

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

Transcript Of Oral History Interview With

Daniel S. Salerno  
Atlantic Hook & Ladder 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 October the 21st, 2004. This is an interview with Daniel S. Salerno. My name is Margaret Dildilian. The interview is taking place at the Port Washington Public Library. Please pronounce your name.

Daniel S. Salerno: My name is Daniel Scott Salerno.

Q: Which fire company are you affiliated with?

DSS: I'm a member of Atlantic Hook and Ladder Company Number One, Port Washington Fire Department.

Q: Do you have a nickname?

DSS: Yeah, a lot of people call me "Danny Boy."

Q: Is there a history to that?

DSS: No, it's just probably because I'm the youngest one in my family--youngest son in the family. And my brother, they call "Johnny Boy," and so I'm "Danny Boy."

Q: Does it have an Irish connection?

DSS: No (laughs). Not at all. Italian family.

Q: An Italian family. And, give me a little of the history of who's in the Fire Department in your family?

DSS: Well, my grandfather [Jesse Salerno] started, I believe, and I'm not sure who before him. But my grandfather was a member for many years. Ran all the way up the ranks to Chief--Chief of the Fire Department. He passed away when I was around fourteen years old--somewhere in there.

Q: Do you remember anything about him?

DSS: Oh, I remember everything about him. I was his favorite grandchild. You know, whatever I wanted "Danny Boy" got, basically was Grandpa's--his nickname was "Curly." He was a very well known and respected man. And people didn't mess with him too much, you know (laughs). He was a brutal guy, I guess, you know.

Q: What was his first name?

DSS: Jesse Salerno. Jesse James.

Q: And why was he called "Curly?"

DSS: Good question. I really haven't really looked into it. You know, I don't know if he had curly hair when he was a lot younger. I never even thought--I know everybody used to call him "Curly;" that's what I always called him, too.

Q: And if you were his favorite, did he take you to fires with him?

DSS: Well, he used to take me to school. He was a union rep for the local union around here. Operators Union, I believe it was. So he always had a big Cadillac, and, you know, he drove it around and he would bring me back and forth to school, or wherever I wanted to go. Spoil me, I guess you.

Q: When was he Chief, do you know?

DSS: I don't know the years. I'm not really sure offhand. In the '60s, I believe.

Q: And your father?

DSS: Yeah, my father, John Salerno, they call him "Bubba." He was nicknamed "Bubba." I'm sure a lot of people know him, also. He's a well known guy. And again, he went up the ranks and became Chief and did everything he had to do in the fire service.

Q: And how was your relationship with both of them, regarding the Fire Department? What did you--what lessons did they leave you?

DSS: Well, you--ever since I grew up, you know, the Fire Department's been my life. You know, every bit of it. You know, well, I remember it as a little kid, just on Sundays going to the firehouse and being at the firehouse. And I lived right next door to the firehouse for most of my life on Avenue A. That's my house right there. And actually, that--the land that firehouse was built on was donated by my grandfather and his family to the fire service. Yeah, well, actually, I don't know if it was really donated or they sold it for a minimal cost. I'm not positive about that.

Q: And where was this located?

DSS: On Avenue A, the Atlantic's Annex, they call it--the Avenue A firehouse. But ...

Q: What memories do you have of that?

DSS: Memories of that? Just being able to play there all the time, as a kid. Living right next door; my grandfather lived in the back of the firehouse and we lived on the side of the firehouse. And in the back of the firehouse is a big parking area. So, as a kid growing up, we were--the neighborhood kids would get in the back. We played dodge ball and all kinds of fun stuff.

Q: Did you play firefighters?

DSS: Yeah, actually. Growing up, as probably we'll get into the-big into the Fire Department Drill Team activities. And my grandfather was on the drill team; my father was on the drill team. And my brother was on the drill team, and now I've been on the drill team for nineteen years now. And it's been a very big part of my life and something I've grown to enjoy and love. And my wife and my kids love it, and it makes it a lot easier that way, with the time I put into it. But, very--a lot of memories of, as a kid, practicing stuff in the back of the firehouse, and the racing team was...

Q: Why do you think that the Salerno family is so involved in firefighting? I think your dad, back in '80--1987, said that there was about seventy-five family groups in the Fire Department. Why do you think that is?

DSS: I guess just, you know, through your family line. You know, like my grandfather did it; my father did it. And you just, you know, you learned from them and you experience what they experience, basically. And, you know, I don't have many bad memories of the Fire Department, you know. I just--everything--I've been brought up with it, and it's like my--you know, the Fire Department's my family. It's another part of my family. That's the way it's been for a long time.

Q: Who really influenced you the most?

DSS: Probably my father. Definitely my father. And I know my father had--you know, his biggest influence was his father, and I think just the way, you know, hand-me-downs, you know (laughs). You learn from--you learn from your elders.

Q: And what is the most outstanding thing about your father that you like.

DSS: Everything. Everything about my father. I always wanted to be like my father, and I think I am a little bit like my father. And I know I have his little bit of attitude, too, but ...

Q: What kind of attitude is that?

DSS: Oh, you know, it's just--I don't know. I don't know how to explain it. But a confident attitude. You know, we're very confident people.

Q: That is important in the Fire Department?

DSS: I think so. I think so. As a--you know, I went up the ranks of office up to as far as Lieutenant, and then I didn't go past the Lieutenant spot. But, if you want to be an officer and you want to have some kind of respect in the fire service, I think you have to be confident, and it's a dangerous living, you know. If people think you're afraid of doing

things, or anything like that, you know, they're not going to follow you. I try to like be a little bit of a leader, if I can, you know. I'm not much of a follower.

Q: So how did your father and grandfather sort of teach you to lead? Can you--what qualities did they instill, besides confidence?

DSS: Again (laughs), I'm not sure how to answer the question. Just--I guess a positive image of yourself, and positive expectations about what you're doing.

Q: Did your grandfather ever tell you stories about the Fire Department when you were little? Any outstanding stories you can remember?

DSS: None that I could probably repeat on the tape here (laughs). No, none. None. I mean, yeah, that's a long time ago with my grandfather. But as far as ...

Q: But at fourteen--at fourteen, could you remember anything that he said?

DSS: Yeah, but I really don't, unfortunately.

Q: And any stories that your dad would have told you when you were little?

DSS: There were so many--you know, every time you walk into the firehouse, another story comes up and ...

Q: Are they fire-related, or are they ...

DSS: Some of them. Some of them, they aren't--the Fire Department has changed a lot. You know, there's a lot more--it was a lot closer years ago. The men were a lot closer. But as times have changed, where people, you know--it's very hard to put your time needs in, you know, the service time needed and required now with the service. Guys nowadays, I don't think they're as close as they used to be.

Q: How do you think that can be remedied?

DSS: I don't know if it can be. You know, especially in towns like Port Washington, you know, the price of housing and taxes and all that. People just--you know, not many people can just work one job, and especially a young person, and be able to afford to live in the town. You know, you're working two to three jobs to be able to stay here. And with that, you know, it eats up all your time. And if you have a family, you've got to put time towards the family also.

Q: Why do you think that they love firefighting so much and why do you love firefighting so much?

DSS: I guess the camaraderie. I've met more people than I'd ever believe I would meet. And there's no place I can go without meeting somebody I know from another fire department.

It has a lot to do with the racing that I do--Fire Department racing. And I can go anywhere. I've been in Texas and ran across people that either know of me or know people that, you know, do the sport that I do. And it's a big part of it--knowing that you can go somewhere and as long as you have a fire department emblem on your shirt, you're welcome into a lot of places. So, there's a little bit of respect in that.

Q: What was training like for you in 1985 when you joined?

DSS: It wasn't half of what it is now. And I guess I'm lucky by that. Of course, when I got in, I was still in high school. I got in my senior year of high school. So, very into the Fire Department, you know. Loved every bit of it. Couldn't get me away from the firehouse. But the training requirements were--and there's a probationary period which you go through, and Thursday nights at the firehouse were what we called work night. And you'd spend Thursday nights at the firehouse. And Tuesday nights were drill nights, when we would go either over to the county service, Fire Service Academy, and do some training there. But not half of what's going on and what the guys have to do now. It wasn't that bad. You know, I actually got in at a time where it just was a lot easier, is how I can put it.

Q: What did it feel like for you to be a rookie?

DSS: It--for me, it wasn't much of a big deal, because even before I got in, was actually voted a member, I was probably at the firehouse more than half the firemen that were there, anyway. So I always spent--my father was there, so I always spent time with him. And I would even go there, for years prior, and help clean up the trucks and do everything that the other firemen would do. I just couldn't get on the trucks and go to the fire. That's all.

Q: When you joined, were they still standing on the back of the fire trucks?

DSS: Yeah, and it was ...

Q: What was that like? Can you tell us how that felt for you?

DSS: Oh, there's nothing like it. It's a wonderful thing. I remember we have--we used to have an old ...in my company over at Atlantic Hook and Ladder, the truck was called 8-5-2-2. Twenty-two. And it had a water tank on the back. And with the water--the weight of the water--the truck would bounce, and the thing--you'd hit a bump and you would bounce off the back of that and be jumping up and down. And it was a technique to be able to ride on the back step of the truck.

Q: What was the technique involved?

DSS: Just to feel when the truck was going to bounce so you didn't get bounced off, you know.

You had to like basically bend your knees and ride with the truck. But it was just a lot fun on the truck, you know.

Q: How did you keep your gear on and hold on?

DSS: Just held on, you know. You just, you got used to it. I can't tell you how. I don't know how (laughs). It was definitely different and definitely a technique, you know. Just holding on and ...

Q: And how many would be on that back step?

DSS: Oh, you could probably get up to four guys on the back step. We used to push each other out of the way to get there.

Q: Was there a fight to get to the back?

DSS: Not a fight. It was a little fun. You always--you always wanted to ride on the back step. And that was part of being ...

Q: Well, what did it feel like? What kind of a rush did you feel inside when you were on that back step?

DSS: Excitement, you know. Anxiety. You know, looking forward--well, not really looking forward to it, but not knowing what you were going to be getting into soon enough, you know, at a given call. To try, you know--for me, I'm always--every time there's a call, I'm always thinking--trying to think it ahead, you know. Think of the next step of what I've got to do to prepare myself, and a lot of things go through your mind, and, you know, it's not all good things. But ...

Q: Did fear play a part?

DSS: Yes.

Q: And how did you deal with that on the back step?

DSS: Well, fear for me started playing more of a part at the--we had a few more major incidents in this town. We had a fireman killed, and I remember the one time I was probably the most scared in the fire service is when we had the fire right down on the corner here at Shields. I was a Lieutenant at the time, and I went down into the basement when we first got there.

Q: Tell me about that particular incident.

DSS: It was--I remember it was Thursday night, because we were all at the firehouse. And a call came over, and we jumped on the truck and we were there. And it's just smoke in the building. They said they could feel the heat. So, as an officer who--there's only one way to get into the basement of the building. There's a little stairway behind where they have the cash register. So me and a couple of other guys--and I think John O'Reilly was the Chief at the time--we went down into the basement. And I was with--there was probably four or five of us, maybe a few more, they had a lot of florescent lights in the ceiling. So, when the lights were on, we were looking around trying to find where this fire was. Couldn't find where the fire was. And we looked down there probably, you know, seemed like an hour, but it was probably ten, fifteen minutes. And we turn around and we look up, and we can't see the lights anymore. The fire was banking down on top of us, and the smoke was coming out on top of us. So, at that point, we just said, you know, because nobody knew there was a light down there, you know. But it wasn't worth our risking our lives anymore to try to find the fire anymore. So we made our way back to the stairs and we got out. And by the time we got up the stairs, the fire had pretty much started to get out of control.

Q: And did they--did you know what started it?

DSS: No. I don't think they ever found out. But it was definitely a weird experience knowing that you only had one way out, and through all the chemicals and all the stuff that was in that basement, you know. It made you think a lot, you know.

Q: Was that in the '80s?

DSS: Yeah. Yeah, I think so. The late '80s, I believe.

Q: Did Shields ever complain about the fire company not coming soon enough?

DSS: I don't know if they ever complained about us not coming soon enough. I know there were complaints. What the complaints were, I don't know. But, I mean, we couldn't have been there any faster. We were all around the corner. You know, the trucks were there within a minute easy. It was--actually, for a fire to happen, it was probably the best time a fire could ever happen, because you got every fireman in town in every firehouse.

Q: There was no loss of life?

DSS: No.

Q: Was that one of your earliest experiences?

DSS: I'm not sure if the fire on Plum Point. There was a big fire there. There used to be a bathhouse on Plum Point. If that was before or after Shields fire. But that was a very memorable fire, just because the way the fire was burning was just incredible. It was just a big ball of flames, the whole building. You had propane tanks blowing up and ...

Q: What part did you play in that one?

DSS: I was on a master stream line, which is a, you know, a big--I don't believe there was any--ever an interior attack on the building. Everything was just from the outside, just putting, pouring water on, you know, trying to protect the outside basically. And I was on the hose line with a couple of other guys, and just all I remember is these tanks blowing up and shooting up in the air like rockets. And it was just crazy, you know. I'd never seen anything like it in my life.

Q: When you trained for Atlantic Hook and Ladder, did you learn a specific skill back then? Were you either a ladder man or a hose man or how did it work?

DSS: As, well, they'd consider us truckies. You know, truck work is, you know, getting on the roofs of the building. You know, with our ladder trucks, we go out on the roofs. And, you know, you got to be involved with opening roofs and ventilation and a lot of building fire. And then, another thing was when I became Lieutenant, it's--you're on the first search team most of the time--going into the building and searching for victims in there. It gets pretty crazy. And most of the time, really just go in there without the hose line. You're going in searching for something. You try to find the fire first of all, and then while you're looking for the fire, you're looking for victims. It's difficult (laughs). I don't know how to explain it.

Q: How difficult is it to maneuver those ladders on the trucks?

DSS: Well, it's not very difficult at all. Everything's all mechanical now and hydraulics. And a lot of times--well, most of the times, we'll be using ground ladders, so we had training with the ladders on how to use the right ladder and the positioning of the ladders.

Q: What's a right ladder? I mean, how do you distinguish that?

DSS: Size-wise. You know, every ladder is--we have ladders that are twenty feet, twenty-four feet, you know, and up. And you don't want to put a twenty foot ladder when you have to go twenty-four feet. You know, you have to pick the right size ladder for where you're going to be going. And sometimes it's just hit or miss, you know. But most of the time we get it right.

Q: What's the difference between how your father's generation handled, or your grandfather's handled a fire like that and how you handle it?

DSS: I don't really think there is much difference. I--well, nowadays, we have, you know--you know, they didn't have electric fans, or I don't believe they did. And, you know, to help with ventilation and stuff like that. And, you know, I guess we've modernized.

Modernization, excuse me, makes things a little easier for us. The tools probably got a little more, you know, updated.

Q: And were there any other memorable fires you can think of right now?

DSS: Well, the fire at--the Cat Lady fire, where Bobby Dayton was killed.

Q: Were you at that fire?

DSS: Yeah, I was at that fire. I was out there.

Q: What were you doing?

DSS: What was I doing? I was actually in the bucket to help on the top of the ladder truck. The tower ladder bucket. And just sitting there. We were pouring water on it. And then, all I can remember is the call that one of our guys was trapped. Sitting--basically, I felt, you know, my biggest thing was feeling helpless, because I was sitting in a bucket and knowing that, you know, you want to go in and see what you can do. But, it ended up, they brought Bobby out to the roof, and we were going to lift him down to the ground with the bucket. But, time was a factor, and to rig it all up and to get him down that way wasn't feasible with the time that we had, because of the condition he was in at that time. So, they brought him down the ladder, and I'll never forget that. Just being purely helpless, you know.

Q: And how did that make you feel about you being a firefighter?

DSS: Oh, it scared the "heck" out of me.

Q: How do you deal with it? How do you--what do you do? How do you react?

DSS: Oh, just try to put it out of your mind, you know. You just try to go forward with everything. I don't know.

Q: Have you ever carried a lucky charm with you to a fire?

DSS: No. I don't believe in any of that.

Q: Tell me how you went from the different offices that you've held to Sergeant at Arms.

DSS: Well, I went through the ranks as a line officer, which are the actual firefighting officers. And I made it up to Lieutenant. And then I ran in an election and I lost the election. And ...

Q: Why do you think you lost the election?

DSS: I don't know. Probably because, at the time, I wasn't really concerned about the position as much as, you know, the other person. The other person just happens to be our Chief right now--Christopher Bollerman--who ran against me. He did good. He made it up to Chief, you know, so I took it--to me, in looking back, it's probably some of the--you know, one of the best things that happened to me, because it gave me more time to concentrate on other things in my life. And it's a very demanding--any position in the fire service now is very demanding. Takes a lot of time--meetings and so, if you had a family, just, you know, it's easier not to be an officer.

Q: And do you have a family?

DSS: Yes. I have two little girls now. I have a four year old and a one and a half year old.

Q: Do you ever think you want to be Chief later?

DSS: Years ago, yeah. Nowadays, not a chance.

Q: Why?

DSS: There's just too much involved in it. It's too much time. And I can't see myself, you know, giving that time. If I was going to do it, I'd want to be able to do it a hundred percent, and I just can't do it a hundred percent. I'm too involved with other things in my

life. I give this fire department as much as I can, and, unfortunately, it's not as much as a lot of other people do. But, I'm kind of lucky, because I work and during work, I'm allowed to go to fires during the day. So I get to put in time during the day when other people can't, which is needed in this town. A lot of guys are working out of town and really can't go--get to go to the call during the day, and us lucky guys are allowed to go. So, that helps.

Q: How does your present job help you go to fires? What do you do?

DSS: I work for the Sewer District. The Water Pollution Control District. And I'm a foreman of a pump crew, which is in charge of all the pumping stations around town. We have fifteen of them. And when we're not busy and I can fit it in, basically we are allowed to go to the calls. It's actually in our contract. I mean, we can't stop what we're doing at work and go to a fire, but if we're in between jobs and we have the time, then we are allowed to go.

Q: So when that horn blows, what decides whether you go or not? Whether you're busy?

DSS: Yeah, well, me being a foreman, it depends on what my guys are doing and what I'm doing at the time, if I have, you know, work scheduled. But if we can fit it in, we fit it in.

Q: And when that horn does blow, what is the routine? If you're going to go, what happens?

DSS: I just get in the car and go to the firehouse. If I have a work truck, then my work truck.

Q: And when you go what happens? What are the routines you do to go to the fire? Do you first grab your gear? How do you ...

DSS: Yes.

Q: ... what are the steps?

DSS: Yeah. Nowadays, we, during the days, we all meet at one firehouse. Everybody from all the companies. There's one truck from each of the companies in the main firehouse over here.

Q: Where is the main firehouse?

DSS: On Carlton Avenue. Atlantic Hook and Ladder's main firehouse. And, we get there and we gear up, and we get on the first due truck that you can fit on, basically. It used to be that the guys from Atlantic would get on Atlantic's trucks, and guys from Protection would get on Protection trucks. But nowadays, with the manpower that we have, you know, the first guys there get on the first due truck. Most of the time, it would be an engine, because you've got to put water on a fire. You can't beat a fire out with a ladder.

We would like to, but we can't. And, if you're there first, you get on the engine. If the guys beat you there, you get on the next truck--next available truck.

Q: And how long does that generally take, from work to being on the road to a fire? How long?

DSS: That depends. Well, for my work could be anywhere around town. Most of my day is driving around to all these pump stations. So, depending on where I am. But within minutes.

Q: You've received awards. Have you received awards?

DSS: Yeah, I received the Silver Medal of Valor through the County.

Q: And tell me about how you received that.

DSS: There was a fire on Bernard Street. It was in--I know it was January. It was snowing out. It was a really bad night. I think it was '96. January of '96. And I was living at my--above my parents' house, in an apartment. And a fire came over, and I was on the first due rescue truck going into the fire scene. And when we got there, there was a report--the police were in the back of the house, and they said they saw silhouettes of two bodies,

or two people in the window on the upstairs floor. And me and my Captain, who was Jimmy Delle-Occono at the time ...

Q: What was his name?

DSS: Jimmy Delle-Occono. Tom McDonough set a ladder up. Broke the window with a ladder. And he started going up, but he injured himself somehow. So, Jimmy and myself scaled up the ladder. Jimmy went in first. And I followed Jimmy through a window. And then really the building was burning so much, but this was the only room that wasn't burning. And we got into the room and searched around, and the fire was actually starting to come through the door in the bed--it was a bedroom. And I went over, and there was a bunch of clothes on the door. I removed the clothes on the door and closed the door so the fire wasn't coming in. And Jimmy kept searching. And Jimmy yelled over to me that he found a victim--a lady. And so I went over, assisted him. And him and the lady to--a couple of firemen came up the ladder to help us also. I think it was Tom McDonough and Donald Reese. And we, in turn, handed the lady to them on the ladder, and they brought her down. And we continued to do another search. And on the secondary search, we found a second victim, which was a little girl. And we picked her up and handed her out to a couple of other fireman. I don't remember who was on the ladder at the time. And they brought her down. And we tried to go in again, but the fire had made its way through the door and pretty much threw us out the window. I remember I was trying to turn around to get my feet on the ladder and to get out the window, and my Scott Pack--my air pack--got caught on the window sill. So, I put

myself back into the building and I actually went out the window head first. And the guys caught me going out. We were lucky. We got the people out, but they didn't live, unfortunately.

Q: Did you go out head first?

DSS: Uh huh, yeah.

Q: How--you didn't land on the ground?

DSS: No, the guys on the ladder, they actually set up another ladder next to the ladder we went into the window. And the guys caught me going out. You know, it was--I don't even remember it. That's what they--you know, everything happened so fast at the time. That's what they told me I did. I don't remember doing it.

Q: So who and when did you get the Silver Medal of Valor? Did they present it to you at a special occasion?

DSS: Yeah, there was an awards ceremony that the County gives. It happened at the Roslyn High School. It was like the following year. And it was an honor. It was nice. The Chief's office put in a letter, you know, recognizing us. They gave us, you know, silver bands to put around your neck and medallions.

Q: Who was the Chief at the time?

DSS: John O'Reilly.

Q: What other awards have you gotten?

DSS: Let me see. The High Point Awards for many years.

Q: Can you explain what that is?

DSS: Well, every time you go to a fire call, you get a point for a fire. And I just happen to be working in town all the time, and I'm close to firehouses many a time. So I was lucky, where I could go to a lot of calls, and for many years I went to the most calls in my category.

Q: And how many were those?

DSS: How many years that I received the awards, or how many fire calls?

Q: How many years and how many fire calls?

DSS: Many years. Probably--I've been in nineteen years now, and I've probably received the award fourteen or fifteen times. So I ...

Q: So how many points do you have to get to get this award?

DSS: You just have to be--there's categories, from the years--how many years you've been in the fire service. And the last--maybe I can't--not telling the truth. The last five years, there's only three of us that are in my category, so it makes it a little bit easier to get the High Point Award. But ...

Q: And who are the five in the category?

DSS: I don't even know. To tell you the truth, I don't even know.

Q: So, the five of you have the highest points.

DSS: No, in my category is all--I'm--basically, it's a competition between me and four other guys, and I work in town, so it's a lot easier for me to get these High Point Awards, but in the last few years anyway.

Q: And what do they give you for that?

DSS: You get a plaque or a statue or something to recognize that I did it. And it's nice. My basement's covered with them (laughs).

Q: How does your wife feel about all of these plaques and statues?

DSS: Oh, she doesn't mind. The basement's mine. She gets the upstairs (laughs).

Q: Explain what you do as a drill captain.

DSS: Well, the drill team is a Fire Department competition team that we compete against all others--there's about seventy racing teams in New York State. And we have a couple of race cars that we compete. We go down, and you go down with the race car, you dig a ladder in the ground, a guy climbs up. There's eight different contests that we do. And, it's just ...

Q: Eight with the ladder?

DSS: No, there's only--there's like--really, we could be here for three hours talking about racing. And (laughs) quite honestly, I don't have that time. But it's a competition between the firemen and ...

Q: And you are President of--what is it? The Nassau County--tell us what that is. Tell us what you're the President of?

DSS: Well, I was the President of the Drill Team Captains Association, which is an organization that the membership of each different Fire Department team would belong to. And it's just to discuss rules and discuss activities of the racing season. And I went up the ranks. I started as Sergeant at Arms of that, and I went up to the rank of President. I believe I was--at the time when I first started in this position as Sergeant at Arms, there were four Vice Presidencies, and then you went up to President. And when I became President, I eliminated all these Vice Presidents. I thought it was too much. So I was the last one that had to do ten, twelve years of office to be able to get to President, and I eliminated that. So for somebody to do it now, it's a little bit easier than when I did it. But ...

Q: It took you twelve years to become President?

DSS: Yeah, just about twelve years.

Q: And how long does it take now?

DSS: Guys would normally, everybody does two year terms. But nowadays, the guys only do one year terms. So they can probably go up the ranks in about five years.

Q: And what are the pluses of being the President of this?

DSS: There are none. Nothing but headaches (laughs).

Q: Tell me some of the headaches.

DSS: You have--well, in Nassau County, there are somewhere close to thirty racing teams.

And everyone always has a problem. So you're in charge of all the problems, trying to solve them.

Q: What kind of problems could they have?

DSS: People don't like rules, and certain people want to not abide by the rules. So there's some

...

Q: A fight (laughs)?

DSS: ... discipline problems, I guess you can say. Basically, it's just organizing everybody.

And I was lucky. I made, you know, kind of made sure that I had the right people underneath me, and I delegated a lot of the authority that way. So I had a good crew that worked with me.

Q: What kind of rules would they not like?

DSS: (Laughs). You know, it's--you're dealing with thirty different, you know, at a meeting there's sixty people. And everybody has their own opinion and everybody has their own way of doing things. So, it's just trying to make the best for everybody. You just try to ...

Q: You mean a firefighter doesn't follow rules?

DSS: (Laughs). Of course they do. You know, in their own way, everybody follows the rules. Just--people like to pinch the rules a certain way, I guess.

Q: And you keep them straight?

DSS: I think I did a good job of doing that, yeah.

Q: Are you still President?

DSS: No, no. I was President from '97 to '99. Now, I'm actually on a committee that's called the rules committee. And we determine the rules now. It's another thing that keeps me busy and away from my wife. And she loves me for that (laughs).

Q: How does she cope with being a firefighter's wife? What are her reactions?

DSS: She--she supports me a hundred and ten percent in everything I do. And she enjoys my--the racing part of it just as much as I do, and she wouldn't be with me if she didn't, because, you know, it's a very big part of my world is the racing team. And it's not--most--for most guys that race, it's basically a summer deal, where you're racing from April to Labor Day. And for me, it's year-round. You know, I take pride in making sure our equipment's in the best shape and doing everything I can to make sure we have a good competitive drill team on the track.

Q: And how do you keep fit? In the Fire Department's basement work-out?

DSS: No. I just try to watch what I eat and keep busy at work. And during the summer with the racing, it's a lot of running and a lot of, you know, where you run a bucket brigade contest where you're lifting a fifty pound bucket up in the air. And stuff like that.

Q: How do you train for that? You just keep doing it?

DSS: Yeah. Practice and practice and practice. You know, that's about it.

Q: And how many times have you won?

DSS: We've--I've never won a drill. The best I've ever done was come in in third place a few times. Then, we came in, in 1990, we actually had a very good competitive team. Came in third place in the New York State drill that year, which is some seventy teams there and it's an accomplishment to be able to do that.

Q: If someone wanted to watch the actual drill team, when is the best time to watch them?

DSS: Nowadays, they actually put it on television. I believe it's on like Channel 19 on Fridays; they do it every Friday. So you can watch the competitions on TV. But, other than that, during the summer, it's basically every Saturday, all different locations around the Island, and upstate once a year. And there's actually a website. It's FDRacing-dot-com. You can go in there and you can see the schedule, or you can--there's links to--every team has their own website. And it's interesting; you can see what's going on.

Q: And are there awards given to the drill teams?

DSS: Well, each competition, during a drill, there's five places awarded. First through fifth place for each different event. And then at the end of the year, at first--if you get first place in the competition, you're awarded a certain amount of points. First place is five points, down to fifth place, it would be one point. And at the end of the year, the team that accumulated the most points, there's a dinner, and you, basically, you're crowned the Nassau County champion. But that one drill that we have is the New York State drill,

and for that one day, whoever wins that is crowned the New York State champion. And our team did it in '69 and '73--became the State champions--which was a very--it's an incredible accomplishment. You know, once you're a champion, you're always a champion, and you're remembered by it. So, it's nice.

Q: They have taken the three companies and made one Road Runners. Why was that done?

DSS: Membership's a big part of it. It was hard to field three teams. I would believe money would be a big part of it. And it's costly, you know. It's getting to be costly. So we do a--we try to offset the cost by doing fundraisers. We do a big raffle every year. That makes us a nice amount of money. And we sell Christmas trees, and between Christmas trees and raffles and all this stuff, we help ourselves out with our budget.

Q: Where do you sell these?

DSS: Christmas trees, we sell down at Protection Engine Company's annex, which is on Channel Drive. And it's a nice little money maker. And, you know, give a little, I guess, help to the public. We give them discounted trees, and we make some money for ourselves, also. So it helps out the costs.

Q: Did either your father or grandfather have a big place on the drill team, as well?

DSS: My grandfather ran, at the time, back then, it was the Rowdies Drill Team. It used to be the Rowdies, the Runts, and the Rangers. And, I believe, in '74, they combined and made the Road Runners. But, back then, my grandfather pretty much ran the Rowdies. He was a driver. He drove the race cars. And my father was on the team. He was a nozzle man, and probably one of the best nozzle men in the state at the time.

Q: What makes a good nozzle man?

DSS: Quick hands. You know, being able to get on a nozzle and, you know, hit the target, where you're shooting the water stream fifteen, twenty feet to hit an eight by eight square. And my father was very good at it. I can't let him know that; he'll never let me hear the end of it. But he was very good at it (laughs). Again, I, you know, he was probably considered one of the best in the state at the time. Besides some other guys from Port Washington also. There's a lot of very good nozzle men from Port Washington at the time. But ...

Q: What is your strength?

DSS: I actually did the opposite. I ran on the hydrant end. And I'd hook up to the hydrant. And I did that okay, I guess.

Q: You'd have to do this in a certain amount of time?

DSS: The trucks go down--they run a--depending on--there's two different trucks. One is a small truck that goes fast for a longer distance. And then, there's a bigger truck--we call it the B truck, and it's a shorter distance, but because of the shorter distance, you're not stepping on the brakes as much. It's basically what we consider--what we called a hot-drop, or getting off the truck hotter. And it's just--again, we could talk about racing forever (laughs). It's just a passion of mine. And I ran hydrant for many years. Actually, last year was the first year I didn't run. I ran for seventeen, eighteen years, on the hydrant spot.

Q: So you were the hydrant, and your father was the hose man, and your grandfather was what?

DSS: My grandfather drove.

Q: And drove. He drove.

DSS: And my father actually ran nozzle with my grandfather driving. I never raced with my father. My father--but my brother raced with me.

Q: Your brother is who?

DSS: John Salerno. John Junior. And he never got off the trucks, my brother. I don't know why. He never got into doing that. I was the--I guess, the crazy one getting off the trucks. I did all right for myself, I guess.

Q: Leaving the drill team, now, going back to when you first came into the Fire Department, what was your first fire call like? ... [INTERRUPTION] ...

DSS: In fact, we were just talking about it, but not on tape. But I was living with my parents, and I was still in high school and very anxious to go to my first call and basically sitting up after I got in the night at the meeting I was elected in. Really, you're just waiting for your first call, so you can go on the call. So it was I was home; I was in bed. And the tones came over--the call came over. And I--we lived right next to the firehouse. So I got up, got my clothes on, and ran next door. I was the first one in the firehouse. Nobody--I'm sitting there waiting for guys to show up. One guy showed up, you know, a couple minutes later. And I'm putting my gear on, and the guys got on the truck and they left, and they left without me (laughs). So, I was the first one there and I missed the truck. They just took off without me (laughs).

Q: Has that happened before to people?

DSS: I don't know if it's happened before to people. It was just--it was weird. I don't know why I missed the truck, or I guess I just was all rambunctious at the time and not knowing

what was going on. You know, trying to take my time and make sure I put my gear on right, and they jumped on the truck and took off.

Q: Were you teased about that?

DSS: Always. Always.

Q: To this day?

DSS: Yeah, there's a guy--a gentleman who's an ex-Captain--Peter Whitcomb who's a very close friend of mine--who was, I believe, the driver of the truck that day. So he jokes about it a lot.

Q: What does he say to you?

DSS: That if I'm not there, he's leaving without me (laughs). So, of course, and I keep telling him I was there and he left without me. So it doesn't matter (laughs).

Q: Tell me about the humor in the Fire Department? Who are the humorous guys?

DSS: There's many of them. There's many of them. I guess humor's a quality in firefighters that's probably necessary.

Q: Why do you think it's necessary?

DSS: Because a lot of stuff we do there's a lot of tension in what we're doing. You know, you're dealing with things that other people don't have to deal with basically. And other people wouldn't want to deal with it. And when you come back, you know, the easy way to avoid dealing with them problems, I guess, or what you've just experienced, is with humor. And everybody has their little jokes, and I don't know to go into it anymore (laughs).

Q: You wouldn't want to repeat any of the jokes?

DSS: No, not really. Not really. It's definitely a guy's thing.

Q: How rough is the language at the Fire Department?

DSS: It gets rough. It's--you're with men, and men are men (laughs). That's all I can say.

Q: And how have--now, there aren't any women in your Fire Department, but there are in Protection. Has that changed the atmosphere at all?

DSS: A little bit, but not that much, no. I think in every aspect of what's going on in the world today, you've got to watch what you're saying and you've got to, you know--politically correct (laughs). It's as simple as that.

Q: Have you ever been on a fire call with any of the women?

DSS: Yes. Yes, actually one girl--Shari--is on our racing team. She races with us. And then, there's been a few women that raced on our racing team with us. I have no problem with the women in the Fire Department. At first, there was a--the first one that joined, first woman joined--first lady that joined, Janet Kimmerly, I remember there was a, you know, a big to-do about whether she could, you know, people wanted her in there and stuff like that. But she got in, and people learned to deal with it, and, not that they have to deal with it. But they do their job, just like everybody else, and I have no problem.

Q: Is she still on fire calls? Janet Kimmerly?

DSS: She hasn't been active for a while. Actually, I don't even know if she's still a member. I believe she's still a member, but ...

Q: And how--does Shari drill with the men?

DSS: Oh, yeah. Shari's actually--right now, she's an officer in Flower Hill Hose Company.

She's an Engineer, I believe. And she does whatever she needs to do. She's just--she's one of the guys, basically. She's a good firefighter, too.

Q: You said you were at a fire with one of them?

DSS: At a fire? No. Shari's on our drill team with me.

Q: But not--you haven't been to any fires with her?

DSS: Many fires.

Q: Oh, you have?

DSS: Yeah. I'm not--I don't know--I'm not as active as I used to be. You know, I go to a lot of the calls, but most ... [END OF SIDE A; BEGIN SIDE B] ...

Q: You were saying that you're not as active as you used to be.

DSS: It seems, basically being a daytime fireman, most of the calls I go to are alarms that really don't have many fire calls. So it's not that I'm participating with Shari or, you know, going to a fire scene as much as I would used to. Now, it's mostly just sitting back and letting all the young kids do the work nowadays (laughs).

Q: Don't you consider yourself young?

DSS: In the fire service? No, I think I've been there nineteen years, almost twenty years. And they have a lot of young guys that, I don't know, I guess I'm a little laid back now, and just let the young guys do the work. They're so--they're like I was years ago, and so I always didn't like it when I was young, and I'd want to do the work and somebody else was doing it. So, now I just--I let them do the work. Let them learn.

Q: So being in the middle, how do you view the younger generation and the older generation in the Fire Department? What do you feel are their differences in how they function?

DSS: I wouldn't want to be one of the young guys now. What they have to go through with the training, it's unbelievable. With OSHA, [Occupational Safety And Health Administration] what they mandate in OSHA now--the Occupational Safety--and you have the amount of hours of training that these guys've got to put in, I probably wouldn't have gotten through it. And I don't know how some of these young guys do it. It's a passion, and probably when I was seventeen, I'd do it like they're doing it now, too. But, now looking back, if I had to do it over, I don't know. It's a lot of time.

Q: And how about--how do you view the older generation? Do the younger firefighters ask for their advice?

DSS: Oh yeah. Yeah. And they'd be crazy not to, you know. One thing with the fire service is experience definitely matters. You know, you're always looking for the guy with the experience.

Q: How do they pass that experience onto you?

DSS: Basically, it's on-the-job training. It's--if you get a chance to work side-by-side with somebody, you know, at a fire scene, well, that's actually I have a story I can get into a little bit. You mentioned earlier about Bobby Dayton. And Bobby Dayton was on our racing team years ago. And he was a City fireman. And there was a call on the back of Ramos store on Main Street. I think it's North Maryland Avenue. We had a call for a basement fire there. And I happened to be by Flower Hill Hose Company, and I got on the truck with Bobby Dayton and the other guys from Flower Hill. And we went there, and me and Bobby were the first ones into the house. We had a report of an invalid trapped in the house. So me and Bobby went through first, the front door. And we started doing the search. And I was following Bobby around, and the fire was burning. It was a basement fire. And we made our way around through what was the living room and through a little bit of the dining room. And then we went into what we knew was a kitchen, you know, we felt a stove. And all of a sudden Bobby turns around and tells me "Stop!" I'm like "What's the matter?" And it's just me and him in this burning building. He goes, "Turn around. Let's get out of here!" So, I backed up and backtracked, and we felt our way to get out of the building. Well, it turns out that if we would have went

another five feet, we would have fell through the floor into the basement. He felt the, you know, the heat from where it burned through the floor. And he backed us out of there. And some, you know, experience like that, you know, if he didn't know, we probably would have fell into the basement. Who knows? And thank God, Bobby was in front of me at the time.

Q: Who's been your best buddy in the Fire Department?

DSS: Well, I have a few of them. But probably one of my best friends now is Ray Ryan, the Lieutenant in Protection Engine Company. I don't have one best buddy, though. Everybody on my drill team is my friend. That's how it is.

Q: Who do you go to for advice, when you need--you know, when you want to talk about things?

DSS: Oh, my father. And whether he gives me the best advice or not, I really don't know (laughs).

Q: And is that relationship-how is that relationship? Is it difficult when you're both in the Fire Department?

DSS: No, actually it makes it better, you know. Gives us more time together, I would guess, and it gives us something to talk about.

Q: And do you talk about fire things when you go home?

DSS: Yeah. Pretty much. Talk about him babysitting my kids and fire service. So (laughs), he's retired now, so he's my babysitter when I'm working. So, when, you know, he's definitely still interested in the Fire Department. He doesn't put in the time like he used to, you know, but a lot of our conversation is still the fire service--good and bad.

Q: What do you think makes a good firefighter?

DSS: You know, it's weird, because the people you would think wouldn't be good firefighters turn out to be some of the best firefighters. And some of the guys that you would think would be good firefighters aren't the best firefighters.. It's--to each his own, I guess. You know, you just--you've got to have a positive attitude about what you're doing and what you're getting into. And it takes a lot of thinking, you know. There's people that just, unfortunately, don't think before they act. And that gets people hurt. And that's the kind of person that I try to avoid or stay away from. Just people with good heads on their shoulders that actually think before they do something.

Q: What do you think when you're under pressure?

DSS: It's difficult. It's difficult. You've got to basically just calm yourself down and remember what you're going to be getting into or trying to think of what you're going to be getting into. As I said before, it's, you know, you've always got to think of two things in front of you before you actually do it, you know. I don't know.

Q: Have you ever been injured?

DSS: At a fire scene, the only time I really ever got was once I got injured. I actually got injured on the racing trucks my first year racing.

Q: What happened?

DSS: The motor blew up on the race car, and we hit what we call the arch--archway. And I got thrown seventy feet down to the end of the track. And I broke my collar bone and ripped up my back and was pretty hurt for a little while.

Q: So how long were you out of commission?

DSS: Like six weeks. Then, after the sixth week and one day I got back on the truck and raced again, you know--but the only time I got really hurt at a fire scene was--there was a fire down on Edgewood Road. A guy known to the Fire Department, a guy named Neily [Capobianco] owned the house. And he was killed in the house. And I was on the hose

line in front of the house just wetting down the front of the house with another guy, and the pressure in the hose was too much and just threw us over. And I hurt my ankle, had a bad sprain in my ankle. But other than that, I've never been hurt.

Q: Has your father or grandfather been hurt firefighting?

DSS: My father--I think my father was hurt a few times racing. You know, there's when they were really crazy back then. We try to do it a little more sensible now.

Q: Why were they more crazy?

DSS: Well, he always jokes to me about, you know, when he raced is "when men were men," you know. They did--you know, they used steel ladders where we use aluminum ladders, you know. Materials, it's, you know, it's a lot lighter with an aluminum ladder. They used a ladder made out of steel pipe that probably weighs three hundred pounds. And just crazy (laughs). You know, just ...

Q: Do you think there's a certain macho element to this?

DSS: Oh, without a doubt. Without a doubt. The old guys, they bust your chops. Again, it's "when men were men." That's the whole thing. And now they say men are boys. I just-- I just him that's when men were dumb; now men are smart (laughs).

Q: Have you ever been called out on any domestic abuse calls or space confined calls?  
Accidents of any kind?

DSS: Well, accidents, I was very involved with the Hurst tool training.

Q: What did that involve?

DSS: You know, cutting and opening cars and all of that. And ...

Q: Where did you train for that?

DSS: We trained in-house here. We do a lot of our training in car parts. We get used cars, and we'll cut them open for training that way. And then I went to a few classes over at the Academy, you know, specialized training. And I've been involved in a few--more than a few incidents of, you know, cutting people out of cars and stuff like that.

Q: Can you tell us some of those incidents?

DSS: There's been many. I mean ...

Q: Tell us one.

DSS: Well, actually, there's one, that I don't remember the year. But I believe it was on Thanksgiving. It was up on Middleneck Road by the Methodist Church. And a couple of people were killed in the accident. We cut the people out of the car, though, but it was too late. I just remember that, because I had to cut the door open to get the people out, and I never even thought nothing of it, you know. And an hour later, I had the fireman that were there with me come into my house and want to know if I was okay. And, you know, I was wondering why they wanted to know that. And I guess I just brushed aside that, you know, the people were killed, and we go on. Whatever--that's just one memory I have, because I remember just these guys coming in, I mean, your brothers seeing that you're all right, to make sure you're all right. It was nice.

Q: How do you know where to cut, on an accident like that? Where do you--how do you know what to do?

DSS: It's just the training with the equipment, with the tools. You know, there's no one way of doing it, because, you know, you see a car accident, and the car crumples all different ways. So, it's just, you know, trying to pick the right spot and the easiest way to get into the person. You could be cutting the roof off the car instead of cutting the door off, or just taking out the windshield and pulling somebody through a windshield. You know, obviously, if we don't have to cut it, you know, you might just try the door first; it might open up.

Q: How dangerous is using this tool for the people operating it? Can you cut yourselves?

DSS: There's a lot of sharp objects, but, yeah, you could definitely cut yourself. But, I don't know how much danger there is. Everything we do is dangerous, I guess.

Q: Why do you like to live so close to the edge?

DSS: Brain dead, maybe. I don't know (laughs). I don't know (laughs). A mental imbalance, I guess.

Q: Would you want your children to become firefighters?

DSS: My girls? No, I wouldn't want my girls to be firefighters?

Q: Why is that?

DSS: Unless--well, my one daughter that wants to be a firefighter. I would let them do whatever they want to do.

Q: Why does she want to become a firefighter?

DSS: Because her dad is.

Q: What would you advise her when she gets to be eighteen?

DSS: Stay away from the firehouse. Especially with some of the guys in the Fire Department (laughs).

Q: What does your wife feel about your daughter wanting to be a firefighter?

DSS: Oh (laughs), honestly, I don't even know what she would feel about that. She'd probably say the same thing I would say is "Stay away from firemen." She should've (laughs).

Q: Are you saying that in jest?

DSS: Yes, I am. My wife, again, she's the best, and she supports everything I do. She actually chased me around the firehouse. We went to school together, grew up together. And I really didn't even like her in high school. But she kept on, you know, forcing her way into my life, and I guess I finally succumbed to it (laughs). And I never regret a minute of it.

Q: How does she cope with worrying about you when you're on a fire call? Does she worry?

DSS: I don't know. I don't know how she does it. She's an incredible woman. She's got to be tough in dealing with the racing and dealing with everything, you know. I'm just--she lets me do what I want to do, and I guess that's why we get along so well (laughs).

Q: Are most of your social contacts with people in your Fire Department?

DSS: Yes. Yes. Probably almost all of them. You know, I still have buddies from high school that I hang around with, and the rest is all Fire Department.

Q: So what is a typical Fire Department social activity?

DSS: Meetings and training and ...

Q: Aside from that.

DSS: Just go to the firehouse and hanging out. Watching a ball game. You know, I'm a big football fan, big Jet fan. So we get together with firemen from all over the place, and we have about seventeen guys that we tailgate for the Jet games, so we're always getting together with different firemen. It's a lot of fun.

Q: You weren't tailgating for the Red Sox and the Yankees?

DSS: No. I'm not a baseball fan. So that didn't affect me too much.

Q: How do you feel about the parades that the Fire Department is in on Memorial Day and on Labor Day. Do you partake?

DSS: Yeah, I normally do every year. Especially with the kids now--my kids. They love seeing their daddy in a uniform. But, again, with the racing team, there's a lot of parades that we have to do as far as the drill team. When you compete in the drill and they, if they're having a parade that day, you have to parade also. So, being on a racing team, on the drill team, you're parading more than the other guys would. Basically, it used to be we'd parade every week. Every time there was a drill, there was a parade. And they cut down on that a little bit. We probably parade, you know, three, four times more a year than anybody else would.

Q: How have the uniforms changed from your grandfather's time? Do you remember his uniform?

DSS: Yeah, there's one hanging up in the firehouse. The first year I got in, 1985, was the hundredth anniversary of Atlantic Hook and Ladder. So I got to partake in all that activity. I just got in, and I got to go to all the dinners and everything they had for that. So that was nice. They had some of the older uniforms made, and the guys marched

down in the old uniforms. And actually I liked the older ones better than the newer ones, I think.

Q: What was nice about the old uniforms?

DSS: Just, you know, the classic style of it, you know.

Q: What colors were they?

DSS: Red and white. The company colors are red and white. It's like a big red, you know, vest and a white shirt. Just it's impressive looking, you know.

Q: Why do you think they changed to what they have now?

DSS: Lighter weight materials. Probably more uniform. Cheaper. You know, just a little cheaper.

Q: Do you think that the care of them is a ...

DSS: Yeah.

Q: ... a factor?

DSS: I would definitely think so. I mean, back in them old days, it's all cotton. So that was probably the weight of the wool. Some of them wool, I guess.

Q: How are the parades judged? Have you received any awards for your parades?

DSS: Yeah, we actually just came in third. Well, the drill team this year got a couple of trophies. I don't know if we took a first place. We took like three different place trophies in three different parades. And we took second place overall for Nassau County as a drill team in parades. But it's judged by uniformity, marching in step. There's all different categories. You know, you can't--you know, you're not supposed to have facial hair or long hair and all that.

Q: And who judges the marching?

DSS: They actually have parade officials--a whole unit of people that go out and judge them.

Q: And what do you get for that? A plaque?

DSS: Trophies. That's the Nassau County Parade and Drill Team Captains Association. I was in charge of them parade officials, too.

Q: And what was that like?

DSS: Just as much of a headache as it was with the drill team guys (laughs). They had just as many complaints as everybody else.

Q: Can you remember any of the complaints?

DSS: Most of their complaints had to do with food (laughs) before and after parades. They like to get fed.

Q: And what were the complaints about food?

DSS: That there wasn't enough, or it just ...

Q: And who takes care of the food at these parades?

DSS: Whoever hosts the parade would have to put out a certain amount of food for the officials that are there that day. And I guess there wasn't enough. I don't know. It seems like there's never enough.

Q: How did 9/11 affect you?

DSS: Well, I went there, down to the World Trade Center with a bunch of guys from the firehouse on Thursday. And that's something I'll never forget.

Q: Can you tell us what you saw?

DSS: Well, we were working, you know, digging. And the one memory I have is just with the horns going off, because they thought that one building was going to fall. And I just remember being on top of this mound of debris and looking at this seventy story building that they say is going to fall and thinking, all right, how can I--no place to run. That's it, you know. And you just ran and got around the corner of a building, and it stopped, and we all go back to work again. And you have a thousand people there. You know, if the building came down, there was another thousand that weren't going to be there anymore. But everybody just did their jobs anyway. It was crazy.

Q: How long were you on the scene?

DSS: We spent the whole day on Thursday there. Digging.

Q: Have you worried about the toxic material in the air?

DSS: No, I was wearing a mask, and most of the people there had put on--that day, anyway--were wearing masks. Yeah, it's a concern. I can't say it's not a concern. But, because I was only there the one day and I did have a mask, it's not as much of a concern to me as

some of these other guys, I guess. But it's something you--if you weren't there to see this mess, you know, it was incredible. It was crazy.

Q: Did you know any of the City firefighters?

DSS: Yeah, I had a couple of friends that passed away there. Couple guys from Hempstead. A guy named Joe Hunter from South Hempstead. And another guy--Pearsal is his first name. His nickname was "Bronco." And then, a guy from Roslyn, a gentleman named Michael Hobb; he was a friend of mine.

Q: How did you feel after you were there all day?

DSS: You basically go numb. You know, you don't know what to feel. It's--I don't know, you know. Mad. I could say mad, you know. It's just crazy.

Q: Has the training been changed since 9/11 in the Fire Department?

DSS: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Everything. Everything that we're--well, between the nuclear worries and biological is the word I'm looking for, you know, a lot of training now with the biological on account of ...

Q: What do they train you on the biological? What can you do as a fireman?

DSS: Basically, you know, you're trained--I'm trying to think how to answer this. Well, I guess, to avoid, you know--proper protective clothes, you know. Just be more aware of what we're going to be wearing. You know, you're not going to go in anywhere--you know, if you do get called to one of these scenes or anything like that, just our regular firefighting gear is not what you want to be in. It's not the protection you want. So being more trained on these new suits, these chemical suits that we carry now and actually protecting yourself.

Q: Do you carry them in the fire trucks?

DSS: Yeah, it is.

Q: Those are chemical suits?

DSS: Yeah, there's suits on the trucks.

Q: When there was the anthrax scar in this area, did you--any of the firefighters respond to anything at that time?

DSS: No, no. Basically, I believe they let the County, that was already trained with that situation, take care of that, because we weren't trained at the time, or properly trained at

the time. I mean, we have some training on all that. But there is more and more training every day. I mean, I didn't even--like now, you know, I don't go to the schools that I used to go to. You've got all these young kids that are probably well more trained than I am. So, I let them go.

Q: Do you feel that the Port community appreciates the firefighters?

DSS: Oh, yeah. Without a doubt. We're always, you know, we're always getting thanked. Every time we do something, we're getting thanked for it. So ...

Q: There's a controversy now in Centerport about the fire community there that wants to build bigger houses, and the community is not in favor. Do you ever think that would happen here in Port?

DSS: I would hope not. You know, I don't think our Fire Department is out of control with the way we do things. I don't think we over-spend. I mean, there are some things we can probably cut down on, but mostly we handle our budget pretty well. We try to keep, you know, taxes from going up. Centerport, I'm not familiar with that whole situation. But actually I do believe they passed that and they are building that now. Couple weeks ago.

Q: Why do you think volunteer firefighting is so important?

DSS: You know, the expense, I would believe--you know, I think the amount of money it would cost to have a paid fire department, your taxes would go through the roof.

Q: What rituals do you enjoy the most? Initiations, the dinners, the parades, the funerals?

DSS: I definitely don't enjoy the funerals (laughs). That's one thing I don't enjoy. But, just getting together with the firemen, no matter what it is. If somebody's having a block party or somebody's having--everybody always has all different fund raisers, you know, to try to offset the costs. And they do things called "Night at the Races," where they have like, fake horse races, and you go there and, you know, you have a good time that night at the races. Or it's just--everybody's doing something different to try to, you know, have a fund raiser.

Q: Was your mother ever in the Women's Auxiliary?

DSS: Yeah. She was President of the Ladies Auxiliary. And she's still involved in it. Not as much, with the grandchildren now, but she's involved.

Q: And how have they helped the firefighters?

DSS: Oh, they were a big help when, if there's a major scene, you know, they'd show up with coffees and donuts, and whatever they can do to help. With blankets. If it's cold, they bring blankets. Anything that can, you know, to keep us at the fire, so that, you know,

just kind of all the running around back and forth to the firehouse, they'd take care of it, and it keeps the guys doing what we have to do to get the fire out. And it's a big help, you know.

Q: Can you think of anything that you would like to say or add to this interview?

DSS: Not really. I think you've heard more talking out of me today than I've probably done in the last three months (laughs).

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

DSS: I think it's a great idea. I think that it's something that we ought to look back on, and I'll be able to show my kids, and they'll be able to show their--my grandchildren. You know, it's been a big part of my life, and to be able to see it, you know, jotted down in a book somewhere and be able to read about it would be nice.

Q: And what would you like to be remembered most for?

DSS: Just that people liked me for who I am. That's the whole thing, you know. I don't need to be remembered for anything else. I do my own thing.

Q: Thank you very much.

DSS: Thank you.