

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

Transcript Of Oral History Interview With

John Murro
Protection Engine 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 Murro
pk

by Margaret Dildilian
November 4, 2004

Q: Today is November the 4th, 2004. This is an interview with John Murro. My name is Margaret Dildilian. The interview is taking place at the Port Washington Library. Can you pronounce your full name, John.

John Murro: John Murro.

Q: And which fire company are you affiliated with?

JM: I'm in Protection [Fire] Engine Company Number One.

Q: And what year did you join the Protection ...

JM: September 1971.

Q: And how long have you been a member?

JM: If I do the math right, it's about thirty-three years.

Q: Can you give us a reason why you joined Protection?

JM: Yes, actually it was kind of interesting. It was 1963. I graduated high school. And I was a musician. I was playing drums in several bands. And I really--I think that is what I really wanted to do is become a musician. I wasn't sure whether I wanted to go to college, but I didn't want to tell anybody that. So, I was going to college at night, and I was working at Lewis Oil as a kind of an assistant accountant, or bookkeeper, and going to school. And a lot of the members of Protection Engine Company were the owners and the workers at Lewis Oil. So I finished--well, I finished two years of college and then I got drafted, because I wasn't taking enough credits. So I got drafted in the Army in August 1966.

Q: Did you go to Viet Nam?

JM: Yes, I did. And so my band--my musical career ended quite abruptly. And, matter of fact, five of us from Port Washington were playing in this band and we were doing very well. And we had auditioned for Bernstein & Shapiro Publishing. Those were the guys that brought the Beatles over. And they liked us a lot, and they said, "You know, you guys really need to get more original material," because we were playing cover songs, so we did them very well. So three of us that were going to school locally--one other fellow was going to school at Ryder College in New Jersey; one was going to Kenyon College in Ohio--three of us were going local--Hofstra; I went to Adelphi, and the other fellow was going to Post--we decided to drop some credits so then we could spend more time writing songs and working on the band. So when the guys came home in the spring, we'd

have more material and we would be better and maybe go back for another audition.

What we didn't realize was that we dropped from twelve credits to nine credits, that they [the United States government] changed the draft status. And instead of having a 2-S student deferment, we were classified 1-A. And two of us--John Lentz who was a Port Washington resident, he got drafted before me. I went in August '66; John went in in May. So the band broke up, and then I went to Viet Nam in January of 1967 and spent the year there, and I also met up with John there. So we had kind of a reunion. We met up a couple of times. We were in the 25th Infantry Division, both in artillery. And it was just so great to see him.

Q: What were your ...

JM: You have to stop it ... [INTERRUPTION] ... came back.

Q: So, can you continue?

JM: So, then, I met up with John a couple of times, and matter of fact, we found an old guitar and some drums in some PX, and we actually sat down and (laughs) we were kind of playing something that we used to play in the band. I was wounded [on the 17th of] September of 1967. I had a shrapnel wound. Spent several days--about a week--in a hospital and another week in the base camp, and then I went back out into the field. John

was also hurt. He had injured his leg, and he was in the hospital where our base camp was, and I got to spend some time with him there, too. I visited him. I have some great pictures of that. We have some slides of us together. And the fortunate thing for me was my plane--when I left a year later, my plane left January 30th, 1968, and the Tet Offensive started the next day, January 31st. I didn't even realize it till I got to Chicago some thirty-six hours later and I picked up a *New York Times* in the Chicago airport, O'Hare as I was making my last leg to New York and looked at the paper and saw that Saigon was being invaded by the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong. And it was just a blessing that I got out of there. Alive, number one, and that I got out of there in time before that terrible event started. So anyway, I was assigned to--came back and was assigned to a unit in Fort Campbell, Kentucky where we were all Viet Nam returnees, actually. And they actually were training us for riot training, because the riots were going on in Detroit and Washington, D.C. And here we are, a bunch of veterans, returning from a war, and now they're training us to fight American citizens in these riots. I mean, it was just unbelievable. The good thing was there was a golf course on the base, and I called my dad and I said, "Can you send my golf clubs?" and he sent them down, so I ended up playing golf every day. And then there was a program that the Army was offering. If you could go back into school, they would give you a three month early out to go back to school. So I wrote to Adelphi, and I said, "Can you get me in the summer session?" and they did. So, instead of staying till the end of August in the Army, I got out in June to go back to school. So that's what I did. I went back to school, re-established my job at Lewis Oil. I worked part-time at Lewis in the day and at nights,

and I went to school full-time and finished and got my bachelors of Business Administration in Accounting in 1971. And then I left Lewis Oil once I got my degree. They had asked me to stay on. I said, no, I wanted to go into public accounting. So I went into public accounting and got a job with Ernst & Ernst and became an accountant and then got my CPA license while I was there, because I was able to study and take some courses, and I spent six years in public accounting and then jump-started further onto the accounting world. But the interesting thing was my boss there, which was Reggie Bedell--Reggie was a member of Protection Engine Company. And before I was leaving, he said, "Johnny, would you like to join the Fire Department?" And I said, "Gee, I don't know." I had a child at the time. Stephen was born. And I said, "Gee I don't know if I'd have the time. I'd love to do it. I've always been a--had a great affection for the Fire Department." And he said, "Oh, come on. It's, you know, it's one night a week, and a couple of weeks of training during the year, and it doesn't take that much out of your schedule." Meanwhile, I had a full-time job and a child, and a wife, of course. And I said, "You know what? I'm going to do it." And I joined. That's how I joined. And Lewis Oil, again, there were many, many workers there that were members of Protection, so it was almost a natural progression of things to do, and it was probably one of the best things I've ever done in my life.

Q: Now, were you married before you went to Viet Nam or afterward?

JM: No. It was--Claudia and I were--Claudia and I were childhood sweethearts. We met in 1961 on the front steps of Weber Junior High. I was a junior. She was a freshman. And we were going out since 19[61], and then [before] I went to Viet Nam [we agreed to get engaged]. So we got engaged before I left. Actually, we got engaged before I went in the Army. And I said, you know, "Are you really sure you want to do this?" And she said, "Yes, I want to do it." So when I came back, we got married in 1969, about a year after I got back.

Q: Would you like to tell us how you were injured, or ...

JM: It was a mortar and rocket attack, and I was in an artillery base. I was in the 25th Infantry Division; the artillery unit was the ... [3rd or 13th] ... Artillery >55 self-propelled. We pulled into a position about four or five o'clock in the afternoon, setting up. And I remember I was going to the chow line to get something to eat, and we were being re-supplied with ammunition with a big Chinook helicopter... The enemy saw that, and they started firing rockets and mortars into the--into the base. Once the first one went off, we all knew, so there happened to be a bunker. I ran for a bunker and dove in, and there was a big--I'll never forget, the Chief Sergeant was right behind me, and he was kind of like on my back as I was crawling in. And he was a huge guy. And we both pushed each other into this bunker, and we said, "Oh, thank God we're in a bunker." What we didn't realize is the bunker was full of red ants. So we were getting bitten by all these ants. So the--I guess the, if I can remember, the rounds that were coming in kind of stopped and there was a pause. So I got up, and then we said, you know, let's go..., and I was going back to fire direction control, because I was the Sergeant running that. [My job was to

give] directions and the fire commands to the guns. And as I was running into the track to make sure I was at my post, another round came in and hit me and hit him I know. And I was Medi-vac'd out by helicopter. We were laying in a rice paddy probably for forty-five minutes to an hour.

Q: And what were your injuries?

JM: In my right wrist. It severed the vein in my right arm. And they were--the medics were just unbelievable that took care of us, and thank God those choppers came in. They were called "dust offs"--came in and took us back to the hospital. Probably saved my life and many others.

Q: And your friend, the musician? What happened to him?

JM: John got seriously--he had some leg troubles. I believe he was injured in an attack. He was in a hospital for a while, then they sent him back into the field ... [INTERRUPTION] ... where I left off.

Q: You were talking about your friend John.

JM: When I met up with John, it was in 1967. It was probably March of '67...[John had a very difficult time dealing with the whole Vietnam experience].... he said, "Johnny, I

can't deal with this. I can't handle it. I said, "There's only one goal here. That's to go home. Take care of each other, and we've got to go home." John did make it home before me. He played in a band here for a while. Ended up moving to Colorado. Claimed he had all kinds of disabilities, just couldn't put it together. And unfortunately, he died about four years ago of liver and heart disease. And he was just a wonderful, wonderful friend, and I miss him dearly.

Q: What do you feel about the Viet Nam War now?

JM: Well, I was very, very disappointed some five or six years ago, when McNamara wrote his book, and the book revealed that he knew and Johnson knew very early in Johnson's tenure as President that the war was un-winnable. That was early in the '60s. Yet they insisted on sending and escalating the troops. And personally, I was one of those guys, in 1967, that was part of the huge build-up. They didn't have the guts to say, "This is wrong; let's get out of here." And when we were there, honestly, our goal was to stay alive and protect each other and go home. It was--we didn't know why we were there, in all honesty. And it was difficult for me coming back, because I was at Adelphi going to school. And it was kind of a liberal school, and there were demonstrations going on around me. And here I am a Viet Nam veteran, and I'm sitting here in the school listening to people say how bad it was and so on. I never really told anybody I was a veteran. I kept it to myself. So mentally it was tough at the time.

Q: Do you think there are any parallels to Iraq?

JM: Very much so. I'm a Republican, and I just pulled the lever for Kerry (laughs). Because there's so many similarities to it, I just feel so much for these guys that are there fighting, and it's almost the same kind of war now. It's a guerilla war, and you can't win it.

Q: Were you born and raised in Port?

JM: Yes, I was.

Q: Can you remember your childhood in Port or any childhood memories of firefighters?

JM: (Laughs). I lived on Marino Avenue starting in 1952. I was about six years old. And John Mahoney who is also a member of Protection, his father lived on Marino Avenue, and his father was a fireman at Protection. And I remember him--seeing him going to fires, and Johnny was always playing with fire trucks, and I was a friend of his. So, he had his own little fire rig and had hoses and helmets, and I spent a lot of time playing in his yard, playing fireman. And I think there was--Chief Murray was also a fireman on our street. And, but I spent a lot of time with Johnny and then ended up in Protection with him. Johnny was a Captain and was a great guy. Still is.

Q: Did you ever think at that time you would someday be a firefighter?

JM: No, but I certainly had a passion for it. I mean, I remember the parades. I would go to my grandmother's house on Davis Avenue and watch the--stand there across from the old Carvel stand and watch the fire trucks go by and I'd say, "Wow, that's a neat thing. I sure would like to be driving one of those some day." And it's true.

Q: Who do you think influenced you the most in your early years as a firefighter?

JM: You mean once I was in the firehouse?

Q: Well, before and ...

JM: Well, before, certainly it was Reggie Bedell from Lewis Oil. And, again, you know, Harvey Lewis who was the owner of Lewis Oil, and the brothers were members of Protection. So, Reggie, certainly I looked up to him as a fireman. He was a great fireman. He was also the Treasurer, who turned it over to me later on. But once I got in the firehouse, it was probably Billy Zwerlein and Peter Zwerlein. They were--Peter, I think, was an Engineer. Billy was a Lieutenant. Johnny Mahoney was a--probably a Lieutenant at the time. And they were the ones that really trained us--my class, anyway. And they were just tremendous firefighters. And, you know, even today, they're a little older and they don't go as much. But they had tremendous knowledge and tremendous courage, and great trainers. And I always felt comfortable going in fires with Billy or

Peter, and I did. There was a fire on Main Street in 1972, and I remember going in with Billy, and he's just a courageous, courageous guy. Wonderful.

Q: Is this the Billy Zwerlein ...

JM: Yep.

Q: ... who was on the Forrestal?

JM: No, that was--that was Rob--Robert. He died. Right.

Q: What did you feel in your blood when you heard that horn blow when you were young?

JM: (Laughs). It's--I still have the response. It's almost like Pavlov's response. The bell rings and the dogs swoon for the food. It's the same thing, you know. When that horn blows, it's just something that--you just get a feeling in your stomach that you have to go. You really have to go. And I know there's talk about turning the horns and sirens off, but I have to tell you it's almost an involuntary response. Your pager goes off, that's one thing. When the horn blows, it's a totally different thing. It's--your body responds to it. And lots of times in the middle of the night, it's harder now that we're a little older. I'm fifty-eight years old. I can't jump up as quick as I could before. But there are times in the middle of the night there's a bad fire and the horn blows, I'm up. I'm up. It's tough. Yep.

Q: What was it like for you as a rookie in 1971?

JM: Again, you know, that was a part of my life where I was a very, very (laughs) busy guy. I had a young child, Stephen was born in December 1970. Claudia, my wonderful wife, was just terrific about it. So, besides going into the City and doing public accounting and then I started travelling, I still made all my commitments to the firehouse. And, as hectic as it was, I wanted to learn more and I wanted to be as good as I could be in firefighting, and so I could help teach the young kids coming in later on and feel confident that what I was doing was going to be okay. Because it's not easy to go into a fire.

Q: Did you bring any lessons from Viet Nam into the Fire Department?

JM: Well, I--you know, I didn't say it before, but I--I--one of the reasons maybe in the back of my mind why I joined was there were some difficult times in Viet Nam, where I was praying pretty hard. And I said, "God, if you get me out of here, you know, I'm going to do some good things (laughs) when I go back, and I don't mean playing in the band." But, you know, I'm going to give myself to someone to help people. And I think that's what I ended up doing through the Fire Department. And it's something I committed to in a difficult situation. So I carried that with me, and I knew how tough it was being in combat. It's also tough being in the fire--being in a fire situation. A really tough situation.

Q: When you're facing death in both instances, whether in Viet Nam or in the Fire Department ...

JM: Uh huh.

Q: ... how do you deal with that?

JM: I think you--you know, if you're trained well, and you've practiced, that comes kind of naturally. You know--you know what to do. No fire is the same; every fire is different. But there are basic things that you have to do for safety reasons. And I think if you're confident and the equipment's set up right, just like in the Army, if you've got the right equipment, you're trained to do it, and you do it.

Q: What was the hardest part for you in training for the Fire Department? Or what did you enjoy learning the most? Either way.

JM: Yeah, I don't know if there's any one thing. You know, always going into a smoke house when you're doing the training over at Bethpage, and you're lined up with twenty guys--ten in front of you, ten behind you--and you're crawling through a building that's enclosed, that's claustrophobic. And what you're doing is you're training yourself to stay focused. And if you fall out of line, that means somebody behind you's going to get hurt

or someone ahead of you. And it kind of shows you teamwork. And if you all work together, you can get through it. I thought that was very difficult. The hose handling and the learning how to go up and down stairs, and then fight the actual fires--I don't think that was as difficult as crawling around in a confined space, knowing that you had to get through it. And that's a confidence builder for when you go into an actual fire situation.

Q: You were driver on a pumper?

JM: I still--yes, that's what I am now. I was an ...

Q: Can you explain what that means?

JM: ... interior structure firefighter for many years. And in 1987--that was around the time Bobby [Dayton] died, as a matter of fact, in the Main Street fire--my wife was diagnosed with a brain tumor. And, my wife was diagnosed with a brain tumor, and she had two major surgeries, and she lost the sight in one of her eyes from the tumor, although it was the type of tumor that couldn't metastasize and go anywhere else, thank God. But she had a very difficult time with it, and I had two young kids. Again, they were teenagers, and I said, you know, I just don't think I can run into buildings anymore, because I've got so much responsibility taking care of her and the kids. So, but there was still plenty to do. I could still be an exterior firefighter, which I was. And I decided I would get more into driving and pumping, which I did. I went to several schools and got certified, a New

York State certification. And from '87 to now, I'm still a driver. And driving and pump operating is a very critical job. I'm the first one at the firehouse to start the truck up, get it out on the ramp. I'm already thinking--because I know where the call is; I may know where the hydrants are--I'm already thinking ahead, where I'm going to be, how I'm going to get there, where the truck is going to position if have an actual fire. And two things I have to do. I have to get everybody there safely. I have to make sure that they're safe if they go into the building and they have the proper amount of water and water pressure in the hose and so on. And I've got to get them back safely. And if I think of those three things, just try and stick to those three core items, then I've been successful in going to a call and bringing everybody back. So, I'm not a speeder. I don't like to speed going to fires. I mean, it's hurried, but it's not reckless. And safety is very important. And every year I get recertified through an eight week program--training program that's at night. That's usually two, three hours a night for eight weeks, usually in around March when it's still cold out and rainy. But I like to keep my skills up and make sure that I'm up to date on things.

Q: Have you had a specific engine that's your favorite that you drive?

JM: You know, we just got a new one (laughs), which I was on the truck committees for the last three new trucks. And they last about twenty years. There's a brand new one we just got. It's called the 8515, and it's a Pierce seventeen hundred and fifty gallon pumper. And, you know, every--every time you buy a new truck--and we buy them, you know,

within ten years--the technology just gets better and better. So, they're easier to handle. They have better controls on them. And this has a computerized governor on it, so it's a little easier when you're figuring out pressures and so on. So I think that's my favorite truck. And we just got it and it's been in service about two months, and I've probably had about, oh, ten runs with it so far. And I like it.

Q: Now, when you pump, you pump the water for the truck ...

JM: Uh huh, right.

Q: ... you have to gauge how much pressure and how much water.

JM: Yeah, we have set pressures that you actually, you know, depending on the length of the hose that's out there and the type of the hose that's out there, there's different pressures that you pump at. Because you have to have enough pressure to give them what they need to put the fire out. You can't over-pressurize it, because it'll knock them out. You can't give them too little pressure or they won't have enough to fight the fire. So, you have to pay attention to what you're doing, and then sometimes you'll have multiple lines out. So you have to make sure that line two is okay and line one is okay, and that you're balancing your pressures and so on. And the other thing is you have to make sure you have enough water coming into the truck through the hydrants so that you're not putting out more water than what's coming in, because then you get into a dangerous situation.

So there's a lot to know. There's a lot to remember. And you've got to remember that there are live people at the end of those hose lines that are in buildings, upstairs, downstairs, and you've got to just--you've got to deliver. And it's a lot of pressure--no pun intended. But I enjoy it.

Q: What does it mean when a hose man is "laid out short"? What does that mean?

JM: Well, usually, the term "laying in" is when you pull up to a fire situation and if there's a hydrant, let's say, two hundred feet before the house, what you'll do is you'll lay in. One of the men will jump off the apparatus, wrap the hose around the hydrant. The truck will go to the front of the house. When he gets that hydrant hooked up, then you'll hook up the other end of the hose into the truck, and then you tell them to turn the water on. So that's called a forward lay, or laying in. You always want to make sure that you have enough of hose before you disconnect, otherwise you're going to come up short. Maybe that's what they mean by that. And that's very important to, number one, secure the water when you pull into the fire scene, and position the truck in the right place. Because there are other trucks coming in. The ladder truck has to come in so they can get a ladder up to the floors to make sure that someone can make a rescue. They can't block the street, so that they can get in. So, it's very--very important to position and have your water set.

Q: What does an interior structure firefighter do?

JM: An interior structure firefighter, you'll see them with the tanks on, and they'll have the masks on. And they go with the first line, and they're either going to put the fire out, or if they have to make a rescue, if they're there before the truck people come, they'll actually make a rescue and then they're in there with a charged line to put the fire out. So, they're fighting inside. If you're an exterior structure firefighter, you can fight the fire from outside. You don't necessarily have to have an air pack on, but you could be directing large streams into windows and second stories, and so on.

Q: Can you recall any memorable fires that you took part in?

JM: Well, there was--I went to a lot of them. The boatyard fires, the lumberyard fires--those were not necessarily fires that had lives at risk, but certainly a lot of damage. The nursing home fire was a huge evacuation type situation. I think the worst fire was 165 Main Street. And that was, again, in, I believe, in 1987. And I live on Annette Drive, which is in Eastern Crest. And in those days, I was riding with Flower Hill. I wasn't necessarily coming down to Protection, because the trucks were getting out so quick down here that you couldn't make them. So I would go up Irma Avenue, go up Haven, and get on Flower Hill's truck. That morning--I'll never forget it--I was driving my wife to church, because she couldn't drive because of the eye operation. And the call came in as an automatic alarm. And I said, "Well, you know, Honey, I've got some time." It was seven o'clock or seven-thirty, and mass was at eight-thirty. I said, "I'm going to run up to

this automatic alarm." I got out to my car, and there was ice on the windows, because it was a cold morning. And I was like, "Oh, I've got to scrape this ice off before I can get in the car and start it up and go up to Flower Hill." But I did that, and I was on the--you know, seconds to scrape enough to see, and I was on my way up Irma Avenue, and I switched my radio to channel two, which gives you the truck- to- truck talking. And I heard Flower Hill starting to come out of their [firehouse]. They were giving a signal twenty-one. And I was at the corner of Irma and Main Street, which is by Alpers. And I said, "Gee, there's no sense--if I go up [Haven]Avenue, they're coming down right now. I'll just scoot up by the train station," and then, it was only a signal eight. There's nothing going on; it was an automatic alarm--it's not a bad fire. So, as I was going up the side by the train station, I saw 8-5-6 coming down the road, and Bobby Dayton was the officer in it. And theoretically, I should have been on that truck with him, because I rode with them, and I was an interior structure firefighter, so I would have had a tank on. When I got up to park the car and started walking in Flower Hill's building, the horns blew again. They were blowing a general alarm. The police had called back and said there was heavy smoke coming from the building. What I decided to do was take the police van, because I was a driver of the police van. I said, well, maybe I'll just take the police van, because they're going to be tied up down there. I'll block the traffic at Central Drive and Main Street, so that the other pumpers could get in and the ladder truck could get in. I already missed the truck. But Bobby got there first and grabbed [Scott] Wood who was on the back of the truck, and said, you know, "We're going to go upstairs and do a search." I had a radio on, because I was standing outside the police van. I had the streets

blocked off, and I could listen to what was going on in the fire. And maybe it was some ten minutes into the fire, I heard "Mayday, Mayday, Mayday!" Blah, blah, blah. And I said, geez, somebody's in trouble. And it, you know, there was so much static and there was so much screaming on the--screaming on the radio, and, if I remember correctly, the Chief gave the order to evacuate the building. And when you do that, everybody goes out who has a truck, blows the air horns and blows the sirens as loud as they can. That's the signal to get out of the building. Everybody got--was getting out, but Bobby got trapped. And Scott Wood who he was with, was upstairs with him, somehow saw some light in a window, or saw a light and just dove. And it turned out that he dove through a window and onto a fire escape and saved his life. But Bobby was stuck up there and ran out of air. And I remember them--the aerial had the ladder up to the roof, and they somehow got him up to the roof, and then they were bringing him down on a stretcher. And I think he was already dead at the time, but they were rushing as quickly as they could to get him to the hospital. It was very traumatic. Very. The good thing is that they brought in a County counselor. And they insisted everybody at the fire go to counseling that day. That day. There was no waiting for the next day. And that was probably the best thing they ever did. Of course, it brought back some memories of Viet Nam, and you'd be surprised how many people were there and had flashbacks to some other incident. And it was a chance for us to talk about it and get it out. And it helped us to deal with it in the coming weeks. And later there was a follow-up session after that, that we all went to. Yeah, it was quite traumatic.

Q: Tell me about the offices you have held in the Fire Department.

JM: Well, I had been asked early on in the game by Peter Zwerlein who was an Engineer--it's probably my second year in the company--he said, "Johnny, would you run for Engineer?" I said, "You know, Peter, I really would love to, but, you know, I'm in the City every day. I just don't think I could really do a good job, because I'm just not around enough." It's a long day for me. I started--I was starting to do some travelling at the time. I said, "You know, there'll probably be some periods of time where I'm on the road two or three days a week maybe once a month. I just can't get here. And I would feel bad doing that job and not doing it right. So, I'm going to have to say no." Shortly after that, his uncle, which--whose name was Zeke Zwerlein--had held the post of Financial Secretary. And he came up to me, and he said, "You know, Johnny, I've been doing this for six or seven years. It's about time we get some new blood in here. I want you to be the Financial Secretary. That's an administrative job." I said, "You know, I'd love to do that. I can do that, be an officer, and so on." So I did that, and I held that position, I think, for about--I don't know, five or six years. And then Reggie Bedell, who was my boss at Lewis Oil, was the Treasurer. And he decided that it was time for him to--he had the Treasury for probably twenty-something years, and he asked me--I was a CPA at the time--he said, "Johnny, would you be Treasurer?" I said sure, I would. And so I took over the treasury function, and I did that for about thirteen, fourteen years. And I finally said I'm travelling so much now--and I was. My job was doing international travel. I was travelling all over the country. And I said to Frank Pavlak, my dear friend, I said, "Frank, I'm going to have to drop out as Treasurer. It's just too much. I come down here

and all I do is work. I don't get to wash a truck. I don't get to sweep the floor. I'm doing the same work here, when I come here, that I do every day." So, he said, "Would you consider being a Trustee?" I said okay, I'd be a Trustee, because that wouldn't require me doing there doing bank reconciliations and entering stuff on a computer. Because I computerized the whole accounting system. It was manual. And so I've been a Trustee for about ten years now and probably will continue to be, if they still want me to be.

Q: Tell me about your nickname.

JM: (Laughs). Who told you that? They call me "Money" ...I'm [very] conservative with the Fire Department money, much more conservative than my own family money. But I feel that's a fiduciary responsibility that I have, and I question a lot of things.... And to just try and keep an eye on what's going on. And I instituted that we have an outside CPA firm audit us every year, because I think that's the right thing to do. And so we do that and file our tax returns on time, and we do all the good things we should be doing.

Q: So you don't mind being called "Money" then?

JM: No. Matter of fact, my logo is I have a dollar sign on my suspenders on my turnout pants when I go out, so they know, everybody knows whose they are. Because nobody's going to steal my stuff.

Q: So what's ...

JM: ...They call me that affectionately (laughs).

Q: What did you, or do you, enjoy most? Being CPA, Trustee, firefighter? What do you enjoy?

JM: Oh, I think I enjoyed being a firefighter most. There's no question about it. Even though I'm in the City every day, I go at night. I go on the weekends. On my days off. I'm off tomorrow. I have a couple of things to do in the morning, but I'll be around the house during the day, and I'll go. Last Sunday, I went to five or six calls, because I wasn't playing golf; I was home. So I just have a tremendous love for it. And I don't think that will ever change. I mean, I'll get old, older, and won't be able to do as much, but I'll still hang around there and do what I can.

Q: So your job in the City involves how much commute time? What do you do right at the moment in the City?

JM: Well, I was in--I was Vice President of Human Resources and Strategic Planning for a publishing company for twenty-two years. And I left there in 2001. When I was doing that, I commuted on the railroad every day. I landed a job in October of 2001 at the Animal Medical Center. It's a large animal hospital. It's actually the largest in the world. And it's at 62nd and York Avenue. It's way--right on the East River. And there's no way

to get there by train. So, I have a car allowance, so I drive every day, and they have a parking spot for me. But my average commute is an hour and a half each way. And it's grueling. It just wears you down. And I've got to do it for four more years (laughs) before I can retire. So it takes me away from the house.

Q: The Animal Medical Center, does that--do you have a love for animals?

JM: That's not why I took the job (laughs). I work for money. I happen to have a wonderful boxer, his name is Ringo, so I do love--I do love my dog. It's a wonderful, wonderful hospital. It's the largest in the world. There's over four hundred employees. I'm the Director of Human Resources. There are over ninety veterinarians. They perform every discipline that a human hospital performs. There's four surgeons on full-time every day. They do CT scans, they do MRIs, they do dialysis, they do radiology, oncology, ophthalmology--every discipline that a human hospital has, they do there. And they get the brightest kids coming out of medical school. We bring in thirty-five interns every summer and they stay for a year, do an internship program. And then some of them stay on as residents, or they may go on to private practice. But they come out of the best schools--Cornell, Tufts, you name it. And there's--we bring in some sixty thousand cases a year come through that place. It's just unbelievable how much business goes through there. And they're very, very dedicated people, and it's wonderful. I really enjoy it. It's not the corporate world. It's a nonprofit organization. It's run by an outside Board of Directors--some very prestigious people are on the Board. Barbara Walters was on the

Board. Her term is up. Oscar de la Renta's wife. Kenneth Langone who lives in Sands Point, who was a founding member of Home Depot, his wife Elaine is on the Board. Many others. Cynthia Phipps is the Chairman. Her grandfather was [partners with Andrew] Carnegie. So it's a very prestigious Board. They do some wonderful things, and the hospital's tremendous. A very rewarding job, I have to say.

Q: And what is your particular skill? In hiring?

JM: Director of Human Resources. I handle all the recruiting. I handle all the benefits. I handle all the relations. I can't think of the word. That's terrible, isn't it. I handle conflict resolution. Everything that has to do with people, I take care of.

Q: Has this been the most rewarding position you've had?

JM: I think it's rewarding. I had a very high powered corporate job, as I said, for twenty-two years and did a lot of travelling. It's not the same. In the corporate world is, you know, everything goes to the bottom line. Here, not so much. Everything goes to the hospital for the benefit of the patients, which is a nice thing.

Q: Getting back to your trusteeship in the Fire Department, how tough are the financial decisions that you make there?

JM: Well, I think we make the same kind of financial decisions that we would make if we were running a corporation. Same kind of non-profit organization decisions that you would make. And we scrutinize what we're doing and what's the best way to do it, what's the most cost effective way to do it. Scrutinize whether or not we should do it. So, that's kind of where I come in a lot. I question a lot of things.... And, of course, it's a-- generally a majority vote.

[section deleted by memoirist]

Q: Do you still answer fire calls, even though you do a desk job?

JM: ...Yes. The answer to that is (laughs) absolutely. And just because I do something administratively, I do that in addition to all my fire service. So I'm a very active driver and exterior firefighter. I go to as many calls as I can on the weekends, because I'm in the City during the day. Again, if I have a day off, most of my time, if I'm around the house and not playing golf, I'll be going to calls. And I have a very, very wonderful, understanding wife. Claudia has been tremendous through this whole thirty-three years of fire service. From when my kids were babies on, there were plenty of times I was

away from the house. Snow storms, I would be sleeping at the firehouse.

Thunderstorms, I'd be going out on calls, and she was always there making sure that the kids were taken care of. There was always a meal on the table. You know, plenty of times I ran out as we just sat down to dinner, and she would keep things warm for me when I came back. She's just been wonderful. And I think all the wives, all the volunteers, should get a tremendous amount of credit for holding the whole thing together, because that's what they do.

Q: How do your children feel about your fire service?

JM: I think my children are very proud of it, although my son was never interested in joining, and Stephen's a musician and also is a manager at Sam Goody's at Roosevelt Field. And he's very good at it. I never pushed him to go into it. I didn't see a tremendous amount of interest on his part, but I know they have a tremendous amount of respect for the Fire Department. The interesting thing is my daughter got married September 18th, but two months prior to that we had a wedding shower for her, and we had it at the firehouse, and she was thrilled that it was going to be at my firehouse. And we decorated the room--I should have brought some pictures. It was just unbelievable! Claudia made it into kind of an English garden setting. It was beautiful, and my daughter was very, very proud that we could have it there, because she remembers, as a kid, we used to bring her there for Santa Claus and parties and so on. So it was really--it was really nice.

Q: Where was the wedding ceremony?

JM: It was at Wheatley Hills Golf Club. That's where I play golf.

Q: Which golf club?

JM: Wheatley Hills in East Williston. And they did a tremendous job. It was a great wedding. She got married at St. Peter's, and it was just terrific.

Q: And was the reception also at the fire--no ...

JM: No, it was at Wheatley Hills, yeah. Yep.

Q: Was the Fire Department there with their trucks?

JM: No, I didn't do that (laughs). Unfortunately, it was a day of heavy, heavy rain that Saturday, September 18th. Must have been three inches of rain that morning. The sun came out at noon time when the photographer got to the house. We said, "Oh, this is great. It's going to break. Even though we can't have the reception on the patio outside at the golf club, it'll be beautiful inside." But what we didn't know is when I got over the church, Monsignor Picciano came to the back of the church when I was standing there, with me and my daughter, and said, "Can you get me a fire truck?" I said, "Why?" He

says, "We have no power in the church." I said, "Why didn't you call me? But if you give me your cell phone, I'll get a truck here in three or four minutes." He said, "Well, we lit as many candles in the church as we could, and unfortunately we're going to have to proceed without lights." I said, "Okay, well, we're ready to do that." So, long story short, he got about five minutes into the mass, candlelight only, and the lights came on. So (laughs), it was great for his sermon, because he just tied in the darkness and the light with their marriage and what they can expect and so on. So, it turned out great. Turned out great.

Q: That's a good story.

JM: It was great.

Q: Now, excuse me for a moment, while I turn over the tape. ... [END OF SIDE A; BEGIN SIDE B] ... Now, I would like to ask you about what you do at the County Memorial Services.

JM: Actually, I was chairman of this County Memorial Service in 199[5]. I was chairman in 2000, and they just asked me to chair it again for 2005. Basically, what it is is we invite seventy-one fire departments to participate in a memorial service for fallen brothers and sisters that have died during the year. And this will be for 2005 for any of those that died in 2004, whether it was a line-of-duty death or was a death of natural causes. And we

will probably have somewhere between seven and eight hundred firemen will come to St. Peter's on May 5th, 2005, to participate in this Memorial Service. And it's a wonderful, wonderful afternoon, and a lot of respect is paid to our fallen brotherhood. So I handle all of the correspondence and all of the operations through committees. And there are committees--some committees handle all the traffic with the trucks that are coming into town. Others handle the assembling of the eight hundred or so firefighters out in the parking area, staging area, so that we can get everybody safely into the service and everybody out. And I'm actually going to co-chair it this year with Tom Tobin who is the chaplain. And we'll do a good job and make sure everything is done right and give the respect that's due to these fallen firefighters.

Q: And these are all throughout the county.

JM: Through the County--Nassau County. Seventy-one fire departments. So we're the host.

Q: Can you recall anything special at any one of these County Memorial Services?

JM: No, actually, the only thing I could--the last one they did in 2000, because I was travelling so much, I did all the work on it. And it was, you know, held on a Sunday afternoon, and I had to be in Arizona on Saturday afternoon, so I couldn't stay for the service, but I did all the work and had everything done, and Chief Cole, who was the Chief at the time, made sure that everything went well, so I was pleased about that, and I

got some nice thank you notes from the Nassau County Firemen's Association, that we did a great job on it.

Q: What did you do for the hundredth anniversary of Protection Company?

JM: Well, of course, I was in charge of all the money. And I ran the (laughs)--the treasury function for the block party and, of course, all the expenses that had to be accounted for, and all the fundraising. We raised some money through chances, raffles, and through a journal. And, of course, I made sure that we accounted for every penny of it. And that was--it was very successful. We had a wonderful day. Frank Pavlak, my dear friend, I was a co-chair with Frank who was a co-chair and Peter Zwerlein and the event went very, very well, other than pouring rain that happened when we were marching from the Post Office down to Channel Drive, and we got to about the train station. The clouds opened up; it just poured for twenty minutes, and everybody was drenched. But we got through it, and that was very, very nice. I'm so glad I was part of that.

Q: What do you do on the block parties? Do you just have food or do you do other things?

JM: There was food. There was rides and, you know, what are those things that you do? (laughs), you know, games for kids to play and stuff like that. It was very nice. We had a band--two bands--for dancing and so on. Sold a lot of beer (laughs).

Q: Does that go into your coffers, or is that your expenses?

JM: Well, you know, the idea was to really break even, and we weren't trying to make money and we didn't want to lose money. So, I think we did a pretty good job of that.

Q: What was your role in the new building. I think it ...

JM: I wasn't treasurer at the time, but I was on the Finance Committee with Reggie Bedell. So I gave my financial support basically through that whole process.

Q: What were some of the positive points and the negative points of trying to get that new building?

JM: I think they were all positive, to tell you the truth. If--I mean, the old building had some great memories, but as the equipment got bigger--we had three bays in the front, facing South Washington Street. You could barely squeeze a truck in there. Of course, when an alarm went off, guys are running in, in between trucks trying to get dressed. Trucks were trying to pull out. It just got so scary that we knew we had to do something. And the building had been there from, you know, the early, early 1900s. And it was such a wonderful, wonderful positive thing when we saw the finished product. And it's still there today. It looks great. It has weathered itself very well. And we have a nice, you know, good sized truck room that we can get two of today's modern pumpers in there without much of a problem. And it needs a little re-do right now. That's one of the

things we're working on. It's been a long time since we fixed up the meeting room upstairs where we hold some of our parties and dances and things. It just needs--it's tired. So we're working on that.

Q: When you do that work, do you have volunteer ...

JM: A lot of the work inside the firehouse has been done and will be done by volunteers. I think for a room that size, we'll probably have some architectural help and have a contractor come in and put the coordinating wall covering and carpeting. And we need new chairs and tables, and we'll have it all tie in to a nice soft color.

Q: Can you recall any humorous incidents that have happened to you in any of your positions?

JM: Hmm. ... [??] ...

Q: Any particular person that you might have, you know, played pranks with or joke around with?

JM: ...Frank [Pavlak] and I were on the same Little League team together. That's how long we've known each other. So, he was also in my wife's [high school] class--the class of '65. So, he knows a lot about me, and I know a lot about him. And we talk every single day (laughs), if you can believe that. We talk all the time. He's a ...

Q: What do you talk about?

JM: We do some firehouse talk, but he loves to talk about the '60s. He's really into the '60s and what went on when we were in high school and so on. So we could--in the summer, we sit on the front bumper of the pumper in the truck room, with the doors open, watching the sun starting to set, and we end up talking about 1965 and '4, and '63. And he's just a wonderful historian. . He's a great guy. And we're always kidding each other. He jokes about me; I joke about him. But ...

Q: ... [Self-mimicry at all?] ...

JM: Yeah. And he would never hurt anybody. He's just a terrific guy.

Q: How do the older members get along with the younger ones coming in at the Fire Department?

JM: That's an interesting question today, because it's a little sidetrack, but we don't spend as much time in our own firehouse as we used to. We're kind of consolidated during the day. We all roll the trucks out of Atlantic's Hook and Ladder's building here on Carlton Avenue, which is behind our firehouse. In the old days, everybody rolled out of their own house. So I, as a young man coming in, would have a lot more exposure to the older members--like George Mahoney, Harry Hooper, John Mahoney, Tom Mahoney, Harold

Poole. We were there a lot when we were younger, and we could hang out there and they would be there, so you got to know them more. And, you know, they were interested, obviously, in the younger kids and what was going on, and we were interested in knowing, you know, what they did in their lives, and so on. So there was always a lot of bantering. Today, we don't have that. We go to someone else's firehouse during the day. We finish the call, we sign our sheets, and we leave. And we're trying to get that back. We're trying to get back to putting--keeping one of the trucks at our house on the weekends, so that the young guys can come down. A lot of the young guys get on the truck, I don't even know they are. I turn around as the driver, and I say "Who's got the hydrant?" and "Who's qualified?" "Oh, yeah, that's me." And I don't remember their names, because I don't see them that much. But when you're around each other more and joking around and watching TV together, you obviously get to know people. You get to know what they're like. We don't have that. And we need to do that. Because that's what bridges the generation gaps.

Q: What would be some of the tensions between the younger and the older, besides not knowing each other? What are the tensions?

JM: Yeah, well, you know, I think it's pretty common in any organization, where--whether it's at my golf club, or whether it's at the firehouse, you know. You get a younger group starts coming in; they want to make a lot of changes. And they want to make changes quick, and usually they're expensive. And the older gentlemen will say, "I don't

understand that. We've been doing this this way for all these years. It works fine. What do we need to change it for?" And "Why do we need to spend all this money?" So, I think that's a common denominator in a lot of organizations. And somehow through the process at the firehouse, those things get ironed out. We talk about those at our month-- those things at our monthly meeting. Everybody has a chance to vote on whether we should do something or not do it, with all the proper input, and somehow it gets resolved. Does it always get resolved to everybody's liking a hundred percent? Probably not. But--and then sometimes I think--and I'm kind of getting up there myself, so I've got to kind of stand back and say, "Hey, this is the future. These guys need a little something different than we needed, so we've got to listen to them." You know, we want them to, you know, stay as long as we did in this organization. So, you've got to step back and give in a little bit. You know, let them have some things that maybe are not important to you, but they're important to them.

Q: How are you recruiting these days?

JM: Difficult. Very difficult to recruit now. First of all, it's tough for young kids to live here. Like my kids are renting apartments here, so they can't afford to buy a house at this point. And same thing with the members that join the Fire Department. They may be living with their parents for a while, and then they get to the age of twenty-two, twenty-three, you know, it's time to move on. But they really can't move on like we did. We were able to--I bought a house for thirty-seven thousand dollars in 1972 and could afford it and afford a lot of other things. You can't do that today. So, keeping people in town is

very, very difficult, and we're trying to get the younger kids in high school for a few years, but ultimately they're going to go to college and they're going to leave. So, it's a dying breed.

Q: Do you feel that their going to college necessarily means that they won't return?

JM: I think they find it very difficult, even with a college education, to come back into this town, with the price of the houses being what they are, and the taxes and all the other expenses. They can certainly live cheaper further out on the Island or in Pennsylvania. So, yeah, I think we've got a real problem....

Q: What do you think would be lost if you had to have a paid fire department?

JM: I can't even imagine that. I guess I'm--because I've been doing this so long and the way we do it, and it seems to work. Sometimes it may not be the most efficient thing in a way, but there's a tremendous love for what we do here. And none of us are paid for it. And I think it would just be business as usual if it became a paid fire department, and I think it would be a lot more expensive for the taxpayers. And I would hate to see that happen, but maybe someday it might.

Q: Did 9/11 impact you in any way?

JM: Well, the fortunate thing was I was out of work for the first time in my life. I was separated from the company that I was at for twenty-two years on April 1st of '01. So I was on a wonderful six-month sabbatical on 9/11. I was home at the time. Frank [Pavlak] called me, and he said, "Turn the TV on." And I turned it on, and I was just crushed. I couldn't believe it. The next thing I did was run down to the firehouse actually, because I thought maybe we would be on call. There might have been a stand-by going. We actually went upstairs on the top of the building at South Washington Street. Frank had a--I remember Frank had a camera. And we could look across the Bay and see the smoke pouring up from lower Manhattan. And I lost a cousin in the second tower. I didn't know till two or three days later. It was awful. It was just awful. Terrible. I'm glad I wasn't in the City that day. That was probably one of the only good things about it. Because I know how difficult people--difficult time they had getting out of there.

Q: Has the 9/11 had any impact on your Trustee decisions, in any way?

JM: Well, I'm not so sure 9/11 did. I mean, we tried--one of the things we just try and make sure we got the best equipment and the best training that we can get. Because we just don't know what's going to happen on a local level here. I mean, who knows? There's so many crazy people out there today, and we've had training now in biochemical hazardous materials more than ever. What to look to for when you pull up to a scene, and so on. So that's always on your mind. But I think that we have to be prepared; we have to be better

trained. We have to make sure we've got the right equipment. So I think, in terms of spending money for those kinds of things, we have to do it. Let's try and budget for those things.

Q: What kind of music do you play now?

JM: (Laughs). I still play rock and roll music. I was originally a drummer. And I also play guitar. When I was off for that six months, I was able to take some lessons, because I need to know more about music theory, even though I'd been playing for a long time. And I like to play '60s Beatles and Rolling Stones and a lot of the British groups and Sonny & Cher and so on. It's mostly '60s. That's what I grew up in. Matter of fact, at my wedding--my daughter's wedding--we had a great, great band. And I got up and sang a couple of songs with a couple of friends of mine who are musicians. And my son played drums while we were up there, and it just--it was great. So I got some video of it and--a professional video will be coming in in the next few weeks, and that'll be--that's a great feeling to get up and play music with your son. It's great.

Q: Do you think you'll ever try to go professional with your music?

JM: No (laughs). I think I had my chance in 1964, '65, and '66. And Uncle Sam kind of changed that around for me. But I'll always play. I was in--actually, I managed a music publishing company. In that twenty-two years at the magazine and newspaper publishing

company, I was responsible for a music publishing company, which had a lot of old standards in it. "Town Without Pity," "Raw Hide," "High Noon," "My Foolish Heart." The last thing I signed with them is we had the rights to the music for the "Producers." I signed the contract before I left with Mel Brooks. I have a copy of it at home, as a matter of fact. So, I got to--even though that was a job, that was like somebody said, "Here, we're going to pay you a lot of money to run a music publishing company." It was wonderful. I enjoyed it. It was great. A lot of commercial work that you do. Great.

Q: Have you ever played for the Fire Department?

JM: Occasionally, I would get up and sing at an event. But they--see, they think I'm a very conservative accountant. They don't see me when I've got a guitar in my hand (laughs). So Frank has threatened to show them the tape of my wedding, which he probably will at some point (laughs).

Q: Tell me about your golf. Has the Fire Department Drill Team helped in your golf in any way?

JM: The drill team?

Q: (Laughs) yeah.

JM: No. I started playing golf when I was thirteen years old. I worked at North Hempstead Country Club as a kid. I worked in the golf shop. So I learned the game by being around it every day, fifteen hours a day, because I would work from seven [a.m.] to seven at night, and then go play golf. And then, when I was--and I played in high school. I played on a high school golf team. And today, I am a four handicap golfer, even at age fifty-eight. And I was lucky enough to be able to join Wheatley Hills Golf Club in 1988 actually, you know, right after Claudia was sick. And I've been there as a member since then. I've been there about sixteen years. So I play every weekend. I can't play during the week as much, because I'm in the City, of course. This thing called a job. But it's a great way for me to relax. I get out on the golf course. I kind of turn the dials down a little bit, and I do it well, so I enjoy it. And I like practicing so that I can play well, and hopefully I'll continue to do that for a number of years. The Fire Department has some outings from time to time, that we play in, which is nice. Get together with the guys and have some fun. The drill team, I had nothing to do with the drill team. That's a whole different breed. But there some very dedicated guys that participate in that, and they're very good at it.

Q: Do you play golf with your family at all--your wife or children?

JM: My son plays. Not as much as he used to. My father-in-law was a great golfer. He's passed away about six years ago. He was a very good golfer. He was probably a four or five handicap all his life, so--and he worked at North Hempstead County Club years ago.

He worked for Lewis Oil. I forgot to tell you that. He was the controller of Lewis Oil for forty years.

Q: Your father-in-law.

JM: My father-in-law--Peter Miglietta. Great guy.

Q: Peter who?

JM: Miglietta. ...Harvey Lewis hired him. And he used to work part-time at the golf club, while he was a young guy and not earning a lot of money, and then, when--as he moved up the ranks of Lewis Oil, then he quit his job [at the golf club]. And he was a terrific golfer and a wonderful guy. Wonderful man.

Q: What does "the brotherhood" mean to you. We hear a lot about the brotherhood in the Fire Department.

JM: Yeah, it's--that's, you know, it's one of those intangibles. Probably hard to explain. But, you know, I'm going to go to a meeting, you know, at eight o'clock tonight, and there'll be a bunch of arguing across the floor about what we do right and what we do wrong, and who did this and who did that. And sometimes it gets heated. And, you know, like every organization, there are guys that are going to maybe talk too much, and you don't

particularly have a great love for them during that. But the horn will blow during the meeting, almost always. There'll be a fire. Everybody will drop all those things that were said, all those tensions that were there. Everybody will go down and get on a truck, and everybody will fight as hard as they can to do the right thing at a fire scene. And they'll take care of each other; they'll watch out for each other; they'll hug each other after it's over. And if we go back to the meeting, maybe we can start arguing again. But there's a different break when that happens. And that's a great thing. That's a great thing.

Q: Have you ever kept a diary of your experiences in the Fire Department?

JM: No, but I kept a scrapbook. I almost brought it down tonight. I started clipping things in my younger days at fires that I attended and so on. So I have some of those things, but I never really wrote anything down.

Q: How do you feel about the parades?

JM: I like parades (laughs). I don't get to go to enough of them, to tell you the truth. But I always march in the Memorial Day parade. I have a '66 Mustang convertible, which sometimes they want me--well, they want it in the parade every year. They want me to drive the Grand Marshal, which lots of times I do. And then, the last few years, I said, you know, "Let me get someone else to drive. I'll either march or drive a truck." So, I like to do that. But I love the parades; I think they're great.

Q: Are there other Fire Department rituals that you like?

JM: I'm trying to think what that would be.

Q: Well, the dinners and ...

JM: Yeah. Oh, I'm sorry. I was thinking "other fire departments." I think we have some wonderful dinners. I've had some wonderful picnics and have some wonderful parties in the back yard. We try and do a kind of a steak and lobster cook-out in September every year, kind of to build the morale up, get ready for the winter months, because these are the tough months when you've got to get guys out of bed and get out in the cold weather at night and so on. So, we try and do it as some morale boosters, and they're lots of fun. They're lots of fun.

Q: Who would you say are the most interesting people for you at Protection?

JM: Oh, certainly Frank is--I think I've mentioned Frank before. He's just a big part of my life. And I like a lot of the younger guys--Donald Reese who's the Captain now is kind of a fun young guy. Very respectful. The last two or three Captains are much younger than us. We try and help them and guide them, and one of them just became a Trustee, so

he's seeing a whole different side of things, from being a line officer to an administrative officer. And it's nice to be around the young crowd. Really is.

Q: Do you feel Port Washington community appreciates the Fire Department?

JM: I think they do. I think they really, really do. I think everybody, you know, is under pressure financially around here. And certainly we've had our share of knocks about how we do things and why we waste certain things, and so on. Our intention is nothing but good ...

Q: What do you mean by "waste"?

JM: What I'm saying is there was an organization called the--what the heck was their name? The General Council. Years ago came after the Fire Department and started challenging their budgets and starting making accusations and stuff. And I can tell you that everything that we do is really done as cheaply and as efficiently as we can do it. I'm not skimping on equipment. I'll have to say that. We want the best for our guys. So--but I think they do appreciate us, and you can see that when you pull up to a fire and people thank us. And middle of the night when everything is okay and people are safe, and that's a great feeling, because that's what we're trained to do.

Q: And do you have anything you would like to add or say? Anything I might have missed that I could have asked you?

JM: Well, I think I mentioned my wife and my children. And I think all the wives of the volunteer firemen don't get as many accolades as they should. We try to, at our annual dinners, to recognize them. But honestly, without their support, you couldn't do this. You couldn't do it. They are left alone a lot. The kids are left alone at an early age. The radios that go off at night in the house. Kids learn to sleep through them at an early age. They have done a lot. They haven't been recognized enough for that. But, again, I'll say it. There's just no way we could do it without them. And I think the camaraderie in the firehouse and the fact that everybody there is trying to do good things and only because they want to do them, that's what makes it so big. There's nobody forcing us to do it.

Q: What do you think the community could do to help you--the Fire Department?

JM: Oh, I think--I think they support us. I really--I don't know if there's anything that we could really ask for that we're not getting from the community. I know Manorhaven once a year now recognizes firefighters. And we don't really need a lot of positive reinforcement, to be honest with you. It's nice after a bad fire or after you're cleaning up, where somebody comes up to you and says, "Hey, you did a good job tonight. Hey, thanks a lot." That's our own people talking to each other. And you see very little of that. I try to do that more in the firehouse. I try and instill positive reinforcement. I get up at a meeting, I say, "You know what? I noticed that so-and-so did this the other day."

"The boiler room was cleaned up," you know; "The trucks look great." Try and just give people that reinforcement to say, "Hey, you know what? It's noticed what you're doing."

And when you see it being done right, tell them. That means a lot.

Q: Do you think your faith has anything to do with how you've dealt with what's been given you?

JM: Yeah, of course. My wife's very religious. I go to church every Sunday. I went to St. Peter's. So I have a foundation of Catholicism. I go because I want to go to church. I want to have that time once a week where I can kind of reflect back. And I think that's important to have in the fire service. I think you have--there's somebody higher than the Chief when things get really bad, that you've got to call upon for help. And, you know, lots of times anticipating what's going to happen--especially driving to a call--you just don't know what you're going to end up with when you get there, and you just say, "You know, God, just let me do everything right tonight. I want to make sure I do everything and everybody's safe." So it's kind of stressful, but if you're going to do it, you're going to do it.

Q: Have you ever carried a lucky charm into a fire, or do you know people who do?

JM: I'm sure there are. Guys have all kinds of jingles and jangles hanging off their coats and so on. No, I don't think so.

Q: What do you think of this oral history project?

JM: I think it's going to be a great thing. I'm not sure what format it's going to end up on. If it's going to be somebody's conversation edited into a DVD where you could see photos of some of the things we talked about--fires and firehouse and so on--it'd be terrific. It will be terrific. You mentioned in the beginning, didn't really think of it that way, but maybe one day I'll have a grandson who will come down here and hear this. Wouldn't that be wonderful?

Q: It's been wonderful talking to you.

JM: You to. It's been great, here, too.

Q: Thank you so much ...

JM: Thank you. Thank you ...

Q: For all these ...

JM: ... for being so patient with me.

Q: Thank you so much, John.

JM: Thank you.