

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

Transcript Of Oral History Interview With

Michael Sawka
Atlantic Hook & Ladder Company No. 1

conducted in association with the
Port Washington Public Library Local History Center

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Q: June 2nd, 2004. This is an interview with Michael Sawka. My name is Sally Olds. The interview is taking place at Mr. Sawka's home at 14 Belleview Avenue, Port Washington. Can you please say your full name?

Michael Sawka: Michael Sawka.

Q: And which fire company are you a member of?

MS: Atlantic Hook and Ladder Company.

Q: When did you first come to Port Washington?

MS: It could have been the year 1952 or '53.

Q: And what brought you here?

MS: My brother-in-law. This was—was working in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, and my brother-in-law was out here in Port Washington, and he was telling me what it was like in employment and so on. So, that's what I did. I was working for Grand Union. I'd come out to Long Island, Port Washington. And I was working at the Grand Union store in Great Neck for about a year or so. And then I started to work in a sand mining operation

with the name of the company, Metropolitan Sand and Gravel Company. And I stayed with the Metropolitan for about twelve years, and then I went to work for Gotham Sand and Stone Company. A crushed stone company. And I worked there up until the year of 1990, which I retired in the year of 1990. And I enjoy it. I enjoy retirement (laughs). It's really great.

Q: What did you do for Metropolitan and Gotham?

MS: Oh, operating engineer. I was an oiler and also an operator of a crane with a clamshell bucket. We were unloading crushed stone barges, which was supplied here to the contractors of Long Island for mostly road work and parking areas. I guess that's about it, what I could say there (laughs).

Q: And when did you join the fire company?

MS: It could have been the year—that'd be '53 or '54. '54. Because we're in 2004 now. That would give me my fifty years. Right.

Q: What made you decide to join?

MS: When I was kid, I remember in Pennsylvania at the Fire Department, they were volunteers. And it sort of hit me. There's something I liked very much. And I always

stayed with having that in the back of my mind. And when I came out here to Port Washington and found out that the Fire Department's strictly volunteers, my brother [in-law], Orlando Scaramucci also was a member, and he told me to join, which he did. Got me an application, and I joined up with Atlantic Hook and Ladder Company. And it was really great to be a volunteer fireman, because the feeling that you get inside where you could help people that are in need of help and also in fires and other things. And they make the call or the alarm goes off, and whether it's one, two o'clock in the morning or twelve afternoon, I would hop in my car and I would go. And the feeling I would get when I would come home. Gee, I'd feel so great for the people. Some of them could have lost their lives in the fire, interiors and so on, and you'd help them get out and do things like that. And it made me feel great inside. It's something that I always stayed with and I enjoyed. Even wish—I wish today that I could hop in my car and go fight fires. But, because of my age, I'm sort of limited, and I can't do that.

Q: Is there an age limit?

MS: No, there's no age limit, no. But, yet, you yourself should know whether you should be able to do something like this or not. And it's sort of dangerous, also. There's a lot involved. A lot of training involved. It's just not that you're going to hop in a car and go and jump on a fire truck. It's the learning, experience, the practice that you get. And you do this, and you do it on weekends or sometimes during the week. When the men at the Fire Department, when they get down at the firehouse, and they teach you and show you

different things that you have to learn how to be a fireman. And that's how it works out. It works out great. And you got to be careful. Number one, you got to be very, very careful. When you see smoke, you just don't go in there, run in. There's a thing you put on your face they call a mask, a breather. And that's one of the main things that you have to do when you go interior. And it's scary, a scary thing when you go in. And several times I went in and actually where you couldn't even hardly see the interior of the room, because there's smoke. You go in and you follow the walls with your hands to get in and out, and you have to remember how you went in so you could run out the same way. If not, you got a problem (laughs).

Q: Did you ever get lost inside a house?

MS: No. No, no. I was several times where it was pretty well smoked up, and I would just follow the rules that they told me and how to— the good training that I got. And I'd go in through the room and check out, make sure there was nobody in there, and go back the same way I went in. Go through several rooms, and you do that. And usually, if it's a smoky fire where there cannot be much damage as far as the fire, but smoke. A lot of smoke. And it takes over the house. And we were trained that it's not going to take us. And that's exactly what happens.

Q: I'm sorry. You were trained to—I didn't hear ...

MS: That it doesn't take us. The interior of the house that the smoke, we were trained what to do and do it the right way. If not, then that smoke would take you.

Q: Yes.

MS: It's dangerous. Very dangerous.

Q: Well, what do you remember about that early training?

MS: Experience, the training, — and it's scary. When you go in and put the equipment on— especially a mask— and you go into a smoke-filled room, or if you're climbing the ladder getting rooftop and you have to ventilate, you have to put an opening in the roof to ventilate, to get that smoke, to get the heat out of the building. It's scary. But the experience that you have—and another great thing about it is the few guys that you have down below who are watching you, and if they see something that could be a little help, they could shout up. They could tell you what you should do and how you should do it and be careful in doing it. It's great experience. It's the training that's mostly that's involved in it that teaches you to do these things. And the men that you work with are great. One will help the other. And then when it's all over, we just take our equipment off, put it in a truck, and go down to the firehouse, do what we have to do with the trucks to repair it, clean it up, put it back in order for the next time you have to go out and do the same thing.

Q: And when you come back from the fire, is there any kind of meeting among the people, the firefighters, to critique their performance at the fire? What you did, what you should have done?

MS: Yes, absolutely. No question. Usually, if there was something that they see that should have been done and it wasn't, they will actually tell you, explain it to you. And it's the training.

Q: Do you remember any examples of that?

MS: About what?

Q: Do you remember any examples when that happened?

MS: It's hard right now, because it's been—I've been away so long from it, as far as fighting fires, because of my age.

Q: When did you stop fighting fires?

MS: Oh, I guess it has to be a good fifteen years or so, or better. But like even prior, at that time and that was about fifteen years ago when I stopped, I would go to a fire, but I

would not go into the building. I would stay on the outer part and see what I could do helping there.

Q: What kind of things would you do?

MS: Well, the on-fire-truck equipment, ladders that have to be put back. There were ladders taken off that you'd put up against the building on the exterior of the building. You could help doing that. And the equipment that the firemen used—could be an axe, could be a rake or something, whatever. You really don't know what they're going to use. When they bring that back and with the fire trucks and we get the equipment that we have, we put it back where it's supposed to be put back in the trucks. And with the firemen, also, with their gear, they would harness the gear on the compartments that we have on the truck to put the gear back. Certain places for helmets and for the boots and for the rain gear ...which is good.

Q: So they can find them ...

MS: Yeah, well, they're exactly put back the same place they were taken from, and that's the way you keep everything in order. And if there's any damage or anything done to equipment, you know where it's at, and you don't put it back in the compartment where it should be. You put it elsewhere in the truck, and then at the firehouse then they take care of it and do what has to be done, or replaced. Or if we could repair it, we'd do that. So, I

guess that's about it right now. (laughs).

Q: And are you still active in the Fire Department?

MS: I go to the meetings. Not all the time, but I will go to a meeting and I enjoy going to a meeting. But, other than that, there's really nothing more that you could—that you could do. Now I have the alarm in my bedroom, and when that goes off I just go in the front of my home and just looking out the windows and see the trucks as they're going by or something and say "God bless you guys. I wish I was there." (laughs). I can't, because of my age. I'm eighty years old. So, I've got to take it easy. So it's great.

Q: Now, you were the Marshal for the Memorial Day parade.

MS: The Memorial Day parade, yes.

Q: Was that in connection with your being a veteran or with being a firefighter?

MS: Fifty year member.

Q: How did you get chosen?

MS: I was the only fifty year member of this year in Atlantic Hook and Ladder Company.

There were five of us that joined in the Fire Department at that time. It must have been '53. And out of the five, I was the only one that made the fifty years. So, I feel very lucky about that, and I feel proud. And I also think about those other four guys that was always with me. The years that we were training and so on. I wished that they were alongside of me when I celebrated my fifty years, that they were with me. But it just so happens that it didn't work out that way.

Q: They left the Department, or they ...

MS: A few of the boys passed away, and that was one of the reasons. And I think one other had to leave. I think he moved out of town, or something. But other than that, that's about it.

Q: Did you ever think about leaving yourself?

MS: No. No. I never had that feeling that I wanted to go. It was the feeling inside of me to stay. To stay. I wish I could live to be a hundred (laughs) and say "I'm a member of Atlantic Hook and Ladder Company." But that could happen, too, but I doubt it. It's only twenty more years to go. It's possible.

Q: Sure. Do you remember who the Captain was of Atlantic Hook and Ladder when you first joined?

MS: It could have been Ralph Nofi [former Chief]. The other fellow, his nickname was "Flash." "Flash" Marra [former Chief]. And I can't think of anybody else. Well, there's Sal DeFeo, another great firefighter, and Jess Salerno [former Chief]. And I can't think of any other—the other—Harry De Meo, and I just can't think of the guys at that time when I first joined, goes back years and years.

Q: Yes, sure.

MS: Probably by the nickname or something (laughs).

Q: Do you remember who the Chief of the whole Department was at that time?

MS: It was John Duncan. Now, I don't know if he was Chief at that time, or if there was a Chief prior to him. I really don't—I don't remember. And "Flash" Marra also was Chief. Jess Salerno was a Chief. But at the beginning when I first joined, I don't remember. I don't remember the guys who were, at that time, were the Chief of the company. Or the Department rather than the company.

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

MS: The first time when there was an alarm—we did not have the alarm in your home if there

was a fire. Just the blast of a siren. And the first time when I heard that siren go off, I don't remember if it was at night or if it was during the day. Most likely, it could have been after like four in the evening, because of getting home from work. When that alarm went off, I was just shaking. I says, "Oh, my God." There was a fire. This is my first one. I'd better go." I hopped in my car, and I got to the firehouse, and I got on the fire truck. And I would go, and just riding the fire truck—the feeling. And you're just looking. "Where are we going? How far is it?" And then when you get to the fire, you have to put on your boots. You have to put on your gear and your helmet and so on. And then you're ready for—at the time, I was just a green bug on doing these things. And I would wait for one of the officers to instruct me what to do and so on. Which he would give me a piece of—a piece of equipment or something and "Just stand by in case they should need this. They will come to you and they'll get it." Being that you were just a rookie, they're not going to send you inside of the building new, until you get more training. And we'd just stand by and be a help on the exterior, not on the interior. Which was good (laughs).

Q: Do you remember what that fire was?

MS: The first? No, I really—really can't remember what it was the first time. But I know it was a shaky fire—meaning me, a shaker (laughs).

Q: You were shaking for what reason?

MS: Being there, I wanted to—first time that I'm going to a fire, and what am I going to do? How am I going to do it? And, but yet the feeling inside of me was "I'm here. If I'm needed, they will tell me where to go and what to do and how to do." And, but like I said—it's a shaky experience. It's scary—a scary experience, because you don't know what's going to happen because this is the first time that you're going there. Even if you had to climb a ladder up, that's—it's very simple, I think, that they would do something like that. Just jump on the truck and go, give him the ladder, and start climbing to get on a roof. No. Experience first, learning, going to school and so on, to learn how to do those things. Taking the ladder off of a truck, extending the ladder up. The size of the ladder—could be a twenty-five footer, forty, or fifty foot ladder. And learn how to do, how to pick this ladder up and extend it up to that certain point. And then the hard—another hard thing about that was getting that ladder away from the building. Holding it straight up, then put it down in the section it's supposed to be in. And it involves a lot, and you have to know what you're doing. You just can't go and mess around and play that you're going to be a game or something. Pretty serious.

Q: Could you put the ladder up by yourself, or did you ...

MS: No.

Q: ... work with other ...

MS: We would have to work with others. The ladders, you get a twenty-five foot ladder and go to a fifty foot extension and some of this, no way you could do that yourself. And there's certain ways you put up ladders, too. You just don't think you're going to pick it up and it's going to go there. The leg at the bottom could kick out one way. You have to have a man down at the bottom of your ladder with a foot, he sort of holds it. And if you have two or three guys on the other end picking it up, you got to hold the ladder not to shift towards them, or they're going with it. And so it has to be done. It's very critical. You have to be there, and you have to know what you're doing. If not, somebody's going to get hurt. And also, when a man is climbing the ladder, you have to have a man down at the bottom to secure that ladder up with your two legs up against the wall with you. You hold it, you have to have two hands on the ladder. So there's no room for the ladder to slide away from the building. And you keep your eye on the guy that's up on that ladder. And he—if he needs anything, he will tell you, or, you know, he will tell you when he's coming down. As he is doing that, you'll stand up and just keep looking at him until he gets off the ladder. Then he slaps you on the back, and you slap him on the back (laughs). "Everything's okay?" You get ready and you go home. So that works out (laughs). It was good. Really good. Good experience. I wish I could do it again, but my age says no, you can't, you have to wait and watch.

Q: What are some of the memorable fires that you were at?

MS: Well, the St. Francis Hospital, at that time, we would have a call. And one time then—I don't remember that much about it, but there was a fire at the hospital. But really, the way it was handled by the Fire Department was great. And the other fires, going to a home with its inside interior, what has to be done. The hose that has to be hooked up to the fire hydrant, which is like Flower Hill and Protection Engine Company. You have to drag that hose into the building and so on. There's a lot involved in it. You're just not going to hook it up and then say, "Okay, we're ready to go." There's a lot involved in getting that equipment into the interior of the home where you have to do what you have to do to put out the fire with the ladder and so on.

Q: You said that Flower Hill had a hose?

MS: Flower Hill Hose Company.

Q: Yes. So you didn't have it at Atlantic?

MS: Atlantic is strictly—we were strictly a ladder company. Atlantic is strictly a ladder company.

Q: Still?

MS: Hook and ladder. Yes. Yes, still. Hook and ladder company. The hook was needed

equipment that you would fight in the interior. You're up on the roof, you got to open it up with the axe that you have, that you have to find, maybe put openings up in the top of the roof so you could get the smoke, everything go out. And that was like ventilation. And that would help the guys that are inside the building fighting the fire. You got to get that smoke out of there. Otherwise, you can't see what you're doing. That means a lot.

Q: Did you go to the Port Washington Yacht Club fire in 1954?

MS: I think, yeah, I think I was there. Yeah. I don't remember too much about it, but I remember Port Washington Yacht Club.

Q: What about at Bradley's Restaurant? Were you at that one?

MS: I don't remember. I don't remember that.

Q: The Renga Brothers?

MS: Renga Brothers? I could have been there. But it's hard to remember going back.

Q: The Sands Point Golf Club? Or, no, Bath Club.

MS: Sands Point Bath and Tennis Club. Yes, yeah. I remember—I remember I was there, but

I don't remember really what type of a fire it was, as far as the building and so on. But I remember going there to that one, yeah.

Q: And what about the—boatyard fires? Were you there?

MS: I don't remember boatyard fires. No.

Q: Or lumber yard?

MS: No. If they were, I was there. But I don't (laughs) really remember. Don't remember that.

Q: What would you say was your best experience in the Fire Department?

MS: Other than—instead of fighting the fires, I was with the ambulance. Ambulance calls. And I lived on Ohio Avenue. 10 Ohio Avenue. And next door, the fellow's name was Ed Piccardo, and he lived in number 12 Ohio Avenue. And at that time, we did not have no speaker to tell us there was a fire, and everything would be by telephone. And if there was an ambulance call, Ed Piccardo was the first man to get a call. And I lived next door to him; I was number two. And this would be during the day and mostly at night, go out on an ambulance call. And it could be a minor incident. It could be something serious, or an accident. And handling people, to put them on a stretcher and carry that stretcher

out of the building into the ambulance and get them over to the hospital, it involves a lot of experience. You have to know what you're doing.

Q: How did you learn that?

MS: Oh, we were going to school for learning ambulance and so on. How to take the stretcher out of the ambulance, putting it back into the ambulance. How to carry, how to hold a patient, get a patient out of bed and put them onto the stretcher. And when you're carrying them out of a building, you better make sure you don't tilt sideways or forward or backward, because if you do, it's a big problem. And, it does mean a lot, because you have a patient that ... [INTERRUPTION] ...

Q: You were talking about taking the person, the patient ...

MS: Oh, out of the building. Sure, you could have—you may have to go up to the second floor and get the patient out of a bed and put them on the—carry them down the steps and you had to hold it up. The person then on the bottom's got to hold up high, and so on. And then when you're carrying it and you're going down the steps, and the person behind you wants to walk forward, or when the person in the front is walking backward, it's a lot easier than the guy that has to hold the stretcher up on the top, because if he lets go, you're going to go down with that stretcher. It's hard. Very hard. And experience. Experience means a lot when you do those things. And another great thing is when you

help a person like this, the feeling on their face, the look on their face, knowing that they're going to be okay, they're going to be safe. And we take them to the hospital. And when we're leaving, they can't say "thank you" good enough, because they were helped, and which was good. It's a good feeling.

Q: Do you ever hear from anyone afterwards whom you had ...

MS: A few. A few that would see you, and they would thank you again for helping them out. Taking them to the hospital, and so on. Then you're really proud. You're really proud that they got help like that. And they say, "Well you can't beat the Fire Department," and he says, "Not only do they fight fires, but they take care of the sick and they do a great job in handling and they know how to handle the people." At times, it's a lot of fun. It is fun, a lot of fun. One experience that I've had with the gentleman down in Manorhaven, who I knew well when he was working at the sand mining operation where I was working. And Ed Piccardo and I had the call to go to get him and take him on a stretcher and put him in the hospital. Well, when we got into his home, it was a fiasco trying to get him out of the house to put him on a stretcher and take him in that ambulance.

Q: Why?

MS: He was drinking a little, and he just felt he didn't have to go. But they called the ambulance to get him over to the hospital. At one time there, we had him on the chair

carrying him out. He jumped off the chair and ran back into the home. And there was also a Nassau County police officer, and he tried to help. We just couldn't get this guy in the ambulance. So finally, the police officer says, "It's time for me to be off duty. My wife is waiting for me. It's almost around midnight. My time is up, and you're holding me here, and we can't get you in the ambulance." So we grabbed the guy in the back around the neck and grabbed his butt. And he just ran him out of the house into the ambulance (laughs). That was a great one.

Q: Why did he need to go into the ambulance? Because he was drinking or ...

MS: No, there was something else wrong with him. What it was, I really don't know. I think he had a cut or something. I don't remember. Cut himself. And he just wouldn't go. But we got him over to the hospital, and then we got him in the hospital, the way he was talking to the doctors, he said, "My arm is bleeding. Cut it off over here, and I'll go home." It's a lot of fun watching this guy, but he needed help, and he made it difficult for us (laughs). Very difficult. But I think that's one of the worst things that I ever had to contend, as far as taking a person to the hospital, was a man like that. The drinks got the best of him. In a way it was funny, but yet it was very serious. That's the way it goes.

Q: Was drinking ever a problem in the fire company?

MS: No. No. If a person, he himself would have a few drinks that he felt he had maybe one

or two too many, he would just put himself on the side. He wouldn't go. He knew what to do. He knew how to handle himself. And if it happened that way, there were seventy-five, eighty other guys around at that time that would be out enjoying doing things. It was all taken care of. Very well handled. Professionals that were doing this. Very professional. And it was a lot of fun. Great. Lot of fun. Yeah. Sometimes, the guys would just kid around, make up a few things with themselves. "I'm going to do this." "I'm going to do that." Then you'd try to help in any way and everybody was laughing. It was a joke (laughs). And it was so nice the way things like that.

Q: Do you remember any of the jokes or the funny things that happened in the Department?

MS: I would have to stop and think. Really, I couldn't bring one right out and say yes, this was this, or so on. But ...

Q: Did you have a special nicknames in the Department?

MS: No. No, mostly Mike. Well, I had the nickname years back that I was left-handed, so I was just called "Lefty." But other than that, no, just "Mike." Well, Mike—"Mike" or "Mickey," they always called. That was it.

Q: But the "Lefty" didn't stay with you?

MS: No, no. No. No, because whenever we did things, we used both hands—not just one. So (laughs), that became with the name, just playing ball years back when I was a kid.

Q: Did you ever play ball with the Fire Department?

MS: Yeah, I think we did. I think, years back, yeah, we used to play ball when we had a picnic or something. We played softball.

Q: But you were not on any of the teams?

MS: No. No, no. No.

Q: You know, the Fire Department did have some teams.

MS: No, no. No, I was not on that, no. I think I was too old at that time. Maybe I can remember somebody saying that.

Q: Were you ever called to a fire when not enough people showed up to the fire?

MS: No. No. There was always enough to do what they had to do. Never, never were you shorthanded. Always, there's enough there. Which is a good thing.

Q: Did you ever drive the trucks yourself?

MS: Oh yeah. No question. I went to school, learned how to operate the aerial ladder and how to put the ladder up against the building or wherever it had to be used. And it was quite difficult, because it was a huge piece of equipment. And then even driving, wasn't just like a car making a turn. When you're making a turn and so on, you've got to—you look around both ways. Left, right, and forward, rear, and so on. And watch out the roads, make sure you get some of these people driving cars that didn't care because they feel they had a green light, and if there was a siren blowing they wouldn't stop for that light. They would go through it, because they had the green, we had the red. But we had a siren going. But there are a few people out there didn't give a damn. They'd go right through. And there's times you had to—sometimes you had to—you have to use brakes to slow down; otherwise, you'd have smashed into these people. Yeah, it was a lot of fun. Yeah. I enjoyed it very much (laughs).

Q: How did you find your way around Port Washington? Like if they said, you know, the fire's at such-and-such a place, how would you know how to find it?

MS: Because we would go to the firehouse. Get our equipment on the trucks. And right there, we would find out where the fire was located. I learned that way.

Q: And then did you ...

MS: Well, they would give you—they would give—they would tell exactly where it was at. And ninety-nine percent of the time, everybody knew where they had to go when they found out the street or the location of the fire. That was really no big problem that you had to look for something. No, you didn't. The funniest one we had—one time we got a phone call. It was in Beacon Hill. There was a cat in the tree. So, we got a call at the Fire Department. Go get the cat out of the tree. And I was driving the aerial ladder. We needed it because of ladders. So we did not use no siren, because it was no emergency. We get by the railroad station, and traffic both ways, we were at a standstill. We weren't even moving. So I says to one of the officers, "We're not going to get over there because this traffic is heavy. Maybe we should use our siren just to get out of here, out of Main Street and go where the cat is." So, okay, "Just take it easy," he says, "blow your siren." Which we did. So I used the siren, and the police officer that was on duty, he was running and motioning all the cars to get out of the way, get out of the way, to get out of the way. Then, finally, when we got the cat out of the tree and the police officer found out that it was just— the call was a cat in a tree (laughs), he says, "Oh, my God!" He says, "I'm pushing these cars, everybody to get out of the way, and those guys are going to get a cat out of the tree!" It was funny (laughs). It was hilarious. And I think that was one of the greatest things that happened to me, when it came to be going to the fire, driving the truck or something to help a cat get out of a tree. And the funniest thing, we put up the ladder, we didn't get the cat. The cat jumped out of the tree. So that was another funny thing. You went to go get a cat, but the cat didn't want us to help him,

because he already had helped himself. So I guess he enjoyed the tree. So that's the way it goes. But there's a lot of other things that are really great and funny, comical. But you just take it day by day. But there was no—there's nothing where anybody was going to get hurt where you were doing something that stupid that you shouldn't be doing. No, no. You do the smart things first. Then, when you did everything. Then they joke, you would laugh. That's when you came out which is good. It's a lot of fun being with the Fire Department. An awful lot of fun at the Fire Department. Even fighting fires. Great fighting big fires. And you're not saying it's fun because you're fighting a fire. The little things that happen, and then after you get back to the firehouse and you start talking, and everything that had to be done, then that's when you would laugh, was back at the firehouse, not at the fire. Which was the smart thing for the firemen to do.

Q: And what kinds of little things would happen?

MS: Well, just the sort of thing that you would do maybe that you shouldn't, but helping out in certain ways. Something like that. But nothing that it was really serious that there was going to be an accident where somebody was going to get hurt. Something like that. But just more of a comical thing. A certain way maybe the way a person held the hose or what he did with the hose or the way he would turn the hose on. Maybe somebody got wet, and it was an accident that somebody got wet and it wasn't his fault. And when we'd get back to the firehouse, we'd talk about that. And on your way home, you're leaving the firehouse, you'd say, "Well, I'll see you at the next one." And you'd leave, big smile on

your face, and you had a good feeling inside. Another one that we helped out, and we're really happy to do it. And that's the way all the firemen feel. Very, very happy to help and do what they have to do to help somebody. And if there's any way they needed help, you're right there to do it for them.

Q: Did you ever rescue someone from a fire yourself?

MS: If I did? No. No. Usually my job was mostly was with the—was the truck, to drive the truck to the fire. And then do what I had to do there. What ladders had to be used. What equipment had to be used, and so on. That way, no. Most of the times, I wouldn't be inside the building. I'd just be on the exterior of the building. Because when you take the truck to a fire, you have to handle that truck yourself. And what has to be used off that truck, it was your job to do that and help the firemen to get the equipment that they needed to fight the fire. Even to getting the gear. Some of the firemen would come, you'd help him get the gear, get him his helmet, his jacket, and his boots and so on. Help him out that way. Just stay at the truck and do what you have to do.

Q: What are you proudest of in your firefighting career?

MS: I would go with everything that you would have to do. Everything. Whenever I would go to a fire, I was proud of every time I went to—that's not that I wanted to go there. No, because I didn't want to see a fire. I was proud after we got there what we were able to

do, what we were able to save and help the people that had the damage to their home and how we could help them out that way. End up being proud that way. I'm not proud because there was a building burning. No, no, no. You don't look at it that way. Being proud that you were able to help and put that fire out in that building and help the people that were in there that way. We were really very proud, and we would get back to the firehouse and we would talk different things over. What should have done, if there's something that wasn't done the right way, we'd explain it to the firemen what they should have done and certain ways and so on. And that was experience. And one good thing about it, there was—the guys would just listen and say, "Oh, fine. Really, good." And thank the guy for helping him out and telling him the proper things and not the wrong things. And that's the way it's handled. That's why everybody got along so good. It was a good thing.

Q: Did you make good friends in the Department?

MS: Oh, yes. Everybody. Every guy that you knew in the fire, he was your friend. And another good thing, there were so many of us that were volunteers, you'd just go around, see somebody, you'd pass by in your car, or you'd blow the horn and you'd wave and so on, and things like that. Or they would say, "Well, did you make the fire this morning?" Or "Did you make the fire in the evening?" or at night, or something like that. And you'd say, "Yeah, I was there," or something. But you don't know all the guys that were at the fire, because you have certain things to do.

Q: Which people in the Department, did you become especially friendly with?

MS: I had nobody special. It was everybody. No matter what fire that I went to, it's always all the guys that were there that you become friends with. Every one of them.

Q: And how did your involvement with firefighting affect your family life?

MS: In one way, especially night fires, if you could go out, you could be gone for one, two, three hours, it would affect my wife where she couldn't sleep. And she'd be really, "My God! What's going on? Has to be something bad." And then, when I would put my car in the driveway and put it in the garage and get into the house, she would get up out of bed. And she said, "My God! You were gone for a couple of hours. What happened?" Or "How big, where was the fire? How bad was it?" and so on. And explain to her, you know, what was going on and so on. And she had a good feeling when she would hear me come home, especially at night. Because you never know what's going to happen that night, you know. And being the change of daylight and night light. So there's a big, big difference. And my wife was great that way. She was, which is good. And if they—I could be outside doing some work, and if the alarm—like the alarm that we have now, if that alarm went off, this alert was on, she'd run out and she'd tell me. And I'd just drop what I was doing, hop in a car, and then would go. So that's when we got the alarm system. It's in the interior. But if we didn't have that alarm system, then I'd have to go to

the firehouse and find out where the action was.

Q: That wasn't a problem for her that you would be gone a number of nights with the training and the meetings and things?

MS: No, no. Maybe at the beginning, sort of yes, she'd be worried why so long. Then you would come home and she would ask you to explain to her what was happening. And when she realized what it was all about, then after that it didn't bother her. She took it well and take it easy. But it was hard at night, if she knew I was out, because she had heart trouble. She couldn't fall asleep. She just lay in bed until I got home.

Q: What is your wife's name?

MS: Irma. Yeah. Yeah, she's great—would come to the fire. Then, she joined the Ladies Auxiliary.

Q: Did she?

MS: Oh, yes. Yeah, she joined Ladies Auxiliary, and she really enjoyed it. Yeah, she would wait when they had those meetings and go. I'd either drop her off, or somebody would pick her up and one of her friends, being that she was not a driver of a vehicle.

Q: Is she still a member of the Auxiliary?

MS: No, my wife—I lost her seven months ago. Yes.

Q: Oh, I'm so sorry.

MS: Yeah, she had a problem. Heart problem, and so—and she was seventy-seven. It was seven months ago, on the 24th of October when she passed away. I miss her terribly. Yeah, yeah. Yes, so ... those things...

Q: Do you have children?

MS: I have two sons. I have one son in Morristown, New Jersey. He's married, and he has two boys. And I have a son that's up at Andover right outside of Boston, and he has two sons also.

Q: And did either of them join the ...

MS: No.

Q: ... firefighters?

MS: No, they never joined. Yeah, by the time they finished high school, then they went away to college for their four years, another two years on top of that. Then, found their work and they moved out of town, and they're really happy where they're at and what they're doing. Very happy.

Q: Okay, were you involved in any of the controversial issues over the years in the Fire Department?

MS: No. No. If ...

Q: And how do you think the entrance of women changed the Department?

MS: Well, I don't know. I don't think it changed. Maybe at the beginning, they sort of got maybe a few of them, you know, wanted in ... But I don't think they made any kind of a change. I think it was for the good of the Department. ... No question. They have their own company. They have the Medic Company. And they're out on Shore Road. They have their building over there, and sometimes you take a ride by and you just watch. They have the ambulances out in the front, and they're working them over, washing them down, checking the equipment, clean that building up, hose it down. They do a great job.

Q: Do you have any women in Atlantic?

MS: No. No. No.

Q: And what about people from various minority groups? Was that an issue that you remember?

MS: No. No issue. I don't remember that being an issue in any way. No. But at the small, at that time when I first joined fifty years ago, you had—we had, I guess, about fifty members or so at that time ... I don't remember an issue at that time, as far as joining, or you can't join, no. I never remember an issue like that. If there was, I never heard of it. No.

Q: How did being a firefighter fit in with your working life?

MS: It didn't. Not with my working life. If there was a fire and it was at night, and I knew that it was time for me to go to work, I would manage some of the guys, and they would take over what I was doing. Or if not, I would wait till I got home and back on the job or where somebody would cover for me. And then when I got to work, I'd explain that we had a fire and this was happening. No problem.

Q: Excuse me. I have to turn the tape over. [INTERVIEWER DID NOT TURN TAPE OVER AT THIS POINT] So, was there ever a conflict with work or ...

MS: No.

Q: ... you know, your employers never ...

MS: Well, I worked out on Shore Road. And with the sand mining operation, that's where Gotham Sand and Stone, which they are there today, but they're under a different name, I guess. And if there was ever any fires, I never knew there was a fire, because there's no way I could find out from anybody there was a fire where I could attend it. No, there was no conflict of anything, any sort like that. And I even think the—some of the men that worked here in different—right here in Port Washington, if there was a fire, they would just go and nobody would say anything to you: "No you can't go." Just, "Yeah, you're a firefighter. You go ahead. You do what you have to do." And they appreciate it. If anything like that happened at a business wherever it was, the firemen would go out and would come back, be appreciated. Because we have people here that are taking care of us. Not only our equipment, our homes, our lives also included in this, which is a big thing. ... [END OF SIDE A; BEGIN SIDE B] ... and check everything out and make sure everything was in fighting order, which was great. You were just not going down to hop on the truck and going. You had to service that truck, everything that was on it, including the human being that was on it.

Q: And what do you mean, service the human being?

MS: Make sure he was okay. He could handle it. He could handle it. He had the training.

You train these guys. When they first join in, if they're going to drive trucks, you have to teach them how, what has to be done, how to drive the truck.

Q: So, after you learned yourself, you trained other ...

MS: Others. Others that joined that were firefighters. Yes, that joined the company to become firefighters. And we met certain days during the week in the evenings or night, that they would come down and train and so on to learn how the equipment should be handled. But, you just can't give a person an axe: "Go ahead and use this axe. Go over there." You got to know what to do with the axe. How to open it up where you got to get in through the building, and there's doors and so on, how to open up the doors, break the doors. Open it up so you can get in there and fight the fire. There's a lot of training involved in something like that. And it was fun. But yet, when it comes to doing the proper job, it was serious. Everybody took it serious, and there was no messing around. But training was a lot of fun, too. Well, "How—what happens if I should do it this way?" Well, if you do it that way, you may not come out to do it the next time (laughs). Something like that. You don't even ask questions like that. You would do the right thing all the time, at all times. It still happens. It's good.

Q: Of all the things that you learned as a firefighter, which things do you think helped you in your outside life? In your work life? Your family life?

MS: Well, something that you always have in the back of your mind what you were when you would get onto a Fire Department like this. And sometimes you would go out with friends and just talking along, and the question would come up about "Oh, we had a bad fire in our town, and this is what happened with the guys that were fighting it." I'd say, "Oh, that's great. That's something," but I say "You learn to do all of this." "Well, how do you know?" I say, "Well, I'm a volunteer." "Oh, really. You're a volunteer?" And I would say, "Yes, I'm a volunteer." They'd ask a lot of questions and so on. And then they would say, "Oh, my God. I'm so proud of you guys. You guys know what you are doing." And it's a good feeling. It's a good feeling inside of you that people speak the way they do about the volunteer Fire Department. Which is good.

Q: You said your brother, brother-in-law got you involved. Was it your wife's brother?

MS: My wife's brother. Yes, yes. He was the oldest brother, and then there were two other brothers. One was Nello [Scaramucci] and the other one was Al [Scaramucci], and they were also volunteer firefighters. Another one, Al, and her brother Nello, he passed away here a few years ago. My brother-in-law Al, he lives down here on Webster Avenue. He's not active with the Fire Department now. My brother-in-law "Scari," the one that helped me get in and join, he passed away here a few years ago. He must have been in his eighties when he passed away. And he was a great guy. A good man. Very good man.

Q: Did you get together with family then to talk about Fire Department things?

MS: Oh, yes, of course. Yeah, yeah. There'd be a pretty bad fire, and you'd get together, just visiting or something, and then questions would come up about the fire. How big it was, what we did, and so on. What happened, why it happened. And then you'd talk, and then you'd say, maybe you saw something where you could avoid having one in your own home when you find out what happened to this place that they had a fire in there. Whether they overload the lines or they have a fireplace they don't care to protect it the proper way. They just burn it, and those things happen. Even on a gas stove, things happen if you're not there or you don't watch. And then you forget. That's the most difficult one is when you forget, and then fires start. And you forget about these things, what caused the fire.

Q: What kinds of things would people forget?

MS: Well, what they had been doing at home. You could be cooking something on the stove. You forget that it's there. And all of a sudden, next thing you know, it's burning. It happens. I was cooking dinner one time, I forget what it was. And then (laughs) it was black, and I had to throw the pot out with it. It caught fire (laughs). I'm a fireman, too. But you do it. You forget.

Q: If you were going to give one piece of advice to people for avoiding problems with home fires, what would that be?

MS: Keep your eyes open. Don't forget. Don't walk away. Stay with it. If you walk away, you forget about it. And it's easily, easily done. I mean, it's easily done. You don't do those things. Or you don't forget to do those things. But it happens. It's only natural that you're going to forget. It's human nature.

Q: Did you ever think about becoming a paid firefighter?

MS: No. No. Because I—the job that I had I liked very much. What I was doing, I was working right here in Port Washington, and I liked that very much. So I had everything right here with me, so I wouldn't have to go miles and miles to travel. Everything was right here in Port Washington. That was one of the good things about it. But to go out and be a fireman, live elsewhere, or do things away, where you're miles away from your home that you live in, it's hard. Very hard. It was easy for me. It was much easier for me. I was a resident right here, and I lived right here, and I worked right here, which is good.

Q: Did you serve in the military?

MS: Yes, I did.

Q: What—can you tell me something about that?

MS: I was—I graduated high school in '42, and I could not be drafted because of my age. I went to Bridgeport, Connecticut. I worked for General Electric for nine months. And then when I hit my nineteenth—nineteenth birthday, I went back to Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, took my exam. I passed. Went back, and the foreman looked at me and he shook his head like this here. "No, you didn't pass." I shook my head like this: "Yes, I did." So I left. And I was inducted into the Army Air Force, which I was very happy for that to happen. I had nine months training in this country. Then I was shipped overseas. And I was in the CBI—China, Burma, India—theater of the War. And I spent twenty-six months over there. It took twenty-nine, thirty days by ship to leave Newport News, Virginia, cross the Atlantic. Capetown, South Africa we stopped for fuel, into the Indian Ocean, into Bombay. Spent twenty-six months, well twenty-four months actually. It was two months travelling to get overseas. Then, when the War was over, we went to Calcutta. And then we stopped in the Philippines to refuel, which was an eyesore. There must have been thirty, forty masts sticking out of the water where those ships were sunk in the Philippines in Manila. And then, we left there, and we landed in San Francisco. And that was like twenty-nine days aboard ship coming back home. Two months just traveling during the War, and then one month after the War.

Q: How did your military training affect your work as a firefighter?

MS: At that time, I was a graduate high school. I worked for nine months and then I was in the military. And then, after I come out of the military, then I joined the Fire Department. That's when I got the—when I joined it was in '50 to '55 in that time. So there was no effect that way. So I had a trip right around the world (laughs). It's funny. But it was great, really something.

Q: Were you at all involved on September 11th, 2001, you know, when the attacks hit the World Trade Center?

MS: No, no. No way. No, that was too—that was, what happened a couple of years ago. Probably seventy-eight years old at that time. No, there's no way I'd be involved in any of that over there.

Q: Yeah.

MS: The only way to be involved is just being sorry for what happened and why it happened. But other than that, no.

Q: Who are some of the people that you think you influenced in your time as a firefighter?

MS: That I influenced? I guess mostly my family. Would be my wife and my two sons, as

they were growing up. And how times, they would just get in my car and take them down to the firehouse and go in. They just want to look at the trucks and put the hat on and sit up on the seat and hold the wheel like they're driving the vehicle. That's what they enjoyed about it. They enjoyed that very much.

Q: Did they want to hear stories about the fires that you were at?

MS: No, not really. No, no. They would ask "Where was the fire?" or something like that, and I would, you know, tell them. Or sometimes they would ask questions: "Was anybody hurt?" and I would say, "No," I said, "Nobody was hurt. Everybody was taken care of," if something like that happened. So then they would have a smile on their face, and that'd be the end of it.

Q: So you were never at a fire where anyone was hurt?

MS: I don't recall any. Maybe—could have had some, maybe overtaken by smoke or something, probably a couple of times. I think there were a few small accidents that happened. I don't remember—I don't remember them, but there were some. And the guys were taken to the hospital, checked out. Nothing serious. But precaution, mostly, to make sure there was nothing wrong with the person. That way, I would say. Other than that, that was about it.

Q: If you had to do it all over again, how would you do things differently?

MS: As far as the handling of fires and so on, I don't think there'd be anything any different. As far as myself, be more careful. Learning, experience, and something like that. But other than that, I could say there's not much more you could say about it. Or how else you would handle it. Unless you say, "Well, I want no part of it." No, no. Couldn't do that. Oh, I could start riding them tomorrow, if I was younger (laughs). Say I'll go over and do it again, you know.

Q: How would you like to be remembered?

MS: Just be remembered that I was a firefighter, period. That way. But, other than that, there's really not more—not much more that you could say. You know, knowing that I put in fifty years service, but not a full fifty years, because of age where you're not able to get in there and do anything. And that was a safety precaution. It was more a safety precaution. If you're seventy years old, they don't want you to go in the interior of a home that's burning that you could do things there, because it would take that much longer for you to get involved in it. You couldn't think fast enough. So, that wouldn't be involved there.

Q: Well, what kind of offices or committee memberships did you hold in the Department?

MS: I was an engineer for ten years. And then after I was elected to be financial secretary. And that was twenty-two years as financial secretary. Which was great.

Q: And what were your responsibilities?

MS: It was, well, as a financial secretary, it was the handling of checks coming in and so on, and other paraphernalia. Invoices. Checks out and so on, to be paid. And that was about it. And it was a good experience. A lot of fun. It was a lot of fun doing that. So, after the twenty-two years was up, I felt well I think I'd better move on, because and let the other guy come in. So I did ten years engineer, and twenty-two. That's thirty-two years right there of being an officer.

Q: What did you do as engineer?

MS: Equipment on trucks. The fire trucks. Keeping the fire trucks in shape and order. And you go to a fire, make sure all the equipment was placed back in order where it should be. Make sure no equipment was damaged. If it was damaged, it was our duty to replace it. Keeping the truck in shape. Having it ready in Class-A form at all times, that truck, keep in shape, because lives depend on it. And that's what we would do as being an engineer. And if you didn't do it, you heard from the upper boys that were above you. And they would question "Why?" And you'd have to have an answer. If you didn't have an answer, well, then they'd rub you down a little bit. And then the next time you would

think about it and do it the proper way and make sure you did it the right way. There's no messing around. There was no horsing around when it come to things like that, because too many lives were dependent on that, and that's why we kept the equipment in perfect shape. And also, the condition of you yourself, to make sure you were able to handle it. As you're getting older you were questioned. Equipment and so on. Is everything—you're doing everything properly? Everything's going the right way? And you were checked out on it also.

Q: And you yourself were questioned about that?

MS: Oh, sure. Absolutely. Sure. It was my job to do that. It was my job to keep it—keep the equipment as it was supposed to be—the equipment. And they would—for some of the things that we didn't know was happening, they would tell us: "Check this out." "Fine, okay." And if we didn't, we heard about it. You wouldn't want to go after the meeting and sit down and have a drink, you would want to go home and say, "Why the hell did I do that?" Keep it in order.

Q: Do you remember any particular instances where you thought you had made a mistake or...

MS: Not really, no. No. Because I would say ninety-nine percent of the guys knew what they had to do, and they kept it— and they knew there was a lot depending on what they were

doing and how they were keeping things in order. Maybe one percent, that would be mostly maybe forgetting something that you needed to do and you forgot to do it. That way. But mostly, no, it was always kept in order, proper way. And there's always reminders that the officers would come up and question you on certain things about the truck and so on... just want to make sure everything is okay. You had to do that. Lives depended on it. It turned out great.

Q: Now, over these past fifty years, what changes have you seen in the Fire Department?

MS: It's hard for me to answer that, because I've been up in that age. I really wasn't that active. But one thing that I do notice, when there was that ... alarm comes over that Plectron whether it's a still alarm or it's a general alarm, that thing blows, it's a matter of seconds and all of a sudden you hear fire trucks. You got these sirens blowing. I say, "Wow, those guys are fast." And they're out there, they're doing the proper thing that they have to do. And the speed of these guys doing things, getting down there and getting out, which is great. And many, many times, you go down to the firehouse, there's always somebody down there, and they're ready to go. When that happens, these guys go. They hop in, they take off, and they go. It's one hundred percent. And I say one hundred percent. And, because this—we just talked to the guy and just look at them—you think, Boy, these guys were right on the ball. They're great.

Q: Do you ever go down to the firehouse yourself just to chat, have coffee?

MS: Now, no, not really. No, no. Not unless there's some holiday or something. Come by or something like that. But not really. I don't go down there. No. So it's a—maybe I should, I don't know, just hop in the car and go down. A couple times I was there, I would just go in. You have the locks. I might go over there, just open the doors and go in, and... And I don't see anybody. One time, there that I was there and the alarm went off. So I just stood by, and these guys come down there within seconds. And when you hear that “duh, duh, duh, duh, duh”—the door's rattling, opening up, and boom. That's what they're...they're gone (laughs). That's when I said "God bless them. They're fast." And they are. They're great and they're good. Yeah. And that way they'd wait a while, a short while, and sometimes could be just an alarm that was really nothing. And within minutes they're back. You ask them what was happening. They say, “Oh, it was this and that and so on.” Really not much of anything. And they would open up the doors and they would be back in. They'd—the doors closed, and everybody was gone (laughs). And that was the end of it. Wait for the next one.

Q: Have you gotten any false alarms over the years?

MS: No. I don't remember false alarms, no. Mostly it's probably something. Could be the only way you could say it's a false alarm is somebody put an alarm and maybe they put an alarm where they should have not put an alarm, but maybe they were just making sure safety that they would be better off putting an alarm instead of themselves having it—

Maybe that way, something like that would happen.

Q: From not for mischief.

MS: No, no. No, no, no. Nothing like that. For mischief, no. If there was, I never heard of any mischief.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit more about your being named Grand Marshal? When did you find out that you were going to be ...

MS: Well, I got a phone call, and they were telling me that I'm a fifty year member and that they were having the Memorial Day parade, and they wanted to know if I was going to parade. I said, "Yes." That's one parade I very, very, very seldom miss. If I did miss it, I was away. And they told me that I was going to be the Grand Marshal. I was really proud. Very happy that I was the Grand Marshal of the parade here on Memorial Day. Good feeling. And the good feeling was when I sat in that Mustang that the owner by the name of John Murro had used, the vehicle. When I sat there, and those people that were on both sides of that street waved and clapped. And I'd wave back to them and so that—it's a feeling that I can't even describe. Can't describe the feeling that I had when I rode in that vehicle and those people just clapped their hands and yelled and yelled and yelled. And the people that knew me would call me "Mikey." "Atta boy, Mikey," you know. Different things like that. I felt proud. Really proud. It's a good feeling. But ...

Q: Did the different companies take turns sometimes of who was going to be the Marshal, or was it ...

MS: Well, you have to get—you have to be a fifty-year member. And you could have two, three guys that are—that could be a fifty-year member and ...

Q: And, so then how is the Marshal chosen?

MS: Well, I think they would choose a Marshal by the Marshal that was prior the year before. Now, next year the Memorial Day parade was the Atlantic Hook and Ladder Company. If there are others, like Protection or Flower Hill, then they would have the Grand Marshal. I'm pretty sure that's the way it works. And then it would be the three companies like that that they take a turn and pick a fire marshal, which is good. But there was only one this year. Like I say, when I joined, there were five, and I was the only one.

Q: Were you in the company ceremony? The one on Memorial Day? And then at the cemetery also?

MS: Oh, yes, yes. Yeah.

Q: Do you go to those ceremonies every year?

MS: Yes, yes. I usually—when it comes to the Memorial Day parade, I love to go in the parade and go parade, because I really enjoy it. Because I'm really proud that I have all those years behind me. Just like all the other—we got a fifty, a forty-nine, forty-eight, forty-seven member. These guys go. They may not march because they have difficulty doing it, but there's vehicles that they ride in, and they enjoy that. They enjoy doing that. And it's a good feeling. Very good feeling, you know. So next year, if they have one, I'll put on my uniform and get myself in a truck (laughs), just sit there and enjoy it. It's good. It's a pretty good feeling. There's a few of us that are up in those eighties. There's one, Tony Augustino. And there's Jules Piccardi. Tony Augustino, he's like eighty-four years of age, and Jules Piccardi is, I think he's seventy-eight, seventy-nine. And he's been around. And the other ones, there are also a few others—I can't remember the name of some of the other guys that are also down there that have the fifty years, and so on. But they're there. Proud. Very proud when you see those guys. But, it's a hard thing when you join, when you first start, because there's a lot of things you've got to put on the side to become a fireman.

Q: Like what?

MS: Well, if when that whistle blows, if you're doing something, you got to go. If you can't handle it, well, then you don't have to join a company, because if you're not going to be a

member. You're not going to be one. Just to join to be a member. You're a firefighter; that's why you join the Fire Department because you're a firefighter, and they need you to help people. And that's what you're going to do is go out and help the people that call in. As years go by and so on and so on, you can slow down a little bit. You don't have to do as much. But the feeling is, there's always somebody behind you that's also coming in to join and be a member of the Port Washington Fire Department. You know, some of these guys come in, they're eighteen years of age, nineteen years of age. And they want to be volunteers. And they join. They're checked out and so on, to make sure, and they join. They're really happy. Proud to be members of the fire company. Even at the firehouse, you'll see these faces, you say, wow, I'm not that active, but these guys are new. I never saw these guys around. There's a lot of smiles on their faces (laughs). Which is, makes you feel happy that they do that.

Q: Sure. Is there anything else that we haven't touched on here that you think is important?

MS: With the Fire Department?

Q: Uh huh. And with your life as a firefighter?

MS: Yeah, yeah. No, I think that's about it.

Q: What do you think the value of this project is? Conducting oral histories with members

of the Port Washington Fire Department?

MS: Oh, I think it's great, yeah, to have this done. At least, you say to yourself "I may not be around, but yet there's something back there that I'm going to leave that somebody can handle." And every now and then the name will come up. "This guy here, he's been this, he's been that," and so on. But he's down six feet, but yet we didn't forget him. That memory is still there. And even myself, with some of these here guys that might be ten, fifteen, twenty years older than I was, and every now and then, in my mind, they come to me. Some of these guys that were firefighters and so on. Like I said, down at the firehouse, you would talk, and you'd bring these names up, these guys that were the officers and the Chiefs and so on. They're not forgotten. They're always there. Yeah, their lives are not, but their memory is. Which is a good thing.

Q: Well, you won't be forgotten. I want to thank you so much for a wonderful interview.

MS: I'm glad that you were able to come.

Q: Thank you.

MS: Good. Really good. ... [INTERRUPTION] ...

Q: You mentioned that you were in an accident at work.

MS: Yes.

Q: Can you just tell me a little bit about it?

MS: Well, I was—we were doing work inside of a hopper. We were blocked inside of the hopper with a clamshell bucket, and we were dropped down too fast, and we were thrown to one side of the bucket. And I hit my head, and I had my—it fractured. My whole head was fractured. Jaw was pushed up to one side, and I was rushed over to St. Francis Hospital and they wired me up. Everything closed. And I stood like that for about two, three months before everything healed, was back. Back to normal.

Q: So, you were back to normal. How long did it take?

MS: Well, it must have been three—three months or better before they took the wires out of my mouth and I could open my mouth and chew. I even had my teeth knocked out. Five teeth. When I was in the ambulance, I says to the guy, "You have something, do you have a spittoon or something? I got a pebble or stone or something in my mouth. I want to spit it out." When I spit it out, I said, "Oh, my God! They're my teeth" (laughs).
Lucky. Yeah, smashed.

Q: But then you went back to fighting fires after that?

MS: Oh, yeah, sure, sure. Yeah. Once I got it healed up, I wasn't as active as I usually—as I was, but if I did go to the fire at that time, I would stay near the vehicle, the truck. And if guys were coming, they need a tool or whatever, I would help that way. And after the fire was over, they would bring the equipment to me to put them back, and I would pick it up and put it back in the compartments of the fire truck. But as far as going and fighting fires, no. That was fourteen years ago. Fourteen, fifteen years ago, yeah. But I wasn't that active either with the Fire Department, because then you're talking, at that time I had thirty-five years in already. So you slow up a little bit. As you get older, age makes you slow (laughs). Right?

Q: But you still went back there.

MS: Yeah.

Q: You deserve a lot of credit for that.