably fifteen, twenty of us that are very tight and very close. Wives—all our wives are friendly—our wives are close. And our kids. Our kids have grown up together, so it's really very nice.

Q: Do you remember the *Readers Digest* used to have a feature "My Most Unforgettable Character"? Would you say that there are people who would fit that bill in the Fire Department?

FF: Yeah. We have—we've had some characters in. We've had quite a few characters in. Flower Hill alone, we've had some.

Q: Could you tell me about them?

FF: I don't know. The good or the bad (laughs)?

Q: Either one (laughs).

FF: The good or the bad. Let's see. We had Bruce Willis. He was a bachelor. He used to make—he was a—he made teeth. He made teeth. He made—he wasn't a dentist, but he was a technician. And, by looking at him, you'd never think of it. But, Bruce imbibed alcohol pretty heavily also (laughs). He was just one of those characters. He was always

around and always—I mean, but always willing to help and willing to be there for anybody. A lot of the older members, I guess when we were younger, a lot of the older members were characters to us, I guess. Eddie Gorman was a gentleman of gentlemen. He was probably about six-four, two hundred and fifty pounds. A big man. Big man. But he was always very, very much a gentleman. A real gentleman. And he was really very funny.

Q: What were some of the ...

FF: He was like the grandfather figure for us all, you know.

Q: What were some of the funny things that would happen? Do you remember some of the pranks that people would play?

FF: Oh, we had water fights.

Q: What were they like?

FF: Oh, we'd have water fights between the members on a work night. Water fights between the companies. Protection would come up with a truck and start water fights. We'd go down there and start water fights.

Q: Would just turn the hose on each other?

FF: Right, right. On stand-bys, which were you'd stay at the firehouse all night, we'd have an air mattress to sleep on, and guys, in the middle of the night, would go up and pull the

plugs on the air mattress so you would wind up sleeping on the floor. I mean, just stupid—just funny little things.

Q: Now, with the stand-bys, when would you have people stay at the firehouse all night?

FF: On a stand-by, if it was like weather-related, like a snow storm, like a bad snow storm. We had the black-out a couple of years ago—not last year, but a year ago we had the black-out. Heavy thunder and lightning storms. Hurricane. Whatever. Any type of situation where it's hard for the members to get to the firehouse. And mainly, most of the younger guys stay. The night of the black-out, I stayed. My son and I stayed the whole night. I'm not used to that kind of thing anymore. But it was all right. I mean, and what—actually what my job now on stand-by is cook. I pull everything together, go down to the store and get food and cook for the guys. Then they, you know, they kind of like that. They like, you know ...

Q: Do you have a specialty?

FF: Oh, no, not really. Pretty much anything.

Q: What do you—what do you usually cook?

FF: I'll do pasta, and I'll do steaks. I'll do hamburgers, hot dogs, chicken. (Laughs) It's very strange. I mean, nowadays when, you know, when I ask the kids what they want to eat, they say, "Oh, we'll take chicken." You know, they want chicken breasts. Healthy, healthy eaters. Salad and chicken breast, you know. But we do pasta. I'll do pasta and clam sauce, or something like that. Actually, the night of the black-out, I think I fed the Department, we fed about eighty-some-odd people that night (laughs), which is good. It

was a lot of fun. It was really—those are the times when everybody kind of pitches in, everyone gets together. Myself, we had my son and his friends, they were all up there, we're making salads and, you know, I'm kind of like the head chef. Got to keep them all going. But it was very—they're very good.

Q: So they were all firefighters. Did they ...

FF: They were all—oh, yeah, yeah. Well, we had some of their family. They had some of their families. They were—this firehouse has a generator, so we had power. We had air conditioning and everything, so it was like (laughs), you know, I mean, it's a—not a plus, but, I mean, it was for the families that didn't have, you know. And we would—well, we'd welcome anybody. There's no problem that way. So we had—probably we had eighty to a hundred people staying that night. And it was quite a group.

Q: Where would everybody sleep?

FF: Oh, we had air mattresses, the floor. I mean, that's up to them. There's no, you know ...

Q: ... [Did they ???] ...

FF: ... the members—the members, no, the members—members, we have air mattresses. We have twenty-five, thirty air mattresses for the members. And then everyone else, there's chairs and whatever. That's up to you. We have no—well, we're not really an emergency shelter. We're just, you know, it's just we have room for the members, and then there's chairs. That's it. The furniture around, you know, there's couches upstairs and things, and we have chairs and things. And some people stayed all night and some people didn't.

Some people went home, back home. I think I wound up sleeping—myself and Tommy Murray slept down in the truck room on chairs. But, I mean, it's a thing when you get something like that, you get multi-calls. Especially when it first happened, we got multi-calls. The alarms go off, things like that. And we may have had twenty-five, thirty calls in a row. And most of them are just automatic alarms. There's nothing; there's no fires. I don't think we even had a fire that night. A fire fire. We had a lot of calls, but not—nothing serious. Then, of course, when the power starts to come back on, that's when the alarms kick in again, so you're back out chasing alarms. But it's just a, you know, just ...

Q: What would be the single bit of advice you'd give somebody to avoid a home fire?

FF: Just, I mean, pretty much just check around your house and make sure everything is—extension cords, everything else, smoke detectors, CO₂ [carbon monoxide] alarms. And just kind of do a visual check around your house and make sure there's no exits blocked or piles of papers anyplace, or anything's piled by the boiler. But, I mean, you can go as far as you can even call one of the Chiefs and have somebody come in—one of the—sometimes the Fire Marshal will go out and just do—do an inspection. We do—you know, we do inspections on all commercial establishments. Home, if you have a special request, I mean the Chief would send somebody.

Q: Well, why would somebody have a special request?

FF: Oh, if they're concerned—if they're concerned about the home, or they're just concerned that they would like to make sure they're safe and they're doing everything they can. And the possibility of a fire is always there. There's always extenuating circumstances. You know, wiring in the house you can't see. A lot of different things. A lot, a lot of different

things that could happen, you know.

Q: What was your best day as a firefighter?

FF: (Laughs) My best day. I don't really— you know, my proudest moment was when my son got in. When my son got elected to membership. When I handed him his badges. That was pretty—that was pretty good. That was real good. I was very, very proud at that moment.

Q: What about your worst day?

FF: I think that goes back to the Bobby Dayton, that I was telling you—that was the worst, I think.

Q: How have you yourself dealt with traumas on the job, like, you know, dealing with Bobby Dayton's death or the time you rescued the man and he didn't pull through?

FF: Oh, well, it was pretty much tough, you know. Dayton, with Bobby, we had counselors. We had grief counselors come in. And that was handled very well. That was handled very well. Pretty much, otherwise, we just kind of talked amongst ourselves, or, you know, you just knew you did the best you could. We never had—before, we never had—we never went into grief counseling or things like that. It was just like it was a job and you did it, and if it didn't work, it didn't work. You know, you tried your best, and as long as you understood you tried your best, then that was it, you know.

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

FF: I think—I think the oral history for the Department is very good. I think it's a—I was involved in the oral history project for the business community also. But I think it's great. It really puts down on paper, on tape, or whatever, what happens in the Department, members of the Department. I think it'll be nice. Maybe a hundred years from now, to be able to go back over this. Because the companies—well, some of the companies have kept up on history, but some haven't. You know, and there's a lot of questions when you start going back. I mean, we're working on our hundredth and we're looking at this and like, well, who's this? or who's that? Or what happened? Did this really happen? Did that happen? Or—and it is, I mean, we have—we have pretty much all our minutes from all the meetings, right from the conception, which is great. We were going over some the other night, just thumbing through some minutes from 1906. And it was really very interesting.

Q: What kinds of things ...

FF: Well, one of the silliest things that sticks out in my mind was they still had—they still had a problem with the Ladies Auxiliary with their closet. They didn't have any place to put their things. And that's still (laughs) the same thing we have today. We have the ladies keep bugging us about their closet. And we're like all right.

Q: You mean, to put their food down there they're cooking or ...

FF: Whatever. Their plates or whatever—whatever it is. Whatever they were doing. I don't know. It was just—it's just (laughs) their storage. Nobody has a key for their closet (laughs). But it was—it was just—and then some of the—the funny: dues were five

cents. I don't know, there was all kinds of little—I can't remember too much of it. But there was just—it was just very—very interesting to go through some of those things.

Q: Is there anything else we haven't talked about that you feel we should touch on?

FF: I think we've pretty much covered it—I think we've covered it pretty well.

Q: Okay. Well, thank you very much.

FF: Okay, Sally. Thank for ... [??] [INTERRUPTION] ...

Q: About how—how has the community changed during the years you've been here?

FF: The community's changed quite a bit. I mean, even just in the last ten, fifteen years the community has changed. Twenty years, the community has changed drastically. A lot of the new people coming in don't even realize that we're a volunteer fire department. They think we're a paid department. In some aspects, it's changed for the better, and some aspects I feel it's kind of lost it. Kind of losing its small-town, home atmosphere. Look at the business community; there's very few businesses left. I don't know.

Q: How do you think it's changed for the better? What are the ways?

FF: (Laughs)I guess being from the old school of Port Washington, it doesn't seem better. It seems kind of sad that we're losing—you know, we're losing our small town. We're losing the real family structure in Port Washington. It's not-- you know, the old-timers are leaving or dying off, and it's just not the same. People aren't as friendly. People aren't as concerned. They're moving in for a place to live on a train line to the city, and

that's it. They're not—but a lot of people aren't community. Which is sad.

Q: When you hear the term "clamdiggers," what does that mean to you?

FF: (Laughs) Well, that's family. My mother's family was clamdiggers. My mother's family goes back to Cornwalls. And there are not twenty left.

Q: They actually did go out and dig for clams?

FF: Yeah. Oh, yeah. They were—they were digging clams out in the bay. Some were clamdiggers; some were farmers; some were fisherman. It was a ...

Q: The term clamdigger, as I've heard it, seemed to represent not only people who actually dug the clams, but people who lived here.

FF: The old-timers. Right. Well, now they—I mean, the clamdigger has been put on our label as the old-timers, as the natives, the originals, you know, the original people.

Q: Do you consider it a positive term or negative?

FF: Oh, yeah, I mean that was our—that was our label. That's what we were, you know, we're clamdiggers (laughs).

Q: And then, you were saying that one of the things you make is, what? pasta with clam sauce?

FF: Right (laughs). Well, I still have the original family clam chowder recipe.

Q: Oh, you do? Could you let us have a copy?

FF: Uh, I don't know (laughs). I don't know. I don't know. Yeah, I could do that—that was brought from my grandfather to my uncle. So they're still using it in the firehouse.

Q: Okay, thanks.

FF: Okay.