

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

Transcript Of Oral History Interview With

Ex-Chief Glen Pedersen
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 November 16th, 2004. This is an interview with Glen Pedersen. The interview is taking place at the Port Washington Public Library. My name is Sally Olds. Can you please say your name.

Glen Pedersen: Glen Pedersen.

Q: And which fire company are you connected to?

GP: Flower Hill Hose Company.

Q: How old were you when you joined the Port Washington Fire Department?

GP: Seventeen years old.

Q: You were still in high school?

GP: In high school, yes.

Q: Were you in the Explorers Program?

GP: No. My father and, previously, my uncles were members. They got me interested – and

I joined when I was seventeen.

Q: And what had your father and your uncles told you about firefighting?

GP: They didn't tell me anything other than I was always at the firehouse with them. So there was really nothing for them to tell me, other than just being there on Sundays and after church and stuff.

Q: You were there from the time you were a little boy or ...

GP: Yeah, a little boy. I would leave Sunday School and go to the firehouse and run around there with the trucks. Like I do right now with my nephew.

Q: And so they didn't tell you any stories or--about, you know, what they did as firefighters?

GP: No, not really. No. They just, like you kind of grew into it, being there all the time and you saw how things were and just, you know ...

Q: When you joined, who was Flower Hill's Captain? Remember?

GP: I believe it was Gary Kujan was the Captain when I joined.

Q: And do you remember who the Chief of the Department was?

GP: Chief of the Department was--it was Charlie Lang, Peter Zwerlein, and I think it was Johnny Salerno? I think Johnny Salerno, yes. It was those three guys.

Q: And ...

GP: Who the actual Chief was, I don't remember.

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

GP: My first days, I was a young kid in high school. I just was waiting for the radio to go off and run to the firehouse. I mean, the first--other than the major--first thing was just going to fires basically, and the only major thing in the beginning was that Bobby Dayton got killed in a fire, and that was--that was right in the beginning of my career.

Q: Were you at that fire?

GP: I was there, yes.

Q: What were you doing there? What was your role?

GP: There was no certain way, you just--there's really no roles. I mean, you know, there were certain--I was new, so I wasn't like one of the original guys that got there, but I got there later on. It was just--it was--my role was doing everything to try and help with, you know ...

Q: So, did you have a specific job in the company, a special skill?

GP: Well, when I joined, I went in--maybe about two years into it, I became an Engineer in the company. I was Assistant Engineer.

Q: And what did you do as an Engineer?

GP: You're in charge of the vehicles. Like Assistant Engineer, you would--there's--you have an Engineer, then you have three assistants. And you start your way at the bottom as an Assistant Engineer, and you just work your way up to the top. And you work your way up to being Chief, like I am now. You were basically in charge of running the work nights -- every Thursday guys get together, and they work on the trucks. You run the work night with the other engineers and make sure the equipment's up to date. You'll get assigned one truck, and one of the trucks will be yours and you've got to make sure everything on there works and, if not, you have to tell the Engineer who would arrange to get it fixed.

Q: Well, now you have some paid people keeping the trucks ...

GP: Right, right.

Q: ... maintained. Right?

GP: Right, but Thursday nights are still a tradition. We keep tradition. We still do check the trucks. The new members come in, and they still check the trucks, because if you don't do that--and the paid guys always do it--if you don't have the tradition, the new guys won't know where the equipment is on the trucks. So, it's basically, they do it, too, you know, with the paid guys. They check certain things, like the main thing--air packs and radios--but then other guys, Thursday nights, the members come and they still check the trucks and go over them with the new guys, and they still wash them, and--but it's tradition. Keep up some of the tradition.

Q: Well, how does it work with the paid--the paid maintenance guys? I mean, do they work a full work week or ...

GP: Yes.

Q: ... do they ...

GP: They're working Monday through Friday. They--one guy'll start at six o'clock, and then the other two guys start at eight o'clock. And they check all the equipment--the radios, the air packs, the, you know really main, important stuff on the trucks. And they're checking all the firehouses, and if certain things have to be done, like an engineer needs something done to a truck, they--and it's hard to get two guys that have other jobs and lives, to do--these guys will get it done. They'll move trucks around and stuff like that -- They do what they have to do.

Q: You said they start six o'clock or eight o'clock, in the morning?

GP: Right, right.

Q: Yeah. Are they also firefighters? Are they also volunteers?

GP: Yes, yes. Yep. One of the gentleman's from Manhasset, another one's from Great Neck, and another one--the supervisor out of the three guys--was an Oyster Bay fireman, but he has since joined our Department. When he got hired, he wasn't a member here, but then he just came and wanted to join.

Q: Does he still live in Oyster Bay?

GP: No, he lives in Port Washington. He moved to Port.

Q: And did you have a role in the hiring of these people?

GP: Yes, I did. I was a Captain at the time when this all came about, hiring people, and I was part of the group of people that made the decision and said we're going to hire these guys. And it was needed. We--as officers, we run the day-to-day operation, and it was to the point where we felt that we need paid guys, which, it's so busy here and, you know, people have a different lifestyle. It's not like it used to be where you used to get your father and you'd get two brothers to come in, and really their heart was into it. Now, you were getting members that joined that just think it's like a--I don't know -- like a club to hang out with type of thing. You don't have that family tradition that we had years ago, and we're starting to lose that very quickly, so ...

Q: So that's why you need the paid ...

GP: Yeah, it's easier on the--you know, as being Chief, it's just you try to-- you all have jobs. I'm a cop in the City, and I work very hard in there, and I try to have a family. It makes things easier on the Chiefs. They get things done, you know, you don't have to worry about something that years ago guys did everything. And it's just so much busier than what it was.

Q: About how many calls do you get a day?

GP: We do about--fire calls--900 to a thousand a year. Probably, say eighty percent of it, is automatic fire alarms, to be honest with you. I think there's probably between EMS [Emergency Medical Services] and fires, 2,700, maybe 3,000 a year. Probably the busiest in Long Island in Port Washington. It's very busy.

Q: How come it's so busy here? It's not that big a community.

GP: As far as the fire alarms are concerned?

Q: Uh huh.

GP: I just think it's very wealthy in this area, and everybody puts a house and everyone has fire alarms, and that's the majority of what we go to. And people just -- they don't pay attention with their fire alarms and if they burn food or construction workers come and they don't cover it up, and a lot of it is just false calls for no reason.

Q: So how many actual fires would you say you get?

GP: I don't know. I think maybe we had, last year--I don't know one hundred percent with numbers, but I know off the top of my head we had five or six of them, I think, last year.

Q: Just five or six in the whole year?

GP: Actual real, real fires, yeah. But, yeah, and a lot of it was little, nothing really, other than maybe dumpster fires and stuff like that. But talking fires and talking real big, you know, house fires and stuff like that.

Q: Do you remember the first fire you fought?

GP: First fire, no, I don't remember the first fire. I'm not good with memory, I'm telling you. I'm probably the wrong guy to be doing this with you, but (laughs) ...

Q: (Laughs)

GP: ... I got picked, so I'll come and deal with it.

Q: What do you remember about the training?

GP: Training was good. You know, training was very good. The training's more intense now, and for a member to come and join now, it's a lot harder. There's a lot more schools that they're required to have. And back when I went, it was two schools and that was it and you were done. But, of course, you had to take other training to become an officer and the Chief, you had to have these other schools you take, but as far as just being a regular

member, the training now is a lot more a lot harder .These guys have to go ten weeks.

Ten weeks in a row to a school, on Friday nights. We didn't have that back then.

Q: What kind of special training did you have to take to be an officer?

GP: There's officers' training. You've got to have an officers' training course, which, you have a hazardous material course. You've got to be able to drive the equipment, pump equipment. And there's an arson investigation course you have to take to be the Chief, you know, to be up to a Chief. And I was just always in--all through my--I've never left town. I always lived here my life, and the Fire Department was my life, up until before I got married--met my wife and got married--I mean, I worked in the Sewer District, and being with the Sewer District, you could leave, go to fires. Peter Zwerlein was my boss, and Donny Kurz was one of the Commissioners there. And we would just--you would leave. It was like almost being like a paid fireman, because as soon as the fire whistle went, we went and jumped in the truck and we went to fires. And it was--it was good. Everything was the Fire Department. And it still is, everything is the Fire Department. On my days off now, my wife's--my new baby and my nephews, and I--there's things you've got to do, you know.

Q: Where are you working now?

GP: New York City Police Department. I work in the Bronx. I'm in the Emergency Service

Unit. It's like a SWAT team, like that. I do that, too.

Q: So how does that work with your being a volunteer firefighter?

GP: As far as what?

Q: Well, as far as if there's a call or something?

GP: If there's a call, I'm at work, I don't know.

Q: Yeah.

GP: I just-- I leave for eight and a half hours, and when I come back, I come back. And that's the way everyone else's job is, unless they work in town in either the Sewer District or the Water District; they let the guys go. But, you know, if I'm in the City, if something goes on, I don't come back. Obviously, if something really bad happens, then the guys call me. But I won't know what's going on.

Q: Has that ever happened?

GP: That I have to come back?

Q: Yeah.

GP: No.

Q: Where guys have called you?

GP: No, not yet. Hopefully it never does. But--and being the Chief, you may get a call if something happens, and then you have to try and get back, if you can. But ...

Q: So what kind of time commitment are you talking about, by being Chief? What do you think that's going to involve?

GP: Well, I've been Chief now for four years--three and a half years--and it's just to commit time, it's just--I don't even know how to put how many hours. It's just--you got to be always--whenever I'm in town, you've got to go. And it's just, you have a car, you have to go to the fires. I mean, if you want your members to go, the Chief's got to go, you know. And it just ...

Q: Well, you're Chief now?

GP: Yes.

Q: I thought Chris Bollerman was ...

GP: Well, there's three Chiefs.

Q: Oh, yes.

GP: There's a Second Assistant, First Assistant, and then there's Chris Bollerman who's the Chief of the Department. And Chris goes out in March and I go in, and I'm ...

Q: So you're First Assistant Chief now.

GP: Right.

Q: Yeah.

GP: And in March I become Chief, and Chris becomes an ex-Chief. And then you get a new guy who comes from Atlantic's. The three--the Chief's are from each company.

Q: And then do you rotate the responsibilities, like if something comes up, they go to Chris first or ...

GP: Yeah, they go to Chris, and if Chris wants to delegate me to do it or Johnny Walters who

is the Chief under me, you know, everything goes through the Chief. And if he wants to delegate other guys to do it, then he'll ask the other guys to do it.

Q: Well, what would you say is the biggest challenge of being Chief?

GP: Biggest challenges. I--well, right now, it's probably, I'm going to say, the EMS part of it.

I mean, EMS is just overwhelming. The call volume that the EMS gets, and we have to work--we're volunteer, and we don't have any paid people. It's just pretty overwhelming, you know, the membership down there --and the fire calls also. I've got to say both of them, it's just--but the majority, I would say eighty-five percent of the time, we get a call, it's for nothing--absolutely nothing. And unfortunately, when the fire alarm goes off in your house, we have to go. We can't just, "No, we're not going." You pay for the fire alarms, and it could be that one time could be the time where there's a fire, and we have to go, and it's--but it's ...

Q: So, would you say the hardest thing is getting enough people to respond or ...

GP: We always get enough to respond. But, I mean, we just, to be honest with you, I don't know--I don't know what's--I don't--we get enough people to respond, but I think the membership is just dwindling. You know, we're losing people. The membership in each company has gotten down, and we don't have the people that want to come up anymore and join. And people can't live in this town-- to be honest with you, that's a big problem.

I got lucky and bought my house ten years ago, and I paid two hundred thousand dollars for my house, and I can get five, six hundred thousand for it. But where can I go, you know. So, you really can't buy anything else.

Q: So what do you think the future of the Port Washington Fire Department is going to be?

GP: The future? I--I don't--I, honestly, I don't know what the future's going to be. And I really--I don't even want to venture to say--I don't want to--I don't want it to go paid. I don't know if I have any control on that. But if I can stop it, you know, help it from going paid, I will. Whether it's going to be paid, I don't know (laughs).

Q: What do you do to recruit new volunteers?

GP: We try to put ads in the papers, and we've got our recruitment drives, and we have fund drive mails that we put applications in. But we don't get--people don't want to come. People don't want to do it. Who knows? It could change. It could change, if you get a whole influx of people that want to do it. And that's what we're hoping for. You know, I don't want to see it die.

Q: I understand you've done a lot in terms of the daytime response program.

GP: Right.

Q: Can you tell me about that?

GP: We had three line companies--Protection, Flower Hill, and Atlantic's. And Protection and Flower Hill have not only their main houses, which are right here--they have one on Channel Drive and one on Avenue A. Used to be, when the fire whistle goes off, people just ran. Whatever the closest firehouse they lived, they would go to. But what happened was we were getting, during the daytime, guys were going to different firehouses, you'd have one guy here and one guy at the other firehouse, and you didn't have enough guys to man one fire truck to go, but you had three or four trucks with two guys here, two guys there. So, I was Captain at the time. We got together with the Chiefs, and we came up with a plan. And we instituted this daytime response from like six in the morning to five o'clock at night, everybody responds to Atlantic's. All the companies have a truck in there, and we rotate the truck--who's going to go first to keep the members happy from each company--and guys put their gear there, so I mean everyone goes to that one firehouse and they get two fire trucks on the road. Instead of getting four or five with a couple of guys on them, you get two fire trucks with good--you know, a lot of people on it. And that was all--we took a lot of heat on that. A lot of the old members didn't want that, and they didn't want the firehouses. There's still guys that don't like it. But we felt that's the right thing you've got to do for the Fire Department and for the members going to fires, that if they did go a fire, that they had enough, sufficient manpower to try and get the job done. And we just--we just went and did it,

and it was ...

Q: And so what were the objections of the older members?

GP: Oh, that they didn't want to close the firehouse, just plain and simple. But they--of course, they're the members that don't--that done their time, and they don't--you know, they're not the ones getting on the fire truck now and going there, but they're the ones that sit in the firehouse and like to criticize what the younger generation's doing. And, you know, they're stubborn people. That's just the way they are. And I'm sure when I'm in there at their age, I'll be the same way. But, you've just got to make decisions and do it, and just, you take some grief from it, but it's working.

Q: But the other firehouses are still open if members want to go in there and ...

GP: Oh, yeah.

Q: ... sit around ...

GP: They can still sit around, right. And if, say I'm at Flower Hill and--or one of the members of Flower Hill and they're watching TV and the fire goes off, they just--we have Suburbans. They get in the Suburban, they come down and get on the truck. And it works out fine. It works out good, and it just, you know, it's for the members. I mean,

it's for the safety and well-being for these people that are going to go to fight--if there's a fire, they're going to pull up with enough people on the truck. It's just ...

Q: Have you seen a difference in response time since you've instituted this?

GP: Very minimal, if that. Very minimal. Very minimal response time. We did studies before and after, and it was very minimal response time. I'd rather have a little more of a response time, but have the manpower to do the job, you know. Just ...

Q: So what, so you mean, the response time it takes longer now?

GP: No, it doesn't take longer at all to respond. It just doesn't take longer to respond. I don't know where this is going to go, and I don't want this ...

Q: Okay.

GP: I mean, this is stuff I don't want to be out there. Someone's going to say, "Oh, now ... "

Q: Yeah.

GP: You understand where I'm going with that?

Q: Right, right. How would you say the responsibilities of the Chief have changed over the years?

GP: Oh, as far as--I mean, the mail is--I remember Chiefs--I talk to guys--oh, past Chiefs that used to go up there on Thursday and open like three pieces of mail. We go up there, we get--we get like fifteen, thirty pieces of mail a day, and we have paid--we have two ladies that work up there and do a lot of our administrative work for us. But I mean, it's overwhelming, the response. Everybody wants--you get involved with it, like there'll be contractors that want to call and want you to make decisions on building houses, and they want--they want to go to the Fire Department to tell this person that we can't--you can't build a house--but we don't get involved with stuff like that, you know. And there's meetings. It's just every--it's very--a lot of responsibility. You talk to the old guys, they used to go to Thursday night and they'd just open a couple pieces of mail and just hang out with the guys. And then, it's every night of the week, you're doing something at the Fire Department. It's every night.

Q: So you just--you go to the firehouse every day?

GP: Yeah, I go to the office, and I work midnights, so on the way home from work, I go in the morning. Before I go to bed I'll stop in there and see what's going on, if anything's got to be done. And then I'll go home. But then, I'll go back there at night. And you've still got to go to the other firehouse. I like--myself personally--like to go to the firehouse. I like

to be with the guys and hang out with the guys, and I like doing that. Still like doing stuff. I still wash the truck. Just because you're Chief doesn't--as far as I'm concerned, I'll go wash--the guys will stop me from washing the truck, but I still do it. I like to do all that stuff. So ...

Q: Do you talk about the Fire Department activities with your wife?

GP: Yeah, she's got a lot to do with it. Of course. I always bring stuff home, and that's just the way I am, you know. Some guys say, oh, they never tell their wives, but I think that's a bunch of bull anyway. I think everybody's doing it. They've got to talk to their wives about it, you know. She supports me a hundred percent with the Fire Department. She loves it, too. She likes the functions. It's like a big family, you know, close-knit group of people and everyone, you know, bunch of friends. The majority of my friends are all in the Fire Department. Without the Fire Department, who knows what you would do, but it's just part of your life. And when I was a little boy and it started and just--it probably always will be a part of my life.

Q: So you've formed close friendships in the Department?

GP: Oh, yeah.

Q: Yeah.

GP: It's nice. It's good.

Q: And would you say the social aspects of being in the Department, you know, are a big plus?

GP: Oh, yeah. Absolutely, yeah. You know, you just--we do--we go out of our way for kids. The kids love and I have a nephew three years old. He's always in the car with me. He's always at the firehouse with me. And he's doing exactly what I did when I was a little boy. So--but his mother and father have nothing to do with the Fire Department, but I bring him in. You know, they come with me, and there's a lot to do for the family and the kids, and they take care of each other. You know, everyone takes care of each other and go out of your way to help people.

Q: How old is your baby now?

GP: My baby's three months.

Q: Oh. So, this is a big change in your life from before when you didn't have a child, and has that made a difference in terms of your involvement?

GP: Well, I still have the baby seat in the car. If I have her and it's a bad enough fire, well I'll

just take her with me. It's just ...

Q: Have you done that?

GP: She's been to fires with me, yeah.

Q: And then what do you with her once you're there, if it's ...

GP: Well, if there's another Chief, then I just--usually one Chief will run a command post. So that's how, you know, one--if there are three Chiefs there, one guy stays to run the command post, and the other guys do whatever. You know, if they've got go inside or what's got to be done. So, if I have the baby, then I stay out at the car. But other Chiefs have done it. Chris has done it. I mean, there's other guys that's done it.

Q: But would you want her to become a firefighter?

GP: My daughter? Yeah. Sure, if the Fire Department's around back then, of course I would.
Yeah.

Q: Have you seen any difference in the Department since women have joined?

GP: No. You know, we don't have that many women in the line companies. And it really

didn't change. I was there before women came in, and when they came, there was really--there's really no change, as far as women being there.

Q: Do you remember what the reaction was among the men, when ...

GP: Oh, there was no problems. You know, nobody really--there was no problems when women came in. You know, the girls came, and they went to fire school like the guys, and they did what they had to do and it's just, you know, they pull their weight. They do what's got to be done. So ...

Q: And the men accepted it.

GP: Yeah, absolutely. You have to nowadays. That's the way it is, and ...

Q: And what about the entry of people from different ethnic groups?

GP: That's a--there's no problem with that either. Me personally, I haven't seen it. Now if it's going behind my back, this is in the position I'm in, or I don't know about it. But as far as I know there's really no problem with that. We have a--we, you know, we're getting more and more influx of those--of different ethnic people. And it brings a plus to us. You know, if you need people that speak Spanish and they're there. Before, you didn't have that. And certain things. We've got one of our guys working with us is Spanish--one of

the maintenance guys. You know, it's good. He can speak to the people, and it's hard if you can't speak the language and you want to ask somebody how to help them.

Q: Can you tell me about the medals that you earned?

GP: I received a medal for--we had a house fire and a gentleman was in the house--trapped in the house. He was left behind. And myself, along with Captain McDonough and Windsor Kinney, we went in through a window. The base of the house was on fire. We went in through a window and pulled the gentleman out of the house. But he later--he died in the hospital later on. We received an award for doing that.

Q: And what award was that?

GP: I wrote it down there. That's a county medal.

Q: The Medal of Valor?

GP: The Medal of Valor. So the gold--I'm not sure if it was a bronze. There's different medals, so I, you know, I wrote it down what it was.

Q: And where was that fire?

GP: On Middle Neck Road. Do you want the address?

Q: Do you know it offhand?

GP: I think it was 38 Middle Neck Road. But it was just..I was the Chief, and the whole thing was -- I was met at the car by a screaming gentleman that's screaming at my face to get dressed, to get my father out of there. And me and Chris Bollerman were both the first ones there, and it was just--the guy's screaming. He left his father in the house, and he's screaming at us to get his father out, and it was just bad enough we knew we had to go in and I had this guy screaming while I'm getting dressed in my car -- and it almost went to a fight later on, because he's screaming at us, and it was a mess. People's emotions get the best of them, and it's just an unfortunate thing. I risked my life to get his father out, and what can you do?

Q: Do you remember when that was? What year?

GP: I'd have to look it up

Q: No, don't

GP: There's a couple of other things we did that might be of part interest to the Fire Department.

Mutual aid, we went probably the furthest the Department's been is we went to Philadelphia, New York back in the ice storm. I'm not sure what that date was. But myself and a group of guys got together after--remember the ice storm? Remember what

I'm talking about--the ice storm in upstate New York?. And we were at a funeral and they had made a phone call; they needed guys to go up and pump basements. So we all got together, spur of the moment, I just happened to be off from work for three days. So we jumped in the truck. We left ten o'clock. We met at Nassau Coliseum and we all went in a caravan--all the Nassau County departments up to Philadelphia, New York almost--that's by Canada, up that way. It's really far, by Watertown, New York. And we lived in a barn--a firehouse. Philadelphia Fire Department had a--we got assigned--once you got there, you got assigned to a Fire Department. We got assigned to the Philadelphia Fire Department. Compared to our firehouse, it was like a barn, a tin barn, compared to what we have here. But--and running on generator. We spent three days there, feeding cows, just going to some fires. And we ended up going to a real fire at night. We were sleeping, and they called us. A gentleman had lit his barn on fire with all his cows in it. So we went to this fire, and it was a blizzard, and we go--I remember the story. Jimmy Interdonati was the Chief, and his car was outside. So we jumped in our truck and we're going to follow these guys. Now, they're driving through a blizzard, like flying. These guys upstate, because they're used to it, and I'm trying to keep up with them, and Jimmy Interdonati, the Chief, he's like, "Glen, where are you?" And I'm like, "I don't know." Because he had to clean his car off only to scream, and I said, "Jimmy, just--we made a left and go straight, and you'll see ..." All you saw was flames, and it was at night. And when they put the fire out, they fight fires completely different than the way we do. I mean, they--they have no fire hydrants. They have to go fill up a big tanker truck from a pump underground. They come dump in a big tank, and the pumper

sucks the water out of the tank, feeds the hose, and completely different than the way we do things. And we went and did it, and--but it was--it was great. They fed us one night, and one night we went shopping, and we fed them a meal that they're going to remember the rest of their lives, because the way we cook and stuff. It's good, and then later on, they invited us back up there for--they had like a party, a ceremony type thing. And we went back up there for that. And good relationship, and that was probably the furthest that I know of the Fire Department going. And I also was out at wildfires on Long Island. Same thing. We went out there and ...

Q: Where were they?

GP: That was in Westhampton Beach. The wildfires. We went out there and just--when we'd get there in the night, we'd go in on Sunrise Highway, and there's a helicopter landing, and fire on both sides of the road coming down. And embers around the trucks were lighting on fire. And then we ended up for a day and a half just riding around, going to fires, putting--or trying to put the fires out, but we really weren't getting a lot of it out. And then, you know, we went out with a bunch of guys with that. And we went out later on for that big parade we had. And ...

Q: And there, too, you had to do it a different way. You didn't have hydrants there. And what ...

GP: Completely different. I mean, we're taking portable pumps in the back yard and just sucking water out of the pools to put the fire out. And the New York City guys come out and they're like "What are you doing with that?" because they are completely--you know, they don't know. We plan for--like with boat fires, we'll take pumps and put the water in the Bay--a hose in the Bay, and we'll take water, or bay water for the boats out. But those guys, they didn't even know--they're like, "What do you guys do with that?" And next thing you know, we're putting water on the fire, and it is waiting to get water. So ...

Q: Are you at all involved in the effort to get a fire boat for the Department?

GP: All three Chiefs are, along with the Board of Directors, are involved with that, because we filed a grant--a federal grant--to get money, and we just decided to put a fire boat, because years, we haven't had a fire boat and guys wanted them and didn't want them, and there's a lot of stuff with the Department now, and guys who want it. "We need this fire boat." But, the way the three Chiefs and the Directors look at it is that if the government's going to give us the money for this boat and we're surrounded by water -- We don't have any fire boat now. We have a Nassau County police boat, which covers from the city line to Suffolk line on the North Shore. There's only one boat. And, you know, if something big happens, and if we have the opportunity to get a boat, we're trying to get the boat. If we get approved for a grant, we'll, you know, Port Washington will have a boat eventually.

Q: Have you had any fires on boats ...

GP: We've had fires on boats, but we've been able to reach them--they've all been around the marinas, and we've been able to do it. But, I mean, if we had a fire boat, and, say, a weekend, a guy goes out there, and the boat blows up in the middle of the bay and the guys just happen to be riding around in a boat, they could pull the people out, you know. And if somebody--just a boat accident, they can be out there. It just--they do on the South Shore. Wantagh Fire Department got a grant and they bought a fire boat, and we're going to try and follow the same footsteps. And if we get the fire boat, then it's great. It's great. We owe it to the taxpayers, I believe. Now, guys say, you know, we don't need it. But, you know something, if you're out there with your family and your boat starts to sink or something and we can be there and help you and save one person's life, as far as I'm concerned, it's worth it, you know. It's going to be a cost to us. We're going to have to maintain the boat. We're going to have to pay for mooring. But, I mean, it's a very expensive boat that we put in for, and if we get the money for that ...

Q: Where would you moor it?

GP: Oh, I don't know. There's plenty of marinas in town. So, I have no idea where.

Q: You also received the Bobby Dayton Award, didn't you? What is that?

GP: The Bobby Dayton Award was established after Bobby got killed in a fire. They established the Captain Robert H. Dayton Award. And what it is is the overall high-point guy in the company who receives the most points, they get--they receive this award. It's a big plaque. Your name gets put on the wall on the plaque, and it's just a very prestigious award that guys strive for to get your name on that board at least once. Bobby was a Lieutenant when he was killed, and they made him a Captain, because he was acting Captain for the company the day when he got killed. But--and they, you know, they made it for that.

Q: And so it's the Fire Department itself.

GP: Oh, no, no. It's Flower Hill Hose Company. Bobby Dayton was a member of Flower Hill when he died. So they made--Flower Hill came up with this Robert H. Dayton Award, and it's an award for him. No, I don't want to say for him. But it's just, you know ...

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

GP: My best day? I don't know. That's a hard one. It's--probably the best day was getting involved last week with that Ashley Dinner that we did.

Q: Can you tell me about that?

GP: That was a fund raiser. We have a member of ours that daughter's got very bad cancer and is very ill from cancer. And we had a fund raiser. All the guys got together, and they had a pasta dinner for this girl, raising money for her. It was a good time.

Q: Do you know how much money you raised?

GP: No. Offhand, no.

Q: Have you had that kind of thing before?

GP: No, no. This is the first time someone's come--that's really happened when we've done something like that.

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

GP: Worst day? Oh, I would say Bobby Dayton, the day he died.

Q: Were you involved in, you know, any of the funeral ...

GP: I was involved with all of it. Absolutely. Not the arrangements, but, you know, I was involved with it all. The funeral and everybody was involved in it, you know.

Q: Did you ever serve in the military?

GP: No.

Q: And what involvement did you have with 9/11?

GP: I was working 9/11. I just got home and it happened, and then I went back to work.

Q: So you were working with the Police Department.

GP: But I didn't have a part in it.

Q: Were you working right down there?

GP: No, I'd come home. I did midnight. I came home. Pulled in my driveway. The planes had hit the towers. And then my wife's uncle [Jeff Leveen] worked for Cantor Fitzgerald, so went to her house, and we called; no answer.

Q: The *Readers Digest* used to have a feature, "My Most Unforgettable Character." And would you say there's anybody in the Fire Department that you would think of that way-- you know, a really interesting person? Colorful?

GP: A lot them--they're all colorful. Everybody's (laughs) got their moments and personalities. But not really. No one really comes off the top of my head.

Q: What are some of the funny things that go on at the firehouse? You know, some of the jokes or the pranks?

GP: Oh, just, I don't know. Just--I wouldn't even know where to begin with that. It's just so much--there's always a good time, you know. We have a good time.

Q: You were also involved in the effort to purchase new air packs. Weren't you?

GP: Yeah, I was an officer, that we were fire officers, we purchased a big--we had to decide where to buy new air packs, and we had to decide amongst three different companies. And we had to investigate and research them. And we ended up buying--the company we have now. That was a big--something big, I think.

Q: And what were the criteria, you know, where you decided on this particular company as opposed to the other two?

GP: It's basically the same company we had, but it was just to update the model, and we didn't--we didn't want to just go--we wanted to investigate some other companies, and we

decided to stay with the company we had, because everything was familiar, similar to what we do--what we had already. And it was just that familiarization of it was very simple for the people.

Q: What would you say you're proudest of, in terms of like being a firefighter?

GP: I'm proudest? I mean, just helping people, in general, and just being part of it, you know. Just helping the community. People need help, you know.

Q: Have you been involved with any other fire departments on the Island?

GP: No. I've only joined here. I never left.

Q: As Chief, do you have to meet with any of the others?

GP: Yes. We have a--monthly, we meet with the Battalion, like Port Washington, Great Neck, Manhasset.— The County's broken up into Battalions, and we, once a month, we have a meeting with the whole Eighth Battalion and we all get together--the Chiefs from other departments in our Battalion. We get together. And we have a representative that goes to Nassau County Fire Commission. And he's like our speaker, part of it. We meet with him, the guys.

Q: Now, you were talking about the rescue that you did of that man on Middle Neck Road. What thoughts go through your mind when you're doing a rescue like that?

GP: I don't know. Whether you're going to make it out, I guess. I don't know. It's just-- honestly, you don't even think of it. You just--you go do it. And then later on you're thinking, like wow, "What did I do that for?" Adrenalin takes over and you just--you go do things. I mean, I do it on my job all the time, and you just--you sit there and think back, and "What did I do that for?" or something. Just, the guy's there, you've got to get them, you know ...

Q: Were you ever injured on the job, you know?

GP: Here? Minor, with an ankle injury, but I mean nothing seriously. Nothing like that.

Q: What happened with the ankle?

GP: I twisted it or something, I mean, but, you know, for the most part, I've never been injured. Luckily, knock on wood. [he knocks]

Q: And how did you get over the human basic fear of fire, you know, the instinctual fear?

GP: Honestly, I don't know. I can't answer that question. Because some people just still can't

get over it. But I--but there's certain fires that you go in that it's--it's hairier than the others. I mean, we had a fire recently in Sands Point. The place was really burning. And I'm in the living room and just sitting there, and there's flames everywhere. Just waiting for the guys to show up. But there's been other fires I've been in where it's dark and you can't see the fire. And, you know, it's dark and your fear of getting trapped, and getting out is just--just weird. I don't know. It's just weird. I know in this position I'm holding that I've got to lead the guys in and go do it, but ...

Q: So how do you handle that when you're in a place and it's dark and you can't see and ...

GP: You go and you just keep going till you find the fire, and find it and put it out. But nowadays, we have new technology. We have cameras that we've since gotten all these thermal imaging cameras, which they help find the fire, and they can find victims in the fire. That's stuff we haven't had. I didn't have that in Middle Neck Road. I was there in the beginning by myself, and breaking that window, the guy was right there, which I didn't know. And waited till (?) those other two gentlemen came, and we all went in together, and now we have --all the Chief cars have these cameras, and the fire trucks had them at the time, but being Chief, you pull up first, and if you couldn't wait five minutes for the guys to come, and if there's somebody in the house, that little use of that camera can help you do something. It can also get you in trouble, get you in there too far.

Q: How would that happen?

GP: If you go in too far without people behind you and something goes bad, it's just something you've got to think about.

Q: So you ...

GP: The number one thing is to get yourself home. I mean, it's not -- as bad as it sounds, but I mean, you want to go home. We're not getting paid for this. And we have wives and family to go to. And just, you know, it's--but you take the risks and sometimes take them and do it.

Q: And you can't help somebody else if you're not there.

GP: Right.

Q: What would you say is the most important lesson that you've learned in firefighting that may help you in the rest of your life? Not *the* most important--an important ...

GP: I don't know if there is any. There hasn't been lessons. I mean maybe you learn to appreciate what people do to help the community and the volunteers and stuff. Because being part of this big organization, you see other people that try to help with volunteer organizations, and, you know, help out. I mean, that's the main lesson to learn. That's

what I'm going to bring out to my kids when they grow up--I mean, just to help people.

You know, people need help everywhere. It's just unfortunate.

Q: What made you decide to join the Police Department?. Is it because you're--you're helping people in there in your paid work. Hold on a second. I want to turn over the tape ... [END OF SIDE A; NOTHING RECORDED ON SIDE B] ...

Glen Pedersen 39

Glen Pedersen side B 39

GP: Ever since I was little boy I wanted to be a policeman and I worked for the sewer district out of High School. I worked for Chester Towing, then went to sewer district when I was 19 years old and I worked there for 5 years. Something I always wanted to do, I guess. I enjoy what I'm doing, I guess. I got it on both ends. The Fire Department here and there I got, too.

Q: I see you're wearing the Port Washington Road Runners shirt. Have you been on the racing team?

GP: I raced one year. But I go out and I support the team. The racing team is part of the Fire Department, I'm sure a lot of the guys told you, and as a Chief I like to support and watch the tournaments. But it wasn't for me, the racing part of it. I did it one year.

Q: About how many tournaments did you go to?

GP: About five or six tournaments. I honestly don't have the time to do that also. So I was with Cantor Fitzgerald, the World Trade Center, I would work midnights, 12- hour tours, and after went to the pit with my Fire Department car and help out. My uncle was lost and I went down there to look for him ...a couple of weeks at a time.

Q: So you went down there to the site?

GP: Yeah, to the hospice.

Q: Did you ever get any word?

GP: They found parts of him. There was somebody on the website saying he was alive

Q: Do you think the department techniques or attitudes were affected by 9/11?

GP: I would think so, yeah. A lot of it . Everyone was worried about the big thing happening here, and a lot of the people you talked to worried, something could happen here. It could happen anywhere, honestly. The bio-terrorism thing worries people, whether when [Long Island Railroad] train may come in, affect the people and stuff like that

Q: Have your training programs changed any since then?

GP: Like the weapons of mass destruction and stuff like that has changed. I've done a lot of training on my own. I just came back from Utah from training on terrorism and chemical warfare. We train different up here, and we're getting some equipment in case anything happens. We're supposed to be getting a trailer from Nassau County, it's a de-con [decontamination] trailer. If something should happen. If people came off the train and were affected or exposed to something. We got training on that.

Q: In the city you got it, or out here?

GP: I got tons of it. We've gone over here, and there's training for it here, but it's gonna be off in the future.

Q: I see you're wearing a yellow bracelet. Can you tell me about that?

GP: It's the Lance Armstrong band. The bands sell a dollar apiece and he's raising money for research of cancer.

Q: Is there anything else about your work in the Fire Department that we haven't talked about that we should?

GP: Not that I know of, no. I don't know how good I've been.

Q: You did great.

GP: 'Cause there's a lot of these other guys you interviewed who've been in a lot longer. You spent a lot of time with Johnny Fico, right?

Q: Maybe one of the other interviewers.

GP: He used to be a lieutenant in the Police Department.

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

GP: This here? I think it's very good. It's good people know about the fire department. We're getting a whole new group of people that come here, the community, they don't know we're volunteer, they think we get paid for this.

Q: How do you think the community perceives the department? Aside from the fact that you don't get paid?

GP: I think they like us. I mean, you get some opposition with the budgets but people don't realize if you had to pay the fire department it would be a lot worse than what it is. You wouldn't get what you get. You know, we're volunteer, but we can come to your house with ten pieces of fire trucks. If your house goes on fire you only get two or three trucks if we're paid fire departments. It's gonna be a lot longer than we respond now. If it ever went that route.

Q: You mean it would take longer to respond?

GP: Oh, yeah. 'Cause who knows if the truck would be in Port Washington. The truck could be located in Manhasset. Could be located in Roslyn. Could be the truck comes with three guys and

that's it. In the city they're located all over the place but there are only four guys in the truck.

Q: Okay. Thank you very much.

GP: Thank you!