

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

Transcript Of Oral History Interview With

Ex-Chief Charles J. Lang  
Flower Hill Hose Company No. 1

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

©2006



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

Q: ... April 25th, 2005. This interview is with Chief Charles Lang. The interview is taking place at the Port Washington Public Library. My name is Sally Olds. Can you please say your name.

Charles Lang: Charles Lang.

Q: And which fire company are you affiliated with?

CL: Flower Hill Hose Company.

Q: What made you decide to become a firefighter?

CL: My family history. My family--my father was in the Fire Department; my two uncles were in the Fire Department. And I spent a lot of time around the Fire Department, especially the good times--the clam bakes and the softball games, and the--I saw the friendships they had through the Fire Department. And most people say it's because they really want to join and help the community. I did also. But, it also started before I even realized that, back when I was young. That's where I came from.

Q: What do you remember about what your father may have told you about the actual fighting fires?

CL: I just remember him going out to fires in all types of weather, and I remember him coming back dirty and tired. But I knew it was a very rewarding experience, and they always talked highly of the Fire Department and never complained. And, I just knew then it was something I wanted to do.

Q: What was your father's name?

CL: Charles Lang, but "A." I wasn't--I'm not a "junior."

Q: And how old were you when you joined the Department?

CL: Eighteen.

Q: So, you've been a member now ...

CL: Forty-seven years.

Q: And what made you pick Flower Hill?

CL: That was the family's company. But, nowadays, that doesn't always hold true. Some of the--some of the younger generation join where their friends are members, not

necessarily where their fathers were members. But, back then, you joined where your father was a member.

Q: And what kind of rivalry was there back then?

CL: It was a big rivalry--friendly rivalry, but, I mean, it went way back to softball games and the tournament competition. And then we had a rivalry to see who could get to the fires first. We all rolled out of our own firehouses in those days, and you wanted to see if you'd get there first. And it was a big thing.

Q: Did anybody keep score?

CL: No (laughs). And it switched, when people moved, and maybe for five or six years, Flower Hill Hose Company would be first all the time, and then, after a while, it would switch to Protection or Atlantic's, depending if you had a few key members that moved away from the firehouse, and things changed.

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

CL: I remember, yeah, it was John Ross.

Q: And the Chief of the Department at that time?

CL: Was John Duncan.

Q: And what do you remember about your first days in the Department?

CL: Well, I mean, in the Fire Department, you were the new kid on the block, and you received a lot of friendly kidding around, and they made you work. They made you earn your way, and you had to--you know, I found out that all these friendships you had in the Fire Department, you had to earn them. Show you how to go to fires. You had to be active, and then, the guys felt you out for a little--for a while, and then you were accepted. And once you were accepted, you were one of the crew, and anything you wanted, anything anybody could help you with, they did. We used to help each other move, help each other paint houses, and -- you never--you never got a mover to come in and help you. You just went and got a truck, usually it was like Lewis Oil's rack body truck, or somebody had a pick-up truck and they'd come up to the house and it'd be eight or ten guys and you'd move, and the women would make food, just like you--just like the old days, like you see in the movies. And everybody'd sit down and have a good time. Then, when somebody else moves, you've got to help them.

Q: Does anybody do that now?

CL: Very little. But--it still--it still goes on, but not as much, because people are busy, you

know. And they're working two jobs, and also we don't have the same amount of young members, and they just don't seem to be as close as we were.

Q: You mentioned some kind of ribbing that you got in the beginning? Do you remember specifically, you know, what kinds of things people said, did?

CL: Well, no, but, you know, there was always a lot of joking around, and you were always the brunt of the jokes when you got in. And we--you know, we still do that now to the younger kids. And I think it's to see--if you can take a joke and if you can take a little heat around the firehouse, then you know that that person is a person you want to be in a fire with, because they can take a lot of heat in a fire. And somebody that--you know, somebody that can't take it around the firehouse, you just feel that it's not the type of person you want to be in a fire with. That's where you find out. I think that's the reason for all of it.

Q: And did the more experienced firefighters sort of take you under their wing and show you what to do?

CL: That's the only way you learn, you know. We didn't learn in high school, and we didn't--didn't go to college for it. And that's--you start out slow, and they tell you what you can do. You know, you start out on the hydrant, you know. And then, you start out backing up the hose line. And then, after you're in a while and you have experience, you went out

to Bethpage to the fire school. And then--then you became a nozzle man, and you worked your way up to it. And, you know, you always wanted to show your friends in the other company that you earned it.

Q: Do you remember the first fire you fought?

CL: I don't remember the first one. I remember the first big one was Plandome Country Club.

I got in in November, and it was the--about two or three days before Christmas, around the 22nd of December that year, was Plandome Country Club. It wasn't in our district, but we went "mutual aid," and actually--we actually went over there, fought the fire, because they don't have--got the trucks, and it was about three in the afternoon, and they didn't have all their members home from the City yet. So, we fought that fire, and that was--that was a big--we were there for about eight hours. And it kind of burned down pretty good.

Q: And so it was cold then, I guess.

CL: Yeah, it was cold. And there was a broken gas main in that building that fed the fire, and we didn't stand much of a chance. But that was my first big one. You always remember the first big one.

Q: And what was your role in that one? On the nozzle or ...

CL: I remember dragging a lot of hose and backing up on the nozzle. I wasn't--I don't think I was on the nozzle yet. You know, a big fire like that, when it's--when it's outside and you're just standing around pouring water on it, that's when they push you up there and they give you the experience to work the nozzle. They don't let you inside. You know, I was only in for a little over a month. So ...

Q: What were your early jobs in the company?

CL: At the fire scene--jobs--or ...?

Q: Well, in general.

CL: Ah, you know, when we got in, we all--we all had--we all had to work with the steward. You had to--or the kitchen committee. That was the first job you had. And every time there was any kind of a party or any kind of a meeting, you were on the kitchen committee, or you were on the clean-up committee. And every Thursday night, we have work night, you used to clean the firehouse, clean the equipment, clean the trucks. And there's more than one reason for that, because, you know, when--from one week to the other it doesn't get that dirty, but when you're going over the trucks and you're cleaning things, you'll get to be familiar with where they are and what they are. And the officers are all explaining it to you. But when I--when I got in, I was on the softball team and the

bowling team and tournament team. And that's--that's what used to bring people into the fire service also--the activities like, like a high school. If your sports teams are good, then you--more people want to go to that school, especially this way you can go from one to the other, and there's the racing team that--things kept you busy, kept you happy. You met all the guys; you worked with everybody and made a lot of friends.

Q: So, can you tell me about what you did on the teams?

CL: Well, on the racing team, I did a little of everything. I climbed the ladder, and I hooked up to the hydrant, and ran nozzle and pumped an efficiency. And back in those days, we had three teams in Port Washington. Each company had its own team, and you were very short of members. So, you did a lot of everything. And I remember playing softball, played the outfield. And I bowled on a bowling team. And that was years ago. You didn't--you know, were weren't on too many committees. All the older guys took care of everything. We just went along and worked and played.

Q: And, can you tell me about the offices that you held?

CL: I held every office at Flower Hill Hose Company, starting with the Third Assistant Engineer, and then I moved up to Second Assistant, First Assistant Engineer, then Second Lieutenant, First Lieutenant, Captain. I was Captain in '71 and '72. When I was Captain, I became Vice President. I was Vice President for two years, and I was

President for two years--'75 and '76. I was on the Board of Directors after that for a few years. And, so--well, when you're an officer, you're Captain, Lieutenant, and you're a President and Vice President, you're on the--I was on the Fire Department Board of Directors. Then for a few years, I wasn't anything, and I became Deputy Chief and Second Deputy Chief in '83, First Assistant Chief in '85, I was Chief in '87 to '89. And, along the way, after I was Chief, I was active on the 8th Battalion, which is eight fire companies up here in the Town of North Hempstead. And the County is divided into eight battalions--nine battalions. So, each town has three representatives. So I was a delegate to the Battalion. Then, I became Chairman of the Battalion. And, as Chairman of the Battalion, you sit on what was called the Nassau County Fire Commission. And Nassau County Fire Commission's a part of--it's a part of county government, and you oversee the operation of the Fire Marshall's office, the Fire Communications Center, and the budget and the Training Center. And any other problems that might come up with the County, as far as a fire is concerned. We were in charge of passing all the fire ordinances, and no fire ordinances get passed unless they go through the Fire Commission. And, so I was Chairman of that, which is why--it's one of the highest offices you can have in the County Fire Service. So, after that, that was it. Since then, I got out of that in '95, so for the last ten years, so I'm an ex-Chief and a firefighter, and I still stay active and drive and drag hose and do whatever else I can. Then, with forty-seven years in, I'm kind of proud of the fact I'm still active.

Q: Yeah, it's a lot to be proud of. And you did so much. How--how did you integrate all

your firefighting responsibilities with your work life--your pay job.

CL: Well, between ...

Q: But excuse me one minute ... [OFF/ON] ... your work life.

CL: In order to do all that, you have to have--first of all, you have to have a family that's very understanding and that works with you and I did. And you have to have--hopefully have the right job. You have to--I worked for Lewis Oil, and the Lewis family was very active in the fire service, and there was a lot of members of the family in the fire service, and there's a lot of firemen that worked down there. And you were able to go to fires without worrying about the job, as long as you didn't take advantage of it. And most of the things we do are at night, just like every night, you know. When you get up there, it's about three or four nights a week is meetings, and we always had every Thursday night's work night, and you squeeze it in. A few sacrifices, and the family had to know that certain things were coming up and that you didn't make any plans for those things. But you made up for it by having a lot of friends and a lot of activities through the Fire Department. And there's more than there were now. You know, there were St. Patrick's Day parties, and then, you know, New Year's Eve parties and Halloween parties. And now, people are so busy, we have a hard job putting those things together. But we did. And that was your social life back then. And you made a lot of friends, and it all worked out.

Q: And so your wife was supportive?

CL: Yes. Her father was a--was a Chief from New Hyde Park. He never became Chief, but was the Deputy Chief, then they moved out of town. And he was a fireman out in West Sayville, when they moved out of town. So it was--you know, she was from a fire department family from New Hyde Park. And her uncle was in the Fire Department, so she knew. And ...

Q: She knew what she was getting into?

CL: Yeah.

Q: And your children--how many children do you have?

CL: Two. And my son joined when he was seventeen. We--in fact, they lowered the age to seventeen when he turned seventeen. So, it's just a coincidence.

Q: Of course.

CL: (Laughs). I didn't have anything to do with it. And he was in for about ten years, and then he went over to Roslyn; he's in the Roslyn-Highlands Fire Department. He's an

officer over there.

Q: What's his name?

CL: Kevin.

Q: So, what were the most challenging aspects of being an officer?

CL: I think one big thing is balancing the job of running the company and getting the work done, and you're still just one of the guys, you know. And, it's not like a boss at work, or anything like that. So, you had to--it was a fine line you drew between being an officer, being a boss, and being one of the guys. And--but the Fire Department is, like they call, a paramilitary organization where the people respect the rank. And, as long as you--I found as long as you did your job--and years ago, when you had people that were in the service, they understood the ranks, it was much easier to get the job done, because they knew where to draw the line between, when you were a--you're just a friend of theirs or when the whistle blew and you were the boss or when you had to get something done around the firehouse. Things changed a lot after there was no draft and people weren't in the military, because they--they just don't understand the relationship between, you know, the officers and the men, and they don't--they just don't have the respect that they had years ago for that. And now you have to kind of drag it out of them, where before we understood it. We were all in the service, and we knew--we knew the scoop.

Q: So, you were in the service ...

CL: Yes.

Q: ... yourself. Where did you serve?

CL: I was only in active duty--I was in reserves for six years; I was on active duty for six months in nineteen--I was on active duty in 1961, which is just a little crucial time. I was in during the Berlin Crisis. Almost got activated for that. And I was out of the reserves before Viet Nam really took off, you know, I was very fortunate. And I just went to Fort Dix for six months and up to Camp Drum for six summers for two weeks and a lot of weekends.

Q: So, how do you think your military service helped you with your firefighting career?

CL: Kind of like I said before. They taught you--they taught you to respect the rank, and also you knew that you had a job; you had to get it done. And they also taught you to work with other people. And, like I said, the chain of command and where you stood in the chain of command and where you--where you were, as far as getting this job done, you know. And taught you to work with other people, and there's not that much of that going around anymore.

Q: Well, but, say, at the scene of a fire, did you ever have an experience where people didn't obey the--you know, the commands that the officer gave?

CL: No. I never ...

Q: Or questioned--questioned them.

CL: I've never really seen it, no.

Q: So that would only happen with the ...

CL: Yeah, you know, you mainly found that doing other things--running picnics or running a parade, or doing something along those lines, where--or at work night, if you gave them a job to do, to clean something, they just--you always had to--you have to kind of watch over them and check up on them. At the fire scene, the jobs get done. And it was easier back then because we had a lot more guys. And, usually, at a fire scene, people only had like one thing to do. And now, you know, it's just--like every--like everything else, you're short. Like even at work, the manpower is short. Everybody has to work harder--the towns, the counties, the state, the cutbacks--and you have to do more things. Fire service, same thing. Just--you don't have as much manpower at the fires, mainly because it's harder to get away from jobs nowadays. And the automatic alarms are killing us.

When I got in, when the fire whistle blew, somebody actually picked up the phone and called and asked for the Fire Department, and you knew they needed the Fire Department. When you got there, they were standing there waiting for you. Could be a patch of grass ten feet square, or it could be a light fixture that was smoking, but they called up and asked for the Fire Department. Now, eight out of ten calls are automatic alarms. And you pull up, and there's either nobody home, nobody there, nothing going on. And it's very hard. It's very hard to get people to go to those things. And that's what's killing us. And people--and also, it's hard to leave work for those. I mean, I worked--I worked over on Roslyn West Shore Road for the Town. And if I'm in the office and a house fire or a building fire comes in, they understand if I go to a house or a building fire, but they--I can't run out for automatic alarms. Just can't be done.

Q: So what do you think is the answer for those automatic alarms?

CL: If I knew that (laughs), I wouldn't be here. I'd be over in the County someplace. They're trying to--they're trying to find people when they have more than one automatic alarm. But the repeat--the repeat alarms are not that many. But it's a real accidental set off--workers in the house, power surges, people cooking. They're not all faulty. But they're sensitive, and they go off for no reason. If they sense smoke or dust or something, so they're doing their job, but just not necessary. And there's not much of an answer. Some departments are--if they have their own dispatchers, they're calling the house and they're talking to the people, and if they have the people say "I don't know why it went off; I

have no problem," you know, they're satisfied with that. Some departments some places just send a--send a Chief. But there's liability involved. And we go to a few that--that there's nobody home and that there was an oil burner problem and the house is full of smoke. And we've been to a couple where we get there and it's burning. So, you can't disregard them. But those false ones are taking a toll.

Q: But, do you think, by and large, the automatic alarms have helped to prevent more fires?

CL: They--yes. You know, they--like I said, the ones where we pull up and nobody's home and there's a faulty oil burner or there's a small problem and we get it early, that helps. But there is a big problem with the faulty ones. And sometimes we have four, five, six a day. It's tough to take.

Q: So, what other kinds of changes have you seen in the Fire Department service?

CL: Well, you have, first of all, the equipment is--it's more modern now--the masks we wear, the turnout gear we wear. All the equipment. We have thermal imaging cameras so we don't have to chop through walls anymore. The alarm system is modern; now we all have pagers. We have Plectrons at home. We have pagers on our belts. The modern construction. Just don't have that many house fires anymore. And we do have house fires--the newer houses are all sheetrock. And so there's less and less fires and less and less bad fires. People don't want to burn down six, seven hundred thousand dollar

houses. That's not cost-effective (laughs). But, years ago, the older houses and the older heating systems, the old electrical--there was a lot more fires. And more serious fires and a lot more fatal fires. So, between the equipment and the construction and the alarms, thankfully, things have gotten a lot better.

Q: What kind of advances in the Department did you champion yourself as an officer?

CL: Well, when I was Chief, we went to standard air packs. All the companies now have the exact same air packs. We have--we have standard insurance. We all went to the same insurance company. We centralized a lot of our services. And, you know, purchasing new equipment. We go to these--they send us to these seminars and conventions, and we did our homework and we come back and we kept ourselves abreast with all the modern things--little things, nozzles, hose, radios. The radios have come a long way.

Q: Do you use radios at the scene of a fire?

CL: Yes. We have--we have our own fire ground frequency, which we have radios that's just our frequency at the fire. And it's--there's nobody cutting you out, and all the nozzle men now have--whoever's on the nozzle inside has a radio; the officers have radios. Chiefs have--well, Chiefs or officers, they have radios. The Captains have radios; the Lieutenants, everybody, and the nozzle men. Years ago, when you were in there, we didn't have portable radios. You had the radios on the trucks. And if you had a problem

in the fire, you had to take care of yourself, because you just--you couldn't call outside for help, you know. But now, the radios or communications are--communication is the big thing. We have 800--these 800-megahertz radios that are county frequency that came in handy during 9/11 when everything else was out--the cells phones were out.

Everything was out. The 800's were one of the only things that we could use. The county was--when I was on the County Fire Commission, we were big on getting the 800-radios.

Q: Were you down at the scene on 9/11?

CL: No. I stayed in Port. We were sending a lot of the younger guys in that night, the next day, for about a week. So, I just--I thought I'd better stay in town. Not as young as I used to be (laughs). I got smart for once and stayed in town. But we did spend a lot of time hanging out at the firehouse to make up for the guys that were in the City. It was a tough week.

Q: Yeah.

CL: Yeah. Especially--we were very, very fortunate in Port Washington, because we must have twenty members that are City firemen, and we could have lost half a dozen, and we didn't lose any. So we were--we're very fortunate. I think about that a lot. The closest we lost was Ielpi from Great Neck. And I can't think of his first name now. I know his

brother and his father. I knew his father. His father's Lee. But that was the closest that we lost. And the two--the two Langone brothers in Roslyn.

Q: Can you tell me about the Incident Command System? What is that?

CL: None of--I failed to mention that. That's a modern communications system, and we've been probably using it for ten years now. And, it's a type of system that helps--helps the information flow back and forth to the members in the--at the fire scene and to the commanders. And it can be used as small as a dumpster fire, or something as large as the World Trade Center. And also, it's a standard system, so that when you're working mutual aid with other departments, they're all using the same system, using the same language. And it can be very simple, and other times it can be very complex. If you have a big incident, and it assigns people for different chores--the media, crowd control, traffic control. What do you call it--EMS. And just all different positions. And they all report back, and it eventually gets to the incident commander. And it's kind of done automatically, and it depends on the system. And then, everybody knows what their job is. If they give you a job, you know what it is, and you know who to report to. And the person could be from another town. It could be a Chief from another town, or an officer from another town, and they use the Incident Command System, so when you come in and you give him a job to do, he knows what he has to do, because it's the same here as it is in his town, and he knows who to report to.

Q: So, well, who would be--say there was a fire in Port Washington, who would be the incident commander? Who would get--who would take over?

CL: The senior Chief is the incident commander. And then, just flows right down from there. And sometimes he could--you know, he could give that--assign that job to somebody also. It could be--he could assign it to an ex-Chief. But, usually, they assign—like... The command post can be run by somebody besides the incident commander. The incident commander usually stands near the command post, and he gives all the orders, and it flows back and forth. But the command post itself is usually manned by an ex-Chief, and they actually operate the radios.

Q: So where ...

CL: That's part of it. But the Chief--the Chief is the incident commander.

Q: And where would the command post be?

CL: At ...

Q: At the fire?

CL: ... wherever the Chief sets it up. And the incident commander is at the command post.

Q: And would that be at the fire scene?

CL: Right at the fire scene, yes. Supposed to be--you know, as close to the fire scene as you can get it without it being in danger, or in any kind of hostile area. And people, you know, you get the information out to where the command post is. And some places actually have flags that go up over the Chief's car that say "command post," but you see a lot of white hats standing around in white coats, that's the command post. You know, they don't have to--you can figure it out.

Q: What would you say its impact of that system has been on the Department?

CL: Well, you know, we don't get a tremendous amount of large incidents, so that we realize the benefit that often. But, as far as training the new members and the new officers, it just makes it easier. Just makes it easier to train the officers, makes it easier for the new officers to operate and be efficient. It solves a lot of--lot of small problems--communications, I think. Communications is a big thing, and any time you can make your communications better, it makes the whole operation better. And that's--we're working on communications all the time. Even when we don't have fires. Communicating between fires. We're running a big operation--the Fire Department. Really, it's a--its a three million dollar budgets. It's a large corporation. And we're running it 24/7. And fires are--are a small part of it, you know. Keeping the equipment

going, keeping the firehouses up, keeping the members trained, doing the paperwork-- OSHA paperwork--county paperwork. Now, we have--we're fortunate enough to have paid people up in the office, and we couldn't operate without them. When I was Chief, we had no paid people. You opened the mail, distributed the mail ...

Q: You did that yourself?

CL: ... answered the phones, got the messages. But it's past that. It's way past that now. Like I said, we're running a--we're running a big corp--we're running a big business. And you're running it with, you know, with volunteer people. It's a system that amazes a lot of people how it operates, and it still does. Gets harder and harder, but it still operates.

Q: Well, what do you think the future is for a volunteer company, or department like ours?

CL: Well, historically, across the country, with volunteer fire departments, the either a county fire department's created in one part of the county, and then slowly it moves out and takes over the volunteer departments. Or the volunteer departments become what they call combination departments where they have to hire a few paid men and then they're backed up by the volunteers. And the paid member would run to all these five or six automatic alarms during the day, and as soon as they pull up and something's burning, then they'd call out the volunteers for backup. And sometimes they'll run together. And then we have a few of those on Long Island. People don't realize, but Garden City Fire

Department's been like that for over fifty years. They have what they call a combination department. They have paid drivers. And Long Beach has a paid--full paid company. And more and more fire departments are hiring maintenance people, and the maintenance people double as firefighters.

Q: Do they go through the training?

CL: They go through the training, and then usually they're a volunteer usually someplace else or someplace, and they're available, and it evolves into what they call a combination department, especially during the day. There are fire departments out on Long Island, and I think--what's the name of that place out by--I can't think of it now, but it's out on the Island near, on the other side of Ronkonkoma. And they've hired--they went to a vote, and they've hired paid firemen during the day. And just because they have to. And I almost bought a house out there. Can't think of it. But they actually hired paid people during the day just--you know, maybe seven to five, ten hours ... [INTERRUPTION FROM FIRE PAGER] ... You wouldn't get that with a fire coming over in those days; you had to listen for the horns. And sometimes if you lived on the outskirts in the wintertime, you had to leave a window open in your house so you could hear the horns. That's when your wife really had to go along with it. And a lot of people didn't hear it. The wind blew the wrong way in the wintertime and you couldn't hear the horns. And then, we would have systems where people that lived near the firehouse would call members that lived further away from the firehouse that couldn't hear the alarms. I'd go

to the alarm, and my wife would go to the phone and make one or two phone calls. And we did whatever we had to do to get the members out. And now you can't hear it there, but now, over my pager--my other pager--the call comes over printed out now—an alpha-numeric pager, as a backup. It's this thing that gives me all the information. And this pager works off a satellite, and that's good all over.

Q: So, then, the alarm comes in through the pager that you can hear ...

CL: Yeah.

Q: ... right. And then, if you want information on it ...

CL: It gives you more information there.

Q: Like what kinds of information?

CL: Almost just--well, basically, it's some of the same stuff that they gave us. The-- the nearest intersections, where the hydrants are. We're going to put more and more information onto these things. What type of alarm, and then when we get in the firehouse, we have a printed copy of this information that we take off of--off a machine. And it gives you if there's hazardous material in the house, and it's a--the house, most of the area is preplanned, it gives us more information on it. But, you know, routes--where

it is. Intersections, hydrants, hazardous material, and we're adding more and more things all the time. So, it's getting sophisticated. It's a lot more than people think. People think it's, you know, we just run out and jump on the trucks and go to fires, and those days are gone. The Chiefs have more radios and more things in their cars than we ever thought of.

Q: Now, I've heard that there's greater accountability now. Is that on the part of the fire Chiefs or the Department, or what? How ...

CL: Accountability at the fire scene?

Q: Yeah. I don't know. Peter Zwerlein mentioned that the Department was affected by an emphasis on greater accountability.

CL: Right. And, well, it's a nationwide program. But the--and that's all to do with this OSHA--Occupational Health and Safety Administration. We all kept two tags--big plastic tags on our coats with our numbers on it. Everybody has a company number now. And when you go to a house fire, you put one tag on a ring at the truck, and they know--so the officer there, or the driver, knows exactly who's there. And then, there's another ring at the front door, where somebody stands at the front door. When you go into that--when you go into a building, you leave your ring at the front door--the clip. And when you come out, you take it. That's if you come out the same way, you know. We--sometimes we have to go out windows and back doors and any way you can to get out of

a house. But--so, theoretically, if there's an explosion or if there's a collapse, or if there's a problem, and anybody that hasn't claimed that ring from the--from the man at the front door, or, if you--when you get back to the truck, the drivers can't compare all the rings with the people that are there, then somebody's missing. And we haven't had to use it yet, but it's better accountability at the fire scene. But nowadays, we don't have a hundred members at the fire scene, like we used to have (laughs), so it's easier to keep--keep track of people. But also, you're supposed to travel--work with an officer and a group of men. You get off the truck, you stay together. I mean, if you take a line, you have an officer, you have two or three men on the line, the officer responsible for those men, and there's very little time when you're off by yourself, what we call "freelancing." Sometimes you have to do it. You'll run in to make a rescue or something. You just can't wait around. But most of the time, you work in groups, you work together, and that's the best accountability you can have. But they have a nationwide system, and we use it; we have it. And it seems like it would work when we need it.

Q: So, that's largely for the safety of ...

CL: Safety of the members, right.

Q: .. the firefighters, right.

CL: And, all across the country, over the years, well, you read about losing four or five guys

in these big factories and these big warehouses and things, there's no accountability who's in the building. So now we have it, and we use it. And then, we all have better--you know, we have also better accountability at the firehouses. When we come back from fires, we have automatic sign-in systems now, and everything is high tech. We're trying to keep up; you have to keep up. And we always managed to keep up, in Port Washington, and we're still doing it. The last few years, we came a long way.

Q: So how do you think Port Washington stacks up against the other departments on Long Island?

CL: We're the best.

Q: Okay (laughs).

CL: No, we are--we've been very fortunate. The type of system that we have in Port Washington allows us to keep abreast with the best equipment and things. And we've had progressive people over the years, as far as officers and captains and chiefs, and we've been able to keep up.

Q: Excuse me. I have to turn the tape over ... [END OF SIDE A; BEGIN SIDE B] ...

CL: You have it on? Okay. I thought you had to do something. Where were we? Back to...

Q: Back to the Road Runners Drill Team.

CL: Yeah, Road Runners. All right. We can do that again. That's all right.

Q: I got so wrapped up in the ...

CL: I know. I thought--we were talking about ...

Q: About the block parties.

CL: The block--running the block parties, yeah.

Q: Yeah.

CL: We started the Road Runners block party, and it was a tremendous success. And ...

Q: You were saying that the first year, though ...

CL: Yeah, we said that, especially, we had a good time, and we worked through all the disasters. You were asking about the disasters. And the first year, we had like about one-tenth of everything that we needed, including food. And we were sending guys out

to get hamburgers and hot dogs all over town. And we had fifty dollars worth of change; we probably needed five hundred dollars. And we set up completely the wrong way. And it's--instead of panicking, we would--we'd get the job done. We'd laugh about it. Of course, we'd always give each other a hard time about different things that go wrong. And we'd get through the tough parts; the next--then, we'd start planning the next year. But the parties were a great success for ten years. Then, after a while, they were just harder and harder to put on. It was harder to get the members to help. People's time was taken up by other things. We all got a little older. The younger guys weren't involved. It was harder to get the vendors. And it was harder to tie up the town down there. We're tying up Channel Drive and using the bowling alley property and Thomson Industries, and people next door. And every year, it just got more and more difficult. But we used to have tremendous help from the neighbors. But it just wasn't practical anymore. So, we stopped then, and now we just run like anniversaries and parades. I think--I don't know if you got it on the tape about the County parade. We were in the County parade when Tommy Murray was Chairman--President of the County Fire Commission--of the-- Tommy was Chairman of the--President of the Nassau County Firemen's Association, and I was Chairman of the Fire Commission the same year. So, that was a big year. We put on a good parade. That was '94.

Q: Was that the only year when you had two Port Washington people ...

CL: Yeah. It was very odd--it was very odd that they had two people from the same

Department as head of both organizations, and we were both in the same company; we were very good friends. So we put on a good party. And that was the last--I guess that was the last big one. That was '94.

Q: What were some of the controversial issues that came up when you were Chief, or, you know, even with the other officers?

CL: I can't remember any tremendous controversial things. There was always a lot of give and take when you were trying to get new equipment and new ideas. But, I think we were--we stayed away--we didn't have much controversy. It was very smooth, especially with my years as Chief. Things were done, and we got the equipment we needed, and we got the training we needed, and had no big problems.

Q: What about the entry of women into the Department? How do you think that changed the Department or affected it?

CL: Well, you know, I think in some places, people might have made a big deal out of it. In Port Washington, it just happened. Mary Lee O'Reilly from Plandome was the first woman, and her brother was in Protection and her father was ex-Chief of Plandome, and we knew her. And she could--she could hold her own, and she--we had no problems. And, since then, we've had, I guess, four or five, and it's been no big deal either way. There's no controversy that you've got to remember who's next or where they were. And

it just happened, and nowadays, we can use all the help we can get.

Q: And what about when people from other ethnic groups joined?

CL: I--exactly the same thing. You know, there was no milestones, I don't think, that I can remember, or I don't--there's no persons I can remember. And then that's the fire service; it's if you come in and you pull your weight and you go to calls and you--you're just not going to stand out. It doesn't make any difference what ethnic group you're in. I mean, I know of a lot of people I can remember that stood out, and it wasn't because of their ethnic groups, because they didn't do their job and they didn't go to fires and, you know. You know what? People come along, like every organization. You know, they come along and they think that--they think it's fun and games, and they think they're just going to take all the good times and not put up with the bad ones, you know. And in the middle of the night, it's cold and it's snowy, and the whistle blows and the radio goes off, you have to get up and go to fires. I still do. And they're the ones that make the Fire Department operate. And we usually get rid of the bad ones, just the people that don't go to fires. That's the big thing.

Q: And how do you prepare yourself to get out of the house fast in the middle of the night--one of those snowy nights?

CL: Well, if you drive by my house, you'll always see my car backed in the driveway, and we

always--now, I have a pair of turnout pants and boots sitting beside my bed. But, years ago, you had a pair of old jeans and a pair of shoes that you could slip your feet into, and you'd lay 'em down alongside of your bed. And you'd usually try to put a sweatshirt in wintertime between you and the door. Not right there, because then you'd have to stand in one place and get dressed; this way, you can be always moving. And you'd always have a coat hanging right by the door, you know, it's not like you'd put it in a closet and have to open up a closet and find your coat. You know, your fire pants was by your bed and your fire coat, just a regular coat is hanging by the door. Your keys were always ready and ...

Q: What about the clothes you'd wear under the fire--under the turnout clothes?

CL: That's the--well, nowadays, well, that's the clothes that we would be wearing years ago before the turnout gear.

Q: Yeah.

CL: Turnout gear was on the trucks. So, these were our clothes that were laying out. We're laying out our own pants, our own shirts, our own jackets. But now, I have a pair of Fire Department turnout boots and the turnout pants next to my bed. And the coat and helmet's in the firehouse. And just little things in order to get going. When--when most people go home at night from work and they get comfortable, you know, they want to

take off all their warm clothes and sit around-- when you're in the Fire Department, you always have to have those warm clothes handy, or you have to have something warm on, especially when it's very cold out, because you're not in for the night. Somebody else gets home from work, and they, when they walk in that door, they're in there till eight o'clock in the morning, you know. You never know when we're going out, so you have to prepare for it. And there's some of us would do and have done it all our lives and are used to it; then, there are some people who don't understand that, you know what I mean? They get to the firehouse late, and they wonder why. And we have to tell them how it's done.

Q: So that's one of the things you teach the new firefighters.

CL: Yeah.

Q: So how--what's the fastest you've got, gone from hearing the alarm to getting to the firehouse?

CL: Nobody keeps track. I live fairly close to the firehouse, and I'm one of the first ones there all the time. And that's another thing people do. People get--when you get in the Fire Department, you get apartments, you look for apartments close to the firehouse. I mean, if you have a choice between an apartment in Manorhaven and an apartment up here next to the firehouse, you know, you're going to--you're going to pick an apartment that's close

to the firehouse. Sometimes it's going to cost you more money, so you pay a little more money. Then, you have to make sure you have a car that starts when it's cold out, you know. And sometimes that costs you a little more money, to make sure you have a car. You can't sit there and warm it up for two or three or four minutes. It has to start up and go. So, now you have to have a little better car. And, firemen do that. The real firemen do that, you know. The good firemen do that. And that always takes away from your-- you know, from your home and your family a little bit. You know, it's a little more money you spend on things. And there's a lot of that. And, you know, sometimes you would take that--sometimes you don't take that second job, if that second job you had to work on a Saturday when you're on a tournament team. So, you made do with what you had because you couldn't work on Saturdays because you were racing in the summertime. Or you couldn't work every night after work because you bowled on Wednesday night. And it's--you know, I don't want to make it sound like you deprived the family of anything--but it made all these little, extra little hardships because you were involved with the Fire Department. Thursday night was work night in the firehouse. So, there were certain things that, you know, you couldn't do on Thursday nights. And it was--it was just a little extra that the guys would put in, especially the active guys, the guys that want to go through all those offices that I had.

Q: Yeah, so--yeah, so, not only do you give your time for no pay, but you pay extra for the privilege.

CL: Yes. Pay for your own clothes every once in a while, you know--shoes, pants, shirts.

You do to a house fire and you got a white shirt on, and that shirt's--that's history. So, you know, water--dirty water runs down on you. That equipment just looks like it keeps you dry, but it doesn't really do it. It protects you from the fire, but it doesn't keep you dry. And, there's just a lot of things like that that goes on people don't understand.

Q: What else do you think goes into making up a good firefighter?

CL: Well, I always say that the one key ingredient is that your heart really has to be in it. You know, there's no pay involved, and everything else is on the downside as far as running to fires, except for the camaraderie and the friendships you make and, you know, some of the parties and things that we have to have in order to keep people interested. But, the big thing is your heart has to be in it. I've seen people--a lot of people--go through that try and they want to be, but it's very hard to do all the training and go to all the fires and things if you're just really not just committed to it. And just fires never happen when you're not doing anything. You're always doing something. You're always, you know, eating or doing something. And you're driving out of town to take your wife and kids to the beach and the fire whistle'd blow, and they'd spend an hour sitting in a parking lot at the firehouse. Then, you'd come back and say, "Oh, it's too late; we can't go to the beach." You know. There's a lot of that. And you had to have the family--your family had to be behind you. So that's--I think that's about it. I mean, to me, it was automatic. I did it; I loved it. And I would--I would do it all over again, and I wouldn't do anything

else. So ...

Q: Can you tell me about the awards that you've won?

CL: I haven't won a tremendous amount of awards. We're not big on awards. I have high-point awards.

Q: Yeah, that's what I meant.

CL: High-point awards, almost every year in my category for all the years I've been in. When, they give out high-point awards, and high-point awards. And there were a lot of-- a lot of things out there where they have the County awards now. But some people in some departments are a lot bigger on that than I am or that we are, you know.

Q: Well, how did you manage to achieve so many points?

CL: Going to fires. Going to fires 24/7. You know not just when I wasn't doing anything. As I said, fortunately, I had a couple of jobs where I was able to go during the day-- especially to big fires. And house and building fires. When I was working for Lewis Oil, I would work and get home at two or three o'clock in the morning in the middle of the night, and put my head on the pillow, and about half hour later there was a call, I would just get up and go. It's just the way--just the way I was. And that's why I was always

high points. I was always up there with the top ten percent in the company, and the top ten percent in the Fire Department. I still am. So, and I hope to continue it for a few more years. Another three years, I'll have fifty years in. And hopefully I won't slow down then. I don't go into fires anymore, you know, unless I really have to. I drive a lot, and I'll drive, and I'm outside helping the driver, helping out, or helping the officers. Being an ex-Chief, the Chiefs call on us to do a lot of things at fires. Be their eyes and ears behind the building if he's up on the roof or something. So ...

Q: Which fires or other emergencies are particularly memorable for you?

CL: Well, everybody thinks of the big ones. But I can always remember the ones where we had loss of life. Where we had--especially when there's children involved. When I was Chief, we lost a fireman, we lost Bobby Dayton when I was Chief. Of course, that's a fire I think about every day. But, the ones that were the most satisfaction were where we could go to a house fire that was in the bedroom and keep it in that bedroom. Or, you know, a kitchen fire, and keep it in that kitchen. And that was a--the most satisfaction I could get out of the fire service is getting there and you can't do anything about the fire. You know, we didn't start it. We didn't have anything to do with it. But what happens to that fire after we get there. And we have always been very, very good at keeping that fire to wherever it was when we get there. If you pull up and it's blowing out the windows, you know, eight or ten windows and it's all throughout a building, there's not much you can do about it. You know, it's in the walls; it's--but when you've got a kitchen fire or a

bedroom fire, and it's in the one room, and you can get up and keep it right there, then there's a lot of satisfaction to that. And, I've pulled a lot of people out of fires, but unfortunately, all the ones that I've had to go in and rescue or find that they were all--they would all succumb to the fire. So, there's no satisfaction in that, except the fact that you tried.

Q: What goes through your mind while you're making a rescue?

CL: Well, you obviously don't think of the dangers involved, because you wouldn't be there, you know. And I--you just--your training kicks in, you know, and your mind's racing at a hundred miles an hour, trying to do the best you can to get--you know, everything is feel and sounds and just, you're trying to just remember all your training. You want to do the best you can. And, you know, and also you rely on the other guys, because when you're in it doing this--you're making a rescue, there's somebody in there with a hose line someplace that's trying to knock that fire down and keep the fire from getting at you. And you're hoping that they're--not hoping; you know you're--you know that they're doing their job, and that makes it easier for you to go in there. But, so, obviously, not the danger; that doesn't go through your mind.

Q: But how do you get over that instinctive human fear of fire?

CL: I think the training and the work with the men and knowing that--knowing that you have

a lot of other people there that are working with you. And the training is a big thing. When you went up to Bethpage to training school, you're in conditions that are very similar. You can't see. It's hot. You're crawling around. So--but as long as you--you have to respect the fire. And, as long as you give the fire the proper respect and you can do only what's humanly possible, so far, it works out. There are always occasions where things go wrong, and that's usually when we lose people, and the City loses people, it's something unexpected that went wrong, you know. It's a very dangerous area, and those things happen.

Q: What was your worst day as a firefighter?

CL: Oh, I guess the day Bobby Dayton died. I was the Chief. A Chief doesn't want to lose anybody in a fire. And that was another, you know, another situation. It just--it popped up. We had experienced men there. He was very experienced. And something happened that--that he couldn't foresee and we didn't foresee, and it happens, you know. And you live with it every day. But, yeah.

Q: What was your best day?

CL: Well, I guess the best day is the day you--the best day is the day you go in as the Deputy Chief of the Fire Department, you know, and it's--you're always striving to be the--I was always striving to be the Chief. And it's not easy in Port Washington. There's a lot of

people that come along that are eligible for the job, and it's like when you buy a boat, they say the happiest day is the day you buy the boat and the day you sell it. Well (laughs) ...

Q: (Laughs).

CL: ... the happiest day is the day when you get in as--when you get in as a Deputy Chief, and the next happiest day is the day you get out six years later, you know. And only because of the tremendous--it's a tremendous amount of work. But it's--you know, there's a lot of very good things, too--a lot of feelings of accomplishment. Like I said, I loved it. I loved every minute of it. And I'd do it all over again.

Q: What would you say you're proudest of in your firefighting career?

CL: Well, I think I'm proudest of the fact that I was able to join the organization and work with everybody and get the respect of everybody in order to be elected to all these offices and to be elected Chief, and to gain the respect of the members of the Fire Department, because, you know, it's a tough job. And there's a lot of people that come in that don't get that, you know. And I was able to do that and work with these--a lot of people--a couple of generations of people. And, you know, some of the members that are in now, I worked with their fathers. Some of them, I'm working with the third generation. So, I'm proud of the fact that I was able to do that, work with everybody, and attain the offices

that I--the ranks that I did.

Q: A lot to be proud of.

CL: Yeah.

Q: Were you ever injured in a fire?

CL: Oh, yeah.

Q: Yeah, what happened?

CL: Oh, I dislocated my shoulder. A slipped disc in my back. Overcome by smoke two or three times. Broke my foot.

Q: How did that happen?

CL: That was at a training; that was at a drill. Yeah, that was about it. I went to the hospital. I've been to the hospital like three times. And, well, it's all part of the job (laughs).

Q: (Laughs). You had to take time out, I guess, from being active when you went through all those times.

CL: Yeah, when I hurt my back, I was out--well, I was out--I was out a couple of times, I was out six or eight weeks, out of work. And, yeah. Banged up a little bit here, a little bit there.

Q: Now, I hear there's a lot of fun that goes on in the firehouses. A lot of joking and everything and funny experiences.

CL: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

Q: Can you think of any?

CL: No, not one. But just the idea that, like I said in the beginning, that's how you find out who the people are, you know. And if you watch these shows on television and everything, they get into all the ribbing that goes on in a firehouse. And it's kind of part of growing up in there. And, you know, part of learning who the people are, and paying your dues. But then, you know, it still goes on. It's part of it. And, it always will be. But I can't think of one thing; there's a thousand things.

Q: Can't think of any pranks that any of the members played on each other or ...

CL: Naw. No, nothing that stands out. There's been a lot, but ...

Q: Of the various things that you learned or your experience as a firefighter, which ones would you say helped you in your personal life?

CL: I think learning to work with others, learning the chain of command, respecting people who were in charge. And that's a big thing. It's, as I said before, you had--that was easier for people when they were in the military, because they were taught that in the military. So, while I was only in active duty for six months, but reserves for six years, and I had a certain amount of that, and I also had it in the Fire Department, and that's a big thing. It helps you grow up. Makes--you know, makes you grow up faster. Helped me. Helped me a tremendous amount.

Q: What did you do with the Eighth Battalion?

CL: Eighth Battalion is an administrative organization. And it's made up of three representatives from Port Washington, Manhasset, Plandome, Williston Park, East Williston, Great Neck Alerts, Great Neck Vigilants. I don't know if I missed anybody. And, so, any, you know, training problems, administration problems, organizational things--it's like a clearing house where these eight departments meet and talk firematics and talk about their problems. Or if they have any problems with the County. And then, that--like I said, the Chairman of the Battalion meets on this County Fire Commission, so he brings all of these concerns to this County Fire Commission meeting. And, if they

have concerns that a lot of departments have, then they'll act to straighten them out with the County. These automatic alarm things are one of them. Training programs at Bethpage, at the school out in Bethpage. It's a very good training academy, but it happens because the fire departments wanted training and they all got together, and then the County Fire Commission goes to the County and they open up a school. And then, when they need more buildings, they need more funding, and they need more training--if they want hazardous material training, one battalion or two battalions will bring it up, and then they'll go to the Fire Commission. The Fire Commission will see a need for it; they'll propose it to the County. And that's how those things get done. So, we did administrative work, and I represented Port Washington and on the Battalion, and then I represented the Battalion on the County Fire Commission.

Q: Have you been following this controversy in New York City about the police being put in charge of ...

CL: Yes.

Q: ... hazardous materials.

CL: Been going on and on and on for a long time. And this answer they just came up with now is the same thing they've come up with over the years. They're trying to decide, you know, who's in charge where. And, they'll work it out. I don't know if this is the final

answer. It's been going on for years and years and years. The men--the rank and file--always work together and the jobs get done. The problems, usually something comes out in the papers or something that comes out in politics, and we don't have that out here, you know. We work with three different police departments; we work with Port police, the Sands Point police and the County police--and we work well.

Q: And so there are no turf battles out here.

CL: No. No. And, say no, you know questions come up every once in a while. Things happen. But nothing that ever interferes with the operation. And that's where these Battalion delegates, these county delegates all talk it out and in meetings with the County police. Everything changes. The officers, the commanders over there change and things change, and so, every once in a while, we have to have meetings, and we iron it out. But ...

Q: Do you remember any specific issues?

CL: We've really never had any problems. Just, every once in a while, the County--the County has their own emergency services bureau, so if we have an accident that's out by St. Francis Hospital and the County police show up and they need the, like a tool, a Hurst tool or rescue tool, and, you know, that's right on the borderline, and they'll--they might call for--they might call for their tool, which is in Bellmore, because that's their

procedure, and the police officer, maybe he's not on the job that long, and he lives in Ronkonkoma. So, every once in a while, there'll be a--he'll call for their tool and ours is sitting here in town much closer, and then we have a little meeting and then you go over there and then they--they have a few updates go out in their training bulletin and they notify the fellows that this--notify to the fire departments right away. They're there to help us. Or notify both organizations at the same time. So, sometimes it's small things like that, because--because there's a lot of different people involved, you know.

Q: What's the fastest way to get firefighters to your house, assuming you have a fire? To call 911 or ...

CL: No. Call 742-3300.

Q: And that goes right to the Fire Department.

CL: Yes.

Q: 24/7?

CL: Yes. We're dispatched by Firecom, which is located in Mineola, underground, behind the police headquarters. And if you call that number, that goes directly to the console that dispatches us. There's nobody in between. That person takes the call, has all the

electronics in front of him, activates us, sends us out, talks to us. A lot of times, they keep the people on the phone, make sure that they have all the information correct, and if you call--now, if you call 911 from Port Washington, you're going to get Port Washington Police Headquarters. Port Washington Police Headquarters has to dial a three-digit number to get through to these people. So, you're just putting somebody else in between. Somebody could drop the call. You could have a problem. The 742 numbers over there now are, they're enhanced calls, I believe. The numbers--your--if you call, your address comes up on the computer. I know that it does when you call like the County 911. I believe it's working that way over in our Firecom. But they--these people are familiar with the town; they're familiar with the Department. And they're going to talk directly to us. That's the fastest way. But, people have been taught to call 911. For a while there, when you called 911, you got the 911 operator over in Mineola for years. And then, the 911 operator over in Mineola, you told them you had a fire in Port Washington, they had to switch it over to Firecom. Sometimes--sometimes can be switched from one 911 to another 911 to the Firecom. So, the best thing to do is get right to Firecom, but if you dial 911 and get the Port Washington Police, they're trained; they dial a three-digit number, and they--that's a smooth transition there.

Q: Well, what's the most important piece of advice you'd give to people to prevent home fires?

CL: Well, careless smoking, electrical are two of the biggest causes. But other things that

people--a lot of people, they're conscious about electrical things and they're conscious about smoking--there's less and less of that going around, thank God. Careless candles. People have candles. Now, it's a big thing--the aroma candles. They don't realize they have pets around. You have a candle that's there for--oh, the candle's there forever. But, now, it just gets a little warm in the house and you open up the window, the curtain's blowing around, papers are blowing. You get a lot of fires started with candles. Not too many--not too many children anymore, or not--just ...

Q: Children playing, you mean?

CL: Yeah, children playing with matches, or, you know, or accidental fires like that. But it used to be a lot of bad fires are electrical, because they get started in a wall. They get started in some kind of electrical outlet. And they're burning before --a long time before you realize it. Smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors, big thing. You know, tremendous. Save a lot of lives and helps us out. And, the other thing is that, if you have to call the Fire Department, you have to make sure you give the proper information, you know, you don't panic. And just a lot of--just something in, just recently, about--I didn't watch it too close--but I think it was in Jersey, and the dispatcher couldn't get the name of the street out. And they couldn't get the name of the town. They didn't have enhanced 911. And they couldn't get it out, and there was a big delay. And she was saying Roxbury, and he thought she was saying Rockland, and it was just one of those things. So, you have to--don't panic. Make the proper call. Make sure you get everybody out of

the house. And let us do our job.

Q: Do you go around to the schools, you know, for the educational programs?

CL: We, yeah. We have, you know, we have a Fire Marshal in Port Washington that does that. And he's got some helpers that go around, and there's usually a lot of the--you have city firemen or police officers that are off during the day and they can go in the schools and they have a pretty good program. If anybody asks or any schools ask, we're there. Girl Scout troops, Boy Scout troops, we give tours of the firehouse. Anything they want to better educate them. We used to have an open house during Fire Prevention--it used to be Fire Prevention Week; now it's Fire Prevention Month, which is October. But they were very poorly attended, and we'd have our guys there like the whole week. You'd get four or five people in. People, you know, Port Washington, you know, it's a bedroom community. People are on the train and really busy, running around. But there are people in town that don't know we have a volunteer fire department, you know.

Q: Yeah. How do you think is the best way to get that information out?

CL: Well, I think now, with our Fund Drive information, we're getting it into the homes every year, you know. We've had articles in the newspaper. The newspaper's been great. They put articles in the papers. So that's been going on for a few years. We have the fire column--fire something. I don't read it. I know what it's going to say. But--and I've

heard people tell me that they look forward to the column in there. I'm not even sure if it's still in there. But they had that for a long time. People educated. There's a tremendous amount of people moving in from out of town that have no idea. So ...

Q: Would you be in favor of changing the name, like to Port Washington Volunteer Fire Department?

CL: We have that on a lot of our literature. I don't know if it's necessary. Because, by the time we got it all changed, we'd probably end up being close to being a (laughs)--being a combination department. It'd probably jinx us (laughs), you know. Down the road, you know, we're going to get more and more people that--we'll have to put more and more paid people on it. But it's going to be slow. I'm not going to see it in my lifetime, you know. And where we're going to have a complete County Fire Department? I don't know. It'd be very tough with the structure that we have throughout the County. But, maybe someday.

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

CL: Hopefully to educate the people about the Fire Department. The fact that we're volunteer, and the fact that there's a lot more to it than driving up and down Main Street on our red fire trucks. And that it's a big business that we're running with volunteers. And that we're modern and that we know--we're well trained. You know, people have

the impression that it's the guy from the local gas station running out, jumping on a truck, and, you know, and chopping up their house. And it's far from that. It's getting more and more sophisticated every day, every year, and hopefully this will educate them.

Q: Well, I mean, as you've come into contact with the public all these years, have you felt that people appreciated what you and, you know, the Department ...

CL: They always appreciate it. A lot of them are surprised that we're volunteer. And then we've had some people that have been--that didn't appreciate us. That thought we did too much damage to their house and that, you know, we were there just to chop the place up, and bad-mouthed the Fire Department, said it took us too long to get there. So, I was home in bed, you know (laughs). But that's very few and far between, and usually--and then, we've had--you know, had people actually go to the newspapers and go to the police and go to people and complain, and we have a radio log. Everything is timed and stamped and you play it back, and we're usually right, you know, that twelve minutes turned into be three minutes. So because everything now--that's the other thing, we're scrutinized--everything is on tape. Everything we say on the radio is on tape. Every--when we arrive, that's why they give us the arrival times. The time we leave the firehouse, the time the alarm comes in, the time the first truck leaves the firehouse, the time it gets to the alarm. And it's all down. So, you know, we can show where we came from.

Q: Is there anything that I haven't asked you that you think is important to ...

CL: No, I think you did a great job. I know I'm one of the last Chiefs you talked to, so you've had practice. And--but, and they told me that you were going to be very thorough, and I think you did a great job.

Q: Thank you.

CL: And I hope that ...

Q: Thank you very much.

CL: ... it comes out.

Q: You were great. ... [TURNED OFF/ON FOR FOLLOWING ADDENDUM] ...

CL: The, say, biggest departments, there are some that are bigger geographically than we are. But we had the--we had the largest membership, and we were probably busier. But I think there's a couple like Manhasset and Syosset that are bigger geographically.

Q: What about population-wise?

CL: As far as members?

Q: As far as the area that's covered--the number of people covered.

CL: I don't know, but that's not the key factor. The key is a lot of what you have in your district, you know. Where we have hospitals and boat yards, and we had the oil terminal and things like that. But we were one of the largest, all-volunteer fire departments. We are in Nassau--maybe some people say the state, I'm not sure--but at one time we had four hundred and something members, who were all volunteer, and we have three thousand calls or twenty-six hundred calls, whatever we have now. So, we're large and we're busy. But Manhasset, they have five separate fire companies, and see, they roll as individual companies to fires. Where if they have a fire and one company, only one company goes. In Port Washington, we're all going. So we're, like, we all go to the calls.

Q: I read that Senator Schumer was proposing a bill to give tax benefits to volunteer firefighters.

CL: Yes, there's several of those out there, and we're benefiting from one now, but it ended up being maybe fifty dollars a year or something like that by the time they get, you know, ten percent off the general tax, which is really the small portion of the tax, after you've taken all the special this and special that. So, now they're trying to include just a ten percent off your assessed valuation or ten percent off all of the tax, except the school tax.

And then, they're working on the schools. Individual departments are working on the schools. So, that would be a big help, a tremendous help.

Q: I know in his statement, he said he thought it would help with recruitment. Do you think so? Do you think it would make a difference?

CL: I think it would, yes. You know, it's not recruitment. Retention. That's the big thing is retaining the people. A lot of people come in, but a lot of them don't hang around. They get married, and now they have a family. Now it becomes a real burden. There's not that much of an upside to it. You know, the pay's not that good (laughs). So, they drift off. But since we've gotten this--we have this what they call the LOS--that's the length of service, the retirement program we have.

Q: The what program?

CL: We have a--we have this--they call it the LOSEP. It's a length of service--it's a retirement type package we get. And the longer you stay in and the longer you make your points, then when you become sixty-five years old, you get a small pension ... [END OF TAPE]  
...