

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

Transcript Of Oral History Interview With

Ex-Chief Thomas J. Murray, Jr.  
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

Q: Today is June 3rd, 2004. We are at the Port Washington Library. My name is Margaret Dildilian, and I am interviewing Tom Murray, Junior, ex-Chief of the Port Washington Fire Department.

Tom, when did you come to Port Washington?

Thomas J. Murray, Jr.: I was born and raised in Port Washington.

Q: And what was your childhood like, when you were here in Port Washington?

TJM: Just like an old-time person from Port Washington-- living on the water, spending most of my summertime on the water. Clamming, fishing, crabbing, playing baseball.

Q: Now, you come from a background of firefighters. Can you remember any stories as a young boy about the firefighting department?

TJM: Well, I remember going to the firehouse and hanging around the firehouse a little bit. I had my father who was a member of Flower Hill Hose Company. Also, two of my uncles-- my Uncle Pete and my Uncle Jimmy who is also an ex-Chief. And I have a cousin John, all from the same company. So there was five Murrays in the same company at one time.

Q: Was there any particular person who influenced you in making a decision for you to become a firefighter?

TJM: I'm not really sure if there was any particular person. Probably be my whole family-- my father being a member, my uncles being a member, the parties at the firehouses, and some of the friends that I grew up with, all Fire Department families, their fathers all being in the Fire Department and we all used to hang around together as kids. It just grows from there.

Q: Well, what do you think are the qualities that make you -- your family-- so giving to the community?

TJM: I think that's just the way that kids were born and raised here in Port Washington. My family, going back to my father who was also born and raised in Port Washington, his two brothers born and raised in Port Washington. Growing up in the community, seeing what the community is all about. The volunteer fire service, what it was all about. Wanting to donate some of their time back to the communities.

Q: What year did you become a member of the firefighters?

TJM: It was March 3rd, 1965.

Q: And as a rookie, what were your initial experiences?

TJM: Oh, as a rookie or a probationary fireman, you know, you have to attend fire schools, various fire classes. You clean up around the firehouse, work in the kitchen. You know, all the duties that nobody else wants to do; they always gave it to the new kids, the new rookies.

Q: Now, you joined the Marines in 1966?

TJM: Correct.

Q: What made you leave the Fire Department and go into the service?

TJM: Well, coming out of high school, I didn't know what direction I was going to go into. The Vietnam War was almost at its peak at the time. And I just thought it was the noble thing to do. My father's an ex-Army-- ex-Army man. So I just thought it was part of the family and just to go and do it.

Q: And I understand you received the Purple Heart in Vietnam?

TJM: Correct.

Q: And can you-- would you like to tell us about this?

TJM: It was shrapnel wounds to my left shoulder. The fellow in front of me just happened to step on a land mine, and both of us happened to take some of the shrapnel.

Q: And was your recovery long, or ...

TJM: I was in the hospital for thirty-three days in a place called Cam Ranh Bay. It was an Air Force hospital in South Viet Nam.

Q: And did you-- were you in for the duration of Vietnam, or were you ...

TJM: Two years. I was in the service for two years. I spent a year in Vietnam. When I came in, I believe it was February or-- I came home, actually, in March of sixty-- '68, I believe it was. And I was due to get discharged.

Q: So then, did you re-join the Fire Department?

TJM: Oh, you never really leave the Fire Department. They just-- when you go into the service, they give you a military leave of absence.

Q: So, your service was actually continuous.

TJM: Continuous, right. When you go into the military, your service counts towards your time in the Fire Department.

Q: What lessons did you learn in Vietnam that might have helped you in the Fire Department, or vice versa?

TJM: Well, the camaraderie between people. You know, whether you like somebody or you don't like them, you have to work together in a real tough situation. Same in the Fire Department. You could be in a smoky basement sometime with somebody that you really don't like, but you have to take care of each other when you're in there.

Q: And how do you instill that teamwork in the Fire Department?

TJM: Well, you try to, you know, take some of the younger kids and take them aside and talk to them. Tell them what it used to be like in the Fire Department, what it should be like nowadays.

Q: What was it like then?

TJM: It was a lot different back in them days.

Q: How do you compare from then to now?

TJM: Back then, everybody lived for the Fire Department. The Fire Department was the central hub of the town and the community for the Fire Department members. As a young kid-- nineteen, twenty, twenty-one years old-- we used to hang out at the firehouse, watch TV, just waiting for the fire whistle to blow. The kids today, everybody is so busy, they have so many things going on. You know, they might have to work a couple of jobs just to live in Port Washington. You know, their girlfriends want more time; their family wants more time; work wants more time.

Q: So how are you recruiting now, then, if there isn't the same community feelings?

TJM: It's-- the recruiting is very difficult now. Years ago, there used to be a waiting list. Nowadays you almost have to beg the kids to come in and join, because nobody really has the time to give anymore. So, our membership is considerably lower than it used to be back in the '60s and '70s.

Q: Now, back in the '60s, did you have women and Blacks in the Fire Department?

TJM: No.

Q: When did they first begin to come in?

TJM: The first woman-- I don't know exactly the date. Probably back in the '80s sometime, the middle '80s.

Q: Were there any issues regarding ...

TJM: Oh, there's going to be always issues. It's something new to everybody to have a female around the firehouse, you know. Everybody just has to watch their language a little bit closer than what they normally do.

Q: Was there any resentment?

TJM: I'm sure some of the people had resentment, but it's just a sign of the times. Things change and progress goes on.

Q: And how do they feel about it now?

TJM: I-- now, I don't think it has any effect on anybody at all. As long as she can do the same job ...

Q: And can they? Can they ...



TJM: Most ...

Q: ... do the physical ...

TJM: ... most of them.

Q: ... labor?

TJM: Most of them can do it. You know, I would say there's some that probably can't. But, hopefully they know their bounds and won't get involved in a tough situation where it's going to hurt somebody.

Q: Now, you became-- before we go to your Chief-- your work as a Chief of the Department, I think you received some awards in 1970?

TJM: 1970, I rescued a woman from a burning apartment fire in Soundview Village.

Q: Could you tell us about how that was?

TJM: I was home. I was still living at home. I used to live in Small Place right off of Shore Road. And the fire whistle-- back then, all we had was the fire whistles to blow. We didn't have pagers and things like that.

Q: Well, what pagers do you have now?

TJM: Oh, we have pagers. It's an audible alarm that comes over and tells you where the fire is, what it is. Things like that. Back then, it was just the fire whistle that you hear in town blowing.

Q: So you had no direction as to where the fire was?

TJM: No. Everybody used to just go to the firehouse.

Q: And now you go to the site?

TJM: No, no. You still go to the firehouse nowadays to grab the fire truck.

Q: And what happened then?

TJM: Well, I was living at home, and the fire whistle came in. I went to Protection's Annex, which is on Shore Road and Channel Drive. When we left the truck, we got to the thing, and someone was there and said that there's a woman trapped in her apartment.

Q: And what did you do?

TJM: I, you know, we had our gear on and we went in and rescued her.

Q: It couldn't have been that simple (laughs).

TJM: No, it's not that simple. But it's, you know, just something that you're trained to do.

Q: Well, did you have any smoke inhalation ...

TJM: No.

Q: ... during this time?

TJM: No, I was fine from that. Yeah, I was fine.

Q: And you received the Congressman's Medal of Merit?

TJM: Right.

Q: And also ...

TJM: Congressman Lester Wolff presented that to me, along with my-- my uncle who was

Chief at the time.

Q: And how did it feel to have your uncle ...Present it to you?... [INAUDIBLE] ...

TJM: Oh, it was very good. It was very, you know, any time you can make a rescue and save somebody's live, it always feels good.

Q: You also received the Schaefer Fireman of the Year. Is that something ...

TJM: That was in 1970 also. And that was for the same rescue. That was from the Schaefer Brewing Company.

Q: You received, in 1988, I believe, the Silver Medal of Valor.

TJM: Yes.

Q: And what was that for?

TJM: That was for the, again, an apartment fire we had on Main Street, where we lost firefighter Bobby Dayton, happened to die in the fire.

Q: And why-- why did that happen, since he was a New York City fireman?

TJM: Well, you know, some people think they may be trained and maybe know a little bit more than volunteer firemen do, but things happen, you know. I don't think we really know. He ran out of air somehow and just couldn't make it out.

Q: Did you have the Scott Air Packs then?

TJM: Yes. Yes. And I just happened to be the one to go in to find him and bring him out.

Q: And how did that affect you emotionally or physically?

TJM: I don't think it affected me like it might affect other people, being, you know, coming from Vietnam and seeing people die every day. Not that you get used to it, but you're seeing it happen. You know, being Bobby, he was very close, you know. He was-- I always talked to my wife about how him and his girlfriend were always around together, as I was with my girlfriend who's now my wife. And, you know, and the older people, "Hey, come with us! Come with us!" And we'd kind of take him along that way. And for this to happen, it was tough.

Q: Now, how do you-- were there any other awards that you got?

TJM: I've received numerous letters of commendation over the years for different things. After

a while, you kind of forget about them, you know (laughs). I don't even know where they are anymore, it's been so long.

Q: Were you in any of the large fires in '69, like the Village Tavern fire?

TJM: Yeah, well, the Village Tavern fire we had, I was in the Fire Department, you know, back then. So, being a young guy, you probably made most of those fires. Obviously, you can't make them all, but ...

Q: Right. And there were several others. I think the club house at Sands Point. Were you involved there?

TJM: I was at that fire also. That was the Sands Point Bath Club that burned. Right.

Q: But there were no loss of life in these.

TJM: No, no.

Q: What was the worst fire that you were in?

TJM: Probably emotionally, Bobby Dayton. I mean, back in 1965, we had three little kids die in a fire. You know, being an eighteen year old kid, you know ...

Q: And you were at that?

TJM: I was at that one.

Q: And where was that?

TJM: That was on South Court. Or North Court, I believe it was, which is right off of Lower Main Street. So we've-- we've had quite a few fires like that where you've had quite a few deaths in them.

Q: Now, what was it like for you to be Chief of the Department?

TJM: It's a great honor, a great privilege. You know, there's only a handful of people who can become the Chief of the Port Washington Fire Department.

Q: And what do you have as your background in order to be a Chief?

TJM: Well, you have to be-- first of all, you have to attend all of the fire schools, get all of the training that's involved. Numerous, numerous hours of training at the Nassau County Fire Academy, through the local schools here in Port Washington, the fire schools that we used to run in the firehouse. And working with the people in the Fire Department.

Knowing how to get along with them, how to push the right buttons to get them to do what they have to do.

Q: What was it like being an officer after being in the rank and file?

TJM: You try not to make it change your life any. I still had the same friends. You know, it's not that big a deal. Hopefully, everybody respects you and, you know, you lead by example.

Q: And what were the major advances, do you think, that you may have championed during your period as Chief?

TJM: Well, back when I was First Assistant Chief, we formed the Fire Medic Company, which is the ambulance company in Port Washington right now, which is celebrating twenty-five years.

Q: Were you instrumental in that?

TJM: I was in part of that. There was numerous committees that everybody used to work on.

Q: What are these committees?



TJM: Oh, there's all types of committees. You-- I mean, back then, when I first joined the Fire Department, we didn't have the Scott Air Packs. So there was a committee to go out and purchase the Scott Air Pack. They were just being developed at that time. You know, there was four-inch hose and five-inch hose. There's committees to go and develop that stuff and look at it. Is it the right fit for the Port Washington Fire Department? Is it something that we really need and can use... Turn-out gear. Everything has changed over the years. You know, turn-out gear used to cost a hundred dollars back then. Now, it's fourteen hundred dollars.

Q: And how do you cope with the rise in prices?

TJM: Terrible (laughs).

Q: Do you have benefactors who help?

TJM: Oh, no. It-- all of the tax money for-- all of the money that the Port Washington Fire Department gets is from tax money. Everybody in the community pays a tax, and that's your fire protection tax. Now, today, they do run a fund drive today that purchases specific equipment that they might like. Some Scott Packs; they had to update the Scott Packs a few years back. They had a fund drive to finance that. Because they're extremely expensive. They're about three thousand dollars a piece now. You know, we probably have fifty of them in the Fire Department with spare bottles for each, which cost

another four or five hundred dollars. So it's an expensive operation.

Q: What kind of time demands is there on you as a Chief?

TJM: It's almost like a full-time job, you know. Obviously, everybody has a real job that they get paid to do. You volunteer your time to be Chief of the Fire Department. It takes a lot of time. Letter writing. Back then, we didn't have a secretary like they have nowadays. We did all the work ourselves. All the mail that comes in, all the phone calls, all of the fires, and then your own family wants a little of that time, too.

Q: What is your career, aside from the Fire Department?

TJM: I'm in the fire equipment business. I'm a partner at Chief Fire and Safety Equipment here in Port Washington. And we sell fire equipment to the various different fire departments on Long Island and New York City.

Q: And where do you get your fire equipment to sell?

TJM: We buy it from the manufacturers. The people that manufacture it. I mean, they're all over the world. Not all over the world, but all over the country.

Q: So how many hours do you work at your job and then as a volunteer fireman?

TJM: Well, I don't do too much as a volunteer fireman anymore. I'm getting a little bit too old for that right now. But when I was younger, you put in as much time as you possibly could. Working at, you know, it's very hard to say how much time you actually put into work. You do what you have to do to get the job done. If it takes forty hours, it's forty. If it takes sixty, it's sixty. I mean, it's our own business, so we work hard at it to keep it striving along.

Q: Have you ever been involved in a police investigation of arson?

TJM: Oh, sure. Sure.

Q: How does that work?

TJM: Well, any time there's a fatality in a fire, you call the Nassau County Fire Marshall's office, and they come in and do the investigation of the fire for you. And then a lot of time, it's interviews, as we're doing right now, back and forth with the arson investigator, the police departments, to find out different details that we found at the fire and what they found at the fire. Things you might have seen. You know, a lot of time, the Chiefs are the first one at the scene. Did you see anybody running away? Any strange cars? Where'd you find-- was the door open? Was it locked? All different things like that.

Q: Have you been able to prove any arson cases here in Port?

TJM: I can't say that I have. I can't speak for everybody else.

Q: Wasn't the boat fire a suspicious fire?

TJM: Uh huh. We had quite a few suspicious boat fires back then. ... They were all pretty big fires.

Q: But nothing came of any ...

TJM: Not to my knowledge, no.

Q: Did you ever think you going to die while you were doing any of this work?

TJM: No, not really.

Q: What goes through your head when you're ...

TJM: I don't know ...

Q: ... when you were young, when you first went in the Department and you were screaming

toward that fire, what would go through your mind?

TJM: Well, you just hoped that, you know, you can get there safe and get back safe, and do the job that you're supposed to be doing.

Q: And what makes you take such a hazardous volunteer job?

TJM: That's a real good question. I don't know if anybody can answer that one for you. You probably have to have a couple screws loose in your head to do it (laughs). You know, most people are trying to run out of the building, and we're running into the building. I think it's just the way you're brought up, you know, coming from a Fire Department family.

Q: The most moving rescue that you made is what?

TJM: The most moving rescue? I think they were all pretty-- pretty much about the same, whether it's a live body you're recovering or someone that is deceased. You know, it's-- they're all tough. They're all tough. Obviously, the ones that live, you're very happy about that you got there in the right time. You have to be at the right place at the right time. That doesn't make me any different than anybody else in the Fire Department. Almost anybody will do the same thing. You just have to be there at the right time.

Q: Would you advise your children to be volunteer firefighters?

TJM: My son who is twenty years old now, he had talked about it. He's with school and he's a baseball player, and he doesn't have a lot of time to dedicate, and the Fire Department takes a lot of time nowadays. And I wouldn't want him to join if he didn't have the time and the dedication to put into it. So he-- he'll have to wait until he gets his college and his baseball career behind him and then see what he wants to do.

Q: What was the-- would you recall a failed mission, as such? Any failed mission in terms of rescue or ...

TJM: All right ...

Q: ... how do you critique after a fire?

TJM: Well, you sit down and go over the fire with some of the officers, some of the firemen who were on the scene. What did we do? Why did we do it this way? Could we have done it a different way? You know, I don't think any of them, it is a failed mission. Usually if someone dies in a fire, they're probably dead before you get there. If the fire is burning that fierce, then by the time you get there it's very hard to get in sometimes, it could be too late.

Q: What do you feel is the major safety factor in homes catching fire?

TJM: Well, nowadays you have all of the-- everybody has a smoke detector in their house, which are huge, huge savings. Fire alarm systems. Everybody is more conscious, especially here in Port Washington with the prices of real estate. You know, it's their home; this is where they live. So they want to take care of it a lot-- maybe, I shouldn't say maybe more than years ago, but people are more conscious about fire and fire safety now than they used to be years ago. Homes are built better, differently.

Q: What is the silliest call that you have ever gone to?

TJM: Oh, you always get calls. You know, maybe a cat in a tree, or something like that. Everybody always jokes about that. But we've always had, you know-- I don't know if they get them anymore, but I know I had a couple of them when I was Chief of the Department. People call, "I can't get my cat out of the tree." Well, when he gets hungry, he'll come down (laughs).

Q: In looking at the history of the Flower Hill Hose Company, back in the early days they had fire wagons, and then they asked people for their horses to pull those. Do you have any recollection of stories ...

TJM: No.

Q: ... like that?

TJM: That's way before my time.

Q: Well, I-- maybe your father's time. He might ...

TJM: No, I think it's before his time, too. I remember some of the older people talking about, "Oh, back in the old days when we had," you know, "horses." But nobody really elaborated much about it, you know.

Q: Well, with the hundredth anniversary coming up next year for the Flower Hill Hose Company, what has changed the most, in your opinion, from the old days to now?

TJM: Probably the equipment. The apparatus. All your fire trucks today are much more sophisticated, more computerized. Much, much larger than they used to be years ago. The equipment is far superior to what it used to be like years ago. Today, you know, firemen go in, and they have bunker pants, bunker coats, helmets, hoods, gloves.

Q: What is the Nomex hood? What is that?

TJM: It's just a hood that fits over your head and covers your upper head area except for your



face. Your face is usually covered with the Scott Air Pack mask. So your body is pretty much covered in everything. Years ago, you used to use your ears as a heat gauge. If the ears got too hot, you would get out. Nowadays, you got the hood on, it's very-- you know, it's harder. You can stay in the fire a lot longer than you used to be able to do years ago. But the gear is so much more sophisticated, so much better than it used to be.

Q: Have you dealt with any traumas on the job with your firemen or firefighters, in any way?

TJM: We used to-- I mean, after the Bobby Dayton incident, we had another female from Fire Medic Company who was hit by a car and killed. And there's always trauma after something like that, and you try to bring in counselors for anybody that may want the counselors to help them get through this incident.

Q: I'd like to ask you about your outside activities, aside from the Port Washington Fire Department. They're quite extensive. Could you tell us about it?

TJM: Well, currently, I'm Commissioner at the Port Washington Water District. I've been a Commissioner there for fifteen years. It's a three year term. You're elected by the community. I happen to be up for election this year. Hopefully, I'll get the community support one more term, for another term. Along with that, I'm on the Board of Directors at the Nassau County Vocational Education and Extension Board. What that is, is we run

the Nassau County Fire Academy, the LPN Nursing Program in Nassau County. We do all the public relation work for the fire service in Nassau County. Going back years, outside activities outside of the Port Washington Fire Department, but related to the fire service, I was Chairman of the Eighth Battalion.

Q: Now what is a battalion?

TJM: A battalion is consisted of eight or nine departments in a particular area. The Eighth Battalion is Port Washington, Albertson, Great Neck, Plandome, East Williston, Williston Park. Within that Department, we elect what we call battalion delegates, and then those delegates elect the Chairman and Secretary. I was fortunate enough to be elected to Chairman of the Eighth Battalion, and then from there I moved on to be the Chairman of the Nassau County Fire Commission, which controls all of the fire marshall's office.

Q: Now, what does the Fire Marshall do?

TJM: The Fire Marshall, that's the people who come in and investigate fires. Do safety inspections at clubs, restaurants, bars, mercantile businesses, to make sure that people are not storing the wrong things where they shouldn't be storing them. Making sure that the restaurants have the proper fire extinguishers, fire suppression systems. Different things like that.

Q: And what other organizations were you a member of?

TJM: I was President of the Nassau County Firemen's Association back in 1994 when we had our big parade here in Port Washington with the block party. Every time there's a president, his home department will host the parade, the Nassau County Parade and Drill. I was fortunate enough to be president of that. I kept myself pretty busy through my fire career.

Q: And that entails what when you do a parade?

TJM: Well, you run the whole parade. I-- I didn't run it myself. We had a committee in Port Washington who put the parade together. For this particular one, it was a parade for the entire county of Nassau. There's seventy-two departments in Nassau County that were invited to the parade, plus some other outside guests. I don't remember the exact number, but there had to be fifty departments, at least, that were here for that parade. I mean, it's a pretty big event to put together, and there was a big block party that we had afterwards up on Haven Avenue. And currently, I try to stay fairly active. I work on some committees within Flower Hill Hose Company. The By-Law Committee. We'll have our hundredth anniversary next year. I'm on the Hundredth Anniversary Committee. I'm Vice President of the Exempt Benevolent Association within the Port Washington Fire Department. And that's an association that if some fireman needs some type of relief, we try to help

out as much as we possibly can.

Q: Now, does that involve any of the retirees upstate New York and the home for the firefighters?

TJM: It doesn't really involve them, but we work, if someone needs to go to the home and they have no place else, and they'd like to go up to the firemen's home in Hudson, New York, we can make arrangements. We know the right contacts, who to call, get the paperwork filled out.

Q: These are basically for people who have no family?

TJM: No family. Even people that have a family, but they feel they'd be more comfortable at the Firemen's Home. All volunteer firemen are welcome to go there.

Q: And how many do you currently have now at that home?

TJM: We have two currently. We just had one pass away within the last month. We had two and one just went up, so we're back to two again. And within a year or two years, they're going to be taking females up there. So, if a fireman wants to go up there and he wants to bring his wife, she'll be welcome, too. So, you know, you don't have to leave your spouse. When you first joined the Fire Department back in 1965, there were the

tournament teams. You know, a lot-- most of the people joined the tournament teams. You'd play softball on Sundays. And then when I returned home from Vietnam in 1968, the Road Runners were formed, which is the tournament team, which is still in effect today. And in '69, we won the New York State championship, and again in '73 we won a New York State championship.

Q: So you take your tournaments very seriously?

TJM: Oh, yeah. It's a lot of work, and they put a lot of time into doing it. Even the current team today, they practice two or three nights a week, all day Saturdays at the tournament. It's a lot to do it. I mean, we were fortunate back in them days in the late '60s, early '70s, that we had one of the best teams in the county. We won the National County Point Trophy six, seven years in a row. I'm one of only two people to be on both New York State championship teams. The Road Runners took a lot of time, doing that, and then trying to do your Fire Department duty at the same time. And still stay married (laughs).

Q: What does your wife think about this?

TJM: Now, it's all past. Now it doesn't affect her at all, you know.

Q: I think with 9/11, has that changed anything for your Fire Department and how they deal with fires? What will happen in a major disaster, if we have a terrorist attack? How

would the Fire Department cope with that?

TJM: It's really hard to say how they would cope with it, because everything happens at the spur of the moment in an incident like that. No one expects something like that to happen here in Port Washington.

Q: But are you-- are you kept on alert on a daily basis of what's going on in the-- you know.

TJM: Maybe the Fire Department may be nowadays on that. I'm not in that-- that active anymore. The only ones who would really be brought up to speed on a daily basis or a weekly basis would be the three Chiefs in the Fire Department. And I don't really think that they're kept up to that great of security measures, unless something is particularly targeted for our area. But 9/11 had a lasting effect on everybody, whether you're a, you know, an older fireman or a younger fireman. I think saw a little membership spike in the Department right after 9/11. I think it has now tapered out a little bit. People seem to forget real quick what happened.

Q: Do you think there's a basic difference between the New York City firefighters and you, in terms ...

TJM: Oh, because ...

Q: ... because they're paid; you're volunteer?

TJM: Yeah, there's no question, there's a difference. I mean, it's their job ...

Q: What would the difference be?

TJM: Well, that's their job. They get paid to do it; we do it for nothing. We basically do the same things. They're doing it because they want to do it. It's a great job. But they enjoy, you know, saving people, rescuing people, the same as we do as volunteers. I mean, their training is probably just as intense as our training is. They have an opportunity to do it a little bit more often than we do, because they're there during the daytime hours and they can train as they're hanging around the firehouse waiting for a fire to come in. We have to train at night time or on weekends. Makes it a lot tougher on the volunteers that way. A lot of the City-- paid City firemen are volunteer firemen. A tremendous amount of them are volunteer firemen. So ...

Q: Here.

TJM: Here. All over. You know, we have one of our current Chiefs is a City fireman right now.

Q: So they not only do this as a career, but they do it as a volunteer, too.

TJM: Volunteers you have, too. Sure. It kind of fits together. I'm a volunteer here. Why not go to the City and do it and get paid to do it. You know, it's ...

Q: Have you ever thought of going to the City and ...

TJM: I took the test back in 1968. Unfortunately for me, they had a height requirement at the time and I wasn't tall enough (laughs).

Q: Why is that?

TJM: That's just the way the rules and regulations were set up.

Q: It would seem to me that it would be better that you weren't so you could crawl into small ...

TJM: Yeah.

Q: ... spaces (laughs).

TJM: They didn't think that back then. So, the way I look at it is things worked out for the best.



Q: If you-- would you be Fire Chief again, if you had to do it over again?

TJM: Right now, in my stage of life, I'm-- I feel I'm too old to dedicate that much time back to the Fire Department. I have a lot of other interests and activities in my life that takes a lot more time. I couldn't dedicate the time that I would want to dedicate to it, so I wouldn't want to do it again. You know, I was Chief twenty-five years ago. Too many things have changed over the years.

Q: You feel that you couldn't really move in now and do ...

TJM: I couldn't dedicate that kind of time to it anymore. I have other interests and ...

Q: Would you say that this is a young person's job?

TJM: Well, it depends on who you really talk to. I was fortunate. I did it when I was young, you know. Obviously, it took a ...

TJM: ... effect on my family. Sure. I mean ...

Q: What toll did it take on you?

TJM: Well, I still hear my daughter today say that, "Oh, you were never around when I was

growing up," because I was always at the Fire Department or I was always working.

Q: And how does that affect you when you hear that?

TJM: Well, you hear it. You know, you just kind of shrug it off. You know, she grew up and it's just a memory in her own mind, you know. It didn't affect her any, I don't believe. But, you know, you hear it.

Q: And how has-- how does the public perceive you in terms ...

TJM: Now, or back then?

Q: Back then and now.

TJM: I don't think the public really knew that much about the Fire Department back then. The fire whistle blew. Even today, some of the people don't know that it's an all volunteer fire department. That we don't have any paid people here for fighting fires. You know, they move in from New York City. New York City is paid. They just assume the fire whistle blows, the fire department goes to the fire and puts the fire out.

Q: Have you-- has your department tried to educate the public?

TJM: Oh, I think over the years, more and more people, but we have so many new people who come into town. You know, they live here five years, they know everything that ever happened in Port Washington, and really they don't know an ounce of what really goes on. You know, they're so busy with their jobs. They leave town early in the morning, they catch a train, they come back late at night. They don't have the time to volunteer, as we did years ago. The whole community has changed. It's not that bedroom community anymore that it used to be. All the clam diggers are gone.

Q: So how-- how do you feel about that?

TJM: It's just a sign of the times. I think you have to move on with it. You know, I would much prefer it the way it used to be, but obviously it's not going to be that way and it's not going to go back that way. You have to move on. Times change. Progress changes. And you got to move forward with it. I mean, when I was growing up down on Mill Pond Road and Shore Road, we had about seven people in the Fire Department, and all of those people became Chiefs of the Port Washington Fire Department, from a small little area.

Q: And was this something that they had a goal that they wanted this as a goal?

TJM: Well, I think when you join the Fire Department, it's your goal-- I know when I joined the Fire Department, I wanted to be the Chief someday. And I think anybody that is

Chief or will be Chief has that same goal when they join the Fire Department.

Q: Now, there are members that are fifty year members that have not been Chief.

TJM: Oh, sure.

Q: Is that because they don't want to be Chief?

TJM: Yeah, right. Everybody's not going to be the Chief. First of all, there's not enough time for everybody to be the Chief.

Q: And is it because there's a lot of stress being a Chief?

TJM: There could be stress. Could be work activities. Could be family activities. Your family has to put up with an awful lot when you're the Chief of the Fire Department. There's a lot of time ...

Q: Do you know if there've been any divorces because of the ...

TJM: No, I don't know of any. I'm sure there's been a couple of mishaps here and there, but (laughs), you know, you're sitting down eating dinner with your wife and family and the fire whistle blows, and you leave, and you come back and your wife has already put your

food away. "Too late. You left" (laughs).

Q: And, how were you ready to leave immediately? Let's say you're having dinner, how do you get your equipment and everything ...

TJM: Well, nowadays, we have radios in our home. The firemen, they have pagers that they carry on their belt, and the alarm comes over that and tells you it's a general alarm with the address, and you respond in your car to the firehouse.

Q: And your equipment then is there waiting for you?

TJM: At the firehouse.

Q: Waiting for you.

TJM: In the firehouse.

Q: You don't keep it at home.

TJM: No. Years ago, we used to. Used to, or you'd keep it in your car. But again, things have changed, and they want you to go to the firehouse now and get your gear there and get on the fire truck and ...

Q: But isn't that wasting a great deal of time in terms of getting to a fire?

TJM: It is, but it's a lot safer that way now. Instead of fifty firemen driving their cars all over Port Washington, just go into the firehouse and let the fire truck take you there. This way, you have all of the equipment when you get to the fire. You have your hoses; you have your water; you have your air pack; you have everything that you need there. If I pull up in my car, I don't have anything. So, again, I'm putting myself in danger and the public in danger. Whereas at the Department ...

Q: The size of your Department is what?

TJM: Well, now it's a lot smaller than it used to be. We used to-- Port Washington used to be the largest fire department in the State of New York, as far as personnel goes. We had so many members years ago. Now, we don't have those kind of members anymore.

Q: So why has it-- because there's nobody wants to ...

TJM: Nobody wants to volunteer that kind of time anymore. You know, it takes a lot of time, and the younger people can't afford to stay in town.

Q: So, the fact that the area has become more affluent has affected the Fire Department?

TJM: Oh, yeah. Not only that, any organization that depends on volunteers, you know, which most organizations do. Everybody's a volunteer. Whether it be the Elks or the Knights of Columbus, or the Lions, or whoever it is. Even the VFW-- American Legion. They just don't get the people to come around anymore, because it takes a lot of time and people don't have that kind of time anymore.

Q: Are the various-- the four, the three separate departments-- are they basically different ethnic groups in the different departments in the beginning?

TJM: No. Years ago, it used to be that way, but no more. Nowadays, everybody is just intermingled. Most of the kids will join where their friends are.

Q: And what were some of the ...

TJM: Years ago, Atlantic Hook and Ladder used to be mostly Italian. Flower Hill Hose Company used to be mostly Polish. And it's all mixed together nowadays. It really doesn't matter what ethnic background you come from.

Q: Was there an Irish group, as well?

TJM: There was Irish. You know, Flower Hill had Irish. Obviously, the Murrays were here in

Flower Hill. They were very Irish.

Q: And what part of Ireland was your background?

TJM: My father's parents came from County Cork.

Q: And did they have fire departments there?

TJM: Well, I'm sure they had fire departments. Probably a lot different than they have here in the States.

Q: But your father was not a member there, but ...

TJM: No, he was born here in Port Washington.

Q: Now, on the estate parties they used to have at Harriman Estate parties. Did we ...

TJM: We used to have a-- like Flower Hill would have a summertime picnic for the members and their wives and their kids. And we were always fortunate enough to go down to one of the estates in Sands Point and have it right there on the beach. Those were some great parties back in them days, you know. Nowadays, you can't do it. All the land is developed. Nobody wants you on their property.



Q: So where do you go now?

TJM: Well, now they either just have a picnic at the firehouse, or they go down to Manorhaven Park. They have a picnic in there.

Q: Now, after the parade on Memorial Day, where did ...

TJM: They went to Manorhaven Park, and they had a barbecue type picnic.

Q: Were you in that parade this year?

TJM: No, I didn't parade this year.

Q: Have you-- you have been, though ...

TJM: Oh, oh, absolutely. Absolutely.

Q: ... in the past. Is there anything you want to say about the Fire Department that you would like to get on record?

TJM: All right, you know, I'm just very honored to be a member of the Port Washington Fire

Department. It's just an extra honor to be one of the few ex-Chiefs that are still alive in Port Washington Fire Department.

Q: How many are deceased?

TJM: Oh, the majority of them are. The Chiefs over-- they change Chiefs every two years. I think there's only nine ex-Chiefs alive today.

Q: I want to find out about what happens when you're on a fire call and you have to flood a house? How do the people that own the house react to that? What do they do while you're ...

TJM: Anytime that anybody has a fire or a tragedy in their house, obviously they're hurt personally, financially. The Fire Department doesn't go in to flood the house just to flood a house. That's just not how it works. We're trained to go in and do-- put out the fire and do as minimal damage as possible. We try to open the windows instead of breaking them, and we try to open doors instead of kicking the doors in. Sometimes, you know, it does happen where you have to break a window. You can't get it open, so you do have to break it and clear it. But the Fire Department doesn't go and try to do damage. I mean, that's an old myth that everybody has. "Oh, they're going to break all my windows. They're going to ruin everything." It just doesn't really happen that way. You know, we all live in homes. We all pay the same taxes as everybody else does in Port Washington.

Everybody cares for their own home, cars, whatever. Boats, whatever it may be.

Q: How do you save the possessions in a house? I'm assuming that's the second item after human life.

TJM: Any time we have to go inside and there's water damage in a house or a fire, and there's going to be a lot of water, we try to-- we have what they call tarpaulins, which are big plastic covers. And they cover as much of the furniture that's possible. It protects them from getting wet. It doesn't protect them from smoke damage, because smoke gets into everything. But the soot, if you have to pull a ceiling down, the ceiling doesn't get into the furniture. We try to cover everything to protect as much as we possibly can. Sometimes it's just not physically possible. The house is burning that bad where you just can't get in to cover it. You have to go in with the hose line and put out the fire and then worry about, you know, the other later on.

Q: And the advice you would give for people who have homes, to avoid fires, would be what?

TJM: Well, everybody should definitely have smoke detectors ...

Q: Aside from the smoke detectors, what advice would you give to people in their homes to have a safe home?

TJM: Well, a safe home-- smoke detectors, fire extinguishers. Make sure that, you know, no smoking in bed. Big cause of fires. Leaving food on the stove and running to pick the kids up right down the road. That five minutes that you're away could cost you your whole house. People have to be conscious of what they're doing and how they're doing it. The more precautions you take in your house, the safer you're going to protect your property.

Q: Since HIV has come on the scene, have you had any dealings with that contamination on the scene?

TJM: I myself personally, back when I was a Chief Officer, that wasn't even thought about in them days. Nowadays, they have the Latex rubber gloves. All of the turn-out gear is what they call blood borne pathogen, so any fluids from the outside will not penetrate the gear and get into the human body. So everything like that, which again has raised the cost of everything. That's why the gear is so expensive. But everybody is very conscious of not only AIDS, but hepatitis. Any blood fluids, body fluids, anything like that. Always wearing gloves that are-- that'll protect you.

Q: [END OF SIDE A; BEGIN SIDE B] ... Tell me about what a Chief actually does. When the Chief gets to a fire, what are the steps that he must take? What-- how does he direct his men? What are the initial things that he must do?

TJM: Well, the Chief of the Fire Department, whether it be Port Washington or any other fire department, is the Chief Officer in the entire department. They control all of the fire and rescue operations that are involved. If I'm not, being Chief of the Department, if I can't make that particular fire today, one of my Assistant Chiefs-- whether it be the First Assistant or Second Assistant-- hopefully, he'll be able to make that call and do exactly the same thing that I would do. Now, when they get to a particular fire, you need to try to set up the situation so you know exactly what's going on. Do I have a real fire here, or is it just an automatic alarm with no fire? Is there food on the stove? What is it? You know, that's why the chiefs now, they have their own vehicles where they can get from their home to the scene before the fire apparatus actually gets there. And they have a better chance to set up the fire so when the fire truck gets there, they know exactly what they're going to do and where they're going to place the apparatus. They take control of the entire scene. They set up a command post, and they run the actual fire scene. Even though they have Assistant Chiefs, we have Captains and Lieutenants in the Department, who actually go in and do all the bull work, the dirty work inside, fighting the fire. The Chief doesn't fight a fire anymore. He just directs the operations. Most of the times, you'll have a Captain or a Lieutenant, they're the ones that are inside getting dirty, tearing the walls down, directing the guys with the hose lines, where to squirt the water, how to do it. You know, different things like that.

Q: How do you handle a back fire? In other words, when you go in, and there's a ...

TJM: Well, again, that's part of setting up the fire so hopefully you don't get a back flash or a flash over.

Q: What is a, exactly, a flash over?

TJM: Flash over is when the air in a room gets so super-heated that it just flashes right over as you're going in the front door or any door that you're crawling down and the fire comes right over the top of you. That's a flash over. Doesn't happen that frequently, but it does happen.

Q: And is that dangerous?

TJM: Oh, absolutely dangerous. Absolutely.

Q: What-- you can be burned.

TJM: You can be burned to death in a matter of seconds. I mean, it comes down at that, depending on the severity of it coming at you.

Q: And how do you prevent that?

TJM: You have to set up the fire. Make sure that the room that you're going to fight is ventilated. Ventilated is either opening windows, breaking windows ...

Q: Is that what you use that Pike pole for?

TJM: Pike pole. For cutting a hole in the roof. Hopefully, you know, if the room is-- again, that's part of the Chief's job, or the officer in charge when he's at the fire, to set the scene up. See what I have. Is it a real fire? How big is it? You know, is it a basement fire? Try to get all these things set before the actual firemen get there and start doing the work, so that nobody really gets hurt. You know, and you learn these things over the years by going to fire school, reading fire manuals, all the training. Because we don't-- you don't see it every day at a fire. So you have to try to simulate it when you go to the Fire Academy.

Q: And you simulate that at Bethpage?

TJM: Bethpage is where the Fire Academy is, yes.

Q: And ...

TJM: We try to simulate it as best as we can. You know, teach people what to look for.

Q: Why was Bethpage ...

TJM: That was set up many, many years ago. The Fire Academy's been there for-- since the inception. I'm not even sure when that was really set up, but it's been there forever. And every year, we get bigger and bigger out there. As I mentioned earlier, I'm a past president of the Board of Directors from the Fire Academy, so I'm a little bit more familiar with how it operates, what we're-- what the future brings, what it doesn't bring. I mean, we're a nationally recognized fire academy, and we have people from all over the country come into our fire academy for different types of classes, schooling.

Q: And who is the-- who are the instructors?

TJM: The instructors, most of the instructors are volunteer firemen. Some of the regulations, to be an instructor is you have to be a volunteer fireman for five years. And a lot of them are ex-Chiefs, New York City firemen.

Q: And they write the curriculum?

TJM: They write the curriculum, and then they teach the curriculum that they write.

Q: So it's all experience.



TJM: It's all experience. There's an extensive test you have to take to become a fire instructor.

Q: How long a test is that? How many ...

TJM: It's got a lot of questions. The last test, I believe, was seventy questions. But it's-- you've got to read the manual.

Q: It's the practical side? Do they judge you on the practical side of things?

TJM: It's a written test first. If you're lucky enough to score high on the written test, then there's a personal interview. And then, they can take you to the Fire Academy and see how you would write up the lesson plan for a particular class that'll be taught that evening. So it's a prestige job.

Q: And you've done that?

TJM: No, I haven't done that. No. Again, you have to have a lot of time to dedicate to that (laughs). Everything takes time.

Q: So, basically, being, having a family is (laughs) tough.

TJM: The family has to be willing to put up with your activities. It's hopefully they do that,

and they understand that this is what you really want to do, and they let you do it.

Q: Now, when do you think-- when do you think that the volunteer service here will end in terms of-- do you think soon, do you think, or ...

TJM: No, I don't know if it's soon. It's very hard to say how Port, the community of Port Washington is going. The community now is getting very, very large. A lot of ...

Q: How many-- how many people?

TJM: The Port Washington Fire Department covers ten and a half square miles. We go all the way from Sands Point up to St. Francis Hospital. So it's a big area for a fire department to cover. Because, you know, the membership, the numbers have decreased considerably over the years. Whether it'll continue to decrease or maybe we'll see an increase, it's-- nobody can predict what the future brings. The amount of calls has gone up tremendously.

Q: How many calls do you get per day or per week?

TJM: I don't know the exact numbers. I'm not, you know, up to date on all that speed, but there's probably four calls, five calls every day between ambulance calls and fire calls. It's a considerable amount. A considerable amount of calls. It takes a lot of time. Each

call is probably a half hour, forty-five minutes, whether it's just recorded alarm, or a small little fire.

Q: Now, as an ex-Chief, do you still respond to the calls, or no?

TJM: I still go to some calls. I don't go to many. I kind of pick and choose the calls I go to.

Q: So when these other people that are in the Department get to a fire and they don't have enough people, what happens? You call ...

TJM: You call mutual aid. Mutual aid is when you call another department to come in and help. Sometimes we do that if we have a bad fire. We'll have a neighboring department come just stand by for us in case we have another fire at the same time, which does happen.

Q: Now, in case of a disaster or terrorist attack, how-- who is designing the plan in order to cope with this?

TJM: Depending on what the disaster would be, the Chief of the Department or the Senior Officer, if the Chief's not available, would be the command. He'd be at the command post, and he would call Nassau County Fire Communications Center and tell them what I need. I need ten ambulances. I need four departments for mutual aid. I need LILCO. I

need LIPA. I need Keyspan for gas. Whatever it may be.

Q: And what do these companies do if they come?

TJM: Well, they come, and they'll be directed where to go and what to do by the Chief of the Department or the officer in charge. It may be just standing by at another firehouse here in town in case we get another call. It may be coming to the scene, bringing manpower to the scene, again, depending on what the disaster or how big the fire is.

Q: Is there any rivalry between the Police Department and the Fire Department?

TJM: No, I don't think. Not in Port Washington.

Q: But apparently there is in New York City.

TJM: Well, there could be in New York City. Port Washington, we have a lot of police officers in Port Washington who are firemen in Port Washington. So, I mean, there's always going to be some rivalry.

Q: Who would have precedence in case of a disaster? Would it be the-- I mean, would it be the Police Department that makes the decisions, or the Fire Department?

TJM: Depending on what the disaster may be. You know, is there a crime involved?

Q: But how do you know that ahead of time?

TJM: Well, somebody's got to set the scene up. That's where the command post comes in. The Chief Officer has to set the scene up and, you know, we've had people that are actually murdered in a house and the place was set on fire. So it's kind of like a dual role. We'll go in, the Fire Department will go in and do what they have to do to put the fire out and try to preserve the scene as much as we can so the Police Department can come in and do the investigation.

Q: Now, how do you know that that's been a murder and not ...

TJM: Well, you don't know.

Q: Oh, you don't know.

TJM: You don't know.

Q: So ...

TJM: That's why you have to, any time there's a death or a fatality, you have to try to preserve

the scene as best as you possibly can.

Q: And how do you do that in a fire?

TJM: Well, you have to do whatever you got to do. You know, it's hard to say. Every fire is different. But instead of-- if there's a body here, instead of pulling the ceiling down and letting it fall on top of the body, you'll work around and try to get up in the ceiling some other way, so you can preserve the scene. You have to work together.

Q: Is that what you had to do with Bobby Dayton?

TJM: No, Bobby was out in the open.

Q: Oh, he died not in the building?

TJM: Oh, he was in the building.

Q: Oh.

TJM: Oh, yeah. He was in the building. It was just a matter of going in and finding out where he actually was. There wasn't any collapse in that building. You have to work together.

Q: And in the fire with the three children that were killed ...

TJM: That was-- it's just a regular house fire. You know, kids normally have a tendency to hide in closets or under the bed. Things like that. The houses don't collapse unless they're really burning, fully involved fire.

Q: And usually a fully involved fire like that could be arson?

TJM: It could be anything...Could be arson. It could be anything. Could be food on the stove could turn a whole house into a fire.

Q: And how many of those have you had?

TJM: Oh, we've had those. I don't know how many.

Q: But you do have them.

TJM: Oh, you do have them. Sure. You know, you could leave something on the stove cooking and go shopping. Takes two hours to go shopping. By the time you get home, you open the front door, the whole place is on fire. Fire is very strange. Could start from your oil burner in the basement. Just a little blow back. Everybody has those. Maybe it's just your house that blows back harder than somebody else's and goes on fire.

Q: So then, these are the additional types of fires.

TJM: Sure.

Q: Are there ever unusual ...

TJM: Well, you know, lightning is unusual. It happens all the time, but it's unusual. You know, it's not the common cause, but it happens.

Q: And have you been at those types of fires?

TJM: Oh, sure. We've had lightning fires. Had lightning hit houses, the house goes on fire.

Oh, sure. Yeah.

Q: Now you say that you are next to the oldest Chief in the Department?

TJM: For time in service, the only other ex-Chief that was before me was ex-Chief Joe Fico.

Joe was Chief of the Department; I was his First Assistant Chief. So, Joe is the oldest ex-Chief, not in age, but in time. In time, the second oldest.

Q: Because you both joined very young.



TJM: Yeah.

Q: You were what? Nineteen, right?

TJM: I was eighteen when I joined the Fire Department. I was lucky enough to be the youngest Chief the Port Washington Fire Department has ever had.

Q: How old were you then?

TJM: This was in my early thirties, very early thirties (laughs). You know, I came-- I moved up through the ranks very quickly. I was at the right-- again, at the right place at the right time. You know, the Port Washington Fire Department, back then, was a very big department. Today, we're probably half that size.

Q: But we have more population.

TJM: But more population, more calls, so it's more demanding on the fewer members that we currently have.

Q: Did you ever have personal injuries while you were fighting these fires? When you went in to get Bobby Dayton, were you injured?

TJM: No, not with Bobby. I was burned in a fire one time. Just some minor things, nothing major. I've been very lucky. Most of the members, we've been very lucky. We've had a few minor injuries, but nothing really serious. At least that I remember anyway.

Q: And your medical expenses. If Workmen's Compensation does not cover all, or does it?

TJM: Yeah, they will. They cover that, too. Fire Department has insurance. We come under the Volunteer Firemen's Benefit Law, which covers firemen that are hurt while on active duty.

Q: If they're totally disabled while they're on active duty, what happens?

TJM: There is an insurance policy. I mean, obviously, if you make a thousand dollars a week, it's not going to give you a thousand dollars a week, but it is going to give you some type of benefit. I don't know exactly what the benefits are nowadays. That's something that's beyond me. I'm not up to speed on all that.

Q: When you were Chief of the Department, how did you handle misconduct or ineptness?

TJM: Any time that we had a problem with one fireman or two firemen-- whatever it might have been-- we would try to bring them in together, sit them down. What was the

problem? Why did this happen? Get their stories. Get both stories. And then make a determination on what the severity of the charges may be. Is there going to be a penalty? Penalties back in them days were usually just charges. Bring you up on charges. You get a ten day suspension.

Q: So ...

TJM: It stays on your record in the Fire Department.

Q: But if you're a volunteer fireman, what-- I mean, so you have ten days suspension.

TJM: So, you don't do-- you're not allowed to come into the firehouse for those ten days. You know, the people that join the Fire Department are dedicated to the Fire Department. They want to come to the firehouse, whether it's to watch television, fight fires, or just hang around and, you know.

Q: So, basically, it's a brotherhood?

TJM: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. You know, and you run into all kinds of disciplinary incidences.

Q: For instance?

TJM: Oh, back when I was, I think, Second Deputy Chief, I happened to be the only chief in town at the time, and I had two firemen fight at an ambulance call or fight at a fire scene. I'm not sure what it was.

Q: What was the fight about?

TJM: I couldn't even tell you nowadays, it was so long ago.

Q: So how did you handle that?

TJM: Being a young Chief, I was brand new. The other chiefs were out of town, so I brought the fellows in to explain to me what happened, and I had to make a decision on what it was. So I just wound up suspending them both for ten days. Things like that. You have to do what you have to do. You know, there has to be an authority, chain of command. That's-- I come from, you know, back when the military was-- those things aren't around anymore (laughs), and people don't know what discipline really is or chain of command. And they need them things.

Q: So you need to be a hands-on Chief.

TJM: Oh, absolutely. You have to be. Chief takes-- it's a lot of time. Lot of time. We used to

go, when I was Chief, we'd go to every party, every meeting, every fire call. You know, we never missed a thing. If there was a company dinner, you went to the company dinners. It takes a lot of time. You know, they called it the old roast beef dinners, you know. You'd go to Great Neck's firehouse, you'd get roast beef. You go to Albertson, you'd get roast beef, you know. After a while, the women get tired of it (laughs). But it's just part of being Chief. You have to do it. It's just you've got to do it.

Q: Talking about the restaurants, do you have cooks that cook for the parties?

TJM: Uh huh.

Q: Not necessarily in the firehouse now, right? Do they have famous recipes for the firemen?

TJM: It's changed over the years. Years ago, the Fire Department was always known for its clam chowder. In a waterfront community, the clam diggers would go dig the clams, open the clams, make the clam chowder. You don't see that anymore. It's rare when you get a clam chowder now at a firehouse (laughs). It's a lot of time, a lot of work.

Q: Is it because there are no clams?

TJM: Well, you can always buy clams. You can't go dig them anymore, but you can always go

buy them. But again, it takes a lot of time. People would take a day off from work just to make a pot of clam chowder for a meeting or a party or whatever it might have been. Nowadays, they can't afford to take the day off. Everything has changed.

Q: So what would you say about the quality of life then versus now?

TJM: I think back in them days, everybody, whatever amount of money you made, you lived with it, you were happy with it, and the people, same today. Whatever money you make, you live with it. You may not be happy that you're-- but you survive, you know. Things are a lot more expensive nowadays, a lot tougher on the younger kids to stay in town, live in town. I think that's why-- that's part of the problem why the Fire Department or the membership has decreased, because the kids can't stay here. They can't afford to live here, you know. After a while, you don't want your kids living at home with you and your wife. You know, it's time to move on. So, they've got to move out of town. And Long Island is getting-- it doesn't matter where you go. All over Long Island is expensive now.

Q: Did your father ever tell you, he must have been at the Fire Department during the Depression. Did he tell you any stories about what happened ...

TJM: No.

Q: ... during the Depression years here in Port?

TJM: I'm sure he probably did, but I don't recall.

Q: You don't recall any of those stories.

TJM: My father wasn't a real active fireman. I mean, when I joined the Fire Department, a few years after that, he resigned. He went what they call exempt firemen.

Q: What's an exempt fireman?

TJM: He doesn't have to come to the firehouse anymore, and he doesn't go to meetings and things like that.

Q: Because he chooses to?

TJM: Because he chose to. Yeah, he just didn't have the interest in it anymore. So, he would get out and that would leave an opening for another younger member to come in and join. Years ago, we used to have a waiting list to join. Flower Hill, we had a hundred members. And there was a waiting list to join that company. You had to wait for somebody to resign or die before you could get into the fire company.

Q: How many members are there now?

TJM: Probably around fifty. It's probably down to half what it used to be. Yeah.

Q: Tom, you were Chief for six years. Is there anything you would like to add to the session?

TJM: I think I just really go over again what I had mentioned earlier, that it's been a great honor for me to serve the Port Washington Fire Department and the community of Port Washington for the forty years that I have been a member of the Port Washington Fire Department and Flower Hill Hose Company. I'm very, very proud and privileged to be an ex-Chief of the Port Washington Fire Department. It's an elite group of people who have become Chief of the Fire Department, and I'm extremely proud that the fellow members have given me that honor to serve them over the years. Along with that, I'd like to congratulate the Port Washington Fire Department on a hundred years of dedicated service to the community of Port Washington. I wish them great success in the years to come.

Q: Well, thank you very, very much, Tom. It's been a great pleasure.

TJM: My pleasure. I'm glad I could be here.