

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

Transcript Of Oral History Interview With

Donald A. Kurz  
Flower Hill Hose Company No. 1

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

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pertaining to the subject being discussed

Interview with Donald A. Kurz  
pk

by Sally Olds  
October 14, 2004

Q: This is an interview with Donald A. Kurz. Today is October 14th, 2004. The interview is taking place in the Port Washington Public Library. My name is Sally Olds. Can you please say your name.

Donald A. Kurz: Donald Kurz.

Q: And which company are you a member of?

DAK: Flower Hill Hose Company.

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

DAK: Twenty-one.

Q: So how many years have you been a member?

DAK: Thirty-two.

Q: And what made you want to join, in the first place?

DAK: Well, my father was a member. And his brother. At that time, he was probably a forty-

five-year member, or thereabouts. And I had grown up around the Fire Department. We lived on Evergreen Avenue. The firehouse was on the next block, on Haven Avenue. So, I'd been listening to the horns blow and walking over to the firehouse after the horn blew, to see where the fire was, since I was, you know, old enough to do that--six, seven years old. So, it was kind of inbred in me.

Q: And what would you ...

DAK: I waited--I waited until I was twenty-one. I thought of joining when I was eighteen, and I was in college at the time. I thought it was better to wait until I got out of college to get involved. I actually didn't finish college, but quit college and joined the Fire Department at that point.

Q: What kinds of things did you do when you were a kid and going over to the firehouse?

DAK: Well, everybody knew me, because, you know, I had been there with my father many times. My father was a lot older than most kids my age's fathers. So most of the younger firemen looked up to him as an older member. And he didn't go to many fires when I was--after I was born. He was already fifty-one years old when I was born. So, you know, I walk over there with him or walk over there by myself, and they all knew me, and we would--you know, I'd just ask where the fire was, and they'd tease me and, you know, dress me up as a runt, and things like that. So, it was--it was fun. I always had a lot of fun. And, you know, some of the other neighborhood kids would tag along with

me, although their fathers weren't firemen, but they would tag along with me. And we'd go inside and look at the fire trucks and, if you were lucky, go into the back room and play pool while they were out at the fire. And sometimes they wouldn't let you do that. If they knew who you were, they'd let you do it. And that's about it.

Q: What's your father's name?

DAK: William.

Q: And how did they dress you up as a runt? What did you wear?

DAK: Well, they would, you know, take one of the men's coats and put it on you and put a pair of boots on you, and it would obviously be way too big, and the helmet would be way too big. And that was the name of their racing team--the Runts. So, they had a picture on the side of all their trucks of a small man in extra large fire gear and they would call him "the Runt."

Q: So that was you.

DAK: Yeah, well, at times, yeah (laughs).

Q: Did you have childhood memories of actual fires, though? Did you ever go to a fire or ...

DAK: Yeah, I can remember going down to watch Bradley's burn. I don't recall a lot of things about the fire. Just, you know, lots of hose lines and lots of fire. And that was down on lower Main Street. Other than that, I remember-- I can recall going to look at, watch house fires, but I don't recall where any of them were. So, that's about it on that. I do remember a fire at the Port Variety Store on Main Street, which is adjacent to what's now the Fleet Bank. And that was going through the roof when we got there. It's right around the corner from my house, and we walked around to watch it. And the Manhattan Food Store fires, I remember that. That was burning. I was a little older when I went up to watch that one burn--still not a fireman, though.

Q: What do you remember about your early days in the Department?

DAK: Well, I joined when I was twenty-one, so I was a little bit older than most of the--not much older, but a little bit older than most of the younger fellows that were joining at the time. I waited thirteen months to get into the fire company. In those days there was a waiting list. But, you know, the night I joined, you know, my father was very happy. He pinned the badge on me, and so that was nice. And presented me with the key and--to the firehouse, and that kind of stuff. I was very active right away. Because I had been hanging around the firehouse my whole life, and most especially in those thirteen months that I was waiting to become a member. So, and I lived right around the corner from the firehouse, so, then, you know, the first time the fire alarm blew, I was the first or second guy in the firehouse. So I was very active right away. I took part in a lot of fires right away. I was a member for two years as a probationary member. You're not allowed to

run for office. But as soon as I got off probation, I ran for Second Assistant Engineer. And I had been driving trucks since I was fourteen or fifteen years old. Oil trucks, coal trucks. So I was familiar with the operation of trucks. So I became a driver fairly quickly. I was probably only a member for eight or ten months and I was driving the fire trucks, and pumping them. So, that set me up to become an officer fairly quickly, and I ran for office in 1974, I guess it was. And--no, I think it was '75--1975, I ran for office. And was elected Second Assistant Engineer. I ran against Doug Strockbine, who was the same age as me, but had been a member for longer than me. And, you know, somebody had to win and somebody had to lose, and I was lucky enough to win. Although he's a nice guy, but, you know, I was lucky enough to win. Maybe on my father's credentials; I'm not sure (laughs).

Q: And what did you do as a Second Assistant Engineer?

DAK: Well, Second Assistant Engineer is responsible for helping run the work nights, keeping the trucks clean, and keeping the trucks organized. Making sure that the proper gear is on the trucks. Making sure we get the proper gear back after every fire. Making sure the air bottles are full. Generally, in those days we had a lot of probationary members. There were twelve, thirteen probationary members all the time. So we--you know, there were a lot of people on work nights to keep organized. We had the Engineer at that time, I think his name was Jerry Christianson. He was the Chief Engineer. He was responsible for work nights. But he would delegate a lot of the duties to the younger engineers, and we would keep things organized. At fire scenes, you were responsible for helping lay out the

hose lines. You weren't supposed to go into a fire as a Second Assistant Engineer, although, you know, if you were the first one there on the scene, you would be in the fire. Which frequently I was, because I was the only officer on the first due truck out at night. So, frequently I did get an opportunity to go into the fires, which you weren't really supposed to do, but lack of being, there being a Lieutenant or a Captain there, you would go in and act as a Lieutenant or a Captain until they got there. So we put out a lot of fires in the hose company in those days. It was probably right at the turn when people weren't as fire conscious--safety conscious--as they are today. So we used to get a lot of fires. There's a lot of small fires, bedroom fires. People were smoking in bed and they didn't have smoke detectors. And overloading electrical outlets and electrical extension cords. So you can really see the change in the way people treat their own homes between now and then, especially.

Q: And what do you think is responsible for that change?

DAK: Well, just knowledge. People, you know, they talk about it more. And they push the issue more. Smoke detectors--I can remember going to a fire up on the Terrace Section, and the lady had been smoking on the couch and fallen asleep, and she was very lucky. You know, it was in the day, but she was very lucky to get out without any burns or anything like that. I guess the smoke woke her up, or the heat woke her up or something woke her up. The fire--the couch was actually burning pretty good right around the seat--the part on the couch where she was laying. And I said to her, I said, "You know, you have no smoke detectors in the house." And in those days, the fire company was giving

away smoke detectors free. We would even come and install them for the people, if they wanted us to. And she said, "I don't need a smoke detector. My nose is my smoke detector. You see, I got up and I got out." I said, "Well, you know what? You weren't in a dead sleep either. You were sitting here in the afternoon watching TV." I said, "You don't know." But today, everybody has smoke detectors in their house. So--and it's important that they do.

Q: Does the Fire Department sell smoke detectors now?

DAK: Not to my knowledge. Not any longer. We used to in the old days. We gave them away, and then the expense got to be a little, you know, much. So we were selling them for what they cost us. And we would always keep two or three hundred smoke detectors there, and when we got down to fifty or sixty, we would order another batch. And we sold them for eight or ten dollars. And then, again, we would go and install them for people, if they asked us to. But we were--well, our fire company was right by the train station, so frequently we had a sign on the building, "Smoke detectors. Stop in and pick one up." And frequently, on work nights and in the evenings if guys were hanging around the firehouse, they could sell a smoke detector. We had a little box, and you'd take the ten-dollar bill and put it in the box, and hand the people a smoke detector. And then that way, at the end of the month, if there was--if there weren't smoke detectors--enough ten-dollar bills to cover the smoke detectors that we sold, it wasn't a big deal. Because if somebody took a smoke detector, they must have needed it.



Q: When did you stop selling them?

DAK: I don't recall. I mean, I was an officer in those days, so I kept track of those things.

Then, after I got out of office, I lost track of that. Probably in the early '80s, I would guess. So it was a number of years ago.

Q: Do you remember any particular problems that came up when you were--well, Second Assistant Engineer? Then, where did you go from there? I mean, what was your next office?

DAK: After I was Second Assistant Engineer for one year, in 1976, I ran for Chief Engineer and was elected Chief Engineer. I went up the line very quickly. You know, a normal progression is two years as Third Assistant Engineer, two years as Second, two years as First, two years as Chief Engineer, two years as Second Lieutenant, two years as First Lieutenant, and two years as Captain. And my progression was two years as probationary member, one year Second Assistant Engineer, one year as Chief Assistant-- Chief Engineer, two years as First Lieutenant, and two years as Captain. And when I got out as Captain, I ran for Vice President and was Vice President for a year and then President for a year.

Q: What made you decide to move into the administrative end rather than running for Chief?

DAK: Well, when I got out as Captain, there was a Chief's election just coming up that

following March. And I was a pretty popular individual in the Department at that time-- not blowing my own horn, but, you know, a lot of people knew me because of my father, because of the fact that we were in business in Port Washington. A lot of the older fellows knew me. I knew all the younger fellows, because I was very involved. And I thought probably I had a pretty good shot at winning as Chief. But two other ex-Captains from Flower Hill I knew had plans to run for Chief. One was Jim Duncan and the other was Charles Lang. And Charlie had already run for Chief against Tom Murray six years prior, and lost. Charlie and I were good friends; Jimmy and I were good friends. And I said to myself that that wasn't the thing to do, to run for Chief against two good friends. I talked to Charlie, who said he was definitely running. To make it a three-way race didn't make any sense to me. So I decided not to run, and after that I got so busy that I really didn't have the time to run for Chief. It's a very time-consuming job.

Q: And so how was it moving over from being a line officer to administration?

DAK: Well, I still kept my hands in the line--in the line duty operations, because I still lived close enough to the firehouse to make the truck at night, to make the truck during the day. In those days, my office was on Evergreen Avenue, as well as my parents' home. And I lived on Beechwood Avenue, which was a few blocks away. I had gotten married in the interim. So I was always on the truck, so I stayed pretty involved in the firefighting aspect as well. The administrative portion of the fire duty was really fairly simple for the Presidents and Vice Presidents, at that time, because we had a very well-versed Secretary and a very well-versed Treasurer. So they kept things in line in that department. And the

job as President was really to keep things moving, keeping committees moving, making sure the committees were doing their job. So it was a fairly easy job. Time-consuming, but very easy, as well.

Q: Who was your secretary then?

DAK: George Kroll.

Q: And the Treasurer?

DAK: Robert Failey.

Q: Do you remember any specific issues that came up, especially any controversial ones?

DAK: Nothing that, you know, hits me real big--let's go back to the fires for a minute. We had some pretty big fires when I was an officer coming up the line. That was the times of the boatyard fires. We had Sigsbee's Marina fire. We had the Riviera Restaurant fire, which was really not a boatyard fire, but it was associated with the boatyard. So it was kind of mixed and matched, then. There was actually probably an arsonist going around setting these boatyards on fire. We had the boatyard fire down here at, well, what was Purdy's boatyard at one time. And I'm not sure what the name of it was when it burned. But there were a lot of boats burning there, as well. So I learned a lot fighting those fires. But at the Sigsbee's fire, I was pumping one of the trucks, and that was probably the first

huge fire that I ever pumped a truck at. And there were, you know, you learned a lot doing that, with five and six lines coming off of your truck and feeding aerial ladders and not having enough water to do all the things that you needed to do. And obtaining more water and finding out where the water was coming from. So, you really learned a lot about how that end of firefighting worked. I had been in many small fires as a junior officer, but I'd never fought a huge fire like this, either. So, instead of being back at the pump and watching the whole operation work, you actually learned a lot how the Chief moved these lines in and how he moved his apparatus around to accommodate the fire.

Q: You said it was a problem getting enough water, with all the hoses. So, how ...

DAK: Well, that was down at Sigsbee's. At Sigsbee's was at the end of Capi Lane. There really is a small water main on Capi Lane. So the Chief had a truck come in from Bayview Colony and hit the mains over there. And they laid lines all the way in from Plandome Road. So, there were--there was distribution coming from all over. This pumper would pump to that pumper, and he would pump to the pumpers that were at the scene, which was myself and another pumper. I know Protection's pumper was in there as well. So, it was a learning experience.

Q: What was the first fire you fought?

DAK: Well, that's too many years ago (laughs). First fire--I guess probably the first major fire was up in Sands Point. I don't recall where it was. It was a typical house fire. I know I

got hurt at the fire. That's what makes me remember it. Maybe it was on Messenger Lane. I'm not positive on this, you know. I got hurt, got a small cut on my arm, and Bobby Lanik who was also a member of our company at that time, took me to the--he was going to take me to the hospital, and we were going right past Dr. Jenkins' office, and Dr. Jenkins had afternoon visiting hours. So we just stopped in there and he stitched me up.

Q: How did you cut yourself?

DAK: Oh, trying to open a window and the window burst, or broke, and my hand went through it. So, probably shouldn't have been doing what I was doing, but I was trying to vent the basement, let air into the basement.

Q: Did it break because of the fire itself or ...

DAK: No, no. Sliding--me sliding the window, and I was apparently over-zealous.

Q: And were you injured at any other fires?

DAK: I was-- I guess when I was First Lieutenant, we had a fire up on Fairview Avenue, at the top of Fairview Avenue. And I came in on the second truck. Our 8-5-7 was first due. And I got there on 8-5-5, and Charlie Lang was driving. We actually came up an adjacent road--probably Highland Avenue--and came across the top of Woodland. And

we were facing down. I was the First Lieutenant, and I knew there were no other officers higher than me in town. So I ran down to the fire, and at that point there was fire coming out of every window of the building. And they were screaming on the front lawn that there was a woman in the building. Well, you know, I mean, I really probably should have stepped back and looked at the building and said to myself that there's no way that anybody could be alive in there. But I positioned the line at the front of the building, and told them not to do anything; just stand there. And we took a line in the side of the building where there was the least amount of fire. Side door of the house. Myself and Carl Schroeter and Timmy Wade took the line in. And we fought the fire in the kitchen and put it out. And we fought the fire in the dining room, which was adjacent to the kitchen. And we were just trying to make the living room where there wasn't a big fire load. And I don't now recall why. Maybe we had put it out already. But I told them to hold the line there--Carl and Timmy--and I was going to go up, move in and make a search. And I moved in about five or six feet, and the floor collapsed underneath me and I ended up in the basement. And I literally--I mean, I was fine. There was no fire load in the basement, thank God. There was fire above me. I could see the fire above me. But they had the line five or six feet away. I wasn't overly worried about it. As I stood up, Carl was moving ahead to find out what happened to me, and he fell in on top of me. So, now there were two of us down there (laughs). And by the time we found our way out--we had run out of air, so we were we were eating a lot of smoke--well, actually Billy McCarthy heard us yelling down there. And we had--we tried to move around and find the staircase to come back upstairs, but there was so much storage in the basement that we couldn't find our way. It was so dark I guess we must have lost our hand lights on

the way. We always had hand lights with us in those days. But we couldn't find the staircase to go the stairs. So Billy McCarthy had come in the front of the building, and I heard them and we yelled and said we were in the basement trapped. And he went out and got a ladder and pushed the ladder down to us. We were probably in the basement about twenty minutes, twenty-five minutes maybe. Something like that. There was a picture of Carl coming out of the--out of the--crawling out of the front door of the house on the front page of the *Port Washington News*. And my wife said to me, "Where were you?" I said, "I was still in the basement" (laughs). But I kind of saw my life pass in front of me on the way down. My daughter was only a couple of months old at the time. And so you see your life pass in front of you, because you don't know what's going to happen to you when you hit. But when I hit, I was--you know, I realized I was fine and there was no fire load in the basement. So we got out; we were fine.

Q: Well, what were you thinking at that point?

DAK: Well, you know what? I mean, I didn't want to leave where I knew they would find us, you know. And I didn't know what the rest of the basement, you know, entailed. What was involved in the rest of the basement. I knew there was no fire where we were. I didn't know the condition of the ceilings and the floors above us. So, there was open space above where we were, so there wasn't anything going to fall on us, unless the second floor fell in, and I didn't think that was going to happen. So, I didn't want to move around too much. And we did move around to try to find the staircase and didn't find it right away, and I said to Carl, I said, "Let's get back to where we were, and, you know,

they'll find us." And they did. So, and we were running--and we ran out of air. He ran out of air first. I shared the rest of my air with him. And then we were both out of air. So, they had taught us in fire school that you pick your coat up and you breathe the air that was in your coat. So, you know, we got a lot--we took a lot of smoke. But, at the same time, we were still fine. We coughed up the black; then we walked outside and we went up to the ambulance and took a couple of hits of oxygen. And, then I came back down to the truck; I put another Scott bottle on, and went right back into the fire. So, you know, it was very--it didn't seem like a big deal at the time. Today it seems like maybe a little bigger deal.

Q: Did you get any medical help after that?

DAK: No. No.

Q: What's the term "fire load" mean?

DAK: Fire load means, you know, how much in the building is burnable and how much is burning. You know, I mean, in this room, there's not a lot of fire load. Whatever's wood will burn. But chances are the ceiling tiles are not flammable, or not combustible. The tables wouldn't burn, unless you really get a major fire in here. The fire load in here is small. If the building or the room were on fire, well, how much of the room is on fire is the fire load.



Q: Now, you said that there was a lot of storage down in that basement. Was that a problem in terms of your finding the stairs?

DAK: Well, it was good that we--yeah, it was good that there was storage in the basement, because when we fell, we really didn't fall, you know, the full eight or nine foot, because of the storage underneath us. It was bad--I mean, we could have fallen on something that could have hurt us, too. Luckily, we didn't. As I recall, I kind of glanced off of something as I fell, that pushed me off. And then there were some other things that I fell on, and I kind of had trouble standing up, because there were so many things in the way. When I did eventually stand up, as I said, Carl fell right on top of me, and I kind of broke his fall. So the fall didn't hurt either one of us. Scared us, without a doubt; but it didn't really hurt us. Unless, yeah, of course, the, you know, being in the midst of somebody's storage where you can't see literally your hand in front of your face. You know, you don't know where you're walking. So, I didn't want to walk too far from where we started in order to find--because you become disoriented very quickly. And especially when you run out of air. And at that point, you're breathing smoke, and you become disoriented even faster. So, I made the decision, and Carl was not an officer at the time, although he had been a Captain, as well; and I made the decision we were going to stand right where we were. We knew that there was fresh air above us--or some fresh air above us. We knew we could communicate from there. If we moved away from where we were, who knows what would have happened. We probably would have been fine. We may have walked five or six feet--seven or eight feet--and found the staircase and walked up and walked up and nobody would even know we'd fallen in. But then again, we may have

run into some other problem, and, you know, gotten, you know, mixed up or something. And you never know. So, we stayed where we were. They put a ladder in for us. We crawled up the ladder, and we were out of there.

Q: That's a big problem in fires, though, isn't it? Becoming disoriented ...

DAK: Positively. Once the smoke gets to you--once you start breathing smoke and the carbon monoxide gets down into your brain, you become disoriented. And then panic sets in, and then you become more disoriented. And that's a major problem. That's the cause of many deaths. Panic, and then you don't know what you're doing. You know, you run around, you know. You just--you try to do things quickly, and that's not what you want.

Q: What kind of safeguards do you have against that now?

DAK: Oh, we still wear the same bottles that they--same air masks that we wore in those days. They're just a little bigger now, and they have a little more air. They graduated from literally a demand situation with the air--when you breathe in you get air--to a positive pressure mask that pushes air into your mask at all times. Makes it easier to breathe. And if there were loose-fitting masks or whatever, the air blows out rather than being able to suck the smoke in. That really would not have had a bearing on us today. I mean, maybe we would have--the air would have lasted a little longer, of course, because the bottles are bigger today. Although I think I had a small mask on. In those days, we used to have thirty-minute masks and fifteen-minute masks. The advantage of the fifteen-

minute mask was it was quicker to put on, and that's generally what I wore. And I used to pride myself on being able to get twenty to twenty-two minutes out of a fifteen-minute mask. Whereas a lot of people would come in and suck up a thirty-minute mask in twelve or fifteen minutes. Depends upon how well you work, how nervous you get. How used to working with the mask on you are, and how much--you know, it's really a head thing also. How, obviously, your mind controls what's going on, and if you get nervous and you get scared, then you're going to breathe air faster. So ...

Q: What about body size?

DAK: Yeah, that also ...

Q: Does a bigger person ...

DAK: Yeah.

Q: ... takes in air faster?

DAK: Oh, sure. Positively, yeah. Yeah, I went into a fire with Jim Gallagher, who was a lot bigger man than I am. I wasn't as big in those days as I am today. I was thinner. But--and I'm not sure how long a thirty-minute mask would last me today. I haven't been in a fire in a few years now. But, Jimmy and I went in at the same time, and I had a--I had what is known as a Sack Pack on my back. It was about a fifteen or a twenty-minute

mask set-up. It had two small sonar [?] bottles as opposed to one big one. And it all came in like a knapsack. And you're supposed to put it on and we used to keep them in the front of the truck, and the officers wore them. I was an officer at that time. But anyway, I went in--we both went in at the same time. He had a thirty-minute mask on; I had a fifteen-minute mask on. And he was out of there, and I was still in there working. But he was a big man, and he got out of breath quickly, and he wasn't used to working in confined spaces. Not that I was--you know, you never get used to that. But I was probably more familiar it than he was. So, he went out, and he got another mask on, and he was right back at the door. When I went came out, he was there at the door waiting to get in. But that's the way it is at all--most fires. There's more people than you need to work inside the fire. So, they wait at the door, and when somebody comes out, the next person goes in to take his place.

Q: And you still have that situation, where you have more people than you need?

DAK: Well, no. I shouldn't have said that. In those days, we had more people than we need. Today, they have a problem getting guys out to go to fires. I mean, they even ask old guys like me to go to fires. And not that I wouldn't like--love to go out and put out fires today, but I've gotten so busy that I just really can't keep up with the work I'm doing. So, I don't make as many fires as I used to. I still make my points, and that's about it. So, but would I like to get reinvolved again? I would. Someday I will. I will. But right now, I'm in the middle of building a house and running a business, and so I'm not as active as I used to be.

Q: Well, can you tell me about the business and how you were able to integrate your firefighter duties with running a major business.

DAK: Well ...

Q: And the name of the business.

DAK: Well, when I joined the Fire Department, I was--my father was still alive. And it was really still his business at that point. But shortly thereafter, it became my business. The name of the business was Kurz Oil. And we were a retail home heating oil delivery and oil burner service company. And when I first joined the Fire Department, we started to expand--or shortly after I joined the Fire Department -- we started to expand Kurz Oil, to some degree. And so I joined the Fire Department in '72. We hired our first employee, aside from myself and my father, in '77. And after that, we hired a number of employees and expanded fairly rapidly over the next four or five years. But, literally, if the fire whistle happened to blow when all our employees were at the office--which was on Evergreen Avenue--most of our employees were firemen. So we would run out of the office and provide the driver, the crew, and the officer. And frequently it was a completely Kurz Oil crew on the fire truck. But, you know what? I--my father being a fireman, I always felt that we needed to provide that service for the community. And, although it cost Kurz Oil money to pay these guys to go to fires, you know what, we did it anyway. And, of course, if we were real busy and we had made commitments, well,

you know, sometimes we couldn't go to the fire. But more times than not, we went to the fire, though. And then, when we were done fighting the fire, we'd come back and take care of whatever responsibilities we had to do. And if we had to work overtime, well, we would work the overtime. And my father would pay us for that (laughs). But it worked out fine. And we moved the business from Evergreen to Manorhaven on Sintsink Drive East in 1983. So, that was the end of Kurz Oil providing the crew for the fire truck during the day. However, I still lived in the area, so I still used to go out at night to go to the fires. And I would respond during the day, as well.

Q: What was your specific job with Kurz Oil?

DAK: Well, after probably 1974--'74, '75--I ran Kurz Oil. My father was, in '75, he was seventy-three years old, and so he was winding things down and didn't want to take an active part and really couldn't take a physically active part. He was there to give me advice, but didn't take much of a physically active part after about '72. And I ran Kurz Oil. And as we got bigger and bigger, we hired more people, and got to the point where we had about sixteen or seventeen employees, I guess, when we sold Kurz Oil in 19--2001. And, over the years, I had many firemen working there. Mostly firemen. But those days are over (laughs).

Q: So, you don't work with the company anymore?

DAK: No, I sold Kurz Oil to Lewis Oil in 2001, and I'm not allowed to work on oil burners or

sell fuel oil for two years. But, if I wanted to be in the oil business, I would have stayed in the oil business. It was a very lucrative business. I did very well in the oil business. But, it became--became very difficult to find the kind of the employees that I needed to run my business. And it became very difficult, with the oil markets the way they are today, to decide when to buy and when not to buy. And you have to be literally a banker to be in the oil business. And I lost money a couple of years, and that's not the reason you're in business. So I decided to get out while the getting was good. But it was a good one.

Q: Are you then retired now?

DAK: Oh, well, still when I ran Kurz Oil, I also ran a plumbing--small plumbing business, Plumbing Pro. And when I sold the oil business, I retained the plumbing business. And, so I have a partner in the plumbing business who ran the business --ran the day-to-day operations in the business while I was running Kurz Oil. So, when I sold Kurz Oil, he suddenly had an active part in the plumbing business. So--but we get along very well, and we have six plumbers working now. So that's--it's a growing business also.

Q: Do you go out to any fires these days?

DAK: Yeah, every once in a while, I still make a fire. I haven't made one in a while now, but I'm still a driver on the trucks, and I'm still an interior firefighter. So I don't know how much longer I will be, but I'm trying to lose some weight right now so I could do it if I

had to. But I'm still an active firefighter. I consider myself an active firefighter. And I would, if there were a fire across the street, I wouldn't hesitate to--to go into the building if I had to.

Q: Do you have to keep up with training?

DAK: Oh, yeah, sure. Positively. They require you to pass a test every year to be an interior firefighter, and they also require you to stay active on the pumpers, driving them and pumping them. And re-qualify firematically as well. So, they keep you--keep you abreast of what's going on.

Q: So that must be pretty hard physical work.

DAK: Being an interior firefighter is very difficult physical work. You know, you put a--you strap an air bottle to your back and you put all the gear on, and you get on the turnout pants and the boots and the turnout coat. And the helmets and the masks. And the tank on your back. And literally, you probably weigh forty or fifty pounds more than you weighed when you started out putting all that stuff on. Now you try crawling around in a hot building in a situation where you can't see where you're going and coming, it's not easy work. It's a young man's job. Unless you stay, you know, attuned to it, which I haven't. So I try not to do that. If I had to do it, I would do it.

Q: Can you tell me about the award you got as Fireman of the Year?



DAK: I got that when I was Captain. I believe. It was 1979. I was Captain in '79 and '80. I was a very, very active Captain and took a big part of the Department operations. I always believed that, as opposed to there being four companies--and in those days, there were only three companies--but, as opposed to there being three companies--three separate companies--it should be one fire department. And I always pushed that issue. So, I did take an active part in the Department operations there. At that time, Joe Fico was Chief, and I can't recall the Deputy Chief's name. Probably Tommy Murray and--let's see, Tom Murray and Bill Zwerlein, I would guess. But, I was--I took a very active part in Department operations. And I think that the Chiefs at that time felt that I was the next in line, even though there were senior Captains above me, I was the next in line. Because I was active, and I worked hard, and I knew what was going on. And when they needed help, they looked for me, and I would help them. So, being as active as I was, they felt that I was probably the guy to give the award to. I don't know how--but they recommended me for it--the two Chiefs. And they discussed it with the Fire Department Board of--Fire Board, they called it, in those days--passed it back. They put my name in as Fireman of the Year. And Joe Fico and I went to an awards ceremony, and they gave me a little mirror that said "Donald Kurz, Fireman of the Year." It was nice. A nice thing. Doesn't mean anything.

Q: And who issued the award?

DAK: F&M Schaefer Brewing Company--a beer company, in those days. They used to hand

them out every year to every fire company.

Q: So, you got it as a member of your fire company, not ...

DAK: As a member of the Fire Department.

Q: ... the Department.

DAK: As a member of the Fire Department. Yeah, it was a Fire Department award. Each department was allowed to present one fellow--one person as the Fireman of the Year.

Q: And you had just said about bringing the different companies together. Was that what was known as consolidation?

DAK: Exactly.

Q: Okay. Can you tell me what the challenges were with that and how you met them?

DAK: Well, the challenges were, and still are--still exist--not as volatile as they used to be. But the challenges were, in those days, that the older fellows had been members of, for instance, Flower Hill Hose Company, Protection Engine Company, and Atlantic Hook and Ladder Company, for years. And they never--they worked as a company as opposed to working together as a department. And the Chiefs, when you're Chief of the

Department and you go to a fire, and then you get the three companies to work together. In those days, there were only three. And--but we used to--we tried to continue that cooperation outside of the fire scene. And frequently it was very difficult. For instance, getting all the companies to fold their coats the same way, so if I took a coat off Atlantic's truck or Protection's truck, I knew how to fold it when I put it back. It just seemed like a very difficult task to accomplish. "We want to fold them this way." "No, I want to fold them that way." So, the three--I mean, maybe First Lieutenants, when I was First Lieutenant, got together and decided, you know what? We came up with a different way to fold the coats and presented it to all the companies and they all liked it, and that's the way everybody folded their coats from that time forward. And we used to have to go around and give schools at the individual work nights that this is the way we're going to fold our coats from now on. Okay. And that was one of the first steps. One of the other steps that we accomplished--myself and Peter Zwerlein and Bill Zwerlein, both members of Protection, both ex-Chiefs. You know Peter very well, I'm sure--was the way to lay out the hose. The hose lays. The hydrant packages. They were different on Protection's trucks than they were on Flower Hill's trucks. And Flower Hill felt very strong that their way was the best, and Protection felt very strongly that their way was the best. And in years gone by, prior to myself and Peter and Bill working on it together, nobody wanted to get involved in it. "We're going to do it our way, and we're going to do it their way," and that was the way it was. So when you went to a fire, if you happened to be riding on Protection's truck, which you were allowed to do--you were allowed to ride on the different companies' trucks--but if you happened to ride on Protection's truck, you didn't know how to hit the hydrant the way they hit it, if you weren't used to the way they

operated. So, we eventually got together, and we went down to Channel Drive, and myself and Jim Duncan, who was the Captain of Flower Hill at the time I was a First Lieutenant--we hit the hydrant our way. And then, Protection came down and hit it their way. And we timed it, and their way was just faster. And then, when we looked at it, their way was easier. And we said, "You know what? This is the way Flower Hill is going to do it from now on." And that was a big step in those days. And it's come a long way since then. But it's a very gradual turnaround. Just, you know, as the older fellows, unfortunately, die off, the younger fellows are not as entombed and entrenched in their company's ways of doing things, and they look--they look more openly at a way that the whole Department can get it, and things are coming together. Consolidation is happening. But it's still a very slow procedure.

Q: What kinds of things do you think you'll be working on in the future for consolidation?

DAK: Well, you know, this Department needs to consolidate, and we have gotten to the point where we roll only trucks out of one building during the day. We don't need the number of buildings that we do have. We could--and these are my opinions, you know, strictly my opinion. As to whether they'll ever happen, I have no clue. But ...

Q: Excuse me. I have to turn the tape over ... [END OF SIDE A; BEGIN SIDE B] ... Okay. So, you were talking about the fact that you need to consolidate.

DAK: Right. The Department does not need as many buildings as they have. We've got so

much duplication of facilities. You know, each company, aside from the Fire Medic Company, I mean, the Fire Medic Company is twenty-five years old now. I was on the committee that started the Fire Medic Company. But, aside from the Fire Medic Company, the three other companies each have buildings with big meeting rooms and big kitchens and truck rooms. Some of the truck rooms are used to capacity. Some of the truck rooms aren't used to capacity. So, you know, I mean, if a little thought had been given to this fifty or sixty years ago, or seventy years ago, or a hundred years ago when Flower Hill was incorporated in 1905, maybe we wouldn't have three separate companies, or four separate companies today. Maybe we would have one fire department. Unfortunately, that's not what happened. They need to do that, but that's come a long way since I was Captain and since I was involved in running the operations. I'm not involved anymore. I don't have any major say-so. But they will--they are bringing it around and they have done major pushes forward in the last ten years, I'd say. It's made a big difference.

Q: If you were going to eliminate one of the duplicated buildings, which one do you think?

DAK: Well, I mean, the ideal scenario in my eyes, would be to, you know, Protection and Atlantic's are back-to-back firehouses. One on Carlton Avenue and one on South Washington Street. Atlantic's owns a lot of property around their firehouse, as well. They own one house, they have a big parking lot. There's one small building in between the two. There is a house adjacent to Atlantic's. I'm not saying to do away with the original companies. I think the companies should remain, or at least, you know, could

remain. And we could still operate as a department. And we do operate as a department. But it could operate as a department and still have the identity of the four companies. We do need trucks around different areas of Port Washington, in case you get caught in situations you need to get trucks down on Channel Drive, and that building would need to stay. I think that Avenue A is a good building to keep, because it's in a remote area of town. I think you could eliminate Flower Hill Hose Company's building on Haven Avenue, perhaps make that an ambulance headquarters. Eliminate the Fire Medic headquarters on Harbor Road. You could centrally locate it. Flower Hill Hose Company is the most centrally located; right next to the railroad station. But it's a small building and has room for maybe two trucks--three trucks the size of the trucks that we have to day. But you could put a Department headquarters building--headquarters in there, eliminate the building on Port Washington Boulevard. Eliminate the building on Harbor Road--Fire Medic headquarters. And do all of that out of Flower Hill Hose Company. And move Flower Hill Hose Company down to share space with Atlantic Hook and Ladder Company. Perhaps you would have to expand Atlantic Hook and Ladder Company, to some degree. But you could expand that building and put a couple of extra bays on it, outside of the house next door, with the proceeds from selling the other two buildings. And put two or three bays out--truck room bays out on the side of that building and allow Flower Hill to share the meeting room space with Atlantic's. That was my idea--my idea fifteen years ago. It never flew, because people laughed at me.

Q: Is it still being discussed?

DAK: Oh, yeah, you hear all kinds of, you know, ideas. But to try to put those ideas into action is very difficult. Flower Hill expanded their building, it wasn't six or seven, eight years ago--ten years ago. Atlantic's built a new building fifteen years ago. Protection renovated their building twenty years ago. It's unfortunate that they don't sit down as a department and say, "Listen, this is the community's needs. It's not *our* needs. It's the community's needs. And maybe we could save some tax dollars." You know, the Fire Department doesn't have a huge budget, and every little bit helps.

Q: How do you think the community perceives the Fire Department?

DAK: I think generally good. I think that there are--there are people that do have issues with the Fire Department and issues in that the Fire Department is not a taxing authority, as a special district would be or a fire district would be, if it was a fire district. Port Washington Fire Department i's a fire protection district, meaning that we govern ourselves. We are not subjected to bidding laws, and we don't have to go out for multiple bids if we're buying something. We can literally buy and purchase what we want. Port Washington has, you know, does a good job at keeping costs down. I know that Flower Hill--we just purchased new truck, and we went to bid on it. Not an actual sealed bid situation, but we got prices from two different fire apparatus companies, and we selected the price that was the lowest. And it was the best truck for the money.

Q: How much did it cost?

DAK: I don't even know, to tell you the truth. Pretty close to four hundred thousand dollars, though. And it was about sixty or seventy thousand dollars less than the other bid. So I think we got a good truck for the money that we spent. But, the community, I believe, perceives the Fire Department in a good, good light. Of course, in Port Washington, there's a lot of apathy as well. People come to Port Washington, they live in Port Washington, they pay their taxes. And most people don't get involved in the community at all, unfortunately. And so, I don't think, of the few people that have an opinion of the Fire Department, I don't really--aside from firemen--I don't really think has any bearing on, you know, the community at all. You know, there are some people who want to see the budget every year, and that's good, because it keeps the Fire Department honest. And we have to present our budget to the town and to the villages. So it gets some scrutiny. You know, every year when the four companies provide--prepare their budget, along with the Department, and the Department prepares their budget, and they put it all together, then they have to present it to the town. And then you go to a hearing at the town, and the Fire Department's budget is reviewed by the town councilmen. If anybody has any questions about it, they're allowed to go to the town hearing and ask questions. That same budget is presented to the villages that we contract with, and those village mayors and village boards have the opportunity to review that budget and have an opportunity to say, "No, we don't like the budget, and, you know what, we're not going to sign our contract with you." Not that they have a whole lot of choice, because nobody else is going to provide fire service for them--fire protection for them. So, you know, they can push it. The Fire Department usually looks at it and says, "You know what? Maybe you have a point." And "No, maybe you don't have a point," It explains the situation to the



village, and in years gone by we've had a couple of, I guess, minor issues with a couple of the villages--Baxter Estates, Sands Point, and Manorhaven. But, then the Fire Department's been able to explain why the budget is where it is to the satisfaction of the villages, and the villages have always signed their contract. And, as I said, they really don't have a whole lot of choice, aside from starting their own fire company or contracting with Plandome or Roslyn or Manhasset, which would, I'm sure, drive the insurance rates in Sands Point or Manorhaven or Baxter Estates right through the roof. And then, they'd have their whole community up in arms. So ...

Q: Can you tell me about some of the committees, which you've served on?

DAK: Well, I've been on a number of truck committees. The truck committee to buy--Flower Hill had, in 1980, bought a new truck. I was on that truck committee. And the truck that we're selling now, I was on that truck committee. It was an E-1 [brand of fire truck]. Fifteen hundred gallon pumper, I believe. I was on that truck committee. I can't recall the year. That's probably about '90 or '91. I was also on the truck committee for our existing 8-5-6, which is another E-1. I was not on this last truck committee, because I'm not as involved as I was. I was on the building committee when--I was co-chairman of the building committee when we expanded our building at Flower Hill, which I was not a hundred percent in favor of, but the company decided to expand it, so we did what the company decided to do. I was on the-- I've lost the words here.--the committee to bring in the retirement program for the fire company. What was the name? I can't recall what it is.

Q: Is that the Firemen's Exempt Committee?

DAK: No, no, no. I'm on that, as well.

Q: Can you tell me about that?

DAK: The Exempt Benevolent Association? Well, Exempt Benevolent Association was begun in 1938 for the benefit of indigent firemen. [PAGER INTERRUPTION] The Benevolent Association consists of members of the Fire Department who have attained five years of fire service. They get what's —known as the Exempt Benevolent Certificate from the State once you've attained five years of fire service. At that time, you have the opportunity to join the Port Washington Exempt Firemen's Benevolent Association. And when you join that, it really doesn't entitle you to anything. It allows the trustees of the organization--there are thirteen trustees of that organization--allows the thirteen trustees to help you if you need help. So, on occasion, we have firemen that come to us and say that they've lost their job, and they're required to provide proof that the need help. That they don't have monies available to help themselves, that they've used up--we don't expect people to use up all their life savings. But if they, you know, exhausted their ready cash funds, and at that point, money is given to them to pay their mortgage payments, to pay their car payments, to provide, you know, food on the table, until they get their feet back on the ground. And sometimes there's giveaways that are a lot, and sometimes a couple of bucks.

Q: How is it funded?

DAK: New York State provides--compels insurance companies that insure fire insurance in New York State that are not based in New York State--they call them foreign insurance benefits. Not foreign, out of country; foreign, out of the state. To provide to a fund in New York State two percent of their premiums. So, two percent of the premiums that are written by out-of-state fire insurance companies every year are put into a fund. And those funds are distributed to most of the fire departments in New York State. They call that two percent money.

Q: And do the people who join the Benevolent Association, do they have to pay dues or any fee for joining?

DAK: Well, there's a small fee for joining. If you join within--I believe it's within five years of when you attain your five year membership in the fire department--so within ten years of joining the Fire Department, if you join then, their membership fee is twelve dollars. Ten dollars for a membership fee and two dollars for you first year's dues. Once it goes beyond that ten year period, then the initiation fee is--goes up a little bit. It steps up a little bit each four or five years to the point that it costs you a hundred dollars to join. It's--the Benevolent Association provides some services to its members. We have an annual meeting every year where we give them a run-down of what the Association has done with its money and what it--what kind of money it has invested. And also, we run a

couple of golf tournaments during the course of the year. We run a fishing tournament during the year. We run a bus trip to the firemen's home on the Hudson once a year. So we provide some services, and we always have an open mind as to if somebody wants to do something. If somebody comes to us with a good idea, we will usually fund it.

Q: And if somebody wants help, how do they contact you?

DAK: Well, each company has a representative from the Exempt Board of Trustees. There are four from Flower Hill; there are three from the other three companies. And that fourth member rotates amongst the companies. As a member of Flower Hill resigns or passes away, then it rotates to the next company, that fourth member. And the idea is to have an odd number of trustees on the Board so you can't have a tie vote. If the person really needs help in Flower Hill, he would contact myself or Tom Murray or Fred Falconer, or John Murray, and say "Listen, I'm down and out," and this is all kept very secret. It's not for public knowledge, or for knowledge in the Fire Department. A person doesn't come, you know, come to you and say "I need help" for you to go down the street and tell everybody that--everybody that he's on, you know, having a problem financially. But if he needs help, he comes to us and says, "Listen, I'm having a problem paying my rent." And this is the reason I'm having problems paying the rent, and if we--if that Trustee feels that it's a reasonable request, he will bring that to the President and ask for a special meeting of the Trustees. And he will also hook up with another Trustee from the company, or a Trustee from one of the other companies, and go and meet with that individual. And determine that he definitely does need help and these are his financial

requirements for each month, and this is his income for each month. These are his assets; these are his, you know, mortgages, or whatever, and present that to the Board. The Board will ask those Trustees that did the interview questions. And if the Board is satisfied, they'll vote on it, and somebody will make a motion that we need to give this individual this many dollars a month or this many dollars a week, or this many dollars as a lump sum. Or we need to pay this bill for the individual. Depending on the situation. And they will usually pay it. And if they require more information, then, they call the individual up and they ask him to come to the meeting, we may just ask him some questions on the phone, then they send the interviewers back out to re-interview him. And they may send the same interviewer back out to do some research on the situation and have another discussion.

Q: And how do the individuals usually respond?

DAK: Well, if we decide to help them, then usually they're very happy. If we decide not to help them, we usually give them a very good reason why not, and that doesn't--it rarely happens. But nobody comes to the Exempts for help unless they really need it. And, so, we usually help the person and, until the person doesn't need help anymore. Some people, we have ongoing cases. Every three months, we meet quarterly. And that person's case is presented again every three months, and if the situation has or has not changed, if it has changed, we will adjust, and if it hasn't changed, we'll adjust the other way.

Q: Do you have a nickname in the Department?

DAK: I have a nickname generally. People call me "Kurzy." Most people call me Kurzy. Some people call me Don, and some people call me Donny.

DAK: When I call somebody on the telephone, or when I introduce myself, I usually say, "I'm Donny Kurz." Because saying two one-syllable words right after the other--Don Kurz--people, you know, they don't understand which is the first and which is the last. Or maybe I speak too quickly; I'm not sure. But, so some--but most people call me "Kurzy" though.

Q: And I know that there are a lot of humorous things that go on in the Department, too. Can you think of some of the funny things that have happened? Some of the in-jokes?

DAK: Oh, well, there are always a lot of funny things going on. And there's always a lot of, you know, guys and girls breaking each other's shoes. You know, giving each other a hard time. Well, I'll tell you one thing. I'm sure you're familiar with Geoff Cole. When Geoff joined the Fire Department, I mean, you couldn't help but notice he had a big nose. So, I mean, he took a lot of abuse for the size of his nose, over the years. And that since has gone away. Geoff has been Chief twice. He's--you know, he's done an unbelievable job for the Fire Department, and he still continues to do an unbelievable job for the Fire Department. He's the chairman at this point. He seems tireless, and that's great. The fact that he's unemployed right now doesn't keep him away from the Fire Department. It just

allows him to spend more time there. Unfortunately, he's unemployed. However, when he was employed, he worked very hard. And he still works hard for the Fire Department. So--but one evening myself and Fred Falconer and Geoff went to Manhattan, Little Italy. I guess it was actually early evening, yeah. And we were there to buy some fireworks, which were illegal, but we were going to buy some fireworks anyway. And Geoff and Fred Falconer and I both have homes out on the island and beaches where we can safely set fireworks off. And, so we went there to buy fireworks, and Geoff was going to be at one of our homes--I'm not sure which one out on the island that fourth of July or one of the weekends around fourth of July. So we went in there, and we were sitting at a sidewalk cafe there having dinner or maybe just coffee--I'm not sure which. And a fellow walked by with a parrot on his shoulder, and he was having people take pictures with his parrot. And I caught him out of the corner of my eye, and I said, "Hey! Come back here." And he came back and he had the parrot. I said to him, "Just put that parrot on Geoff's shoulder and have him sit there, and let us look at the profile." And Fred and I looked at the profile of this parrot's nose and Geoff's nose. There was a big -- maybe it wasn't a parrot. It was some kind of a big bird, though. And it was very similar. So we had him take pictures of this parrot and Geoff's nose. And that picture got circulated in the Fire Department for quite some time afterwards, and everybody got a kick out of that.

Q: Even Geoff?

DAK: Oh, yeah. Geoff always took everything very lightly. And he never got peeved about any of that kind of thing. No, he was always very--very good guy to talk to and that's

perhaps why people used to give him a hard time about it, because he took it so well (laughs). But, and he, you know, we would compare ourselves, you know, obviously, there are lots of people with big noses--myself included. But we used to--when he first became a member, we would actually measure his nose as compared to other people's noses. So, that was one (laughs). When he comes in for his interview, you can tell him that little story (laughs).

Q: The *Reader's Digest* used to have this feature, "My Most Unforgettable Character." Would you say anybody in the Fire Department would qualify for that?

DAK: Well, there's a lot of characters, and characters in different lights. But, Charlie Lang who is my very good friend, is probably the most unforgettable character in the Fire Department. He's always liking to joke, always had a joke. Always happy to laugh at himself as well as everybody else. So, he always makes the situation light and makes the party a fun party.

Q: Can you think of any specific times, or examples?

DAK: Well, not right off the top of my head, honestly. His wife just passed away, unfortunately, about two weeks ago, so it's a little difficult to think about all the good times with him. So, I'm sure there are lots of good times to remember. I just have a difficult time remembering them right now.



Q: What are you proudest of, in terms of your firefighting service?

DAK: Well, you know, I was never the type of person to take--I took pride in the fact that I always worked hard, I guess, being a fireman. And doing the right job. That's probably it.

Q: What would you say was your best day as a firefighter?

DAK: You know, I get emotional, unfortunately. Probably when my father made fifty years. I was very proud of that. And, unfortunately, he's passed away now. But that was when I was First Lieutenant. And I got the opportunity to make the presentations to him, and his brother who also made fifty years on the same night, as well as--as well as Michael Chester. The three of them all got in the fire company in 1928, and in 1978--it wasn't '79--and in '78, they all made their fifty years. So, Jim Duncan was Captain at that time and I was First Lieutenant. And maybe Jim's father, John Duncan--no, Ray Liotti was President. So, the three of us had arranged the party for the three fifty-year members. And Flower Hill always recognizes their fifty-year members with some kind of a party, whether it be just a Sunday afternoon brunch or a full-fledged dinner. There were three of them at that time, so we had a full-fledged dinner, and each fifty-year member was allowed to bring a table of his guests. So, yeah, that was fun.

Q: What was your uncle's name?

DAK: George Kurz.

Q: And where was the dinner held?

DAK: At Flower Hill, at the firehouse.

Q: Who cooked?

DAK: I think we brought in a caterer, as I recall. In those days, we did a lot of the cooking ourselves. I don't recall, to tell you the truth now. You know, you we have had a lot of good stewards over the years. But in those days, we could have--we may have done all the cooking ourselves. I'm not sure.

Q: What would the program have been like?

DAK: Well, the program that night was--we had a small music group of some kind or other. Probably four people. But those parties always start out with a small cocktail hour and give everybody an opportunity to get there. And then the President would have been the emcee probably at that point--Ray Liotti. And he recognized each of the three fifty-year members and the fact that my father and his brother were brothers, and that they'd been firemen for fifty years together. And would introduce all the other fifty-year members, and in those days we had five or six still alive. And then they brought them each individually up and each fellow had an opportunity to relate to the company, one of the

times in his history that he remembered best. And then they usually do something like that. And each member--each of the fifty-year members gets a small gift. I'm not sure what it was at that time, to tell you the truth. I don't remember. Some kind of a small gift, probably worth a couple hundred bucks. And a jacket from the Fire Department that said "Fifty Year Member" on the back of it. So, and then they would have politicians there, and they'd have proclamations from everybody from the President on down, to give to each one of the fifty-year members. So there was a lot of reading of proclamations and presentations and proclamations. And by the time the evening was over, each one of them had an armload of gifts and proclamations to take home with them and hang on the wall. Which is nice.

Q: How has this affected your family? Well, your mother, when your father and you were both in the Department, and then your own wife and children?

DAK: Well, the Fire Department is really an extended family by itself. And your own family becomes part of that extended family. You know, firemen and they all consider themselves brothers and sisters, to some degree, at least. And obviously, there's an age situation there and some company discrimination as well there. People in the Fire Medic company may not even know me as a fireman, you know, to look at. Most--most people know the old names in the fire companies, like my name and the Salernos and the Zwerleins. Because we were always active over the years, and people just talk about those old names. But, you know, I mean, growing up, when my kids were growing up, we went to the firemen's picnics, and, you know, they got to know the other firemen's

children and, you know, those kind of things. And I stayed pretty active in that kind of thing until probably about, well, maybe fifteen years ago or thereabouts. I don't usually go to those things anymore. Number one, my children have grown since then. But we bought a home out on the Island near the water, on the water right around 1986. So weekends were pretty much dedicated to that place. And so, you know, trying to stay involved in the Fire Department socially as well as actively was difficult. So I still go to the social affairs that I can. But frequently, I'm out of town.

Q: How many children do you have?

DAK: My wife and I have two children--Tracie, born in 1977, and Brandon was born in 1980. So, unfortunately, Tracie passed away in 2001. December 31st, 2001. But Brandon is still with us, and he works in Manhattan now. Graduated college just almost two years ago now. Brandon was a baseball player all through school. High school, he was the pitcher on the baseball team and the quarterback on the football team. And then when he went to college, they gave him a scholarship to go to New York Tech in Westbury to play baseball, which is a very nice baseball program. An independent Division I baseball school, which puts them--pits them against some very big schools. The Miami Hurricanes and Georgia Southern, and Clemson Tigers. And so he had a huge opportunity to play some very good baseball there in his four years of college. And that's a big opportunity, but the fact that they paid for the majority of his college career. So, we had a good time for those four years following him all over the East Coast to watch him play ball. I think that was the best time of my life.

Q: Was he at all involved with the Fire Department?

DAK: Well, he had thoughts of joining the Fire Department when he was in high school, when he turned seventeen, he talked to me about it. And I said, "You know what, Brandon," I said, "you should do the same thing that I did, you know, not allow the Fire Department to interfere with your education." And I ended up not finishing my college degree, but it wasn't because of the Fire Department. I didn't quit college to join the Fire Department. I quit college to go to work. My father was older, and if we were going to be able to keep Kurz Oil, I had to either quit college or lose Kurz Oil. So, I quit college.

Q: Where did you go to college?

DAK: Post--C.W. Post. So I detracted Brandon from joining the Fire Department at seventeen, when a lot of kids do. I said, "You know what? When you finish college, if you still have the idea that you want to join the Fire Department, I would not have a problem with that. I would encourage it. But let's get your education out of the way first." But that was it, though. And now he has--I wouldn't say he has *no* interest in the Fire Department, but he works in Manhattan. He lives here in Port Washington. But to work in Manhattan and live in Port Washington and join the Fire Department is a very difficult thing to do. You know, the Fire Department's requirements on the younger, as a probationary member, are pretty stringent. You need to be there, and to be able to work in Manhattan and commute, you know, every day and put in your twelve hours it takes to get to

Manhattan and back and still work eight or nine hours a day is difficult and still have a lifestyle as well. So, I really don't think he has any interest in joining.

Q: What do you think the Fire Department has done for you in terms of your own personal and professional life?

DAK: I think it allowed me to open up, to become more social at a young age. I wasn't overly outgoing as a youngster. So, when I joined the Fire Department, it introduced me to people that I didn't know or people that I did know but really was not friendly with. It allowed you to socialize and communicate with people of different age groups. So, it allowed you to become better versed and more able to communicate. Socially, you know, that helped. Professionally? Being that I'm in the Fire Department introduced me to people that I didn't know and our reputation probably spread in Port Washington more quickly because I was a member of the Fire Department. And other social organizations in Port Washington--fraternal organizations in Port Washington I've been a member of over the years. But it certainly was a stepping stone, as far as pushing my name around Port Washington. So it helped. It positively helped. And I enjoyed it. So ...

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

DAK: Well, you know what I think history is, it's wonderful. I think it should be documented. It's the first time I've been involved in an oral history, and I think it's an excellent idea. Let's get some of the older folks involved and get their ideas and their thoughts, and their

voice, if nothing else, recorded. So that they're--so that we can, you know, people down the road can listen to us. I remember speaking--I mean, my father and mom were substantially older than most of my peers' father and mom, as I told you. So they had a lot of older friends. One of the things my father did as at the owner of Kurz Oil, was to send out a calendar every year. And he always put an old picture of Port Washington on it. And he had an old friend who was an artist--his name was Bill Galloway. A very popular individual in Port Washington, you know, back in the '50s. And my father used to have him do a pen and ink sketching of some old building or old view of Port Washington, ranging from Sands Point Lighthouse, to Execution Lighthouse, to Sands Point Hotel to The Anchorage, to old firehouses, to the train station. And we used to put a pen-and-ink sketching on our calendar every year from 1954 until when I sold the business in 2001. So I've spent some time over the years researching these pictures, and after Bill Galloway, unfortunately, passed away, I brought another artist in to do these pictures for us. And sometimes we wouldn't use his original art. Sometimes we would use somebody else's original art or get permission to use their art. But I've spent many hours speaking with older people. I can remember speaking to a lady, her name was Lillian Seaman. And she used to own a plumbing and hardware store up here on Main Street where Finn McCool's is today. And I spent hours with her talking about old places in Port Washington and trying to learn about these places and trying to--that was the most difficult part of making this calendar every year was deciding on a picture to put on it and then doing the research on that place, after we'd decided on a place that we wanted to draw, doing the research on that place and finding pictures and things of that place so that we can--so we could prepare a picture. But I can remember--and then, I always

frequently thought that she was a wealth of knowledge of history of Port Washington.

And I don't think anybody ever actually recorded her. Maybe the Library has. I'm sure the Library has many things that she provided, you know, historical ideas and things of Port Washington. But she was just a wealth of knowledge. And, you know, you never know where knowledge is going to come from. People have ideas and things, and then they keep them in. So, doing this oral history is a great idea. And it should be done of all of Port Washington, and of every town. And the library's the perfect place to do it. Perfect.

Q: Is there anything you think we haven't covered that ...

DAK: No, I enjoyed myself here today. I really did. It's fun talking about old things about your life, and it's fun putting it in a recording.

Q: Well, I enjoyed it ...

DAK: I hope somebody someday gets a kick out of it.