

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

Transcript Of Oral History Interview With

John T. Murray
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 John T. Murray
pk

by Sally Olds
July 12, 2004

Q: Today is Monday, July 12th, 2004. My name is Sally Olds. This is an interview with John T. Murray. The interview is taking place at the Port Washington Public Library. Can you please say your name?

John T. Murray: John Murray.

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

JTM: Flower Hill Hose Company.

Q: What was it like growing up in Port Washington?

JTM: A lot better than it is now.

Q: And why?

JTM: Oh, everyone was close to one another, and it was more community-oriented. Not segregated, like it is now.

Q: Did anything happen in your childhood that made you want to become a firefighter?

JTM: Well, I had three cousins that were members in the Fire Department. One was an ex-Chief. And that gave me some interest. And then when the Berg fire blew up down here, I was in school across the street.

Q: Which fire was that?

JTM: Berg's.

Q: Berg's Oil.

Q: And, so did you see it from where you were?

JTM: Oh, no. They made us get out of--evacuate the school at that time. I was only a youngster then. Being that my cousins were in it, and I thought that I should follow.

Q: What kinds of things did your cousins tell you about firefighting?

JTM: Well, there was a lot of different things going on besides firefighting. Ball games and other activities within companies. And everything was socializing around the Fire Department in those years. Very nice.

Q: So, do you think the social aspect of being in the Fire Department is a big attraction for people?

JTM: Well, yes. Because once you join, your friends usually join, and, you know, that's the way it was. There was nothing else here back in those days. And in '49 when I got in, there was not much around.

Q: How old were you when you joined?

JTM: Twenty.

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

JTM: Oh, yeah, sure.

Q: What were they like?

JTM: Well, I worked right around the corner from the firehouse. So I could go to alarms Monday through Thursday. My boss would let me go. Friday and Saturday, no. I would be one of the first to respond if I was right around the corner. That was fun.

Q: Where were you working?

JTM: At the Giresi's Market [Epicure Market, James Giresi, owner).

Q: And where was that?

JTM: 92 Main Street. It's not there anymore. I was there all told for fifteen years.

Q: Fifteen? And what did you do there?

JTM: I was the delivery service, and we had some business! A hundred and ten deliveries on a Saturday. No coffee breaks. No nothing. Work.

Q: So, is that why you couldn't respond to fire alarms on the weekends?

JTM: Yes. And that was fine. My boss was also a member in the Fire Department.

Q: What was his name?

JTM: Mr. Giresi--Jimmy Giresi--G-I-R-E-S-I.

Q: And was he also in Flower Hill?

JTM: No, he belonged to Atlantic Hook and Ladder Company.

Q: What were the differences between the companies?

JTM: Well, most of them were family oriented. Went from father to son to grandson. Later on, it's just whoever was around. Attitudes change. People change.

Q: What are some of the biggest changes you've seen in the Department in your years?

JTM: Less respect for elders. And wanting to be very self-centered. Self-centered today. And I'd rather not say too much about that.

Q: Okay. Just let me ask you one question. If you don't want to answer it, it's okay. Did you find this among the firefighters also, as opposed to the general public?

JTM: With the firefighters, it's just that the younger ones don't seem to recognize what it's all

about. They think it's fun and games. It's not. There's more to just firefighting. Because when the fire whistles blow, they don't care who you are, as long as you respond and do what you're supposed to do. But the attitude while we're not firefighting is "no fooling around". When we were invited in, they used to tell you that this is what you do and this is what you shouldn't do. But they don't want to be bothered.

Q: Like what did they tell you you should not do?

JTM: Years ago?

Q: Yeah.

JTM: If you were in a parade, you behaved like a gentleman and you respected the man next to you and you acted accordingly. Which meant you behaved. And the same thing when you went to a fire, and you didn't try to be a hero or a show-off or whatever. Today it's different.

Q: Do you remember the first fire you went to?

JTM: A real big one? Yes. I'm trying to think which one. Well, one later on in years was the Sands Point Yacht Club or Bath and Tennis Club, it used to be. And that one burned to the ground. We were there at least four or five hours. And there was others, but then they had one up in, across from North Hempstead Country Club where a young lady lost her life going back in the house for a doll. That one was bad. And then, there's another one on Bayview Avenue where they had a gas leak in the house and the house went up and turned around and what strikes in my mind is this lady laying at the front door, and

she couldn't breathe, and the doctor cutting her throat with a pen knife. I can still remember that. But she passed on later on anyway. Those were ...

Q: As a result of the fire?

JTM: You know, that and not getting oxygen and everything. And then we had another house blow up on the corner of Revere Road and Orchard Street. Brand new house. It lifted the house right off the ground and went on fire. And then, of course, they had the lumber yard fire. All the big ones you remember. The little ones you know, but every one meant something. You had a job to do, and everybody pitched in. Firefighting, they're all the same. Everybody does what they have to do. Other aspects of being in the fire service has changed. They don't want to hear about it.

Q: Well, what was your job in the Department?

JTM: Well, I was a driver at one time. And then, I never was an officer. I never wanted to be an officer. I had a personal reason for that. But I was a driver and pump operator, and I had other duties in the fire company. I was on a few committees...

[section of 3 pages deleted by interviewee

]... Because I'm very into it. I enjoy helping people.

Q: And you mentioned that you were on some other committees. What other committees are you serving?

JTM: Well, I've been on the Sick Committee in the company and on what they call the Bereavement Committee every year. And we used to go out and put flags on our past members' graves and stuff like that. And I was a trustee for a while, but I gave that up.

Q: Why?

JTM: Why? Well, my wife was very sick.

Q: Oh.

JTM: Since she was blind, I couldn't leave her alone too much. Other than that, I'm still active. In fact, I'm going to a parade Saturday night. And I go to conventions and been delegate to state associations a number of times. In fact, I've made 51 conventions out of 132.

Q: What do you do as a member of the Sick Committee?

JTM: If someone is sick, you go and see if he needs any help or any way that we can assist him, if need be. Same as the Exempt. Everything is to help one another.

Q: And is that mostly--on the Sick Committee--is that mostly financial help?

JTM: Not necessarily. No.

Q: What other kinds of things do you do?

JTM: Well, if he's not too sick, then, you know, just to cheer him up, visit, whatever. It's not all

financial. These are the kind of things I'm doing now. Most of the time, people are only sick for a short period of time, but if it's anything drawn out, there's different things involved.

Q: And are you still on that committee?

JTM: Yes and no. I'm a little too old to be running here and there. At seventy-five, you slow down, or you're supposed to. But if need be, I'll go.

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

JTM: The Captain? Yeah. William Mullen, I believe it was.

Q: And the Chief of the Department?

JTM: Was Michael Chester [Mick]. Oh, no. At the Department, when I joined was, when Mr. Chester was Deputy Chief, I think Mr. McCarthy was Chief when I joined, if my memory serves me right. And then there was another Chief. Let's see. I think the Chief from Atlantic's was John Whaley or Eddie Piccardo, one of the two. I'm not sure.

Q: And did anybody, any of the more experienced firefighters kind of take you under their wing?

JTM: Oh, they always--they always used to do that.

Q: Yeah. Well, what did you learn from them?

JTM: First, you learned respect for one another. And you learned to behave yourself. And, then you learned that you joined it to help your neighbor and do what you were supposed to do.

Q: And were you mostly an outside firefighter, or did you go inside the buildings?

JTM: We didn't have that separation in those days. Everybody went forward. Today, it's a different firefighting arrangement. They have inside and outside. Now, there's a reason for that, too. As you get older, they don't want you inside. I haven't been in a fire in quite some time.

Q: When was the last one you were in? Do you remember?

JTM: No, not really. I'm retired thirteen years. I would say after I hit sixty-five, they just don't think you should be a firefighter anymore.

Q: And what do you think?

JTM: I think they're right, because, God forbid, something happens to you at that age, someone's going to feel guilty and have a guilty conscience. You know, "John, you should've known better." Though there are members that do fire police work and they're even older than I. I think after a certain age, you--like going to parades-- I go, but I don't walk. I ride in the truck, or something like that.

Q: Where was the parade last week?

JTM: In Baldwin. It was nice. They're always nice.

Q: And what was that in honor of?

JTM: That was the Nassau County Day Parade. Nassau County Firefighters' Day.

Q: Were there other members from Port Washington there?

JTM: Oh, sure. And they were from every County in Nassau. You know, seventy-one fire departments in that area. Or supposed to be. Some show; some don't.

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

JTM: Fighting fires, or all the way around?

Q: Well, let's start with fighting fires.

JTM: When everyone just pitches in and does their job and you get the fire out and everybody safely out. You minimize the damage. Then, pack up and go back to work.

Q: Did you ever make a rescue yourself?

JTM: No. No, thank God.

Q: And what would you say was your worst experience fighting fires?

JTM: I would say the worst experience was when one of our fellow firefighters got killed fighting the fire. When he got trapped in there on Main Street. Because I was around the corner at home with my wife. Even though she was blind, I went to see the fire and see if I could help out. Then, I found out that he was from my company. That was probably the worst.

Q: And who was that?

JTM: Bobby Dayton. But, you know, other than that, you don't remember the bad times; you remember the good times. That's what makes it great.

Q: Did you have a special nickname in the Department?

JTM: Yes. "Murph." M-U-R-P-H. And that's because I was short, and there was five Murrays at that time in the Fire Department.

Q: All relatives of yours?

JTM: Yes. We had three cousins, myself, and then one of the older Murrays' son. But there's only myself and the youngest Murray that's there now.

Q: And who is that?

JTM: Thomas Murray, Jr. He's an ex-Chief.

Q: And so he's a cousin of yours?

JTM: Yes.

Q: Yeah, yeah. How did being a firefighter impact your family life, let's say before your wife got sick?

JTM: Oh, we had plenty of time, plenty of fun, plenty of gatherings, plenty of dances, and plenty of vacations together. And when we'd go to the conventions, there used to be a lot of people. In a way, it was like vacation time.

Q: So she would go along with you?

JTM: Always went. Oh, yeah. Well, she was active in the Ladies' Auxiliary, which they also had. They don't have them – they have one out of three now in the Fire Department.

Q: Do they still have the one from Flower Hill?

JTM: Yes, it's the only one.

Q: And is your wife still active?

JTM: No, she's dead.

Q: Oh, I'm sorry.

JTM: That's all right. But she was a past president of that a long time. A very active lady. But there was a dance at least every three months, that the ladies would run or the members would run. There was always something going on. Not like now. Now it's dead.

Q: They don't have those events now?

JTM: No one has any urge to want to do much anymore, other than the firefighting.

Q: Why do you think that is?

JTM: Well, they say it's the economy, this and that. It's just plain laziness. Speaking bluntly. If they read this part, they don't--I didn't say nothing wrong.

Q: Not a thing. Do you have children?

JTM: Yes. She's also a past president of the Ladies' Auxiliary.

Q: Oh. A past president of the Ladies' Auxiliary?

JTM: President for eight years. She's kind of slowed somewhat.

Q: Does she still live here in Port Washington?

JTM: Uh huh.

Q: Is she at all involved with the Fire Department activities?

JTM: Just the ladies and the Ladies' Auxiliary.

Q: What's her name?

JTM: Sharon G-R-Y-G-O, Grygo.

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

JTM: Oh, I would say the best thing I ever remember was marching down Fifth Avenue. We had a hundred and--at least 125 firefighters from Port Washington, attending the convention. That was great.

Q: When was that?

JTM: Oh, in the '50s. I don't remember the exact date. But they had the convention in New York. We went down Fifth Avenue. We had over 125 men in line. That was great. There was a lot of other things that, you know, that were nice, but I'm looking forward to the hundredth year of Flower Hill. See what happens.

Q: When will that be?

JTM: 2007, I think. Good, don't quote me; don't write it down.

Q: Okay.

JTM: I know they started it up already, the festivities. But I've had some good times, and I've had some bad times. But years ago, it was more fun. Everybody used to meet, and I shouldn't pick on the young people, but it's just that they have an attitude. They don't think like me... But I would say less than half of them are social. Of course, no one tells them what's expected of them on this. If they do tell them, they're hard of hearing. You know what these young generations are like. That's all. I don't want to--I don't want to knock them, because I get along with most of them. There's a lot to be learned, not only firefighting, but it's living with one another.

Q: Do you--do you still go over to the firehouse to ...

JTM: Sure, every day.

Q: Every day?

JTM: Yeah.

Q: And what do you do?

JTM: Read the paper. If someone comes in, we speak, you know. I even wash my car. Not everybody does. They tease me about it, but it keeps me busy.

Q: And do you have any duties over there now? Answering the phone, or anything like that?

JTM: Oh, if it rings, I pick it up. I'm kind of on the back burner now. They don't expect too much from me.

Q: And are there other firefighters who ...

JTM: Very few.

Q: ... go every day?

JTM: Very few. You don't find too many old-timers hanging around anymore. We used to sit and play cards. And a lot of them passed on. But I had lots of fun.

Q: Did you take part in any other Fire Department activities, like the drills or the ...

JTM: Oh, sure.

Q: ... ball teams. Which ones ...

JTM: I didn't play ball, though.

Q: Oh.

JTM: But I used to support them. You went as a spectator. We still do. But they don't have ball teams anymore. They have one ball team, and that's they make up whenever they get together. Years ago, there used to be three, three teams--one from each company. Now, they have a fourth company that's come later on.

Q: Did you take part in the drills?

JTM: Oh. Fire Department drills? Yeah, I was on the racing team. That was way back when.

Q: And what was that like?

JTM: Fun. It's the same thing. Everybody has to get along. Otherwise, it doesn't work. But it was fun. I enjoyed that.

Q: And, most of the time, people did get along?

JTM: I would say seventy-five percent of the time, you never--if you had a problem, you talked it out. But, today ...

Q: What kinds of problems came up?

JTM: Oh, like if someone misbehaves or--but the problem would be something unbecoming a member. You know, there's certain rules and regulations. Other than that, a lot of petty nonsense. But get that straightened out, so you wouldn't lose anyone. And if the person was real bad, he was a small loss, because no one builds a bad reputation.

Q: Do you remember any of the pranks or the jokes the firefighters would play on one another?

JTM: We'll--we'll forget about that one.

Q: Oh (laughs). Aren't there any you can talk about?

JTM: No. I'd rather not.

Q: Okay.

JTM: A lot of these things shouldn't be--I mean, it might be fun to read, but it's not fun to knock somebody else. A prank is a prank, and as long as no one gets hurt, what difference does it make. That's the way I look at it.

Q: And as far as you know, I mean, nobody got hurt from the pranks? What friendships did you form in the Department?

JTM: Lots. Not only here in town. All throughout the state of New York. I have friends from here to Niagara Falls.

Q: Do you still keep in touch with them?

JTM: Oh, sure. I've seen one fellow. I'll be seeing him in three weeks. He moved from Florida, and he lives in Cortland, New York, which is quite a ways from here. Every year we meet.

Q: How did you meet him?

JTM: He was a past president of the State Association. We became great friends, very good friends, and we meet almost twice a year. Out here on the Island, I have lots of friends. From here to Montauk. I just get along--try to get along with everyone.

Q: What do you remember about the training way back when you first joined?

JTM: Oh, it was scary. But if you paid attention and did what you were told to do, it became-- and the more you did it, then there wasn't a chance for getting hurt, or anything like that. Of course, accidents happen, but if you paid attention, that was the main thing.

Q: So you say it was scary.

JTM: Well, they used to send you in a smoke-filled room, and you didn't know where you were going. They had an open door where you could--there was somebody standing there. If you got frightened, they would just take you out. Then, they'd send you back in again, they'd have fellows around. And then we used to jump off the building into a life net. That was fun.

Q: Jump off which building?

JTM: The Atlantic Hook and Ladder Company. But don't miss the net. That was--that wasn't scary. I mean, if you didn't jump, they just nudged you. Once you see your friends jump, it wasn't so bad. Training was--today, it's a little more--I think you would say ...a little more professional. Where they really get down to the nitty-gritty so that you're not supposed to get hurt at all. Which is good. You have better equipment, better everything you have. But accidents still happen. But ...

Q: Do they still have the firefighters jump off the building?

JTM: No. That went out long ago. That was fun. No, they don't have those things anymore.

When they came out with the big aerial ladders, all that old-fashioned stuff went away. That's quite the thing.

Q: And though you sometimes see pictures of firemen sliding down a pole. Did you ever do that?

JTM: No. They had one in Great Neck. You could go and slide down it, if you want. We never had one. Now, that was old-fashioned stuff.

Q: So you talked about the training being scary at first. How did you get over that normal human fear of fire?

JTM: Go back in again. Keep going back. And there's always somebody around to get you through it. You're never alone. There's always someone behind you, and there's someone always in the front. He might be a little ways out of sight, but he was there. They don't let you go anywhere alone.

Q: And so you knew that there would be a back-up.

JTM: Yes. Oh yeah. You very seldom see people get hurt in a training session. Very seldom. The only time you might get hurt is if you had a flash-back or fire burning or something like, you know, when they set a fire, you know. Very seldom have I ever seen anyone get hurt in a training session.

Q: Were you yourself ever injured in a fire?

JTM: No, thank God. No. Come close one time, but ...

Q: What happened? What was the ...

JTM: My friend in front of me had his ears burnt, and we had to get out in a hurry. We had a flash-back. He made it, and he was all right. He's not here anymore.

Q: But he didn't die as a result of that?

JTM: No. [INAUDIBLE] But again, now they have--they have flaps and everything else. It's hard to get hurt today, I'd say. Back in those days, things were different.

Q: Do you remember when the new equipment and gear came in?

JTM: Oh, it's coming in almost every year, there's something new. It's hard to remember when they changed the, you know, the gear and hat and helmets. It changes all the time. There's always something new coming out. And they keep up with it--not every fire department does. Here they do.

Q: What do you think was the most valuable improvement, in terms of the gear?

JTM: Turn-out gear. Hat, coats, boots. Years ago, you put on the first hat and coat you can find, even if it didn't fit. Now, it's all different. Everyone has their own personal items.

Q: When you say you grabbed the first hat and coat, you mean from the firehouse?

JTM: They used to have it on the trucks. Now, they have it hanging on racks. But it's yours. You're the only one that's supposed to use it. Years ago, you could have any one. Didn't matter. There's a reason for that. Every one of those turn-out gear has a tag, so who it belongs to in case anything does happen. You don't belong wearing anybody else's clothes. It's safer.

Q: So, wait. So, you say it has a tag. On the gear itself? And then, what--exactly where is the tag? How would somebody else read that tag?

JTM: Oh, it's hanging on the coat.

Q: So somebody seeing you would know that this was yours.

JTM: Yeah.

Q: Was your name also on it?

JTM: Yes. We had like dog tags. It's changed. It's all safety precautions and things. And that's about it.

Q: How do you think the Port Washington Fire Department stacks up against the other fire departments on the Island?

JTM: As far as which way?

Q: As far as ...

JTM: Fire fighting?

Q: Yeah.

JTM: Equal or better, as far as membership. Every fire department on the Island is down. All membership is down. And they say we can't make it here. When we first joined, those old times, it wasn't too cheap to live here either. I would say we're equal or better than some of them. We don't knock any of them. There's no need to knock them. Now, we help one another more than ever, now. If we get a big fire, we get response from Manhasset, Great Neck, Roslyn. They come and help. Everyone cooperates more than ever now.

Q: Why do you think that is?

JTM: Because you're short-handed.

Q: So what do you think the future of volunteer fire departments is?

JTM: Oh, it's hard to say. I hope it doesn't collapse, but it might eventually, I think, because of lack of interest. [People have so many other things to do. The taxes and the homes are so expensive. That's what they say.]

Q: Have you brought any members in yourself over the years?

JTM: Oh, sure.

Q: How did you talk them into joining?

JTM: Well, they come around. They see you as a member there and everybody having a little fun and then working, and say, "How do you go about joining?" You tell them how to go about it. But people come, and people go. That's what happens. Then, of course, a lot of them pass away...So as you get older, you know, you don't want to vouch too much for anyone.

Q: You don't want to vouch for anyone, you say? Why is that?

JTM: Well, you don't know who they are. And years ago, you knew everybody in Port Washington. Now, there's a lot of new people, and you don't know. He's got to show a real interest for me to vouch for him. Because if he's only in for a year, he's of no value to anyone.

Q: You think that it takes longer than that to really become a good firefighter?

JTM: Not only a firefighter. There's the whole business. People get too creative. Too engrossed in firefighting. That's not the main purpose.. The whole theme of the fire service in the community, how you--how the fire service reacts. That's the whole thing in my opinion. There's so many other things besides firefighting that shows you where you are . You walk down the street in a parade or something, and somebody doesn't like what you're doing, that doesn't only reflect on you. It reflects on everyone. That gives you a bad image sometimes. Then, of course, young people, they have no fear. I guess I did too, who knows. I don't remember that far back. I don't want to remember that far back.

[added post-interview: “There are other things in fire service than fires: officers, becoming officers and promoting fire service. Eager beavers don’t last.”]

Q: As a trustee, what kinds of controversial issues came up before you?

JTM: Oh, we were responsible for whatever we bought. To maintain the fire company, and stuff like that, the same with the trustees, you know. If anything pertains to whatever comes up that'd benefit the firefighters or one way or another, and its membership. It was like a business. Somebody had to do it. It's still going on today, and it's proven that it works. Like I say, you can't knock them all. There's a lot of young people out there who really put their heart and souls into it. Others, very haphazard. That's with any organization. Right?

Q: Sure. Did you ever serve in the military?

JTM: No, they wouldn't take me. I tried to go, and that's on account of my problems. But I would have liked to. Can't win them all.

Q: So you served your community in the Fire Department.

JTM: Uh huh. And I enjoyed it. Still enjoying it.

Q: What other fire department community activities did you take part in? Like blood drives? Things like that, or ...

JTM: Well, they just had the blood drive here, and used to go to that. Whatever was there

whenever you were available, you tried to be part of it...

[this section deleted by interviewee]

Q: Well, what is the most important piece of advice you would give to just ordinary citizens to prevent home fires?

JTM: Fire prevention? Smoke detectors. Carbon monoxide detectors. Get rid of all the newspapers. I know people stack newspapers in the hallway. Unbelievable. Candles. How many people today burn candles? For what reason? Because they give off a scent and then they go to bed and all. Most, I would say seventy percent of the fires today are accidental. People smoking in bed. Candles. If it's a big fire, it took a long time to get started.

Q: When you said seventy percent are accidenta, what about the others? Do you think ...

JTM: Oh, it's some that are suspicious. Not many. I don't think we've had a suspicious fire here in twenty years or more. Those are handled differently.

Q: Were you ever involved with an arson investigation?

JTM: No.

Q: Were you ever at a fire where you thought it might have been suspicious?

JTM: Yes.

Q: Yeah, what do you remember about that?

JTM: The flames were kind of high when we get there. Took a long time to put it out. Any time it takes a long time, that makes it look suspicious.

Q: Because you think that there's some other chemical involved?

JTM: You know, that's handled with the Chief's office. That's not the firefighters' problem. That's the Chief's office.

Q: Did you ever think of leaving the Fire Department?

JTM: Not really, no. No, I have enjoyed every minute of it. And I still do. I think it's great to be a part of it. If I had a son, I would encourage him to do it, too. But I don't. I just had a daughter. And there's so many things, not that you're looking for anything for it, but you see some of the members that were Chief or are Chief, and they don't want to be glorified or anything, but it's a privilege. A certain community. People look up to you, say, "Boy, look at that guy. He's been one of the best Chiefs going." That makes you feel like you did a good job. Many times they say to me, "You still going to fires?" I say, "No, I don't go to fires, but I'm here." There's other things I can do. And, like I say, I've been with the Exempt Association a long time. Anywhere I live.

Q: They know how to reach you.

JTM: Oh, yeah. They know where I live. I'm not around here. They say "you're never home."
That's right. I don't hang around home. No reason for me to hang around home.

Q: What kinds of things do you do besides going to the firehouse?

JTM: Oh, I go meet some old friends out there ... [END OF SIDE A; BEGIN SIDE B] ... live
life. That's my motto.

Q: Do you have grandchildren?

JTM: One. Still in Spain today. He'll be away for ten days. That's it. I had a brother who was
an ex-Chief. Not here. In New Hyde Park. Don't ask me the year he was Chief. I don't
remember.

Q: Did you ever think of becoming a paid firefighter?

JTM: No way.

Q: Why?

JTM: Well, first of all, they wouldn't take me there. I had a physical problem. Here, they have
different rules, and I have this physical problem. Here, they more or less--you still had to
pass a physical; city's altogether different. No, I haven't been out there.

Q: How were you and your company affected by the attacks on September 11th?

JTM: Oh, we did different things to help them out.

Q: What did you do yourself?

JTM: Well, when they were collecting food and everything, like the food at different firehouses and transporting it into the city. Stuff like that. Or whatever needs that they had. We had four or five truckloads of stuff taken into the city. I was there.

Q: Were you one of the drivers?

JTM: No, no.

Q: But you went into the city with the ...

JTM: No, no, no. Oh, yeah, I went in to help them load, you know, with loading the gear and unloading it in the city out by the docks. There were so many going in and out, you didn't even have time to look up. Just unload, then go. The city [INAUDIBLE] ...they're more professional. They have different ways of doing things. So you don't argue, and do your thing. Anything you can help.

[post-interview addition: "Almost everyone has one particular job, like one climbs the ladder, ones carries the hose, one drives the truck. They have specific things. We do whatever's needed at any time."]

Q: Do you feel that the Port Washington Fire Department was affected by the 9/11 attacks?

JTM: It brought them closer together. Now the volunteers and the paid men, now there was more socially, it's more than that. It made a big difference. And then there are a lot of

volunteers that are paid firemen there, also paid firemen here in town who work for the city Fire Department. We have, I would say, a half a dozen, maybe more. We have one fellow who is a battalion chief, [Larry Hatton]...

Q: What would you say you have learned as a member of the Fire Department that's helped you in your overall life?

JTM: Oh, maybe to be a better citizen overall and respect for other people. Hope that they have respect for you. And do whatever you can to help someone. What else--who wants anything more? You came with nothing; you leave with nothing. That's the way I look at it. You don't want to be a hero, you just want to be helpful. There's not too many live heroes.

Q: How would you like to be remembered?

JTM: Just by who I am, or was. Just "local yokel." That's all. I've had good times; I've had bad times. Like everybody else.

Q: If you had to do it all over again, would you do things any differently?

JTM: No way. You ask any of my friends. They say, there's a couple of things you don't do anymore, but, thank God here I am. I've had a lot of fun in the fire service. I meet my old friends. I met some fellow Saturday. Comes all the way from North Carolina, just to watch the drills. But you meet people like that. They're still interested. Must have been fun. It all depends. If their interest is in the fire service, you will always know. A lot of people have lost interest, but there's reasons – as you get older, some people slow down;

some don't.

Q: Did you ever keep a diary of your ...

JTM: No.

Q: ... experiences?

JTM: I might put in the wrong things. [laughs] We all know what we know. What would a diary prove?

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

JTM: It's--really, it all depends on what comes out of it. That's my opinion. People can say a lot of negative things that--I don't know who you've spoken with other than me. So, you don't know what you're going to put in. I mean, what I say here, you might not even like any of it.

Q: Oh, no. Please, your contribution is valuable.

JTM: I hope I haven't insulted anyone with my contributions, you know. Sometimes you speak, people take it up in the wrong way. But I haven't said anything untruthful.

Q: No, this has been a wonderful interview. Is there anything else that we didn't talk about that you'd like to comment on?

JTM: No, I, like I say, it's just I wish there were more people that were interested in it. But in today's world, I don't think you'll find that. It's a different world no matter where you go on the street corner, into another town. How many people do you see hold the door open for a lady? How many people say good morning to one another? You don't see it anymore. Then, it just comes back by itself. You can't bring the dead back, but you can bring reality back.

Q: Okay. Well, thank you very much.

JTM: That's my interpretation of life. You can't bring the dead back, but you can't forget what they did. That's the way I live life, you know.

Q: Thank you. Okay. Great.