

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

Transcript Of Oral History Interview With

Deborah Henderson
Fire Medic Company No. 1

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

©2006



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

Q: ... name is Debbie Henderson, and you are currently the Chief Engineer at the Fire Medics. And before that, you were the assistant engineer. So, that's a big job for someone as young as yourself. Tell me how you got to be Chief Engineer.

Deborah Henderson: Well, we had an older gentleman that was kind of like..we called..we nicknamed him "Pops [Richard Borelli]." And he was kind of like, you know, the father of the company, almost like that. And he asked me, because I'm available at different times than other people, like I'm available mostly in the mornings due to the fact that I work nights, he asked me if I could come around and to hang out in the mornings and stuff and stock the ambulances and stuff. And I said I would. So, he put me in the position as an Assistant Engineer. And I started just doing basic stock of the ambulance and stuff. And unfortunately, last year he passed away. I mean, actually, it was this year. March of 2004, he passed away, and I kind of had to move up in rank to Head Engineer. So, it's kind of a big responsibility.

Q: Yeah.

DH: Not so much, necessarily for someone my age, I mean (laughs), but I enjoy it. It gets me, you know, involved in the company, more so than I ever was. I stock the ambulances. I make sure that the drugs are off when they're expired. I make sure that the maintenance is done and everything. You know, that they're serviced correctly and everything and all

the equipment is up to par and everything. So that's basically what it is.

Q: So you've been a member since 1999. So, what--so you are twenty-nine years old, so you were twenty-four when you joined?

DH: Uh huh.

Q: Okay. So, tell me why you joined.

DH: Well, I joined after I came back from college and Europe. I spent two years in Europe, then I came back.

Q: You did?

DH: And I joined because the profession I was going into was nursing.

Q: Right.

DH: So, that's what I went to college for, and I was very interested in the emergency part of it. Like the before the hospital part. So, I knew Fire Medics was in existence for quite some time--at least twenty-five years already. We're celebrating twenty-five this year. Because my dad is a member of Port Washington Fire Department, and I also have many

friends, like Beverly who's the President of the company, and she was encouraging me to join and stuff. So I figured it would help out, not only, you know, with my nursing career, but with--get me back to--back in touch with the medical profession before I actually went on to be a nurse. So, it--it worked out pretty good. It's a very interesting company. I like it, you know.

Q: And your dad is Ronnie Henderson.

DH: Ronnie Henderson, uh huh.

Q: And how long has he been a member?

DH: He's been a member of Protection for thirty-five years. He's actually, I think, almost close to forty now.

Q: Wow.

DH: So, yeah.

Q: And, so do you have any memories of him firefighting, as a child, or your own memories about firefighting?

DH: Lots of memories (laughs). They probably date back more so for the athletic reason, because my dad was on the drill team. And he was on the softball teams. So, I can remember being a child and being wheeled around in a carriage and hearing nothing but the screeching of the racing trucks as I went to tournament upon tournament. My mother would drag me. But I enjoyed it. I mean, it really opened a whole, like 'nother side, you know. It's weird. It's--I think it takes a very special person to understand the Fire Department. I mean, there's the rumors and then there's the truth, you know. And everybody knows what they know, and unless you experience it, it's an interesting--and there's no lie when they say it's like a brotherhood.

Q: Right.

DH: Because you have--I mean, there's four hundred members in the Department, and I have four hundred people that like know me and would come to my aid and my back-up in a second. And it's ...

Q: Right.

DH: ... really, really an interesting like lovely experience, you know. So, I just like it. As far as fires, the only one fire I remember is I remember (laughs) the lighthouse fire. The lighthouse fire that my dad went to. And I remember him telling me how it was just blazing. And we had gone to like watch it--my mom and I.

Q: Where was it?

DH: It was at the Sands Point lighthouse.

Q: Oh, yeah, that's right by the Point.

DH: Yeah, right down on the Point. It was a big lighthouse fire. My mom was like, "Come on, come on! We can go see it." So we went to see it ...

Q: How old were you?

DH: ... we could just see it burning. I think I was--I had to be in my younger years. I had to be like six, eight years old, or something like that. And I could see it burning and stuff. And I said, "Daddy's going to go in there?" And she's like, "Yeah, he's going to go in there."

Q: Wow.

DH: And they came out and stuff, and, you know, it was just--it's just--it's a miraculous thing to watch, you know.

Q: And now I know that--well, your father grew up in Port Washington. Do you have other people in your family, besides your dad, who's also in the Fire Department?

DH: My brother is not and my mother is not. But that's ...

Q: Your uncles, or do you have any ..

DH: Oh, my uncle was involved, yes. My dad's brother, Tommy, was involved for--I think he was in it for at least ten years, at Protection also. And he was a huge, huge athletic softball guy. They won--they won their first state tournament when he was a member of the softball team.

Q: Yep.

DH: And, as a lot of people say, then, if you know Ronnie and Tommy, they were the best softball players ever. They'll tell anybody. Ask Manhasset, ask Great Neck.

Q: True.

DH: And they'll tell anybody that they were. So, most of it has been athletic, but it has been like, you know, other stuff, too.

Q: And so what kind of things did you learn from your dad about fighting fires or about the Fire Department? What specifically do you remember? Anything?

DH: I think more so like responsibility.

Q: Uh huh.

DH: Like you have a commitment to an organization, and, you know, it's--it's not a joke organization. You know what I mean? It's an organization that is--they need you, and when you make a commitment to be in it, you have to make a commitment all the way. Like you're going to respond to these calls; you're going to be there when somebody else needs you--especially the Fire Medic Company. I mean, because we do so many calls, and the town relies on us so much to get our ambulances out and get them to a hospital, that you just can't like--I mean, blow it off as like easily as you think. Especially when someone's life is concerned. Fire is a little different story. I mean, you know, not everything is blazing. We all know that.

Q: Right.

DH: But, I mean, when somebody calls 9-1-1, there's a likely chance that a likely--a real emergency's happening, you know. So, when you're there, you've just got to go, and that's, I think, the biggest thing he's taught me is responsibility about it. And, you know

...

Q: When you first joined, who was the Captain of the Fire Medics?

DH: Captain. I think when I first joined, it was Christine Alexander. And she's a young girl, just like me. She's like my age. And I think, as far as--she was like a mentor almost. It was kind of interesting to see a girl that was so young be a Captain of a company and have so much responsibility, but handle it so well. Like she really did a great job for the year. She only did it for a year, because she ended up getting married and having a child and stuff. But, I mean, just that people looked to her. You knew she was like a leader, you know. And it was just how nicely everybody followed in line. I mean, every company and every department has its ups and downs. You know what I mean? But she had an ability to just bring everybody together when it needed to be--like when it was crunch time. And that was very unique, and I thought she was awesome at it.

Q: Is there a formal process for mentoring, or is it just something that happens naturally?

DH: There sort of is a formal process now. We've just put one into place as a mentoring system. When you come into Fire Medics, you have to be sponsored by a member. Which means, like that member's supposed to keep an eye on you for the first six months to make sure you get equipment-trained, vehicle-trained so you can drive the ambulance and stuff. We've more so put that into a respect as maybe a mentoring program now,

because not only are you the person--not only the person that sponsored you, but one of the more senior members in the company like--has like two years or more in the company. You get assigned--they get assigned to you, and you're supposed to just keep an eye on them and make sure they're doing the right things. And make sure if they have any questions or if they don't--not sure, you're supposed to be there to answer. You know, you give them their phone number, and they kind of like--your little sidekick is what they are, you know, just to make sure that they're handling everything very well. I mean, because a lot of the kids now joining are seventeen, eighteen years old.

Q: Right.

DH: And the maturity's not there, you know. And for something when you're dealing with life and death, you know, you've got to be ready for the situation. So it's--I think it's a great idea--the mentoring program. And the Captain now is--she helped to institute that. That's Kelly ... [Corelli] ... And she's done a nice job of that, too, so--following up on it.

Q: What do you remember about when you first joined? Were you scared?

DH: Was I? I don't remember. Let's see. I remember Bev really telling me that she was very happy that I joined, because, as she'll put it, she used to change my diaper.

Q: (Laughs).

DH: She was very excited to see ...

Q: This is Beverly? Who's Beverly?

DH: Beverly Reese. She's the President of the company. She's been there twenty-five years.
She's been in ...

Q: R-E-E-S?

DH: R-E-E-S-E. She's been a member as long as the company's been in existence--Fire
Medics has been in existence.

Q: Right. Wow.

DH: I was nervous, I guess, the first time I went on a call. The first time I went on an
ambulance call, I mean, it was just--it was nerve-wracking. A lady had fallen down a
flight of stairs. You know, she broke her hip and everything. And, you know, you're
kind of nervous. You--you know where everything is and they're telling you what to do,
and then there's like, you know, and it just takes it to a whole 'nother level. So ...

Q: Right.

DH: But once you put it into play and you get your knack down and stuff like that, it's nice.

Q: Now, do you think it was easier for you, because you were a nurse?

DH: Yes. I think I had a very big advantage over a lot of people that are brand new. I mean, I knew how to take a blood pressure; I knew how to take a pulse. I know situations, like how to recognize medical situations and stuff. I wasn't a nurse when I joined; I was only a nurse's aid. And I wasn't an EMT when I joined; I had to go for that training. So, the first six months in the company, I was just like, you know, doing my equipment and driving, and that was, you know, stuff to get under your belt.

Q: Wow. So, what do you think is the most challenging part of your job there?

DH: The challenging part of my job?

Q: Uh huh.

DH: I think it has to be--I think it has to be the personalities. Like, you know, a lot of people work together very well, but they have to realize that when they put it together--well, they put aside their personalities and stuff, that we have to get a job done. Like, you know, and get the ambulance out and get somebody's, you know, life saved. And I think,

you know, once you can get past all--everybody's own different personalities and work together as a team, I think it's very--it works much smoothly, much more smoothly, other than like when you're having people bickering at each other and stuff like that. But it's an organization, so things happen, you know.

Q: Would you ever consider running for Chief?

DH: Chief? Fire Medics doesn't have a Chief in Port Washington. As far--highest we can go is Captain. Would I ever consider it? I would.

Q: You would.

DH: I would. I would--I like it. And we'll see what happens. I don't know.

Q: So what do you plan on doing for the hundredth anniversary?

DH: The hundredth anniversary. What do I plan on doing? Probably a lot of stuff, whatever the Department's doing. I usually just kind of hang out with the Department and make sure like, you know--I think simultaneously, Fire Medics is celebrating their twenty-fifth this year, and then isn't the Department's hundredth next year? It's 2005, right?

Q: Right.

DH: So I think, you know, I'm sure there's going to be some--there's going to be some parties, and there's going to be like some remembrance stuff and everything. So I'm sure it'll be really nice. They usually do a nice job.

Q: Now, when you go--when you decide to join a Department, is there some kind of an installation, a dinner or a--what do they do? What's--how does that ...

DH: There's two types of installation. There's an installation dinner for all the companies.

Q: Right.

DH: And that's--there's four companies, so there's an installation every year when we elect new officers.

Q: Right.

DH: So, you get installed then. And then, on every two years--because we elect a new Chief--there's a huge installation for the entire Department to go to.

Q: Right.

DH: And this year happens to be a year where there'll be a Department installation, because Chris Bollerman who's the Chief of the Department right now is stepping down, because he's done his two years, and Glen [Pederson] will go up as Head Chief. And they'll elect a new Baby Chief. So ...

Q: And--okay, and then, so now your company--because it's not like the other companies--there--I mean, is there competition between your company and the others, or what do you think?

DH: I think there--I think there is. Fire Medics, I think the firemen, you know, they like us to a certain extent.

Q: Right.

DH: And then they get upset at us, because we're so busy that we can't hand--sometimes handle all the stuff that goes on in Port Washington, and they kind of just--they get on us. You know what I mean? Like, you know, just like jokingly will say, "Hey, listen. Couldn't get your ambulance out today?" "Couldn't do that ..." you know. Because there's just so many calls that it's really hard to man an ambulance twenty-four hours a day seven days a week. And, you know, we try, you know, to the best of our ability and stuff like that. And we do a very good job. I mean, if you ask any of the ambulance companies on Long Island would say that Port Washington is probably one of the best

ambulance companies. Our Tetarized [a qualification status, named after member Joseph Teta] technicians, and everything. It's just, unfortunately, the demand, you can't really-- so they'll get on us, yeah. There is--I'm sure there's some competition, too, because sometimes the firemen don't get their trucks out, so we'll go right back at them. It's friendly, you know. We joke around and like that, but we like to go at each other, yeah.

Q: Has anything controversial come up since you've been in the Fire Department? Since 1999?

DH: Anything controversial? I don't think so. Not really. I mean, we run pretty much our own ship, I guess you would say. You know, the Department, I mean, Fire Department they're "firemen," and the medics, we--some of us are firemen also that are in Medics in stuff. But it's just so hard for them. I mean, they can drive for us and stuff, but to have your own unique thing, you have to be an EMT in order to run a New York State ambulance, you know.

Q: You say fireman; also "fireperson"?

DH: Yes.

Q: You're firemen also.

DH: Yes.

Q: Okay. Now, how many women in the Fire Medics are also firemen?

DH: I think there's like one, two, three, four--I think there's like five or six of us that are cross-trained between the two.

Q: So did you have to go through the physical training?

DH: I went to a class for a week. It was a crash course. I took it, and then I didn't actually do any of the training around here that Port Washington does as a fireman, which, of course, if I wanted to go inside a fire, the Chiefs would want me to do that stuff. They told me any time I wanted to go further with that--I took the crash course specifically because on the ambulance we do have Scott Packs, which is the mask breathing stuff--that if anything was ever to happen and I was the first one to respond, and I had to go in a house, at least I knew how to use the equipment. So it was like--but, you know, you take a test. It's like EMT. You become certified. You just have to further your credentials, and I haven't gone any further than just becoming certified. I haven't really done anything else, because the EMT takes up so much time. And I want to go try and be an AMS technician--advanced medical technician, which is like a paramedic, and that's a whole 'nother thirteen months of school. So ...

Q: Wow. How about women in the Department. Who was the first woman?

DH: The first woman. In the Fire Department? I believe there was a young lady; her name was--I believe it was Janet ... [Kimmerly] ... who's been in Protection for quite some time. I know she writes for one of the--Fire News or something like that. She's one of the--she was active for a very, very long time. I think she was one of the first women to ever like break the barrier into the Port Washington Fire Department. Medics has always had women. And, you know, like Beverly's been twenty-five years, and, you know, Leslie [Culp], and a bunch of other people have always been twenty-five years. But, I guess as far as, you know ...

Q: How many women firemen now?

DH: Oh, I--one, two, let's see, I know three, four. I think there's at least four or five now, currently, that are active.

Q: Really?

DH: Yeah, so ...

Q: And so how long is it--so do you feel--I guess, because you're with the Fire Medics, do you feel different as a woman, being with the Department? I mean, there's still a lot of

guys, I guess, huh?

DH: Yeah. Do I feel different? No, not really. A lot of guys treat me, I guess, just like one of the guys. They know my history. They know, like, you know, my background. Like who my dad is, you know, and stuff like this. So, I mean, a lot of them don't degrade me as a woman. You know what I mean? They don't--they don't hold those standards that they hold some women to, you know. I mean, I was a huge athlete. They all know that, too...

Q: Right.

DH: Some--in some cases (laughs), they even think I'm actually a little bit more superior than they are. Not that--no one would ever--they won't ever tell you that in person, but, you know, some of them will say, "Listen, you know, if you need to get the job done, she can get it done." So ...

Q: That's nice. How do you think that the Fire Department is perceived by the public in Port Washington?

DH: I think the--I think it's very positive in Port Washington. I really think it's very positive. You can just tell by when you walk down the parades for Memorial Day and Pride in Port--we just did Pride in Port this past weekend. And every time we march, the crowd

just cheers for like the Fire Department and for the EMS personnel. They see us all over the place. I mean, we do three thousand calls a year. So there's not one time you don't see our trucks or our ambulances out there, so--and I think they have a very high perception of Port Washington Fire Department.

Q: What do you think makes a good firefighter? What are the qualities that's required?

DH: I think you need strength, yes, to a certain extent. You also have the right--have the right frame of mind to be a firefighter. Courage. I'd go with courage, definitely. And, you know, and skill and stuff, you know. I mean, you'll get the training. They will provide the training. Port Washington will provide the training for you, but you have to realize that if you're not going to--you know, if you don't have the courage to go into a burning building to save somebody, or the heroism and stuff like that, then it's not going to work. You know what I mean? You have to be able to perform fast. Quick and fast. You know, you have to make split second decisions, you know, in split seconds. And if you can't do that, you kind of get--you may get shoved around and like the guys may over--turn you and stuff like that. But as long as you can hold your own --then I don't think you should have a problem.

Q: What's the most serious situation that you came upon as a Fire Medic?

DH: Serious situation? It would have to be--I guess it would be--I guess it'd be almost two

years now. I responded to an ...

Q: So, 19--so 2002?

DH: 2002 or '01, yeah. I responded to an overturned vehicle on Middle Neck Road, up by Guggenheim in there. And it came over as an MVA.

Q: Which is ...?

DH: Motor vehicle accident. And I was the first to in an ambulance. I was on night duty. I guess it came over about--it had to come over about ten o'clock, ten-thirty at night. And I went around the path and I'm looking for the car. Because they said it's between that ... [Luckenbach] ... Road, right past where the stables are, and the other road. And I'm looking, and I'm like, "Does anybody see a car?" I'm like I don't see anything. And I'm like it can't actually be down Luckenbach because they gave that as a crossroad. And I'm thinking to myself, I really don't see it. And out of the corner of my eye, I see one of the headlights in the street going like this. To find out that the car was up on its side against the telephone pole like this. So, with that, I got on the radio right away, and I called for ... [our cops] ... to let them know that they had an overturn and that I needed heavy rescue. And by that time, the Chief, had been right behind me, so he saw what I saw. So he started [stepping on the air] really fast for a lot of the extrication. We needed the jaws of life and stuff to get these kids out. I had gone over to the vehicle, and I could only see

one person. I couldn't see the driver. The driver was buried under the--the steering wheel. But I could see the passenger, and, you know, I was looking for a pulse, any sign of life. And she--the cop had told me--the Sands Point cop who had got there first --said that he had heard, like, you know, maybe a little bit of like moaning and stuff like that. When I went over to the vehicle, you know, I was looking for pulse--anything I can get. Like trying to shake her, wake her, and nothing. So, we still extricated them within--both of them were out of the car within fifteen to twenty minutes. I mean, it was fabulous extrication. We worked it up as a trauma--cardiac trauma. Brought her to St. Francis. She ended up dying. And he went to North Shore, the boy, and he ended up dying. But it was a very, very--it was the first time I was ever in a, like incident like that. I mean, I've seen death before, as a nurse. But to see two kids my age--well, they were actually younger than me. They were like three or four years younger than me. But to see two kids on a stretcher, on a backboard, being, you know, I'm working them up as best I can, is just--it's a whole 'nother experience in itself.

Q: Yep. Yeah. Do you ever dream about fires?

DH: Not really. I'm not really a fire buff.

Q: Right.

DH: You know, but, I mean, no, I don't think so. I'm more of a ...

Q: Do you ever do anything for good luck?

DH: For good luck?

Q: Are you superstitious?

DH: I don't think so. I'm not really that superstitious. Not like basketball. But (laughs), like I say, I mean, I wear my jacket all the time, and my--my Star of Life jacket, which is kind of special to me, because, you know, the Star of Life is, you know, representative of EM--a symbol of EMS.

Q: Oh, it is?

DH: Yeah, and it's like, you know, it's ...

Q: What color is the jacket?

DH: The color is navy blue.

Q: Uh huh.

DH: And it has silver. This huge reflective star of life. So, you can stick out like a sore thumb anywhere, and I think it's kind of funny. When I first put it on, everyone's like, "Wow, you look like a billboard." You know like, "Yeah, thanks." But I kind of wear it-
-I like to wear it on calls at night and stuff, so I bring it with me most of the time.

Q: So you told me before we started that you're marrying someone who's a fire chief.

DH: I am.

Q: And you're going to be moving over to [Seaford] ?

DH: Seaford. Yes.

Q: So, how is that going to be?

DH: Port Washington allows you to be a member on what they call a squad of medics. So that's how I will stay in Port Washington in Medic Company. I think the firemen have a different rule that you actually have to live in the town.

Q: Right.

DH: Medics is a little easier, because we need so many members that they extend it, you

know, you can--as long as you do your duties and everything else.

Q: How does that work? Will you come over ...

DH: Come over and I spend the night.

Q: Oh, okay.

DH: It's night duties. So, from nine p.m. to six a.m., I do duty, which is nine hours. So, I just sleep at the firehouse. We have sleeping quarters and stuff.

Q: Right.

DH: So I sleep there, and whenever a call comes over, I just take the ambulance and go to it.
So ...

Q: So, do you go to the social ...

DH: Events?

Q: ... events?

DH: Yeah. Well, that gives me a chance to hang out with the Department, and I like all of the guys from the Department. Some of my best friends are in the companies, Protection and Flower Hill and Atlantics. So that gives me a chance to see them.

Q: And who are they? Who are your friends?

DH: Glen Wood. Scott Wood. Brian Vogele. Brian [Waterson]. [Vicky McCabe] ... Billy Davis. There's a bunch of guys. They're like--a couple of them are a couple of years older than I am, and a couple are a couple of years younger than I. So I kind of mix in between the older boys and the younger boys, and I have a good time, you know. So ...

Q: What has surprised you since you've become a firefighter? What--something like you didn't expect to either happen or just surprised you?

DH: What surprised me? I think just the amount of calls, I think. I don't know what I was expecting when I came in. Like, I guess I was just expecting, like, you know, oh, a call comes over and you go. And--but, like a call comes over, and then another call comes over, and then another call comes over. Like, you literally could sit on the ambulance all day and not get off if you like don't pace yourself. You know what I mean? You get to the hospital, you get rid of your patient, you come back, and then another call comes over. So, I've been tied on the ambulance for like five or six hours at a time, and it's all doing calls back to back to back. And you're like, it's mind-boggling to you, because

you're like, oh, my God! I can't believe that people use the ambulance this much. Like sometimes it--you know, sometimes you go on ahead and you get there and they're like--and, you know, people are scared to death and everybody's, you know, instance of whatever they consider emergency is different. You know, to me, like, you know, if somebody calls for a nose bleed, I'm like, you're tying up a 9-1-1 emergency ambulance for a nose bleed, if somebody has--is having a cardiac arrest. Like, you know, you try not to like say, well they're not an emergency.

Q: Right.

DH: And, you know, but you've still got to go and you've still got to assess the patient, and you've still got to do your thing, and if they want to go to the hospital, it's your job to take them and make them feel comfortable. And, I guess that's kind of the surprising thing is the people's definition as to what they consider a 9-1-1 emergency. You know, I've just been to sometimes what I consider a little ridiculous calls, you know.

Q: Right.

DH: And just--I don't feel like, you know, they needed to tie an ambulance up for that, when somebody else--we do that many calls that you're tying our ambulance up and that I can miss something else. You know what I mean? That might be more--but they don't know that. So that's not fair to say, but that's just our little thing and ...

Q: How many calls do you get in a year, do you know?

DH: We get over, I think, fifteen hundred calls a year. Yeah, we're up there. Up there. Port Washington does a total of three thousand. I think we almost split it half and half. The ambulance does fifteen and fire does fifteen, like, you know, a little bit.

Q: Really?

DH: So ...

Q: Can you think of something funny or an unusual event or something that made you really laugh with the Fire Medics?

DH: At Fire Medics? I think we just--any one of our parties, I think, is great. Because, you know what? It's a chance for us to all let our hair down, and you get to see different sides of people and aspects of people. I mean, a lot of people think it's so funny because I can be so serious at one point and then I can go out and have the best time in the world, and they think it's so funny how I can just like change. Like they call me like the Jekyll and Hyde. Like I'll be so serious on a call: "You've got to do this; you've got to do that. Let's get it done. Let's get out of here with this patient." And then we'll go like out and we'll hang out at one of the parties, and we're having a couple of cocktails and we're

dancing, and I'm out there dancing like, you know, because that's what I love to do. And everyone's like they found it so amazing that--but it--it's just, I think, getting to see people in different aspects and in different lights. You get to see the two sides of everybody, you know. Their fun side and their serious side, and I think that's nice.

Q: Do you ever pull any pranks at the--on each other?

DH: No, I don't think so. No. Because we've done--I don't know, they try, but, no I don't--we don't even try, I don't think. Because it's too much like if something happens and suddenly happens to the ambulance, then we're in a lot of trouble. So we really don't try to pull too many pranks.

Q: Have you ever made a mistake?

DH: Have I ever made a mistake? I don't know. That's tough to say. On a call, maybe. But an error in judgement. Like, you know, just patient assessment-wise ...

Q: Right.

DH: ... or, you know, like, I would say like--I can't think of anything specific that I could really find in my memory that I made an error on, but, you know, maybe just a mis-judgement of something that I should have done and that I didn't do fast enough, or I

didn't--you know, I didn't assess this part where I should have assessed, you know. But I didn't realize until I'm watching the doctors do their fast triage assessment, and he's like, "Well, did you listen to this?" And I'm trying to sort of like, "Hmm, not really," you know. Because you're supposed to do a focused assessment, and like--but that's the only thing I could think of. There's no one specific thing that I think I've ever made a mistake on.

Q: So, who do people call before Fire Medics was formed? Like how--what was the ambulance process then?

DH: The ambulance process, I believe--because now this is before me-- ...

Q: Right.

DH: ... is I believe the firemen ran it. Like the firemen--Fire Medics was not in existence by itself. It was part of the Port Washington Fire Department, like, not that it's not Port Washington Fire--it is still the Port Washington Fire Department. But it didn't have its own house like it does now. I believe the gentlemen--the older gentlemen you see at the ambulance and stuff, my mother used to tell me about the old station wagons they used to have that they ran as ambulances. And I look at those ambulances on the walls down there, and I'm like, are you kidding me? You actually put a patient in the back of that? I mean, it looks like a flat-back station wagon, you know (laughs). There was no room to

sit in the back. How did you do any kind of patient care? What did you do? Just stuff 'em in, run around, and drive, and like, you know, and pray the thing made it? That's what I got the picture of. But, I believe the firemen ran it for such a long time, and then there was a bunch of courageous--well, I would say courageous--but enough willing guys and willing women to divide up and actually form Fire Medics. Take the ambulance part away from the Fire Department and form its own house and stuff, and it's been like that ever since.

Q: What is the standard call that you get?

DH: A standard call?

Q: What are the most calls that you get?

DH: I would think a lot of times we get--we get a lot of--there's a lot of elderly people in this community.

Q: Right.

DH: I think the most of them are either elderly falls or elderly people with difficulty breathing and stuff. I would think those would be the most common ones that we get. So they're just, you know, they've either fallen--they've fallen, or something happened during the

middle of the night, the wake up short of breath and I think it freaks them out so much that they dial 9-1-1. And then we go to the house. So ...

Q: Have you--are you active in the social--you know, the setting up of the social events, or no?

DH: Me? No, not so much. I kind of--I kind of just go to them. I don't really, you know, if they wanted me to help and stuff like that, then I would. I mean, like I certainly--if we have like Thanksgiving parties and Christmas parties, I certainly bake stuff and do that kind of stuff. But I don't really like--I always help clean up, too. I'm a big clean-up fan, you know, so--but I don't really set up anything or organize that kind of stuff, the parties. They pretty much have a committee that does that, and I'm just not on that committee.

Q: What do you think is the future of the Port Washington Fire Department?

DH: I think the future--I think the future's good. I just think that the future is going to be changing a little bit, due to the fact that what's--I mean, just so many people live in Port Washington now, that I think that we have a--we have trouble with volunteers. You can't always get somebody to volunteer. I think that you need a lot more people to donate some time, so it might be harder later on to respond to these kind of calls with all the housing that's going up and stuff like this. I think it'll still be here forever and ever. I just--I'm not so sure if it's going--I think it'll be maybe one big firefighting company, like

where everybody's cross-trained with everything. I just think it's too hard to keep the four houses open. You know what I mean?

Q: Right.

DH: As much as I like the four houses and each company's unique to its own different thing, most of the firefighters are cross-trained with the companies, and the only thing that stands outside is the Fire Medics. And most of the guys in the firehouse can drive the ambulance, you know, but it'd be nice if some of the guys would go for the EMT training. Because some of them already know how to do CPR and they're first responders and stuff, so it would take another two--I mean, six months for them to actually go and just take a state test and then be certified as an EMT. And I think it would be a lot easier if we all just ran as one, like one whole big Port Washington Fire Department. And I think it would be easier.

Q: Has your experience as a fire medic enhanced your nursing career?

DH: Yeah.

Q: How?

DH: Yeah. Well, because we have codes in the hospital, too. So like my--what a lot of people

say is that I'm very calm in stressful situations, even people at the nursing job. Like-- they're like why? And I'm like, well, because you know what? You can't panic. If you panic, then they see you panic, and then once you've lost the whole sense of stability and the calmness, rather than making chaos. And that's when it happens, chaos happens. People don't know what they're doing, where they're going, who's coming, who's doing this. And in nursing, it has, you know. I mean, it's more of a structured situation in nursing than EMS. We can run around a little bit more in EMS, but nursing-wise, I mean, I feel it's just, as far as like as soon as somebody's in trouble, you know, I like to be the first one there. I like to see what's going on, what's the matter, what's your problem. All right, I'm going to do this, I'm going to get this, I'm going to get this. You go get this. I like to delegate and everything. And then, hopefully, within a half hour to an hour, the patient's feeling much better.

Q: Right. Where do you work?

DH: I work at St. Francis, yeah. I work on the med-surg floor. Regular cardiac med-surg, so ...

Q: Did 9/11 affect your Department?

DH: Yes.

Q: How?

DH: 9/11 affected our Department because we were called --that morning--actually, that night, I had gone to a Yankee game. September 10th, with my fiancé. He wasn't my fiancé at the time; he was just my boyfriend. We went back to his house in Seaford, and we got up the next morning and we saw the Towers had fallen. So we quickly jetted to the firehouses, because we knew that's where we were going. He got on his truck. They went into the city to dig. So he was down at Ground Zero digging. And I got on the ambulances to go in to--we were at Chelsea Piers. And kind of just hung out there, just as standby units, if they needed us. We really didn't go anywhere, but that's kind of what we did. And did it affect? Yeah. I mean, I didn't have anybody personally lost in 9/11 that I knew. But, I mean, I can't imagine what it was like for some of those families and some of those firefighters, you know. And everyone says that they're heroes, and they really are. Because that's what the job's all about is that you put your life on the line for somebody else. And that's how it was ...

Q: Right. Did your attitude change after 9/11 about anything?

DH: No, I don't think so.

Q: So you've always thought they were heroes ...

DH: I always thought they were heroes. I think it just put it--finally put it in the spotlight to everybody. I mean, you walk around--and the funny thing is, not soon after that, I went to Las Vegas, and the hotel, New York, New York, was having--they had a huge, huge fountain in the front with like spikes over a fence. And what they were doing was they were taking donations, and they were also letting you donate your t-shirts of your fire company. So, like I was with a couple of my guy friends from the firehouses. And we all took our t-shirts off and like, you know, we hung our t-shirts in respect. It's just so amazing to see it go from New York to Vegas and back. And people see that you're from New York and that you're a part of them, not even FDNY, but you're a firefighter and you're just, you know, it puts you on a whole 'nother playing field. And it makes it nice. You know, not that you're trying to be egotistical that way and soak it up, but it just makes--it makes it important that you know what you do is important, and you stand out just that much more than the regular "Joe Schmo."

Q: Right. So, if you had to do it all over again, would you have joined earlier than twenty-five years old?

DH: Everybody asks me that question. Maybe yes, maybe no. Because I see a lot of kids join now, and I see a lot of kids not go to college because of the Fire Department. And that's a good and a bad thing, okay.

Q: Right.

DH: If you have--if your career is to be a firefighter and to be an EMS or something else then, that's fine. If you have something else in mind, or policeman or something like that, if you have something else in mind, I'd rather see them go away to school and come back and then join. That's what I did. But that's--everybody ...

Q: Where did you go to school?

DH: I went to the University of Massachusetts.

Q: That's right. And you played basketball there.

DH: Uh huh.

Q: Right. Would you want your son or daughter to be a firefighter?

DH: Yeah, I think it's going to come down to that (laughs), considering that my husband will be a Chief and he's probably going to be brought up just like I was in the firehouse. It wouldn't bother me in the least bit. As long as they had their priorities intact, you know. They knew what they wanted to do. I don't know if I'd let them join in high school. I don't know. I think, after, sure. You know, if you want, I think it's a great organization. Like I said, it opens up a whole new world for friends and family. I mean, you meet so

many interesting people. I mean, I thought I'd met a lot of interesting people playing basketball overseas, travelling, and you meet just as many people being a member of the Long Island Fire Department volunteer network. Because there are people that I know from all the way to Montauk to all the way, you know, in Franklin Square. So, and you see them every day.

Q: What does your mother think about you joining? And your father?

DH: I think at first my parents were happy that I joined, because I think my dad was looking for somebody to continue the legend of the firehouse. And honestly ...

Q: The Hendersons.

DH: Yeah, the Hendersons in the fire--honestly, I don't think he knew--I don't think he believed that my brother was ever going to do it. My brother just didn't have that knack for it. Plus, my brother was two years younger than I am, and by the time my brother was born, my dad had cut back his abilities in the firehouse, like by half. My mother told him, you know, "You've got kids to worry about. You have to kind of sort of be here." So he kind of cut back on everything. So I got most of the experience to the firehouse and stuff, and I kept my connections with the firehouse. Even when I was away, I mean, because every time I came home, my dad was like, "Oh, you know, these people were asking about you." And that's all my dad's friends, which happened to be the senior

members in all the companies that I belonged to. So ...

Q: Right, right. So what do you think about this project? About ...

DH: I think it's a great project. I think it's a great project. Because I honestly think somebody like me who knows nothing about--I know thirty-five years ago, but I know nothing about when it actually started. And I think it would be really nice to bring it out into the light, to see actually how it began and how it's developed to where it is today. I think it's great.

Q: Do you wish that more women would join?

DH: Yes, I do. Because I think there's enough women out there that have the right head and mind-frame to do it, you know. I know they don't have a lot of time and stuff. I don't even have a lot of time. But, you know what?

Q: How much time do you devote to it, do you think?

DH: Oh, I devote, I would say, about probably forty, fifty hours a month, we try.

Q: That's a lot.

DH: Yeah. So, yeah.

Q: So is there anything that you would like to tell me that you haven't told me?

DH: Not really. I think that's it. I mean, but I just think it's--it's really nice--it's a really nice organization. It's well-respected. It's well-run. It's just--it's a really nice situation to be in for yourself. You know, it's something that you could always look back on and be proud of. If you don't always do it for the rest of your life, you know, I just think it's something that you'll have and you can always cherish. So that's really it.

Q: Great. Okay.