

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

Transcript Of Oral History Interview With

Raymond Ryan
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

Q: Today is January 21st, 2005. This is an interview with Raymond D. Ryan. My name is Sally Olds. The interview is taking place at the Port Washington Public Library. Can you please say your name.

Raymond D. Ryan: My name is Raymond Ryan.

Q: And which company are you connected with?

RDR: Protection Engine Company.

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

RDR: Well, I loved it here. You know, like any other kid, you know, you didn't understand what the town has to offer until you get older. But this town has absolutely everything, and I love this town. That's why I'm still here. As long as I can afford to be here, I'll (laughs) stay here.

Q: Did anything specific happen in your childhood that made you want to fight fires?

RDR: Oh, well, my father was a volunteer firefighter. My great—oh God! my whole family has been in the Fire Department. And my great, great grandfather was the very first Chief of

the Port Washington Fire Department. At the time, it wasn't incorporated as the Port Washington Fire Department; the individual companies had formed themselves prior to the Port Washington Fire Department taking a name as the Port Washington Fire Department, and he was the Chief of those two companies.

Q: And what was his name?

RDR: Eugene E. Carpenter.

Q: So, what did your father and your other relatives tell you about the Department?

RDR: There's really not much that you have to tell when you grow up, you know. It's just part-- it was part of our lives. I mean, back in my parents' day, life was simpler. Everywhere, not just in Port Washington, you know. So, I was what you considered a firehouse brat, as my parents would have social functions to go to. And not just dinners, but, you know, picnics and clam bakes and, you know, all that kind of stuff. And I would be running around. And, as a young kid, I'm sure I went on those fire truck rides for Memorial Day, and the like, and it was just part of my life and my family.

Q: And what do you remember about the picnics and the social get-togethers?

RDR: Well, it's--it depends, because, back then, I was really young--I don't know, just—you'd

like--I'll give you an example. One of the guys that I work with--Scott Wood, "Woody"--him and I both grew up together in the Fire Department. His father ___ same; He's a year younger than I am. And we knew each other through the Fire Department mostly at that point, and only at that point. And then, of course, our church, we happened to go to the same church. So, you know, that's when you're really young. And then, you know, you go through the school stuff, and then the Fire Department really wasn't part of my life. And then, when I started getting to the age of eighteen--at the time, that's what was required to become a member--the interest was there again. And two of my brothers were members, well, my father--they were members, I started hanging around the firehouse. Actually, I started hanging around the firehouse probably about the age of sixteen. And I was known as the pain in the neck because I would always come and ring the doorbell, because, of course, not being a full-fledged member, I did not have access to the building. And I would aggravate quite a few of the guys who had to, God forbid!, get off their chair to come open the door (laughs), you know. But, and I was a hyperactive kid--which I still am hyper--but that's beside the point. And, like I said, I just would come and break everybody's chops, bounce off the walls with the energy of a young sixteen, eighteen-year-old.

Q: So, how old were you when you did join?

RDR: I was eighteen. And I think I mentioned in my bio that, again, reiterating that I hung out for two years prior to actually formally joining the company. And I had made, I think,

every single Thursday night drill/work night prior to joining, and then I got elected to membership, and, of course, I went away for two weeks and I missed my first two official ones that I was supposed to receive credit or was required to attend. Yeah, they broke my chops about that.

Q: Did you get into any trouble about that?

RDR: No, not really, because it was--their requirements weren't--in fact, I was part of the crew that made the requirements even stronger, because I would come to every single Thursday night drill night, and there were a few of the other probationary members that would make the minimum requirement, and it kind of aggravated a group of us and we raised the minimum requirement. We were behind the bylaw change behind that.

Q: What did you raise it from and to?

RDR: I believe, at the time--oh, boy, you had to make two of the four Thursday nights, and we raised it to three. And, you know, of course, the first Thursday of every single month is our company meeting, which a drill was prior--work-night was prior to the meeting. So, then, that was always a quick, fast one to get everything done and check to sort of, inspection purposes, to make sure all the equipment was okay.

Q: What do you do now on the work-nights, because now you have a maintenance crew,

don't you, to keep the equipment in order?

RDR: Well through your other interviews, I'm sure you understand the structure of the Port Washington Fire Department. I'll briefly go over it, as I see it. Unlike a normal corporation, we're backwards. The four companies of the Port Washington Fire Department are the parent of the Port Washington Fire Department rather than the opposite way around. When it came time for the Department to research hiring maintenance personnel--we are through a transition period right now where we are trying to consolidate, for obvious reasons--you know, saving money and whatnot and operating more efficiently, because the system that we had has been outdated. There are some pluses still, and there still are some minuses--you know, pros and cons. And so the Department went and hired maintenance people, and they went and inquired to the company. The Department, as its own entity, is the one who hired the maintenance personnel. So, when they approached the four companies, my company, in fact, decided not to utilize them. I think we were the only one at the time. Because we were of the belief--and I also stated my opinion, as the same--that our Thursday night work-nights is a drill. That it familiarizes the probationary members and regular members of location of equipment and maintenance of the equipment, and so on. And, that's basically what we do on Thursday nights. It's an inspection period, and a training period. You know, not only do we check that the equipment is present and accounted for, that it's also operating properly, and preventive maintenance is performed as simplistic tasks by whatever we can handle. And if we discover any larger type of problems, then the engineering staff,

as it's known, makes the arrangements to have the repairs made as quickly as possible through commercial vendors, whatnot. So that's what my old position was, and that was in my bio, as you read, one of my favorite positions, you know, being an engineer--*the* engineer. You know, I happen to--it's pretty much fleet maintenance, for lack of better words, you know, for like--and I happen to enjoy doing that. I was an auto mechanic prior to becoming a cop. So--and I learned from my brother who now is in the position that I was in.

Q: What's your brother's name?

RDR: My brother? Tom Ryan. Every body thinks his name is "Tucker." Everybody calls him Tucker.

Q: And what's your dad's name?

RDR: Robert Ryan. Robert H. Because my brother, Robert S., was also a member at one time. He was up at rebellion--my brother Bobby. He threw a chair at the company Captain at a meeting one day and got thrown out of the Fire Department.

Q: Oh.

RDR: (Laughs)

Q: But why? What made him do that?

RDR: I believe because, at the time in the '70s, you know, long hair was considered hippie-ish, and he had longer hair, and in the Fire Department, you had a lot of World War II vets, and unfortunately we're losing some of them, which I have a high respect for, and they were probably breaking his chops about getting a haircut and whatnot. So he probably wasn't cutting the mustard either. He was, like I said--I love my brother to death, but I also believe in being a good member of the company. I'm sure that was part of the problem.

Q: How many relatives do you have serving in the Department now, do you think?

RDR: I still have quite a few. I'm not sure of the number now. If I had a company roster, I could look, because most of what's left is just in my company. Let's see. Two, four, five, six, seven--I'd say probably between ten and fifteen, at this point. You know, I mentioned in my bio, at one time, that I had twenty to twenty-three active members at one time. My sister-in-law's a member of the EMS [Emergency Medical Services] company. You know, my brothers and nephews are members now. My nephews. Just goes on and on.

Q: Did anybody in your family ever keep count of how many in the family had ever served?

You know, a total count?

RDR: Oh, boy. I don't know. Well, actually, you know, through the history of Protection Engine Company--you know, we do have an in-house history committee. And it's pretty well documented as to who the members are and in the past and whatnot. And I think--as a matter of fact, I think I have a family history from 1636 to 1984 with me, and it shows who--it's pretty much my grandmother's name is Ima Jean Carpenter. And it's the Carpenter side of my family that is the lifers in the Port Washington Fire Department--specifically Protection. Now, my cousins are Paul and William "Butch" Carpenter are still members of the company, and their grandfather and my grandmother--which are brother and sister-- were the descendants of that first Chief, Eugene E.

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

RDR: Oh, God! Again, I'm your typical teenager. You know, oh God! I was an idiot (laughs).

Q: When did you graduate?

RDR: I graduated early. I graduated in January. January 1982. And I was thinking of going to college, and I was--what I was going to do was--my family didn't have much money, and I was going to try and--I went to work. I had been working in the local gas station for Mike Matero, which, God! he just passed away a few months ago, God bless him. He

was a character and a half in this town. He owned what was then Mike's Esso, which then changed to Mike's Exxon. And then Mike's Service Station, when they stopped using--pumping gas at the station. And my brothers had all worked there. The station was on Haven Avenue at the base of the Long Island Railroad by Bayview Avenue. And, again, that's right around the corner from where I grew up. I grew up on Bellevue Avenue, and all my brothers had worked there. So, my eldest--my brother Tom is a mechanic and my brother Bob, at the time, also was working on cars, I believe, and he had worked there also. And my brother Michael, I don't think he ever worked there, but he knew of them. He wasn't mechanically inclined with cars, but he's good with computers. Anyway, I started hanging out when I was about twelve years old. And, again, my brothers--I don't think they even worked there at the time. I just was friendly with Mike Matero Senior and his sons. And I would go there and he--I finally convinced him to pay me money to push a broom and sweep the floors, at twelve. And he gave me twenty dollars a week to sweep the floors (laughs). And that evolved into, okay, learning how to fix a flat, learning how to pump gas and then, eventually, work on cars as I got older. And throughout high school, I was working. I'd go-- after I finished school,. I'd go to the work in the afternoon and then come home and do whatever I had to do. And I guess, at the young age, I thought I--I considered myself pretty cool as a grease monkey, you know. So, and when I graduated in January, I went to work for him. And I never went to school, at least at that time. It was ten years later that I went back to school; I went to C.W. Post. And that was--I don't remember what year it was. At least ten years later. I don't remember what year that was. I went for a summer session in Post to garner

some credits.

Q: So, what do you remember about the training?

RDR: In the Fire Department?

Q: M hm.

RDR: Well, I was very fortunate. When I joined Protection Engine Company, the Company Captain at the time was Mac--Billy McCarthy. And Billy was a member of FDNY [Fire Department of New York] Rescue 4. FD 4 was an elite company within the Department of FDNY, which it still is ... [?] ...

Q: Wait. That's ...

RDR: He was a New York City firefighter, as well as our company Captain.

Q: Right.

RDR: Mac, as everybody called him, he was also a firehouse brat, and I don't know now what the age difference at the time was, I don't know. Again, I was eighteen. I don't even know what age he was. His father was chief of the Fire Department, and he had family

going back to the day. And at the time, in the firehouse, pretty much everybody had family and were descendants of previous firefighters, and there wasn't too many members of the company--or the Department, for that matter--that had no relations and just joined.

Well, all that's changed, and not that that's good or bad. You know what I mean. It just happens to be the history. Because today, you know, I had risen through the ranks to become Captain in 1993--I know I'm jumping ahead now, but ...

Q: That's okay.

RDR: ... and after I finished my term--well, actually, I just finished one year of the three-year term--and I had stepped down. I took a hiatus, so to speak. I was not as active. I still attended and made all my requirements and whatnot. Well, when I came back and Donald Alexander became Captain, he had asked me, prior to being elected to company Captain, if I would mind serving as an engineer again. And Donald just stepped out of--he just finished his two year term, and Donald Reese is in his second year of his term now. So, Donald asked me if I would be Chief Engineer. So, I said "Sure." And that's my third time around of holding that position. And now I--this time frame, my nephew, who just turned eighteen or seventeen, and I joined. And he brought in a bunch of his friends, and there was a bunch of other guys that had joined, and hardly any of them had any relations to the Fire Department. I have to tell you, everybody complains about the younger generation. These kids are excellent. They're very respectful, you know. Of course, they're typical teenagers, you know. They're wise guys, but I'm a wise guy back,

you know. I'm a big kid, as they say. And I had a blast, you know. Because everybody's personality's different, and I can work well with people, so--at least I think so (laughs)--a little cocky, I guess (laughs). But, boy, they were good. They were a lot of fun, and they were willing to learn, you know. I can, at least, I felt, understand when they made mistakes and did stupid things, where they were coming from, and I would stand up for them to other people who had less patience than I do, I suppose (laughs), to put it nicely. But, either way, they're going to be good guys, and they're going to probably do very well for themselves in their careers when they grow older. So, especially--and even now, because it comes in different groups. Now, his group had finished their probationary period, and I went to my second year as Engineer. Now, I'd already completed my first year as Second Lieutenant again. There's a second group of younger guys that have come in, and they're great. They're even better. But they're all in college right now. That's one of the things that--the issues that we have to deal with now. You know, a lot of the young kids that are joining--well, actually let me go back even further. Prior to 9/11 of 2001, we had a stagnant period of minimal joining into the volunteer Fire Department, and membership was depleting. The older members were moving on or passing away. And other people were just getting priced out or moved out. So, when 9/11 hit, we were very fortunate in Port Washington. I think, after 9/11, as a Department, and as a whole, we got an influx of approximately thirty to thirty-five new people to join, which was phenomenal. And my company had like twelve to fifteen of them. And that includes my nephew and his group that I'd spoken about earlier. And so that was, you know, a very good, positive thing.

Q: What's your nephew's name?

RDR: Justin. His older brother, Corey, decided not to join Protection. He joined Atlantic's. Atlantic Hook and Ladder. Because he didn't want the family pressure, so he says (laughs). But anyway, the group that had joined, again, a bunch of young guys, you know, like I said, great, great kids. And it's funny, me saying "kids." I have a baby face and I look so young. But I'm old enough to be their father. And they all went away to school, and including my nephew. My nephew goes to SUNY [State University of New York] Albany. And a lot of these guys went to Colorado or all over, wherever they went. So we lose them, you know, for quite a few months at a clip. But I look forward to when they come back, because when they come back, when I do have the time to hang out, I like it when they're there, because they're a lot of fun. Because I like training, you know, and they're hungry, they really--they--I can't say that enough, that they're *hungry*. They want to learn, and they love instruction. And, you know, they--and practice, you know. It's like Vince Lombardi. Vince Lombardi says perfect practice makes perfect. And I like to go over everything as simplistic as I can. Not that-- but I'm also open-minded. I tell them, "Listen, don't go by everything I say." Get a bunch of different opinions on how to do things, because there is more than one way to skin a cat.

Q: Well, how was the training different when you joined?

RDR: Oh, well, we always used the Nassau County Fire Service Academy. Always have. And, in addition to the Nassau County Fire Service Academy, we have Department training and company training. Probably the biggest change that I could say from back when I first joined to today's present day is obviously the training has improved tremendously on the County level, you know. The OSHA [Occupational Safety & Health Administration] and NFPA [National Fire Protection Association] mandates are a lot higher now, as well, which is probably one of the reasons why. But, other than that, back in my day, when I first joined, the training was more, okay, you have to do your basics in Nassau County, and then your company officers and members trained you like you don't understand, and the Department would have a school as a Department every so often. You know, because that's just the way it was. Not that we didn't interact with our other companies; we always did, and we did that for every fire. But today, it's the opposite. Today, it's the County, again. There's a lot of emphasis on the County training. And then, the Department gives a vast majority--and, in fact, every third Thursday of the month is a Department training class that everybody gets together and drills together. And then, again, your company officers do train and train your men, you know, on the same kind of a level, but the Department staff is stepped up. And one of our Assistant Chiefs--Johnny Walters who happens to be from Protection, and he's also employed by FDNY--he's always had a strong emphasis on training, and he's great, and I just look forward to when he's the Chief of the Department, you know. Without knocking the other Chiefs (laughs). I'm just saying (laughs) ...

Q: What do you remember about the first fire call you went out on?

RDR: Well, in my bio, I listed my first, *almost* fire call. And then my first fire call. Well, you could look across the street--you can, the tape can't. But Main Street School, as I went to it and know it, at the time, there was fencing around the property. Now, I had just joined the company, and when you first join the company, you get elected to the membership, and then they forward your information to the town of North Hempstead, which is our governing agency that provides Workmen's Compensation insurance, God forbid you ever get injured at a fire. So, the process is you have to--they have to wait for the next town meeting, and then, they pass the resolution that they acknowledge that you are a member of the company that elected--you got elected to. So, there's a period after you get elected into the company where you have to wait to get your, quote-unquote, insurance before you can actually participate and ride on the truck. And, of course, every young kid, that's what they want to do. "Oh, I just want to go to fires," you know. So, my insurance had finally come through. And I was with --I can't remember who I was with, but a couple of guys. And we were up at Main Street School playing stickball. You know, there was a--as you know, stickball, you throw the ball against the wall, and you hit the ball up and over the fence onto South Washington Street was a home run (laughs). So, we were playing stickball and a fire call comes over. And it's my first fire call. So I go. I'm so excited and hyper--as I've mentioned numerous times. I go running down to go leap over the fence, and, of course, I jump on the fence, and there's one of those spikes and it goes right through my hand (laughs). Now, I can't go to the call. So, I

couldn't go (laughs). It wasn't that bad. It just punctured my hand, and it went through the webbing between my thumb and index finger. It wasn't that bad, but bad enough where I just said, "Uh oh. I shouldn't do this" (laughs). So that was the first ...

Q: So, what did you do then?

RDR: My--one of my cousins--in fact, my cousin who owns the property that's now the parking lot over here--Eddie Baker --who called me "Puppy" all the time--took me and said, "All right. You're not going." And he just put bandages on it and whatnot, and I don't even think I required any stitches, but I didn't know at the time. I might've. I had to go to the doctor, I think, to get cleared to come back. So that was that. And then, my first real fire--it's funny. It's nothing probably major; it's just something that I remember. There was a--they had a big--you know, again, through training, you know, obviously, you don't get thrown right into a fire when you first join. You had to get trained properly. So, I don't remember the time-frame--that was probably, you know, within a year or so--that I became qualified to wear the breathing apparatus--self-contained breathing apparatus--SCBA, as it's known. And that was the first time I had a line in a fire. It was a commercial building behind the Triangle Gas Station on Harbor Road. I believe it was either an automotive body shop or just an automotive repair shop at the time. And it was cooking. And W.G. Zwerlein was Chief of the Department, or an Assistant Chief--I don't remember. Because there's two points that I remember. I don't know why -- because that's where my head is. I love W.G. Zwerlein to death. I just thought W.G. Zwerlein

was one of the greatest guys in the world. He is one of the most knowledgeable firefighters I've ever met. And he ...

Q: Who--wait ...

RDR: W.G. Zwerlein. Bill Zwerlein Jr. It's not W.C.

Q: W.G. Oh, okay.

RDR: Yeah. That's Peter Zwerlein's brother.

Q: Right. Okay.

RDR: And the thing I love best about him, he's no nonsense. And clearly, I can hear him screaming on the radio (laughs)--not screaming, because he never screamed or panicked. But his emphasis with annoyance (laughs) on the radio. One of the other engines that was arriving on the scene, he wasn't happy with the way they were positioning themselves (laughs). And, I don't know why, but that just stuck out. But I ended up being on the first engine. I believe I was on the first engine. Whichever, I ended up being on the line. And of all people who helped me out and took me into my first fire--and I didn't realize this till going through this project, I remembered. This happens to be the same picture of the fire. I happen to have the picture. Oh, and so I also have it written on the back. It

was an auto body shop. Peter Zwerlein was the one who brought me in--and it was just prior to Peter being elected Chief. And it was a great experience--a great learning experience, and a prideful one. I, for one, felt that I did a good job, and he, in fact, commented as such, so--and you always remember those things. You know, you're a young kid-- [showing photo of him at the time] skinny, God, I was skinny. Okay, that was--yeah, even, so I said what rig I came on. I came on rig 8511 from our main house here on South Washington Street. It was a Thursday night about 6:20 p.m. It showed the date, yeah.

Q: You don't remember the year.

RDR: No. I'm gathering that since I joined in April of '82, and judging by the equipment (laughs), I would say it was about '83 or '84.

Q: What other fires stand out in your mind?

RDR: Stand out? Well, obviously 165 Main Street, where Bobby Dayton got killed. I happened to take an injury that day myself. And, as sad as I was--I happened to be pretty close with Bobby. I was at their wedding--him and his ex-wife Pam--his--oh, God forgive me--his widow, Pam. You know, Bobby was also on the racing team, which I was a member of. We were teammates. And that was very, very sad. That was a very heartfelt sorrow. Oh, God! I don't even know how I can describe that to show the

emotion that everybody went through around here. It was very rough. But, I had forgotten that there's a lighter side to the story--not a lighter side to the story, but there's a lighter moment, I should say. I was--again, this, I think that was about '85 or '86. I don't know. And, again, I was young, so I was probably maybe twenty at the time—nineteen, twenty years old. So, I was with a bunch of friends who had just got an apartment together. Three of my friends had gotten an apartment together. And you know what it's like for three single young guys. Right? We had gone out carousing for the night, so to speak, and had gotten in late. And I had crashed up there up on the couch. So when the fire had come over--and again, these were--we were all firemen. One of them comes running out and said, "There's a fire!" you know. So, I woke up in a daze. "Where is it? In the kitchen?" (laughs). Before it registered to me that it was just a fire call and we were responding to a fire call, and it was a real fire. So--so then, I woke up and we went to the fire, and it was just--I tell you, it was horrible.

Q: But wait, you said '85 or '86. The fire when Bobby Dayton died, that was in '88, wasn't it?

RDR: Was it '88? Okay. I stand corrected.

Q: Yeah, okay (laughs).

RDR: All right. I forget.

Q: How were you injured?

RDR: I don't know. I had done quite a few different tasks that day, and I took a little bit of smoke. It was more that I was just checking for smoke inhalation, you know, and I passed out, I think, at the--they gave me oxygen in the back of the ambulance. I don't know. Possibly from hyperventilation at that point. And they just took me to the hospital. And just for precautionary reasons.

Q: Did you already know at that point that Bobby had died?

RDR: You know, it's funny. I don't remember clearly. But I believe that, at the time, we were aware there was a problem definitely. We knew something was going on, and we knew it was bad. I don't know if we knew--well, actually, you know what? I don't think anybody knew. But I will tell you that I did know, because I was in the same hospital where they brought him and told his wife. And the thing that stands out clearly in my head is I'm like--because a lot of us went to the hospital in that fire. There was probably like ten or twelve of us, if I remember correctly. And I was like on the opposite end of the room, and I can clearly hear Pam screaming and wailing, "Don't leave me! Bobby, don't leave me!" And it--that--I get a little chill right now. Sorry. No, that was very emotional, you know. But ...

Q: So you say you were the one who told Pam?

RDR: No. No, no, no, no, no, no. I just happened to be in the room, or within vicinity of hearing her, you know, then with the doctors and she was with him, and, God, that was awful. God.

Q: So how did you deal with the trauma that you felt?

RDR: Well, you know, our Department is very progressive. And, you know, our leaders knew at the time *immediately* that stress counselors were required and had them in. And we all went through grief counseling, and the like. And we all pulled together. I mean, it was--you know, it turned out to be, at the time, a major news story. It was broadcast on every network, front page of every paper. So I mean, the focus was really, really here from like all of Long Island. And the fact that he was a city fireman, as well, you know, how they treat a line-of-duty death in the city, it was treated exactly the same out here. It hadn't happened in Port Washington in years. Because it had happened, unfortunately, back in the early days--I would imagine '30s, '40s, '50s, something like that. But not since then. So it--you know, it was just very emotional. I don't know how to describe it. But, you know, we worked all together, you know, with the fire service in general--volunteer or paid, you know, and I--you notice I didn't say "professional," because there's professionals in both volunteers and paid. And they stand together like a family and take care of their own, as much as they can. I don't know how they're getting through 9/11--

the FDNY. They're going to have some very serious problems. But they've got a lot of good people working there that'll help each other out. Just going to be hurting for a while.

Q: And you were involved with the Shore Road Stationery fire?

RDR: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Q: What can you tell us about that?

RDR: It was a gas leak. That was on Shore Road by Manhasset Avenue. I think I was a junior officer at the time, of my first time around in office. I think I was an Assistant Engineer. And, basically, what I remember of the fire is I had just recently become qualified as a pump operator and chauffeur of one of the engines, along with Johnny Olszewski-- "Johnny O," as everybody calls him, because the way they spell his name--I could spell it for you, but I don't know how--it's Johnny Olszewski--O-L--I mean, O--yeah, it's O-L-S-Z--oh, forget it. I can't spell it (laughs). "Olzewsky," I call it, because that's how it's spelled. It's like O-L-S-Z-E-W-S-K-I, something like that, but it's pronounced "Olsheski." Anyway, Johnny O and I had gone through pump qualification, and he ended up being the chauffeur and pump operator for that fire on one of my company engines. And that was the first time that I got to see the engine had every single line operating off of every single discharge. And, because what happened was that the gas--there was a gas

leak in the building, and the building ended up exploding and collapsing and--partially, and burning up a storm obviously. It was a major fire. And it was a real pain in the neck fire. I felt we were there for an extended period of time,—but after I had written to you, and then I was talking about it with other people, and they're like, "No, we weren't there that long." But I remember that I ended up coming back the second day, because, I think one of the reasons why it was more than one day was because obviously there was quite a few--I mean, it was a lot of hours that we were there fighting the fire, and then, of course, there's the overhaul, is whatever follows to make sure that it doesn't reignite and whatnot. And so there was quite a few hours of that. And, I think the following day was when the fire marshals must have come, and we were still there, just remaining on the scene to, you know, wet things down to make sure it didn't reignite. So that's probably why I was there again the following day.

Q: So, you said something about the discharge-- that every line was involved. What do you mean? You mean ever hose line?

RDR: Yeah, every single discharge of the pumper had a hose line on it that was either feeding a crew on the nozzle or another--well, at that--I think it was all just lines, you know, the same engine probably, it wouldn't be a smart move for the engine that's feeding men on the line to feed another engine or a ladder. You wouldn't want a failure to affect your men. So, you do things--that's why I don't do that.

Q: How about some of the other emergencies that you were called to--do any of them stand out in your mind?

RDR: Yeah, there's so many. Again, I've been a member twenty-two years now, so one night I remember clearly. One. Because I'm in the engine company. And back when I first joined, even though you're trained as a firefighter to do both engine and truck work, and in Port Washington our truck company is also our rescue company, so I always considered that part of truck, but it's actually a separate type of work, I went on a rescue call once, and that's when, again, usually you don't go with the other companies, but I went. And it was down on Orchard Beach Boulevard. And a young man had fallen out of a tree. And the kid--he couldn't have been more than five, six years old at the time--have you ever heard of those Johnny Bench Batter-up? It's a thing for a young kid. What it is is it's a ball tied on a--tethered to a pole--a steel rod that you mount in concrete. And the kid bounced the ball, it swings around, and you bat the ball. The kid fell out of the tree onto the steel rod and impaled his groin, and it came out his stomach. And we took the Jjaws of Life, as most people call it--it's called the Hurst tool--the cutters--and we had to cut the steel rod. And, oh, man, when that--because when you cut steel like that, those hydraulic jaws cut and they slowly press into it, and then at the last moment, it snaps because it's solid steel. And when it snapped, whoo-hoo, that kid screamed. You know, he didn't feel it at that point. It had gone in and out. And then he was transported with the full-length steel to the hospital. Lucky for him, it missed everything. The kid suffered nothing more than a puncture wound coming in and a puncture wound going out.

I'm sure it was minor cuts on the inside. I come to find out, when we go to the deli right around the corner from the firehouse all the time, that the kid working around the counter is that same kid--Steve Ducass. So--and I always tell that story, and I tell everybody. I say, "You know this kid?" to all his friends, you know. But, nice guy. Oh, boy! What else. Where are we?

Q: How was it--how is it that sometimes you were elected to the Engineer's post and sometimes you were appointed? Isn't there a consistent ...

RDR: Yes, you're always elected every January. What happens is that some people quit in the middle of the term, resign. And that's how--and when somebody resigns, everybody moves forward up, and the bottom slot gets filled. And, technically, even if you move up, that's an appointment. So, that's probably where, in those offices that I held through appointment, were. Looking back, I got in the company in '82, and I went into the junior officer spot a couple years later. I went in rather quickly. And I stayed ever since, you know. And, except when I stepped--I stepped out at one point not to seek reelection one year, and I mentioned that John O'Reilly stepped in at that point, in that position. He went on to become Chief through staying in those successive positions. Can you imagine, if I'd stayed in, I'd have finished my Chief already (laughs).

Q: What made you step out?

RDR: Burn-out. You know, I was a young guy back then. Young and, you know, just needed a break. And more--and, you know, I see now, in my twenty-two years, it's self-inflicted, most of it. You know, even at the time, if I probably, complained about anything, it was probably directed at everybody else but myself. Most of it was self-inflicted. Actually, it always is, you know. I choose to do so much because I enjoy it, and then I get frustrated if I can't get something done because I've taken on too much. Cut that out. Don't let anyone hear that part, because they're all going to go, "Yeah, that's right" (laughs).

Q: How do you prepare for being an officer?

RDR: Okay. Well, once you get elected to officer, there are certain schools that you should take. Officers' training at the Nassau County Fire Service Academy, Incident Command. Incident Commander is--well, actually, that came out later on, because Incident Command is a system used on an emergency--I was going to say fire ground, but on an emergency scene that allows continuity and fluid information to flow through the Incident Commander, regardless of who is in that position as Incident Commander.

Q: So, in other words, if you find yourself the top-ranking officer at a fire scene, Incident Command is what tells you what to do?

RDR: You will become the Incident Commander and run the operation. I could be a Lieutenant, as I am now again, and arrive on a scene and be the first officer there, and I

could assume the Incident Commander's role, and technically, when a higher-ranking officer shows up, obviously, I would relegate--excuse me, I would give them the contro. And I could. But in Incident Command, you don't necessarily have to. If, for whatever reason, it may not be feasible to do so immediately, depending on the situation. That's pretty much why that situation would occur, obviously, if it's, you know, well, in a perfect world, the higher ranking officer would assume the commanding officer's role--the Incident Commander, Captain on up to the Chief. But there are circumstances where I could be so heavily involved in the decision-making that I've already made up until that point that when a higher ranking officer comes that it would not be feasible for him to take over and he could end up doing other things and I could still end up staying as the Incident Commander.

Q: Do you remember a case where that happened?

RDR: Not really. Because, truthfully, when we have circumstances here, if I was the Incident Commander and another, higher ranking officer had showed up, it does come to the point where you can turn over command, and you will. So I wouldn't remember, because I've been in command-up calls on a lot of occasions, and, but they're regular, routine calls. They're not fires--working fires. You know, I'm trying to think. Again, you know, again, what most recently is coming to mind, because Incident Command really wasn't used back then. It was the highest ranking officer and that's it, and then, you immediately had to turn it over. No, I can't think of any specific circumstances.

Q: What are some of the major challenges that you faced as an officer?

RDR: Well, the first time around, as a young guy when you get elected to office, you're a young guy. You have a lot of older members who have more experience than you. And that's just--let's face it, in the volunteer fire service, elections are popularity contests more than anything else, you know. But I also felt it an obligation and a duty to become as best-trained as possible if I'm going to be in that role. Not to mention the liability factors as an officer. God forbid anything happens. And, again, getting older and going, through more experience, you realize these things especially when, like we mentioned when we spoke about the incident where Bobby Dayton had gotten killed. Again, we--the Port Washington Fire Department's always been very progressive and aggressive in firefighting. And we do very well. We were very fortunate that we had--we didn't have the best documentation at the time of certain things, but, you know, we've improved on anything--any recommendations that have been made by OSHA, and we follow it very well. Today in this day and age: training. Training, training, training. Training is, you know, you can't train enough. Every situation is different, and everything is different, and there's always something to learn. I'm learning every day still. I'm in another class now at the Academy.

Q: What? What class?

RDR: Strategy and Tactics. And I don't remember if I have taken it in the past. I may have; I've taken so many classes. But, it's been quite a few years. If anything, it's been over ten, fifteen years since I've taken it. HAZMAT [Hazardous Materials] classes. You know, hazardous materials. I mean, that's, today's day and age, more than ever, dealing with terrorism and whatnot. So, the point is is basically you--I don't even remember. It's just you take—you've got to keep on learning and you've got to keep on training, and, as an officer, the challenges I have today is doing the best you can with--as a volunteer, now speaking--with the time that you have with these people. The hardest part that I felt when I became Captain--that's probably the best reference that I can use--back in '93, was--in my company particularly, and each of the volunteer companies have administrative duties and they have their firefighting duties. Most of the other companies have company Presidents and Vice Presidents. My company does not. The Captain is the chairman of the meetings, the Chairman of the Board, so to speak, with the Board of Trustees running the financial aspects of the company, but nonetheless, ultimately, it's going to fall on the Captain of the company, the responsibilities. So, to find the time to do it and do it well is probably the biggest challenge. You know, I don't want to do a job and not do it well. And sometimes I have to make sacrifices. And, again, that first time around, when I was going through the ranks, I was, again, a young kid and getting older, and I committed my life and soul pretty much to the place, so to speak. And I was there all the time, and I went to every school, every fire I possibly could, and then, when I got up to Lieutenant, you know, I'd been going out with the same girl for a while, and then I got engaged. And roughly around in '92, I got married. And in '92, I was a Lieutenant,

and now I had to change my time around a little bit. Priorities were different. And when I became Captain, again, being Captain's very different from being a Lieutenant. And when you're First Lieutenant and Second Lieutenant, you have different duties, but you're still both Lieutenants. When you're Captain, you're responsible for it all. Chief Engineer is probably the other very--extremely responsible position, you know. The Chief Engineer and the Captain have to work together and keep each other abreast of everything that's going on in the company, because the Chief Engineer is, again, fleet maintenance and equipment--everything with equipment. And he's always with the younger guys and training young guys and any issues they may have with their equipment. And the Captain is the one, he goes to go to the Board of Trustees for any type of purchases and whatnot. So, anyway, the--so that's probably the biggest challenge, finding the time. And especially today's day and age, you know. Because, back then, if you worked in town and whatnot--I'm talking like the '80s into the early '90s--anybody who was a volunteer fireman, if they worked locally, if there was a fire, most employers let the employees go. You ran through there, you know, the '80s' boom, and then, the '90s, and now we're in the 2000s, you know. You have to work more for less. And employers do not let their employees go to fires around here very often. And that, again, leads to less manpower. Older members are dying and, you know, getting too old. That's less manpower. And, the younger guys, they go to college. So you make do with what you can. But it's, you know, that's affected island-wide, and that's just the nature of the volunteer fire service. Some people argue that that's the reason now that it's time to consider going paid.

Q: How do you feel?

RDR: Well -- that's a very hard question. Because, again, my history with the Fire Department itself and my love for my company and the Fire Department, you know, and all the guys and everything--there's ways to go about it, you know. To out-and-out and go paid on Long Island, or even in just Nassau County, would be cost prohibitive for salaried personnel as well as equipment. Is there ... [END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE A; BEGIN SIDE B] ...

Q: ... in the Fire Department.

RDR: In the fire service, in general.

Q: Yeah.

RDR: As I said, is there an excessive amount? I said I think so, to a certain extent in certain locations. There's room for improvement. Personally, I think my department has done quite a bit to--and specifically my company. Protection Engine Company is probably the most fiscally responsible companies around. And my department is probably the most fiscally responsible in Long Island, if you ask me. We're all taxpayers ourselves, and we care about our taxpayers and our community. And it's very important to us to do the best

we can. Now, we have internal controls. We have, procedures which we're looking to change, to make improvements. And--but there's a lot more factors than the public understands. ISO ratings--insurance service organization ratings. You know, if we cut down on some of the equipment, the ISO rating for the community goes higher; thereby their taxes go up on that alone for fire protection. And--but there's other ways to save money. And, unfortunately, the equipment is very, very costly. Me, personally, I think the fire service industry knows they can--that the taxpayers are paying and don't care and have the market cornered, almost like a monopoly. Because \$450 for a helmet, that's unbelievable. You know, it's a lot of money. But the technology that goes into them nowadays, I can understand it. Material costs money, you know; who am I to say that that material doesn't really cost that much. I don't know how much of a profit they're making. But, do we shop around? Yeah, we do. But you still want to provide your people with the best protection as possible, you know. So, we are looking to save money, and we have. We've cut down on the amount of equipment, you know. What else? We've cut down on purchasing separately. We do consolidated purchasing.

Q: Excuse me. When, you say you cut down on the amount of equipment, like what have you cut down on?

RDR: Well, specifically, the other engine company--Flower Hill Hose Company-- used to have three fire engines. They're now--they have two now; they no longer have three. So, they cut down on one engine, which, and one engine today is \$450,000, give or take, you

know. And--but again, our department here is very responsible. We have a guide--at least my company does, and I'm pretty sure that the entire Department is the same--of a twenty-year replacement plan, you know, give or take. There are extenuating circumstances where a piece of apparatus would get replaced earlier. I know we just replaced one of my engines this past year, that was just about over the fifteen-year mark--it was between fifteen and twenty. I don't remember exactly the age. And the reason being is because that one had a large amount of problems, and it was supposed to be the lemon, you know. But I won't even get into that, you know, from back there in the '90s when it was built. 1990, I think it was. And so that makes it fifteen years old now. But anyway, you know, so that's--that, plus, again, like I said, you know, something as small as a helmet is like \$450, you know. And you've got--you have to outfit every person in the--you know, because of OSHA standards, NFPA standards, they have to have equipment that's theirs, you know. So, we have roughly seventy-five members at Protection Engine Company alone. And so that can get costly. Not that we give our sixty-, seventy-year members their own personal helmet, because they're not really going to fires anymore. But anyway, there are ways that we're looking to save money, you know, and that's why, like I said, I applaud my Board of Trustees and the Department directors and all the company directors for trying, and they are still trying and we're still looking for ways to save money, you know. And we're going to get there. We're going to get there.

Q: Tell me about the time demands. How have you fitted your volunteer firefighting work

with your paid jobs over the years? How has that worked out?

RDR: Well, right now, I'm a little upset that I can't commit as much time to my company, because my hours changed at work with my new assignment. And today, in this day and age, every new home that's built is built with automatic fire alarms and automatic carbon monoxide alarms, which, when are activated, transmit to the Fire Department, and we have to respond. So, as a Department, our response--we're running to roughly 2300 runs a year, which, we're one of the busiest, if not the busiest, all-volunteer Fire Department in Nassau County. And you want to be able to make sure that you provide that level of service to your community by having it full staffed and the appropriate equipment responding to every alarm. And that means a lot to me, that my company, specifically, gets their vehicles out. So, I try to make what I can. And when--most of the calls happen to be during the daytime hours. My old assignment, prior to December of 2004, I would work shift work and I would be off during the day and work evenings a lot. So I made a lot of calls. And now, with my new hours, God! It's killing me (laughs). I hate them. It's right in the middle of the day. I've got to be in at eleven, and that means I'm leaving by ten. I wake up at nine, so I have no time to do anything. And I don't get off until like eight o'clock at night, and I'm missing everything, so it's killing me (laughs). All because of want--the desire to be there. But, I'm making my calls, you know. I make them after--before and after, on the weekends, you know, and I can still make the requirements. Because the requirements are not that difficult to attain. Not that we have people that are on the cuff. In fact, my company happened to have a member just this year who didn't

meet his requirements and was dismissed, unfortunately

Q: What do you mean, on the cuff?

RDR: On the "cusp," I should say. He was on the cusp of making his point requirements. And, unfortunately, this one member failed to make his requirements, and he was dismissed.

Q: So does a member who fails to make his requirements in one period of time get a second chance?

RDR: He's asking for that (laughs). I love him dearly. I wish he could. He could re-join. But would he get--back in the day--I keep referring to that. What I mean, is in the past, when you had an abundance of men and a waiting list to join the company, if you couldn't cut the mustard, as they say, and you didn't make your point requirements and you tried to re-join, they wouldn't let you back in because you weren't a, quote-unquote, "good enough" member. Nowadays, because of the time constraints, it's so difficult that by the same bylaw, which is still there, that you must make x amount of points, if you don't make it, you're dismissed. If he put his application in and attempted to re-join, he more than like will be elected back to membership, you know.

Q: Like what period of time?

RDR: He could do it ...

Q: No, I mean, to make your points?

RDR: Oh, the fiscal year for points is January to January. So, as of December 31st. It's January 1st to December 31st. So, when he didn't make the required points as of December 31st, at the next company meeting, they would mention that the individual failed to make it and they were terminated from the company. And they would notify them through the mail. And--but again, that is something to pursue. Because one of the other companies does offer a second chance if a person doesn't make their required points for the fiscal year, they are given a probationary period for the next six months, where my company does not offer that. That bylaw hasn't been changed, and unfortunately we have to--we try to abide by our bylaws as much as possible.

Q: Do you think it should be changed?

RDR: In my company, that's a tough call. Specifically, because the person that it happened to, I care for a lot. A cousin (laughs). Shhh, don't tell him. Cut that part out. But the requirement is so easily attainable, out of 2300 runs, and that's not--well, actually, change that, because that includes EMS runs and my company doesn't run the EMS runs. But even the thousand or 1200 that we do, or whatever the case may be, it's so easy to be done.

Q: How many do you have to go to?

RDR: It depends. It depends per company. Some of them are percentages; some of them are not.

Q: What about in Protection?

RDR: We don't require a percentage. You know, we require--we've always been, you know, with the belief that our requirements are not strict, because we don't want to demand it out of our men; we want them to want to do it. And it has; the formula has worked for years for us. And so, the requirements are very minimal. It's a hundred points, period.

Q: So that means you have to respond to a hundred calls over the year?

RDR: You could attain points as well--by attending a meeting, as well. We meet once a month. That's twelve a year, you know. So--and you get credit for that.

Q: Work nights? You get credit for that?

RDR: Yeah. And that's, give or take, fifty-two a year--fifty-two weeks a year. So technically, if you count it at fifty-two and twelve, what are we talking--sixty-four? and it's very

easily attainable. But ...

Q: Then--so then, you just have to make like, what? Thirty-six points from calls, from going out on a call?

RDR: And each call is a single point. correct. If they chose to do that. But the officers--we print their monthly point totals. You know, they're entered into the computer and we keep track of it, and we see--if we can, if we see somebody who's lacking in points, "Hey listen, you know, you're not, you know, really doing very well. Is there something wrong? You know, do you need our help with anything? Can you make more calls? We need you to respond to more calls." And so we'll do that, you know.

Q: So it's like a warning before you see that they're ...

RDR: It's posted also. Everybody in the company gets to see their points, you know, including the individual themselves. You know, so they should be keeping an eye on it themselves, you know, as well.

Q: Tell me about your involvement with the racing team.

RDR: Oh, boy (laughs). Again, that goes back. When I first, before joining the Fire Department, I used to go and watch the racing team--the Port Washington Road Runners.

The Fire Department racing team. Back in the day, in the past, my father, in the '50s, raced for Protection's team. The Rangers, they were called. It's, again, being a little bit of a history buff, the local volunteer fire departments on Long Island--again, life was simple back then --would compete against each other in skills. They would take fire equipment off of the fire trucks and compete doing a variety of different tasks. And it evolved into a sport. And, as a young kid, I remember watching. My parents would go to tournaments, and even after my father had stopped--my father did his racings, I call it, in the '50s, and then, like probably in the '70s, and my parents would go. If it was in the '60s, I'd be too young to remember, so it had to be in the '70s. And I would watch as a young kid. And, over time, the competitions between the departments and the equipment that they used, evolved. I'm sure, like I mentioned, that it was one fire truck competing against another fire truck who'd go down and guys'd get off and hook up to the fire hydrant, and then the fire truck would continue a little further. And then a couple more guys would jump off the fire truck and then they would connect the hose to a nozzle and squirt the target. That's one event of the eight that there currently is. And so events with hoses, with ladder;, four of them with fire trucks; four events running on the ground for the men; and one of the events is a bucket brigade, they call it--filling a tub of--a fifty-five-gallon drum on top of an arch, with water. But you use little five-gallon buckets. And guys would get on the ladder and--four guys would be on the ladder and like five guys would be on the ground filling buckets and running around in a circle (laughs). Kind of silly, but, in fact, that's what they did, you know. So, getting back to the equipment and how it evolved, I'm sure at one point or another, when it came time that

they would use the fire trucks to compete and, like I said, take the equipment off and then put it back on after they were done practicing or competing, and then respond to the fire alarms with that fire truck, that after their replacement period came to replace a fire truck, well, somebody on the racing team said, "You know what, that truck was very good for us in the racing. Instead of selling it to somebody else, why don't you sell it to us?" And they all chipped in money and then they bought it. And so now that truck was put on the side and specifically used for competitions.

Q: Where do you keep it?

RDR: In one of the firehouses. Wherever there's room. It was actually two vehicles. I don't know when they switched to using two vehicles, but one was an actual fire truck with a pump on it, and then one just they used, which was a little speed car. You know, a speedier one. I don't know if it was like a Chief's car or an ambulance--one that they modified. I don't know how that began, to be honest with you. But there was two. So, now, getting up to more modern, with the two types of fire trucks that they used for the things and how it evolved, it has evolved from a little old fire truck that they used that they were able to keep from the Fire Department and then they started doing things to improve. How can we be faster than the next team? How can we be faster? Well, they started--they see racing on television. They started doing dragster-type motors into them, and now they have--and they developed, you know, high performance racing motors and best brace. And they've evolved into that, and that's how it's competed. And in today's

day and age, the trucks that are used and the equipment that are used are similar to NHRA [National Hot Rod Association] and Nascar-type racing equipment. And, of course, as I mentioned, you know, my team and I, we do our own fundraisers for our team. And we, over the past few years, we just--we raised money all ourselves, and raised enough money to have a brand new truck built, and it cost us like, I think, it was going to be about \$48,000, less the motor and transmission. Just for the frame and everything else. And we used our old motor, and that was entirely raised by me and my teammates.

Q: How?

RDR: We sell a raffle every year. It's a 600-tickets, fifty dollars each. I'm the chairman. I'm ready. I can run out in two seconds. It's \$10,000 dollars cash first prize. Fifty dollars, tickets, 600 tickets. They sell out every year. You know, fifty-dollar tickets at 600, that's \$30,000. Fifteen thousand is given back in prizes and we keep fifteen. And over the past four years, we've raised enough money where we made the purchase of the new truck.

Q: Great. That's your only fundraising ...

RDR: No, no. That's just one. We also sell Christmas trees in the winter at one of the firehouses. One year, we had somebody donate 400 trees to us, and we raised quite a bit of money. That was fantastic. Normally, we go out and purchase, which we still do--we

purchase roughly 200 and mark them up, and we raise money there. I have also an old-- after the big raffle, I have a little mild raffle in the winter, which is just usually I keep it within the Department--a thousand dollars for five-dollar tickets, and we raise some money there. And the guys on the team, we usually, you know, we chip in and pay dues for soda and food, stuff, and whatnot. But the Department's good to us. You know, hoses and stuff like that--ladders, stuff like that, you know, they can get for us. But the rest of the stuff, like the racing motors, we're going to pay for.

Q: Do you have a specialty on the racing team? Or do you still race yourself?

RDR: Yes. I am currently the treasurer of the team, as well as, you know, one of the obviously most experienced guys there, with my twenty-three years in the Fire Department and racing for ten years and then taking a break and now racing--I'm sorry, seven years. And then coming back and racing again. I ran in all the positions. There's eight events. And, you know, one event--the first event is called Three-man Ladder. That's when a guy starts--one man starts at twenty-five feet away. The next one at fifty. The next one at seventy-five feet. And the moment the first person breaks an electronic beam of light the clock starts, and all three have to run up the ladder as quickly as possible, and then when the final guy grasps the top of the rung, that's when the clock stops. And he has to grasp and hold. God forbid he doesn't. It's a red flag disqualified. So the skill is not just in how fast. There's a certain sequence of how the guys can touch and how they have to hold it and comply with the rules. The rule book is quite thick (laughs). So, that, I was

one of the guys that used to climb the ladder. I wasn't fast enough to be the third guy. I was the first guy. But, then there's the Motorized Ladder Event, with one of the fire trucks. And that's where the fire truck starts on a certain line, and four guys hang off the back of the truck with a metal ladder with steel spikes. And the truck speeds down and locks the brakes up, and we jump off the back with the ladder, and two spikers--or "digger" is the terminology used. It's different all over Long Island and New York State, because we compete throughout the entire state of New York, against other fire departments, still to this day. They spike the ladders into the blacktop patch, and the one guy pushes the ladder up and holds it ... [generally? gently?] ... And I was the climber that would have to mount it--climb up the ladder and grab the top of the rung. I wasn't very good. I'll say that now, so all you who are hearing that, from the Fire Department, who remember are going to say, "He was terrible." Yes, I know, I was terrible (laughs). I wasn't very good. Although I got one first-place trophy in a county tournament, probably because every other team missed and didn't complete properly (laughs), but it was enjoyable. And, so I did that. And one of the other spots, which I felt that I did very well in was in the Motorized Hose Event. And I briefly touched on that before. The trucks start at a certain point, break the beam of light. They speed down to the hydrant and skid to a stop. Two guys jump off. One guy connects a coupling of hose onto the hydrant by spinning it on as quickly and efficiently as possible, and turning the handle on so the water flows through, so the water's actually coming through while you're still--while the fire truck then proceeds further down the track with the remaining two guys, which would be, I would be one of them. And then it would skid to a stop and you'd

jump off, while it's still moving--and they go quite fast now, seventy, eighty miles an hour, whatever they do. And then, we'd jump off and we'd have to disassemble a hose, and I'd have a nozzle in my hand, and I'd have to put the nozzle on as the water's right up-coming up behind me. And then be there quick enough to put it on and accurate enough to hit the target as quickly as possible. We're competing for one-hundredths of a second against other teams. So, every little advantage helps. There are teams out there who actually heat-shrink their hose to minimize the inside diameter of the hose to have the water speed through faster, which we consider cheating. So, they developed a rule where there was a--the referees, or officials, as we call them, if there's any question, could inspect the hose by sticking an expander in, making sure that the inside diameter of the hose was exactly two-and-a-half inches, as required, so that one team wouldn't have an advantage over the other. There's ways around that, too. Because that expander only goes in thirty-six inches on the other end. So, teams would shrink the middle of the hose. Some teams, back in the day, would pour silicone into the hose prior to running, allowing the water to move quicker with less friction loss. We don't do that. We don't cheat. We want to go on skill. What else?

Q: So is that your favorite event?

RDR: That was my favorite. And then, there's the Motor Pump Event. And that's basically, as it sounds: A fire truck would start from a--not such a far distance. And it wouldn't come in as fast as it could. It would come in slow. It would have a lot more guys on the truck.

And he would come in, and he would pull up to the hydrant, and one guy would hook a hard suction hose into the hydrant. And ... [??] ... So, he'd be slamming it on. And another guy would be getting there just slightly ahead of him and could actually turn the water on when the guy was like three inches away, because his momentum would carry him into it anyway. And then, the driver would have to get the truck in to engage the pump quickly enough from--because the transmission's engaged as he rolls up.

Disengage the transmission and then engage the pump. And then the water would come in, and he'd hit the gas as hard as he could for the pump to pump the water as quickly as possible. The remaining guys would take the discharge side, stretch the hose out, and hit the target from a certain distance. Well, again, the power of those motors and the pumps--you know, we'd take them out and try and do them ourselves--with such power going through all that hose -- when those guys go for rides sometimes, there's so much back pressure that three guys--four guys lying on top of the hose, the hose would push all four of them back. Because they're lying on the ground with it, because it's dangerous to stand up. Everybody has helmets on, by the way. And the crowd would get wet. The crowd would love that part, because they put barriers, you know ...

Q: It's always in the summer, right (laughs).

RDR: Yes, of course. But sometimes, the nozzle could actually get away, whip around, it could injure people. There have been injuries, you know, but there's injuries in softball too, and other sports that we do, you know, and firefighting. But it seems--appears to be

extremely dangerous, but there are safeguards, as much as possible, for safety reasons. So--and the bucket brigade. And there's another contest where we all start on one line altogether. There's like eight of us. And straight across the track, and we have to run down the track with the hose. You start off disassembled, and pretty much-- "On your mark, get set, go"--for lack of better words. And then, everybody would have to start connecting, twisting the hose together as they're running, without tripping on the hose-- which has happened (laughs). And, again, hook up to the fire hydrant. One guy turns it on, and one guy twists--turns on. That's his only job. He runs down there and he turns it on. The other guy connects to his coupling to the hydrant itself. And the remaining guys pull the hose straight. You have to have a perfect hose lay. Down to a science, we have it. Try and keep it on the ground, stretching it straight out. The straightest lay possible without any kinks or without any loops. And the nozzle man has to hit the target, because hopefully he got the nozzle on and he hits the target in the quickest amount of time. And just to give you an idea of the time frame, I mean, an eight-second time in that event is good. You know, the Motor Pump Contest.

Q: What do you call that event?

RDR: That was called the Efficiency Contest, when you run with the hose. And the final event of the day is the Bucket Brigade. And again, in a nutshell, there's a fifty-five gallon drum on top of an arch, which is usually about twenty feet tall. And a wooden ladder is set up against the arch. And Everybody has collapsible, five-gallon buckets. So, there's like

five or six of us on the ground with buckets, and then there's four guys that run up the ladder. Nobody starts on the ladder or on the twenty-foot arch that the ladder's laid up against, with the fifty-five gallon drum. So the first guy runs up. He runs up the ladder, steps onto the arch, off of the ladder, and he's the one who's going to dump the buckets into the fifty-five gallon drum and throw a certain amount back off for guys to refill. The remaining guys that run up, one guy goes three-quarters of the way to the top; one guy goes into the middle, and one guy's on the bottom. And then, you've got a guy that runs to the base of the ladder on the ground and stays on the ground, and he lifts to the first guy that's on the ladder, and the first guy then lifts it to the second, and the third guy--the second lifts to the third, and the third guy lifts it to the top guy on the arch who dumps—"the dumper" is what we really call him. So, I was on the ground with the buckets, and we'd run towards it. We'd start off so many feet away. We'd run to a trough full of water, which I think had like two hundred and fifty gallons in it. I'm not quite sure the exact amount. And we'd fill our buckets. We'd walk over as quickly as possible to the lifter. He would take it, without spilling any water, and then the next guy would get it, and the key to it is to do it at a very fast pace, with very minimal water loss. And then, you'd fill it up, and there's an electronic float inside the fifty-five gallon drum, and when it reaches a certain point, it's full, and the clock stops. And that feat is accomplished in--a good time--twenty-one seconds, twenty-two seconds. The record is nineteen seconds. You know, the state records that have been made. And that's a fun event, and we used to be very good at that.

Q: Well, how much do the individual buckets hold?

RDR: Five gallons apiece. And not more. Because we had actual weights and measures device from, you know, County Weights and Measures. We measured them exactly at five gallons. And they get measured, and if it drips one drop over five gallons, you're disqualified (laughs).

Q: And how much do they weight?

RDR: Oh, roughly eight pounds per gallon, and five gallons, you're talking forty pounds each, so--give or take. You know, we have a good bunch of guys on the team. And girls, because, you know, we have a few girls on the team as well. So it's fun.

Q: What was your best moment as a member of the racing team?

RDR: My first year running. All I got to do was be bucket holder carrier, you know, because I was the new guy on the team, and everybody else had their positions and whatnot. And we took third and fourth in New York State tournament, and we were a half a point out of third, and a full point out of second place. And so that was great. And then, of course, winning my first trophy, running some key events. Taking first place in that ladder event. That one, I'll never forget. I wasn't that good, but I must have had a good day then (laughs). One time we crashed. We had an accident once with the truck, and my best

friend Danny--one of my best friends, I should say, because I have quite a few--Danny Salerno got thrown off the truck. And luckily, he had a helmet on. That was during practice. He got injured. And what else? There's been so many different funny moments, I can't even begin to even think, you know. And, of course, back in the early '80s, it was a requirement that the host department that would host the competition, that when you raced, either prior to the competition, or after the competition, there was a parade within the town. So, we'd have to parade. So, we did all that, as well. Now, it's not mandatory. It's an option. And out of the six or seven competitions a year that we go to or our county ones that we count-- usually, I'd say about half have parades still.

Q: Talking about funny moments, what do you remember about, you know, humorous kinds of things and like ...

RDR: Oh, well, I wrote down in my bio, I'll go back to when one of the first times when I got qualified as a chauffeur in Protection Engine Company, I still hadn't driven to a fire yet. Thursday night being the work night--drill night, as we call it--everybody was around. So, we decided amongst the guys we're going to go get pizza. So we called up to a local pizzeria, and I was one of the guys that went up to go get it--me and, at the time, my best friend, Bob Gennusa. Me, Bobby and Edgie [Edward Haragsim] --we were a threesome. We were always together back in the early days. And then Danny was my best friend on the racing team, and Danny came into the picture, too. So, me, Bobby and Edgie were everywhere together. So, Edgie was the one that was in office with me during my first

time in office, going through the ranks, when I attained the Chief Engineer's position, Edgie was First Assistant Engineer, and then Edgie and I both went to the New York City Police Academy six months into our term. So the last six months of our term, we weren't around much, because that took quite a bit of concentration, and, let's face it, that's a priority in life, you know. And then, we got defeated in the election the following year. So, we were upset about that. I came back. Edgie was very upset. He wouldn't come back anymore as an officer. But he's over it. He's a good guy. Anyway, with Bobby and I, we were going to go a fire. We went to pick up the pizza. We came--and the fire call comes over. And I remember now, but at the time it wasn't clear to me, that the fire was on Orchard Farm Road, which is behind the Post Office in Beacon Hill. So, at the time, I didn't know where the call was. We came back down from the pizzeria, and the other, remaining guys at the firehouse had responded, and we passed them, obviously, coming back down to the firehouse. There was one remaining engine--the one that I was qualified on. So, okay. I'm going to drive to my first call. Well, not only was it my first call that I drove to, that was the first time ever that my friend Bob Gennusa had been in the front seat. And that's usually reserved for an officer, because that's--the officer is the one who monitors the radio and gives radio signals and receives orders from back and forth from the Chief. He's also the one who controls the lights and the sirens. Now, the driver, his responsibility is to drive. There are capabilities for, in the absence of somebody in the seat, that there are horns and sirens on the driver's side, should the need arise. Anyway, South Washington Street firehouse. I get into the front seat. And then, he gets into the front seat. And, again, we're young, you know. So, like every young kid,

you want to hear the lights and sirens, I think Bob Gennusa had the siren and air horns blasting on the engine, while it was still parked on the ramp, and he didn't get off of them (laughs). And, so I come down South Washington Street to Main Street, and then, I realize "Holy Sh--Holy Cow! I don't--which way do I go-- where is it?" So, I start making the left, and somebody--because there was an intercom system, at the time it was in the closed cab. I couldn't communicate. It was an intercom system. And somebody said, "No, it's the other way. I don't remember." And, of all people, you know, two of them that were on the back of the truck who are senior members of the Department now-- Frank Pavlak and Sal Zimbardi--were on the back. You know, and that's back when the men used to stand on the back step and hang on to the truck. I don't know who told me, but somebody said, "I think it's the other way." And I ended up--so I almost made the left turn, heading toward St. Stephen's, and I ended up realizing that and turning completely right to go back up east on Main Street, and I think I almost bounced off the curb right here in front of the library. I had crossed completely on the road. So then, we start coming along, and once again, like I mentioned, Bob Gennusa is on that siren and horn. I thought they were going to burn out (laughs), you know. The air horn began losing air pressure. The siren, I thought the electric system was going to burn out. So now we're continuing up. Now, we're getting to Port Boulevard. I'm approaching it, and now I'm realizing I still don't know exactly where I'm going. I'm like, Ooh, no, what am I going to do when I get there? Well, luckily, when I finally do get to the Boulevard, I see a police car quickly zip up and turn up--is that Orchard Farm?--the road right by the church on Beacon Hill Road--the first one. Is that Orchard Farm? I think so. I'm

drawing a blank right now. So, I then made the right turn. And then, we went flying up the hill to come up there, and the big ladder truck is parked at the scene, and I pulled up so close behind it that the ladder almost went into the windshield of the truck I was driving. And then I said, "You know, what? We're not going to do this again (laughs). We're going to take a break." So, I told my friend, Bobby, I said, "That's it." And then, that one incident was funny. And Frank Pavlak laughs about that story, to this day.

Q: Do you get teased still?

RDR: Yeah.

Q: You said you had some different nicknames in the Department.

RDR: Boy, geez. Well, okay, I mentioned earlier that my cousin Eddie Baker, he used to call me "Puppy." Because I would follow everybody around, I guess. I don't know, you know, I was young kid, and, again, hyper--bouncing off the walls. Look at me now. I can't sit still (laughs). I talk fast, too. That's beside the point. Hello. Transcribe that (laughs). Anyway, so he called me that. My hyperactivity probably was my signature. So they--oh, God! "Twitch" was one nickname. Then, came that stupid pizza commercial for Dominos with that thing called the "Noid" was bouncing around on the pizza box. They called me "The Noid." It's hard--but, you know why I'm having a little difficulty right now because I had some nicknames at work, too (laughs), you know.

Q: Did you ever have a problem in school because of hyperactivity?

RDR: No, not really. I don't think so. No. I happen to be, you know, fortunate, I think.

Fortunate and unfortunate. I was lazy. And, meaning that I wish I'd studied more, because, had I studied more, I'd have probably been a lot more successful. I had--I think, you know--and this, again, another cocky comment--I happen to think that I'm an intelligent person. If I applied myself better, I would have done better. Not that I'm not, you know, I'm not satisfied with what I'm doing. I'm very satisfied. But, again, you know, in school specifically, I wish I'd done--well, I had doubled up on my classes so I could graduate early, and I succeeded in doing that. And that's a testament that I can still--I got by. That's the thing is -- I got by without effort. You know what I mean? And, you know, and it--and looking, you know, in retrospect, you look at it when you get older, the high school —Schreiber -- has a lot to offer, and it still does, you know. The administrators in the school, people up there--the teachers--they're excellent, you know. Whichever.

Q: What made you decide to join the Police Department?

RDR: One of my uncles in the firehouse was a Port Washington cop, and he happens to be my godfather. And he also happened to be--my aunt, his wife--was the youngest in my father's family. My father was the oldest. So, she was six years older than my sister.

You know, there wasn't much of an age difference between her and my sister. But, between her and I, there was quite a bit. But, nonetheless, my uncle was the youngest relative on that, and he would still--he would take me out, play baseball, football, with all the young guys, with the cousins when the families got together. That uncle was always my idol, you know—my Uncle Mark. Mark Davis. And I always looked up to him. And then--and my brother Tom, too. But anyway, I guess that and the opportunity. You know, the opportunity come, and when you join the Fire Department, you know, the networking, as we call it today, is immense, you know. And everybody advises-- gives you advice. You know, "Get a job here," or "Try and do this," "You should do ..." this, "You should do ..." that. And it was--the timing was good. Again, I'm a very fortunate person. I am very, very fortunate, Sally. You know, the timing is everything, as they say. And that's the truth. I bought my house in '92--you know, in a buyer's market. I got my jobs when, you know--in law enforcement, at the right time, when they were hiring everywhere. And everything. Even my promotions at work. Everything is timing. And I'm just--I'm a very, very fortunate person. I thank God, and I truly, truly mean that. So, I happened to take the Nassau County--and that was a tough choice, and I have to say something about that. I took the New York City police test. The first test I took, I believe, was Nassau. But I also took the Suffolk County police and New York City test and the Nassau test. And I say that asterisk because, at the time, the same day of the Nassau County police test was the FDNY test. Firefighting's my first love. I have to honestly admit that. You know, being a volunteer fireman, I actually would love--would have loved to have been a career firefighter. One of the reasons that I chose to take the

Nassau County police test over the FDNY test--and probably *the* biggest reason--is I was extreme skinny when I was younger and I didn't feel I was strong enough to be a city fireman. So, I figured I would go and use my brains and be a cop instead. And that's why I took it. So, I did. And coincidentally, again, for the first test, the Nassau PD test, and then, I took the remaining--and New York City called me first, though. And then, I got hired by NYPD and ...

Q: Wait. New York City called you when you were a Port Washington police officer.

RDR: No. No, I was first a New York City police officer.

Q: Oh.

RDR: My first job was a New York City police officer, and I was a cop. And that was in April of 1987. And at the time, I was working in a union shop for a sanitation company, with my brother, and I was a member of the union. And, whatever the date was in April--I don't remember, and when I complete the story, you'll understand why I'll say April 15th, just for argument's sake, I was supposed to start the Police Academy the 16th, we'll say. The 15th, that night, at eleven-thirty at night, I got a phone call, said, "Sorry. The class is overbooked--or overfilled--you're going to have to wait. I had resigned from my union and quit my job. They say not to do that, and that is, you know, what you're supposed to do and all, but when it gets to the point of that evening, it was that day that I waited till

the last minute. I had gone through the investigative process that it takes to become a cop before you even step into the Police Academy, you know. Psychological, physical, written, health, background investigation. I forget all the tests, it's been so long (laughs). But, so anyway--long story short--for three months, I hung out and worked with a friend on the side, and and it was good. It was actually not bad. I ended up starting the Police Academy in June or July of 1987. And it was nice, because then I got like three months vacation (laughs). It got to be fun. I'd been working since I was a young kid, believe it or--you know, like I mentioned earlier. Anyway, I went ...

Q: So that's at a Police Academy in New York City.

RDR: Correct. So, June and July of '87, I had completed my investigation and started the New York City Police Academy in Manhattan. And, so, and along with my best friend Eddie--Edgie, as we called him. Edward Haragsim is his real name, but Edgie is his nickname. And Edgie is as hyper as me, if not more so. And Bobby was the calming and cooling one of us all (laughs). But, no, it was great. Unfortunately, Edgie smokes like a chimney, and he did then, and he still does. But anyway, him and I went to the Academy together. And that's when we were both junior officers in the firehouse, and it kind of worked out where we weren't around, because we had to commit everything to it. Long story short--again, with my career-wise--I was in the New York City Police Academy, and I graduated, and I was assigned to South Jamaica, Queens for my training unit. And that was during the late '80s. And that was during, what I had written on my bio, known

as the crack heyday, when crack first came out as a drug in the area. And it was vicious, obviously. And, at the time, a police officer was assassinated down in South Jamaica, Queens, named Eddie Byrne. And Eddie Byrne was a regular patrol cop, but again, I was in a training unit. And, from what I understand, again, he--long story short--he was sitting in a patrol car in front of a certain location, was approached on the passenger side by somebody who claimed ...

Q: Excuse me, I have to change the ... [END OF TAPE ONE; BEGIN TAPE TWO] ... to Queens, and that's where Eddie Byrne was assassinated. He was approached on the passenger side of the car, by somebody who claimed--was claiming to ask for directions, and then snuck on the driver's side was another individual who shot him in the head five times and killed him. And, again, at the time, I didn't know, but I know now, that where he was parked, I was walking a foot post at that location two days prior. And I did not know why, in the middle of South Jamaica, Queens, we were walking on a residential street, as compared to the main drag of commercial establishments where every other post was. NYPD wasn't that forthcoming at the time. But I know now: we were walking foot post in front of a witness's house, who was testifying in a drug trial against a drug posse from that immediate neighborhood. And the assassination of Eddie Byrne was a direct signal from the drug dealers that "We control this neighborhood. The cops don't." And they were trying to send a message. One of the drug dealers, I think, felt at the time that he was disrespected--by a local, 103rd Precinct cop, and was either targeting that specific cop or just any cop, and killed Eddie Byrne. That was the first time I had to

deal with a line-of-duty situation like that, and that was extremely emotional, having to go through a funeral for him and whatnot. And as my career, making me realize, damn! – pardon the language --mortality really sets in, you know, and you start to think about these things. My parents absolutely panicked when they heard. Because, again, of course, the news, it was a major broadcast news story that a cop in the 103rd Precinct was shot and killed. But everybody that knows me knew I worked in the 103. And it was just--everybody was bugging. Anyway, it's unfortunate for his family, but they ended up catching them and whatnot. So, after working in South Jamaica, Queens for a few months, I got transferred to Brooklyn, and I got to work with another resident of Port Washington, a good friend of mine, Rich La Pera whose father's a judge in Nassau County. And Richie had been on the job the year or two prior to me, and he has enjoyed a successful career. He's ready to retire right now, as a matter of fact. And he's so funny. He's another character. And I don't know if he had anything to do with getting me assigned to that same precinct or not, but it was great to work with him, and we had fun. And I got close to him. You have to meet him. After working in the City in the 103, and that was my NSU--NSU stood for Neighborhood Stabilization Unit--they changed the name to FTU--Field Training Unit. NYPD's great with acronyms (laughs). Anyway, as it turned out, I--was it May 10th of '89, I got hired by the Port Washington Police District. So that was a lot of fun. New York State law is the same. So, the laws weren't different. I didn't have to learn anything different, other than local laws and procedures. So, I did not have to go through the Police Academy a second time. Certain aspects, I went through the Nassau County Academy for--firearms training, driver training, EVOG

[Evasive Vehicle Operations Course], as it's called--evasive maneuver training. And to certify that I'm--you know, for legal reasons. Everything is for legal reasons. That's what the almighty dollar and everything boils down to. So, and over the years, I worked for Port Washington now since, like I said, May 10th of '89, and I've been there-- what does that equate to now? I'm almost entering my eighteenth year. A long time.

Q: So you're now working for Port Washington.

RDR: As a patrol officer. I work with Port Washington as a patrol officer, and I had a great, great career there. Guys I work with, phenomenal. The old bosses that have retired, I miss a lot. Things have changed. In police work, in general, as well as like I said, people are retiring and whatnot.

Q: Well, in terms of your Fire Department involvement, how was it, when you were working for the city as compared to working for Port Washington?

RDR: Different. Different ...

Q: In terms of your ability to--the time you had available, your ability to respond.

RDR: Well, either way, with NYPD, obviously, I'm working out of town. I don't have the capability of responding from the city. I wouldn't. And, even in Port Washington, I

would not respond to fires. When you're a cop, you just can't do that. Your job is a police officer. I can't be leaving my post as a police officer here and jumping on a fire truck to respond to calls. But, now that I'm working in Port Washington, there has been occasions where a fire call has come over, and the Police Department gets the specs on every fire call, that I would be dispatched, and since the police are on the road twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, if I'm on the road, our response to that scene is going to be before the Fire Department ever gets there. So, yes, when I've gotten to the scene and it's been a situation where there's a fire, I immediately will notify, either via my radio system or directly to one of the fire Chiefs, of what they're going to be approaching. Okay, you've got a second story fire, you know, a fire on the second floor of a one-family dwelling, you know, and relay as much information as possible. Know if everybody's out of the house, or if somebody's trapped--whatever the case may be. If somebody's trapped, chances are me and my coworkers--cops--we're going into get them. We can, safely, you know. Well, nothing's really safe, but safe as possible.

Q: Now, would you be going in to get them if you were not a volunteer firefighter?

RDR: Yeah, I'd say so. Because there's cops that I work with who are not volunteer firefighters, who have actually gone in and saved people in fires in Port Washington. So, I mean, it's just part of an emergency responder that you could classify a cop and a fireman both as an emergency responder. So, there're those things.

Q: Yeah. Can I ask you something. A man I know recently had a stroke, and they called 911 immediately, and they said that it took longer, they thought, for the ambulance to arrive because the police checked it out first. Now, what's the story with that? What's the procedure?

RDR: Okay, there's a--the phone number for the Fire Department and ambulance is not 911. It's 742-3300. So, when you receive a 911 call, if you're in like, let's say, Manorhaven--or, I don't know if Sands Point is the same--but anywhere other than the Port Washington Police District, if you dial 911, it goes to Nassau County 911. And then, to transfer over to a Nassau County Fire Commission--Firecom, as it's called, which is the dispatcher for all the fire departments, believe it or not, there's a delay. And that happens. If it did, in fact, go to the Port Washington police, because they receive 911, that's a misnomer, I think, in my opinion. And that, again, let me make that clear--that's my opinion--that it's a delay because of that. That's the reason for the delay. And I mean this. Yes, when the Port Washington police receive a call for an emergency medical need, they do transfer it immediately to Firecom. They also—if it can be simultaneous, or immediately thereafter--dispatch their own cars to the emergency medical scene. Now, with that being said, there still is a certain amount of time that it takes an ambulance to get to a scene. And there's a variety of different factors as to why it could take longer than others. First and foremost is the fact that the Port Washington Fire Department is averaging six-point-something ambulance runs per day. So, the likelihood of the ambulance coming from St. Francis Hospital instead of its own little firehouse, which is

close in vicinity, is likely. The likelihood of the ambulance responding or having to call for a second ambulance because the first ambulance is already on the road, is highly likely. So, those are probably the biggest contributing factors.

Q: So what would you recommend that people do?

RDR: Dial directly the 742-3300 number. That will eliminate that delay of whether it be two minutes, four minutes, whatever the case may be. I don't know how long it takes for Firecom to process the information or interview the person on the phone. Again, right now--and I can speak only for Port Washington because I happen to be aware of how it works with our 911 system, when we receive it, we just press a transfer button and so the Firecom dispatcher picks up the phone and says, "Go ahead," and then, we release the call and they're directly speaking to Firecom. So, again, they interview people on the phone. The dispatchers are trained, "What's the medical emergency?" "What's your address?" "What's your phone number?" Whatever they ask type of information. And then, however they process it from there, I don't know. Do they type the information first in the computer and then start dispatching? Do they dispatch first? I don't know, okay? So, and I believe that's how they do it. I think they type first, and from what I understand, that fire dispatch system in Nassau County is archaic. I don't mean to criticize my compadres at the Firecom, but I'm sure they would also love state-of-the-art equipment. But, again, it boils down to money. And, for years, the county's been hurting, so.

Q: Going back to your own, you know, Fire Department involvement, what would you say was your worst day as a firefighter?

RDR: It definitely has to be when Bobby died. Yeah, most definitely.

Q: What about your best day?

RDR: Well, I guess when I achieved the goal of becoming Captain. You know, I achieved that goal. But, again, I'm in my second time around. I'm recycled. And I'm thoroughly enjoying myself. Because I don't have the expectations, I think, that I did then. I understand more now than I did then. It's just, it's different, you know. You get in the mode back, first time around, going through the ranks, that you get caught up in the horse crap (laughs), so to speak, and you want to prove that you have the knowledge, but you don't want to look like an idiot. Now, I know I'm not there to prove anything other than to do my job. Because I know that in today's day and age, my goal is survivability of the company and the service. I want to train my guys--my specific guys--as best as I possibly can. I want to teach them. I want to find the time to teach them, and I want to teach him. And I want them to learn, whether I can physically do it myself or hand them off to somebody else who's knowledgeable, to make sure that it gets done. Again, I'm reiterating that our Department is, training-wise, very well. I still want to get in all the ins and outs, and just all the intangibles, as well. It's not just training to fight fires, you

know. I want them to teach them the respect for the community, the respect for my company building, and stuff like -- you'll see, like, I'm sure you have a lunch room here at the Public Library, or a lunchroom at an office complex, people post signs: "Your mother's not here; clean up after yourself," you know. I'm big on that. The people that passed before me have given me this Fire Department and this firehouse for me to use, and their sacrifices--my sacrifices and anybody after me can't compare, because these World War II vets that I spoke about earlier, who I have the utmost respect for, everything was out of their own pockets. They built the place with their own hands. Any alterations to the firehouse, they went and chipped in and bought the wood to build the addition. We have a barbecue pit in the back of the firehouse. Our men built it ourselves. We built it, you know. And that--there's a lot of pride to me on that. Everybody thinks that we like to waste money. The old--and this is the old attitude, the drunken fireman image, you know, and that was an impression that people had that's all that the firemen did, you know. There is a physical bar in the building. There's no alcohol on it. It's where we sit down and we have lunch with now, you know. Things have changed. In fact, yeah, did they ever have it? Sure. Do we still, every once in a while, have beer? Yeah. But nothing like that, you know. Priorities are priorities now, you know. And we--I know, you know, I don't know how long you lived in Port Washington yourself, but ...

Q: Thirty-six years.

RDR: Okay. This community--and I love our community--things have changed in this community. I would say, over the last decade or so, there is a very large change of people who have sold their homes and new people have moved in. With that being said, there's also a thing in our community of new people and versus old people, you know. I don't have that. I guess, to a certain extent, I guess I can, but I also have respect for everybody, you know. Fine. You know, I accept that our town is different. Let me put it that way. I don't hold it against somebody because they're new. You know, what bothers me is--and a lot of guys, you know, you can hear comments that "Nobody gives a crap about the Fire Department anymore." "They come here. They moved here from the five boroughs--wherever they may have moved from--where they had paid services for everything. They expect their service. They don't understand that we are sacrificing our families at dinnertime, our childbirths, our weddings, our family weddings people have planned things around, you know, holidays, middle of the nights, sleep, you know, to come and help our fellow person in the community." And, again, in its simplistic form, back when the community was very simple, that was very noble and that was the thing. Now, it's expected. It's different. Again, I accept that now, you know. But, along the same lines, I'm not afraid to show my pride with my service and my Department. We are a bunch of professionals. I made that comment before about a paid fire department like FDNY and a volunteer fire department. We're both professionals. A lot of people refer to a professional as a paid fireman. To me, it doesn't equate, you know. Do we take anybody with a pulse to become a member of the Fire Department? Yeah (laughs), we do. But, again, now that I'm in office again, I will do everything I can to take the person

that may not be the sharpest tool in the shed, and train them as best as I possibly can.

And, I mean--that means a lot to me, you know. And again, and the other thing, like I said, is I'm very, very proud of my company, because we try to do the best we can to, you know, choose our expenditures wisely.

Q: Would you consider running for Chief?

RDR: Yes, I actually almost did. Let's see. Johnny has been Chief now almost two years. Two years ago roughly, John Walters was--who is now our Second Deputy Chief, who happens to be a City fireman, he was one of my junior officers when I was Captain -- he was taking 9/11 quite hard. You know, his particular company--he's from Squad 288--lost seventeen men at the World Trade Center. And he particularly was quite close with the Ielpi's from Great Neck who lost their son, and the father was also a champion of the cause for 9/11 to Congress, as a matter of fact, and victims' families. And he was very, very involved with that. And, of course, it took an extreme emotional toll on him. And I wasn't sure if he was going to run or not. So, I started getting my schoolings in order. Certain qualifications expire. So, I started renewing my qualifications and I became very interested in running. And exactly what I just said, I'll repeat: While getting my qualifications in order, I did become very interested in running. Not that I wasn't interested before, but now, I was like, you know what? Yeah, I want to do it, you know. So, I started continuing with it. And then, John, coincidentally his helping of his fellow firefighters in the city, was diminishing that role and was coming back into his role to run

for the Chief's position —it was fine. I still continued to run and it was going to be pretty much a contested election. And it was already, because there was a third party also running--Tommy Golden. And who is also from my company--another great guy. No matter what, the Port Washington Fire Department was well--going to be well-served, because out of any one of those three, I think, would be fine, and I think the Department would be happy with. Both qualified as well as good to the men and people of the Department. And, again, that's something extremely important to me, as an officer.

Q: Wait. So, when will the election be?

RDR: So, now John got elected. I--my qualifications, I misinterpreted one qualification and I didn't have it. Instead of--it's called the HAZMAT Operations and Awareness Class--I had the one-half of it instead of the other. I was reading an old bulletin. So I didn't run. I could've run, by completing the class, which I did complete, but it was too late for the nomination purposes. I said, "Fine, I can wait." I was actually considering backing out at that point, anyway, because I was back in a company role, and I was relishing my time as a company officer again. So, anyway, Johnny's now Chief, and he'll complete his term, going up through the ranks, barring any unforeseen circumstances, in 2009. And 2009 is when I will consider running for Chief again. I know Tommy is also going through classes right now with me. Tommy, more than likely, will run as well, and we'll probably contest it between Tommy and I. Again, that's if I run. Right now, I'm into doing my company level job, and that's what I want to focus on. When it gets close to

that time, that's when I'll have to sit down and really evaluate whether I want to continue to go that route. Because, honest to God, it's a full-time job. And when you have a full-time job and you take on a second full-time job, it's insane.

Q: And what is the impact on your family life?

RDR: Exactly. Well, unfortunately, I'm divorced. Fortunately, I have a new girlfriend.

Q: Do you have any children?

RDR: No. I wish I did. The time that I spend in the firehouse--see, it's working out well, actually, for me now. My girlfriend's hours at work and my hours at work, it's hard for us to get together, just on that alone. And like the Thursday nights that I have to commit to the firehouse, that's not a conflict, because then she has meetings and whatnot or has a class on that night. But we make time for each other, which is good. To become a Chief--and she's totally supportive. She's excellent. You know, she--every person has their demands, to a certain extent. I shouldn't say the word "demand," but, you know, she--out of respecting her, I should be giving her some time, you know. So that's how that works. So, hopefully, if that comes down to it where I do become Chief and we're still together, hopefully, she'll accept it, I'm sure, and be supportive. She's supportive of me personally. So, and that's the way it works. That's the way it works.

Q: If you do have children, would you want your children to join the Fire Department?

RDR: Well, yes and no (laughs). As with any parent, I would want my children to get the best education possible, first and foremost, and succeed in life. If they want to be, if they can do--if one doesn't interfere with the other, by all means, you know. And that's really what it boils down to. But again, as you probably know, being a parent, you only have so much control. You can't live their life for them; they're going to make their own choices. If--like I did with mine. I graduated in my high school half a year early--doubled up my classes, because I said I was going to go back to school. But I was so into the Fire Department, and that's part of the reason I was--all my time committed was here. Although I got a very large education in the fire service. You know, I've taken so many schools over the years, and I continue to take, you know, that has educated me on a multitude of different issues. Construction, hazardous materials, safety. Science. I mean, fire science alone. Chemical properties in hazardous materials. Hydraulics. I mean, hydraulics and mathematics is basically what pump operation boils down to. And God bless W.G. Zwerlein and John O'Reilly, another one. Excellent teachers.

Q: Are you free to talk about your present assignment on your job?

RDR: Yeah, I can be, in general. I'll go with the--stepping back to what we spoke to about where I started working for Port Washington police in May of 1989. I worked on patrol as a uniform cop responding to calls up until September of 2000. September of 2000, I

was promoted to detective, and I was assigned to the gang investigation unit. And I do street gangs.

Q: Here in Port Washington?

RDR: Here in Port Washington. With that being said, as I've said so often today, Port Washington still is a great community. But we are not exempt from certain problems. We are no worse or better than the neighboring communities. Do we have our problems? Yes. Sometimes they're in the news more than others, because Port Washington police, thanks to my upper echelon bosses, have taken a proactive approach in 2000 by assigning myself and another guy to a gang unit for preventive. We have neighboring departments that haven't done that, or have just buried their heads in the sand, and I won't even mention that. And we were extremely aggressive against some of those locals. Not everybody's a gang member. These young kids today have the internet and MTV for instant trends from coast to coast. So, when the music star on television is wearing his baseball cap on backwards or sideways or up or down or red or blue, and his whole outfit is one color and he's throwing off hand signs, that doesn't necessarily mean he's a gang member, but it raises my eyebrow, and I look. And I look for other indications. And, by legal means, I go by my legal indicators. And that's when I will label somebody who may be a gang member. And we did investigations. Any cases that would come to the Port Washington Police District involving somebody that is a suspected gang member, my partner and I received and we would investigate and we would prosecute with zero

tolerance against any gang members in the community. When we weren't investigating a case, we were out on the road. Again, I went to work in blue jeans. I work plainclothes. That doesn't mean undercover. Undercover's different. That means you'll never know I'm a cop. Plainclothes, people know I'm a cop. They know the unmarked car is a car that has no lights or sirens on it, with "Police" written on it. It's unmarked. It's not undercover. You won't know an undercover car; you will never know (laughs). And that's the difference. And people make that mistake often. Anyway, we would be out on the street, stopping them, questioning them. "What's your name?" "What's your I.D." Legally. And with emphasis, you know. And we would work with a specific assistant district attorney in Nassau County, which is assigned to the street gangs for prosecution purposes. And we've gone that route. Without getting into specifics, over the past year-- or past six months, at least, I got involved in a very major case. An investigative case that has taken--the case has gone nationally and internationally, and there are resources that I've always used as a gang investigator, not only in Nassau County District Attorney's office, there are specialty units within Nassau County, as well as other agencies. Specifically, I'm talking to the F.B.I. right now. There's an F.B.I. federal gang task force on Long Island that covers Nassau and Suffolk County. And when they came in, and I advised them of what I was doing, they came and assisted me. And after working with the F.B.I., my job, as well as the F.B.I. got together and thought it would be best if I was transferred to the Federal Gang Task Force. So, as of December of 2004, I've been transferred to the F.B.I. Task Force. It's a two-year appointment, where I am cross-designated as a United States Marshal, giving me law enforcement powers, because

if I have to go elsewhere out of Port Washington, I can still effectively, legally enforce the laws of the country. So, I'm working there now. And the benefits to our community here are great. Now, some people would say, "Well, he doesn't work here anymore. How can that be a benefit?" (laughs)

Q: Well, so wait, so your employer is the F.B.I. ...

RDR: My employer is the Port Washington Police District. I'm assigned to the F.B.I., cross-designated as a United States Marshal (laughs). A little convoluted. But anyway, the way it works is this. It's, again, the Port Washington Police is my employer. I am assigned to them in a specialty unit. The benefits are is I can use the manpower and equipment--which is almost limitless, because it's the federal government--here in Port Washington. And I am still working on my Port Washington case, even though my office is now in Hempstead, and Melville. And the, again, the technology and resources are incredible. Without saying too much. The other thing is--I'll give you an example. Port Washington can receive monetary gain as well--the District--to save the taxpayers money. We recently did a case--not me; I had just been assigned, so I don't know how this will work out--but my unit that I'm assigned to now did a case out in Suffolk County against a certain gang that was doing narcotics trafficking, and ended up seizing six houses, about twenty-two cars, \$22,000 in cash or \$10,000 in cash--I'm not sure--a bunch of guns, and like five kilos of cocaine. Other than narcotics and guns, which they don't sell, the houses and cars are seized. They will eventually be sold, and all the money and

proceeds from the narcotics trafficking then will get distributed to the agencies involved, saving the taxpayers money. Which is a very big bonus. And that--how much will the Port Washington PD get because of that case? I'm not sure, because I was only assigned at the tail end of the case. They were working on the case for a year, and I was there for the last two months of it. But, anyway, there will be future cases, you know. And, so that's great. And I hope that I can do something that will be very beneficial to my Department. Believe it or not, there are cops out there that are trying to do the right thing, and I hope that I'm one of them. (laughs) I want--my main prerogative, being over in that unit, is to clean up Port Washington. If I have to help them out on other cases on Long Island, that's great. That's good experience for me. But my main objective is taking care of Port Washington. And I mean that, because I live here. This town means a lot to me.

Q: Which do you think is more dangerous--being a Port Washington firefighter or a police officer?

RDR: It's hard to say. I'm a cop, so I would probably say a cop. And meaning--one of the things is is, you know, you come to an emergency as a fireman, and people love that. They're so thankful you're here. "Thank God you're there to save me." You come to a scene as a cop, most people hate you, because you're going to take away a family member. You're going to take--you know, you could--not most, but you could be taking away a family member. You could be taking that person away because they've violated

the law. And, let's face it, as a cop and an investigator, I'm going to be asking personal questions. I'm going to be asking stuff that you don't want to tell me. I'm going to try and be getting information from you that you may not be aware that I'm looking for. And, as it says on the rights, "What you say could be used against you," you know. And, it's not always pleasant. I mean, there are good parts of being a cop, as far as helping the people out. I mean, let's face it, you know, you're patrol, when somebody gets hurt or injured, I'm there to help them. Somebody gets hurt in an auto accident, I'm there to help them and guide them through the process of getting the paperwork ready. You get a call for a domestic incident, and the new O.J. Simpson laws--and I'm pretty sure it was right after O.J. Simpson--the domestic violence laws in the whole entire country changed. And it's a mandatory arrest policy. You get a husband and wife, they might have one small argument and the husband got angry and threw the phone against the wall, he damaged the phone. That's criminal mischief. He's going to get arrested. Whether the wife wants it or not. And it's not always pleasant. The state law requires it now, or the policy requires it. Things have changed.

Q: How have things changed for you since 9/11? Were you affected personally?

RDR: Yeah. I mean, immediately thereafter, on 9/11, obviously, I was as emotional as anybody in the country. I'll never forget--it's just one of those things, like when JFK was shot, I'm sure, you'll never forget where you were. I'll never forget where I was and what I was doing. And I didn't know what was going on, because I happened to be at my house,

vacuuming, by myself, and I couldn't hear the TV. But I finally heard it, and I ran down to my father-in-law's house, at the time, and saw the second tower, or first--both towers fall at that point. And I was in astonishment. In astonishment. I couldn't believe it. I was cursing and screaming. My father-in-law didn't know why. He didn't understand what was happening. I knew it right away. I don't know why, but I did. And so we went running up to the firehouse, and we could see. We stood on the rooftop, and you can see from Port Washington, Manhattan. You could see the smoke, you know. And we ended up getting called in to the--as a fire department in Nassau County, we got called to go into mutual aid, as we call it. When you go one town to the next, it's called mutual aid. We ended up going mutual aid into the city. We set up at a staging area. I think it was Belmont Race Park--me and a bunch of us. Again, remember what happened on 9/11. If the towers hadn't have fallen, chances are FDNY would have been the Incident Commanders and running the entire operation. OEM--Office of Emergency Management--probably would not have been that involved in it, because it would have been the FDNY. When the towers fell and all of the firemen were killed, including the upper echelon of the Department, there was chaos, you know. I can imagine, even though I wasn't there, you know. It was mass confusion at the very least. So, when we were called, mutual aid--and everybody obviously at that time on Long Island knew what was up. Everybody knew at that point. All the departments of Nassau County went into Belmont Park, and we had a staging area, standing by, waiting to figure out what we were going to do. Now, every hour on the hour, we'd get like an update, what's going to happen. We had heard originally that, obviously, all of FDNY was now going to the

scene. There were other people volunteering--and I'll get to that in a minute. But, you know, procedurally-wise, we were going to be covering like Brooklyn and Queens, and leapfrogging. You know, should something happen, move up, move up, move up, so to speak. But we were waiting, and we heard, "Okay, you're going to take the Queens firehouses, and you're going to take this," and they didn't utilize it. They started taking some specific equipment, like our--Port Washington's light truck, which would be, pretty much, a big generator on wheels, with big, huge lights. That was called specifically to go into Manhattan to the scene, and that did, along with the crew that were assigned to that truck. We remained standing by until, I think it was--let's see, that happened like--I can't even--9/11 happened, what?9:45 in the morning, give or take. And we were over at Belmont till late at night. Every hour, getting--waiting and waiting, watching--and again, chaos, and sometimes we're our own worst enemies in the volunteer fire service. Suffolk County going right past us directly into the city. Guys: "I've got to go. I've got to go. I've got to go help," and just went in. So, the--and we're trying to do the right thing by doing things procedurally. So, the orders never came, and I can't remember what time it was. Give or take 1:00 a.m. "Okay, guys, go home. We're going to call you back at 6:00 a.m. or we'll going to call you back tomorrow morning and find out what's going on." At that point, we left. I came back. Myself and Scott Wood--Woody, who I work with as a cop as well as the firehouse, or fireman--we said, "Let's go. Let's go in." That was the next morning, which would have been Wednesday morning, right? A couple of guys I work with in the Police Department, and a couple of other firemen:"Let's go into Manhattan. We're going in." We had the fire gear. We went in as firemen to help in the

rescue effort. Because there was conflict of what was happening. Should we go in? Aand shouldn't we go in? They're screaming for help, you know, and officially they're saying, "No, don't come in." But unofficially, all the guys--because we could talk to them however we found out through cell phones that were remaining, are saying, "Yeah, we need help. We need help." We're getting into conflicting reports. And that was twisting, I'll tell you. So, we ended up going in. We went to Manhattan, and I kind of, in the beginning on that day--that was Wednesday--was like the--being an officer in the Fire Department at the time, and previous officer, I kind of didn't take control of our guys. It was very unorganized, but they would--I just kind of said, "Listen, guys, just let us all--let's all stay together, you know, let's not travel and venture out on our own. If we get broken apart, let's meet at this specific location, and should anything else fall, this is the way we're goin.," And we had contingency plans like that, which was good. So, it was rough--that first day working there, because we got there early, like 6:00 a.m., and that was still in the survivability of anybody who was trapped in this type of a collapse. And it was rough. I mean, we were there, and we thought we heard people and, you know, there was some type of communications. We were digging and we thought we heard, and we had to take out--we were involved with some body removal. Woody is in a great photo. Not a photo. It's a magazine centerfold and fold-out--it's three pages wide--of *Time Magazine*, and we have that hanging at work. I was just going to try to figure out, get a reproduction of that and get a frame for him. He's clear as a bell. Unfortunately, the unfortunate part of the picture, it's carrying a body draped in the American flag on a Stokes out of the rubble. But, again, that's a situation similar to with Bobby Dayton, a

similar situation with Eddie Byrne, when he got assassinated -- extreme emotion initially. But you deal with it. You learn to deal with it. I mean, I guess it's hard, you know, but you deal with it. I move on. I'm a realist. I don't know how to describe it. I mean, it's unfortunate. I'll never forget it. I hope they'll learn from it, so it can never be, you know, done again. But you have to keep going. You have to--it's life. You've got to keep living. While I'm still breathing, I like living. I don't want to go anywhere (laughs).
What are you going to do. What else?

Q: Okay. What else do you think ... [INTERRUPTION] ... We want funny stories you have (laughs).

RDR: I'm looking at the pictures of when I was--this was when I was--remember I told you there's a title called Chief Engineer.

Q: Yes.

RDR: The ranking in the Department, in the company--at the highest is the Captain, then the First Lieutenant, then the Second Lieutenant, then the Chief Engineer, and then Assistant Engineers first through four. We're looking at a photo where I'm the Chief Engineer and those were my assistants. And that was the photo when we got all the trucks ready for Memorial Day. And every Memorial Day, there is a big huge clean-up. And it's the--like inspection of the year of the Chiefs, for the parade, for the community. And these trucks

are twenty years old; you want them to look new. Well, that photo, what happened was is I was the Chief Engineer, and all the guys, I had them--and I'm a little bit of a perfectionist at times and a pain in the neck and very meticulous--all the wooden-handled axes, I had them sand down with abrasive sandpaper and whatnot. The aluminum ladders, they had them scuff pads. I wanted them scuffed down, shined, and get the dirt off of. Then I wanted--then, the proper way to get the sand off the axe handle is to use--pour linseed oil, as it's called, to preserve and use, because if you have your paint on, and you work all the surfaces, you can cause blisters on your hand if you're using your bare hands, which you shouldn't be. You should have gloves on. Or any type of other material could be conductive of electricity, believe it or not, electricity. If the axe hits it, you're using an axe and you hit an electric line and whatnot. So, anyway, with all the chemicals and the filings of the metal and the wood filings from the sandpaper, the guys all threw a pile of rags into the center of the floor down at the firehouse on Channel Drive--Protection's annex--while I was Engineer. And we left for the day. That was after a work night. Well, the next morning, one of the Board of Trustees, who is retired now and he's moved to the Firemen's Home on the Hudson--Arthur Poole--"Sassy," as everybody knows him--he came down to the Annex that morning and smelled something funny. Peter Zwerlein was Chief at the time. And so he called the Chief, and he says, "Peter," he goes, "you know, I smelled something funny. Do you think you could just take a look at it when you get a chance?" I think that's how it went. I don't think he put any other emphasis other than that. And that was in the morning that he had gone down there. So, Peter, who works locally, as you know, at his lunch hour, ended up going

down to the Channel Drive firehouse. Coincidentally, I'm up at the main house firehouse with Mr. Poole who just told me he smelled something funny and one thing and the other. Well, Peter Zwerlein went to open the door, and the smoke from the fire that was burning inside the firehouse was down to the floor. The rags with all the chemicals and dust -- spontaneous combustion ignited, and the firehouse was on fire (laughs). So, hence, in that picture -- Engineer Raymond Rags Ryan. Which is a story I forgot to tell you about in the bio (laughs). Maybe I was trying to omit it.

Q: So what year was that?

RDR: Oh, geez. I was Captain in '93. Lieutenant two years before that, '91. Lieutenant before that, '89. Chief Engineer and all that -- had to be like '88. Yeah, '87 or '88. So, luckily, it's a concrete floor, concrete walls. No materials around to burn. It was just the pile of rags. And it burned the Terrazzo floor. And I'll never get over being embarrassed about that. [END OF TAPE TWO; SIDE A; BEGIN SIDE B]

One time, when I joined the Fire Department--oh, boy (laughs), I shouldn't say it like that--I was the last guy in my group of friends to drink. I didn't really drink a lot. And I was a young, skinny kid. And not illegal drinking; it's nothing illegal--I was eighteen. I don't condone drinking. In fact, I've been sober nine years. Back then, as an eighteen-year-old, I would drink with my friends. And the one time I went to upstate for a competition--a state tournament-- that was the first time I ever drank. And it was a--we--

that's when I--we had taken the third place in New York State and almost took second place. Oh, I'm sorry. Fourth place, and almost took second place. And I was so happy. And I tried this juice mixture that they made (laughs). Well, it tasted like pink lemonade, and I threw up all sorts of different colors. I was green, and here I am--I've never felt so sick in my life. But, that's all ... [INTERRUPTION] ... I have a funny story -- when we were going through the list and I was spelling Rich La Pera's name. On my wedding day, he was in my wedding party, and my family was all together at my apartment. We're getting ready. And one of the--Edgie and Bobby were supposed to go pick up--when they went to go get their tuxes--it was a place in Mineola--they were supposed to get Rich's tuxedo. So, they did. But we called Rich and said, "Rich, we forgot to get your steams. We forgot to get your shoes. The guy says he's going to wait. You've got to go get your shoes. You've got to get there now. He's closing in five minutes." Oh, he was so angry with us. We were kidding, and he went and took his motorcycle and zoomed over there and the place was closed. He was going to kill us (laughs). ... [END OF RECORDED INTERVIEW] ...