

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

Transcript Of Oral History Interview With

Thomas J. Tobin
Protection Engine Company No. 1

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

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pertaining to the subject being discussed

Q: Today is November 19th, 2004. This is an interview with Thomas J. Tobin. My name is Sally Olds. The interview is taking place in the Port Washington Public Library.

Thomas J. Tobin: Okay.

Q: Can you please say your name?

TJT: Tom Tobin.

Q: And which fire company are you affiliated with?

TJT: Protection Engine Company.

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

TJT: I was twenty-nine years of age.

Q: And what made you decide to become a firefighter?

TJT: Well, my brother had been a member of Flower Hill Hose Company. As a matter of fact, he'd been President up there. Caused a little rift in the family because I joined Protection

Engine Company. But I had always wanted to be one, but I didn't live in the area. When I first came back from military service, I had had an accident and I lost part of my leg. And that kind of knocked me down. I couldn't get active at that time. I later moved upstate, and when I came back, I was married; we had two children. And the fellow who lived next door to me on Manhasset Isle had been a classmate of mine, and he asked me to join. And I had the interest, and so I'd--in those days you went up to the firehouse and you hung around, you helped them out. You weren't a fireman, but you went up and you showed your interest by helping them out on their work nights. And I did it a couple of times, and I liked it, and I wanted to go into it. So I applied. Took me thirteen months to get into the company, because in those days, there were waiting lists. But that's how I got started.

Q: What was your friend's name?

TJT: Pete Downes. D-O-W-N-E-S. He's still my neighbor. Pete was a professional firefighter over in Garden City and he was seriously injured so he had to get off the job.

Q: And why did you join Protection instead of ...

TJT: Because Pete, he was in Protection. And I wanted to be away, you know, I didn't want to walk in anybody's shadow. Let me do what I had to do on my own.

Q: Had your brother told you anything about ...

TJT: Oh, well, I had lived with him, and he joined Flower Hill when we lived up in the Park Section, and I used to remember him getting up in the middle of the night and running out. And I got to know several of the firefighters in town. And it —always -- aside from admiring them, I wanted to do what they did.

Q: Did they tell you anything about the actual experiences they had had ...

TJT: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah ...

Q: ... and what was involved?

TJT: ... before you get into the company, you sit down with what they call the membership committee, and they go over an extensive review of what is expected of you, what is involved, the dangers. So, yeah, you don't go in blind. I will say that for the Department. As long as I've been in it--and it'll be forty years-- I've never seen anybody come into this Department in any of the companies, who was not fully advised of what was expected of them and what the dangers are.

Q: Can you tell me about your nickname in the Department and how you got it?

TJT Well, that goes back to, I think it was 1981--it was 1980, '81--we had a chaplain in the Department by the name of Irv Pedersen--a wonderful man. He was a member of St. Stephen's Church. I think he was a leader over there. Or an elder--I'm sorry, he was an elder. And Irv was the chaplain. He came out of Flower Hill Hose Company. In those days, we only had three companies. We did not have the Fire Medic Company at the time. And each company was required--aside from the Chiefs, officers--each company was required to supply an administrative officer. And as I alluded to in my writeup, I got into the company, into Protection Engine Company, I was only in the company six months, and I wound up being the Department secretary, on the promise that they would replace me within the year. Well, twelve of those years went by (laughs) before I got replaced. But, to get back to the other, Irv had been--Irv worked for the old Pan Am, and he worked the night tour. And it got to the point where Irv couldn't function as the chaplain. And, in those days, the chaplain basically officiated at the prayer before the meetings and the prayer that they closed the meetings, and the funerals. And Irv just couldn't--he couldn't do it. Then he went to the Chief of the Department at that time, who was Tommy Murray Jr., and he told Tommy that he couldn't keep up. And they came to me, and they asked me would I read a service for them one night. And you know, this was for a deceased firefighter; I couldn't refuse to do that. So I did it, and within about three months' time, Tommy came to me and said that he'd like me to take the job as chaplain. At that time, I was Captain of the Fire Police. And I agreed to do it. And, as time went on, I developed the office of--I kind of originated, if you would say-- it wasn't very active, and I've changed that all around. And the kids gave me the nickname

"Padre." I'm either "Padre" or "Pope," whichever you want to call me (laughs). And then there were a lot of funny stories and things that just make me so--so proud of these kids, that I could tell you, but it'd take up probably three days of your tape (laughs).

Q: Well, can you just tell me maybe one or two?

TJT: I'll tell you a funny little--a funny story. A very dear friend of mine is John Salerno. He's an ex-Chief. And he has two sons--Danny and John Jr. And, as I say, when I became chaplain, I made a concentrated effort to expand the duties of the chaplain in the Department. I joined the New York State Association of Fire Chaplains and, in about ten years, I was--I had worked within the State Association, and they came to me and they nominated me to be the first lay chaplain of the State Association. Prior to that, you had to be ordained clergy, and I'm not. I'm a lay chaplain. I'm Roman Catholic, but I work with all the denominations. And that's another thing I really enjoy is my relationship with the Council of Churches. I think that the clergy in this town are just wonderful people. I can't say enough about them. They have been absolutely just wonderful to me. And so, I was over at Atlantic Hook and Ladder Company, which is John's company, and we were talking and having a couple of--I don't drink, so I was having Coke and the guys would have a couple of beers after work night--and I tried to leave, and they kept me in the bar room, in the recreation room. And I couldn't understand why they were keeping me there. At that time, I drove a red Valiant. And I got outside, and what they had done was--I don't know if you recall, but at one time they had a picture of Pope John

Paul, but it was on a spring. And it had a suction cup on it. And they had suctioned this thing to the window of my car. And when the car moved, he waved his hand at you (laughs). And while it was funny, two nights later--I'm also involved with the County Chaplain Service, and I was called out to a big fire out in Hicksville, because you needed a chaplain on the scene. And I'm driving along, and I notice--I'm on the expressway now, and I have my red light going and I'm driving. And I notice this guy driving along next to me, and he's looking at my car and he's laughing. And, of course, I'm concentrating on the fire: "What am I going to do? What am I going to find when I get there? Are we going to have injuries? What are we going to do?" And all of a sudden, this guy almost hit me. He almost drove into my car from the side. And it was only then it dawned on me that John Paul was waving at him, and he was (laughs)--so I came back and I told these guys, "You guys are crazy! You almost got me killed out there." But, I mean, these are the things. I guess I was chaplain about maybe five or six years, and that was the first--the first incident where they called me "Padre" was, they called me into a meeting at Protection Engine Company, and the young kids had gone out and bought me a jacket. I still have the jacket; it's in my closet. It was a corduroy jacket. It has Protection Engine Company and the Department patch. And across, on the right-hand side, they had had inscribed "Padre." And that's when the name took off. And I've lived with it ever since. But I enjoyed--they're just a wonderful bunch of people.

Q: Did you have any special training to become chaplain?

TJT: No. As a matter--I'll be honest with you. As I look back over it, going in, no I did not.

But I honestly believe that it was a calling from God. I consider my chaplaincy a ministry. I wrote that [?]. (Laughs). You know, I had a job--a normal job like everybody else's. But I always considered it a calling. And I took it upon myself--and the Department always supported me--I went to training. I have--I have more certificates and degrees right now than Fahrenheit 9/11. But I have been to training--I go to training every year with the Federation of Fire Chaplains, which is an international organization. I'm certified in pastoral counseling and intervention. I'm also certified as an expert in acute traumatic stress, but that's the Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress. And actually, I'm a charter member of the Nassau County Critical Incident Stress Management Team. I was on the ad hoc committee to form that. And my wife and I are both counselors for that organization. But, yes, as far as formal training, yeah, I've taken some since I became chaplain, because I realized I needed it.

Q: What kinds of things did you learn ...

TJT: Well, you ...

Q: ... in your training? What was that like?

TJT: ... you learn counseling; you learn consolation. You learn how to deal with various episodes and various incidents that you can--as a matter of fact, I came back, and I wrote

the curriculum for the New York State Association of Fire Chaplains, on Unexpected Sudden Injury or Death Notification. I'm a New York State instructor--I teach that course three times a year for chaplains. I teach the role of the chaplain in the fire service, as well. And the role of the chaplain in the fire service, I also teach in various academies in the State, basically teach that to the chief officers and the men that are coming up to be chiefs.

Q: So you learned on the job, but ...

TJT: OJT, but I did ...

Q: What would you recommend for people who want to become chaplains? Do you think they ...

TJT: Well, the first thing you'd have to do--and I would say this without hesitation--if the chaplain is a married man, he must have the support of his wife. If he doesn't have the support of his wife, he can't do the job correctly. Fully--let me put it that way. I shouldn't say "correctly," but fully. He must have the support of his department. The chaplaincy--years ago, we used to call it being a knife-and-fork chaplain. That's when you went to the dinners, and, you know, you said grace before meals, and you offered a benediction at the end of the evening, and that was that. But, I learned--and I actually learned the hard way-- it was right up the block here, and we lost Lieutenant Bobby

Dayton in that fire. And up to that time, I had been, you know, I had expanded the office to where I went to the hospitals, and I visited the sick, and I officiated at the funerals of the dead. But I had never encountered, for me, the devastation of losing a firefighter. I had never come across it; I hadn't been involved. And that day, that turned me inside-out, upside-down, and all around. I was—I was—I don't know truly if there's one word to explain it—I went through periods in that seventy-two hours where I still carry the picture of his wife looking at me through the storm door as I went to get her on North Bayles Avenue. And she was holding the baby. I honestly believe that God got me through the whole thing. I can't consciously sit here and say I turned to God, consciously, but I'm sure I did subconsciously. Because, once I got to the house, I—I made the notification. Of course, Bobby was not dead when I left the fire scene to get her. I told her there had been a serious accident, and he was in danger. Well, we got the next-door neighbor to come in and sit with the baby. Bobby's parents both lived in town at the time, so we got them, and we brought them to St. Francis Hospital. And, as everybody knows, Bobby expired a couple of hours later. But in that time, I was—I—I don't want to sound like a theological whack-job, but in that time, I was very fortunate. God sent me a priest at St. Francis by the name of Tom Sinnott. And Father Sinnott has since passed away, but he was the chaplain at St. Francis. And he just—he exuded a strength to me that I—I didn't know I even had. I made it through the notification at the hospital when they came out. The doctors told Pam [Bobby Dayton's wife] that they had done everything they could, but Bobby had expired. See, now that's wrong. I'm not supposed to say "expired," because I teach the men now that through notification, don't be afraid of the word "died."

Use the D-word; that's what we used to tell them. Because your railroad ticket expires, or your registration expires. Humans don't expire; they die. And people, I have found over the years, doing them, unfortunately--or fortunately, whatever you want to say or however you want to look at it--I've had a number of these now, and I have learned--how much I've learned how to--I've learned how to cope with it. I haven't learned to accept it. But, I cope with it. And in Bobby's case, we had, in addition to Bobby, had nineteen fellows hurt. And we had to disperse them among three hospitals, so I had to care for them, as well. So I quickly ran around to the hospitals to make sure everybody was all right, and then I came back, and we had to sit down that day and plan the funeral for one of our men--something we had never done. I think the last man to die in Port Washington in a fire was 1947, named Charlie [Tobin later corrected this, saying that his first name was William] Dargan. He had a heart attack on the line that night. That's the story that was passed on to me; I wasn't there at the time. And Bobby and I, we had been friendly--he was a lot younger than I am--but he was a nice young man. He was a New York City firefighter, as well. And he was tremendously talented with his hands. He knew carpentry. I often said to him, "Why don't you just get out and go into business for yourself." But, like so many of us, once you get that--it's a fever; it's a sickness, in a way. Once we get in, we can't come out. Very few firefighters that I knew--I mean, true firefighters, not the people that join for social reasons--very few of them that I know are out, unless they die. I mean, I mentioned Johnny Salerno. John Salerno went on to be Chief. John Salerno, now, he has a heart condition, he's diabetic, and yet, he comes out. And I'm sixty-eight. I was sixty-eight the other day. I would say John's probably sixty-

two maybe--sixty, sixty-two. And we've grown so close that, you know, I had an incident that I was hospitalized myself for a month. And John was in the hospital every day to see me. And we don't really come from, you know, common backgrounds. John was raised up in what we used to call Hicksville, up there on Avenue A, Avenue B. I was raised in the Park Section. I'm parochial school educated, and John's public school educated. John likes to pretend he doesn't, he's not too religious, but that's a lot of baloney. That's a facade that he throws up. I tell him, "Oh, throw your defense mechanism back in the drawer. Stop telling me that you don't believe in God. Don't give me that stuff." But a man with a bigger heart--as big as he is, his heart's even bigger. And he loves these men. Here's a man that gives up his Saturdays every summer and goes down and he cooks for our drill team when they're racing. He doesn't have to do it. You know, he could be sitting home. But his son's involved in it. A lot of that--but that's a big--I don't know who else has been interviewed, but I would have to believe that a lot of them told you that this is a family-type thing. I mean, it's not necessarily handed down father to son, but when the families get in--I have three sons. All three of them are firemen. One of them is a New York City fireman as well as being a volunteer. They were volunteers here, but unfortunately the cost of living here drove them out of town. And I'm very sorry to see that, because they're my sons, and I will tell you, I'm so proud of them. They are good firemen. They are good firemen. They're faithful to the job, and yet they know that the job comes second. Their family comes first. And that's something. That's another thing with this Department that makes me so proud. We sit the youngsters down and we tell them, "There are three priorities in this Department.

Your first priority is yourself, your family; your second is your job. And your third is the Port Washington Fire Department. Don't get them mixed up." And, you know, I have yet to see--not that we don't have some that they do get it a little mixed up, especially the younger fellows and the more newlyweds. But I'm so proud. And I don't have to do it. I will see a Lieutenant take a new firefighter or somebody maybe a year in the company, and they may be spending a little too much time at the firehouse. And I've seen Lieutenants take them into the side office--they never do it in front of anybody else--and, all of the sudden, the man is--he's making his points; he's coming up when we need him. But he's not sitting around that firehouse when he should be home with his family. And, to me, just socially, that makes us an organization that stands out above a lot of others. Our people are told, "You come here when we need you, but your family comes first."

Q: You mentioned, you know, a kind of fever or sickness that--what do you mean?

TJT: You can't get out. No, I couldn't turn around and walk out of here now and walk over to Protection and put my badge on the desk and say, "I want out," you know. Now, we were out until three o'clock this morning. We, what they call, "mutual aided" to Plandome. They had a fire. And they have a rather small department over there. It was working fire, so we sent men over. And maybe I'm a little crazy--and I've had Chiefs tell me I am--but when I--first of all, a chaplain's job, in my eyes, is to serve those who protect and serve. That's my firefighters. I call them mine. They're not mine. I don't own them. But, to me, they're all--we're a family. We have the problems of a family, but we're a

family. And when they go out, I go out--especially if they have a working fire. I don't make all these automatic alarms (laughs) that we get here all the time nowadays. But I will go out. If I find the Chief going on the air, and he gives -- we have various signals, and I hear the particular signal, I will leave what I'm doing at home and I'll go. And, of course, if it's what we call a general alarm here, when you hear the sirens going--that's a general alarm--I go to them automatically. I go to the ambulance calls. Not so much because I'm a medic, but the medics, some of them--and they're so young--and I often think to myself, are we--should we take them that young, because we expose them to so many dangers. But they're so good. These kids are good.

Q: How young?

TJT: Eighteen. Now, we're taking seventeen with parental consent. But these kids go in and you know, you walk into a room and somebody has died from a cardiac. And here you've got a nineteen-year-old young lady who is just finishing up her EMT [emergency medical technician] class. She has just been graduated or certified. And I don't care how many films you watch or how many doctors you talk to, or--when you have a physical dead body in front of you, it drives home. And I'm there, not to get in the way, but I go because I believe I should be there if they need me. If they don't need me, sometimes I'll deal with the family for them, because it's very difficult, and--but this is all through training. I've been through thirty--I don't even know how many schools I've been to. The Department has been very good that way. If I pick out a course I want to take, they send

me. And I've learned--I had an old time instructor from Adelphi University. She's gone now, but--I mean, she moved out of the area. And she put it on the line with us. It was funny, because everybody in the place was a guy. And, I mean, we were, I guess the average age was close to -- we're probably forty, forty-two. And she said to us--and she was so right, you know—"Until you see it in front of you, you don't know"--as she put it—"you don't know what the hell you're talking about." And we just sat there. And she said, "I'll tell you" and she did really. She had slides; she showed us various accidents and terrible scenes. She said, "Yeah, but you can sit and watch this because it's on a--it's up on a screen." She said, "But what would you do if you were standing on the side of that auto accident, wrapped around the tree, like those kids out there in Ronkonkoma or Bethpage--you know, there. But, you turn around and you see these youngsters, and they get in there and they do what has to be done. And I often go back to the firehouse later. I'll go back to the ambulance with the medics. And I'll just sit there. Won't say a word. Sit there and have a cup of coffee. And I do it, because I tell them, "I'm here for you. If you want to talk to me, fine. You don't want to talk to me, fine, too. That's your problem. But don't let this stuff get to you." It will get to you; it has to get to you. If it wasn't, you'd be a headstone. But, my function, as far as I'm concerned, is go there and listen. I don't talk.

Q: So you won't initiate a conversation.

TJT: No. Well, yeah. Well, I'll go over and say, "How you doing? Everything all right?" If

she says "No," or he says, "No, can I talk to you?" we slide off to someplace or sometimes, I mean, when that young policeman was killed down here on Pleasant Avenue when the tree fell on him. I was on the road. I was in Melville, and Firecom [Fire Communications Center] called me up. I have a radio--the Department has a radio in my car. They called me, and they said, "Can you respond to St. Francis Hospital?" I said, "Okay, I'll give you an ETA [estimated time of arrival] of about thirty minutes, because the expressway wasn't really moving too much. And I got there, and I've got to say that's another--well, God has been so good to me, with the people I've had to deal with, because I got to St. Francis; the charge nurse had taken these four from the ambulance, took them into a side room, and had them sitting there waiting for me. Got them up--of course, we had cops up there, the PBA [Police Benevolent Association] was there; we had the detectives there, homicide--everybody was milling around. I walked in, and the police Lieutenant thought I was their chaplain. And he came over, and he says, "Father, can I talk to you?" I said, "Lieutenant, come here." I said, "First of all, I'm not Father." I said, "I am a father, but the Bishop would not like to find me going around with a collar on. I'm not Father." Then, that's another--I try to lighten it a little bit. I don't like make a mockery of it, but I try to lighten the scene a little bit. I said, "I'm the Fire Department chaplain." And I said, "I have an ambulance crew that I have to deal with, but I will be happy to sit with your men until your chaplain gets here." And I did. I went in with my crew. I sat down, and they were terribly distraught, because, well it--I'm going to say something that you won't--I'd ask you not to print this up--the press has been very hard on us. They don't give us too much leeway. And somebody had made a

remark that, had they moved the young man in a different way, he might have survived. Well, the medical examiner told us later on that he was dead “when you got there. Your people did what they could do, but there was no way they were going to save him.” He said, “He would have had to have intense surgery immediately, almost on the spot, to have saved him.” What did happen, we found out, was he fell, and his friends tried to move him. Now, am I going to accuse them of doing anything? No. They did what they thought was right, and you can't criticize people for that. But, they--the kids were very well--very much taken aback by this thing. And I said, “Well, you know, let me get a little background on this.” And I talked to the charge nurse, and she had read what they call the PRI [“Patient Report Information”], which is their form where they describe what actions they took. And she said, “You know, I have to tell you. The kid—“I have to interrupt this just a minute. It is very common (laughs), and it's almost automatic when you walk in and you have the cross on, you're Father. To everybody (laughs) you're “Father”; I don't care who they are. And I have to stop them. “I'm not a priest. I'm a lay chaplain.” And then they want to know what a lay chaplain is. And you say to yourself, why didn't I just shut up and (laughs) let them think I was “Father,” and go, you know. But, you know, you have to be honest with them all. And she told me, she said that the one young lady was--I don't know--she was at his head, and she was locking--what we call “locking the neck” [and that's another kind of move?] ... And she was taking the position, “Well, maybe I did something wrong.” And I said, “Well, from what I understand, you didn't.” But I said, “Well, I'll tell you what,” I said, “if you'll feel any better,” I said, “why don't we set up an appointment with you with a professional

counselor." Because the Department has what we--we budget for these kinds of things. And, "Oh, I don't know." I said, "How old are you?" She said, "Nineteen." I said, "I'll tell you what. Why don't we go sit down, talk with your mom and dad." And the father-- I have to say, the father helped to ultimately make the decision to go and see--he--what the children today, unfortunately, they attach a stigma to counseling. You know, "There's something wrong with me." Well, the very basic--basis of critical incidence stress management is "It's okay not to be okay." You're a human being. You have human frailties. You have emotions. And your emotions and my emotions are not going to be the same for everything that happens. And that's what we teach them. So she did go. And what I'm leading up to with this story is that one of the big things we have here in the whole fire service is what we call burnout. They come in and, I mean, they just--they live in those firehouses ... [INTERRUPTION] ... But I find that to be a major part of my job as chaplain of the Department is try and prevent burnout. I have always have--from Tommy Murray on to every Chief I've served--I've always had the greatest of support. And I can go to them and say, "Listen, Chief, it might be advisable for you to talk to so-and-so, and maybe give them a couple of weeks off, because they're very stressed out here." With Bobby Dayton, we had seasoned firefighters resigning in droves, because they didn't want to put their families through what the Daytons were going through. And I can understand that. You know, I mean, when you step back and you take away the bells and the whistles, these young people are going into places where everybody else is running away from. And that's not just a saying; that's a fact. 9/11, I'm sure, drove that home. But, before 9/11, we were experiencing it here. I mean, I'm not going to use

names, but we had three fellows that are very high up in county government right now. One of them was a Captain of my company. And a more solid human being you don't think you can meet. And he walked over to them and said, "I can't do this. I can't put my family through this. I'm going to resign." Now, one of the first things we tell them when we counsel, is "Don't make any decisions for the next two to three months. Anything that you think is terribly important: Try to put it off, if you can." I didn't know that at that time. I hadn't been trained. In 1988, we were very fortunate that when I got back from the hospital, the Chief – who happened to be Charlie Lang -- said to me, "What are you recommending, Tom?" And I--you know, here I was, what? A grown man. I had three sons. And I looked at him and I was a blank. We were standing up on Main Street up the road in front of the fire scene. They were still putting the fire--well, they had controlled it, but they were putting it out. By this time, the New York City Fire Department trustees were out. A representative from the Mayor's office showed up all of a sudden. The homicide detectives came over, the arson detectives. And it started to become a bureaucratic hodgepodge. And in the middle of all this, I'm thinking, Look, I've got a widow now with an eleven-month-old baby. What am I going to do? And as far as Bobby was concerned, we got through it all right, and I'll tell you why I got through it. And, unfortunately, I had to go bury him with Father Mychal Judge. I called him, and I said to him--and I told him who I was. I said, "Father ..." He said, "Oh, you're the chaplain for Port Washington?" I said, "Yeah." I said, "One of my guys just died out there." And this is maybe six hours after the incident. I said, "Well, Father, I'm calling you because I don't know what the New York City Fire Department protocols are, and

we're trying to put together a funeral here, and we don't know what the City's going to want." You know what he said to me? He said, "What's the next train to Port Washington?" I said, "Father, I don't have a schedule in front of me." He said, "Wait a minute." And then he went to his desk, pulled out a schedule, found out what the next train was. He said, "Meet me at the railroad station." I picked him up, and he and I went to Jonathan's. I took him to dinner-- and it was Jonathan's in those days. And I said to him--he moved me through the entire protocol. And at the very end of it, I still--I'll remember this to the day I die. He put his arm around me, and he said, "Now, remember, when the guys from New York come out, you tell them to mind their business. This man died a Port Washington fireman, and you're running the show." (Laughs). I looked at him, I said, "Father, I can't ..." He said, "You'd better do it." He said, "They'll run all over you if you don't." And they did. It was--we had a little roughness there, but we got through it. Everybody cooperated. But he was--he was the guy I could go to, and he and I were together about a year before 9/11. And I happened to be in the City,. and he was--his rectory was right across the street from Penn Station. So I called him, and I said, "Listen, are you free for dinner?" He said, "I'm always free for dinner. If I get a free meal, I'm always free" (laughs). He and I went to a restaurant, in the neighborhood there. And he said to me, "Okay, kid, what's on your mind?" And we talked. I think I got the two-thirty train out in the morning. But I could always go to Mike--and I'll tell you, when he died, I said to another friend of mine--Father John Delindek who was the borough chaplain from Brooklyn--I said to John, I said, "You know, if I do nothing else, my phone will always be open, because that's the way Mike was. And I mean it. He was

such an inspiration. And I didn't see him on a constant basis. I saw him in 1988; he came out for the evening service. He had another funeral in the city on the day of Bobby's funeral. So, Father Julian came out. And it was just--he--I always looked to Mike if I had a problem, I would call him. And he never hung up, and he never did not take my call. And I made a vow to myself that I was going to--I could never imitate him, but I was going to try to get as close as I could.

Q: Who can you go to now?

TJT: There aren't too many of them left. A lot of them have died now. I have a very good relationship with the chaplain from Huntington Manor, Richie Holst. I have another-- Father Chris Keenan, who temporarily replaced Father Judge. But he's of the same order. And--but to be honest with you, the one I turn to the most is my wife. She's never away. You know, she's never too busy.

Q: What is her name?

TJT: Maureen--Maureen Connern. Her father was the banker of Port Washington. Jimmy Connern. He ran the branch up here for the old Port Washington National, Meadowbrook, NBNA [National Bank of North America]--whatever they turned out to be. Yeah. But Maureen and I, we're married forty years. No, what am I saying. My God. You know, I'm so used to pulling this stunt. She had an old Irish aunt, and people

would say to me, you know, "How long have you been married?" And, like my son was twenty (laughs), so we would say--I'd say, "Oh, twenty, thirty years." And her aunt used to get furious. She would (laughs) call me names that weren't so good. But she was Gaelic, and, you know, that was--you didn't say things like that. (Laughs). We've been married forty-two years, and she's never been away.

Q: Did she help you start the Nassau County Critical Stress ...

TJT: No, that was started by a Ph.D. by the name of Dr. Ray Shelton. And Ray's still the head of it. Still operates it. He's a county employee. He teaches. He has his own practice, but he also directs the Crisis Center for the Nassau County Police if one of their men has a problem. We go in on that. She came on board as a peer counselor. I got involved in it, and Ray turned to me--Ray had met Maureen. I'm trying to think of where we met. But Ray met Maureen, and he said to me, "You know, Tom, we're out of balance here." And I didn't pick up on it at first. He said, "We don't have any females here." He said, "We're going to be dealing with women." There were more women coming into the fire service, not as firefighters, but more as the medical people. And he said, "We're not providing anybody for them." He said, "I don't understand the emotions of a woman." So, sure enough, she--Maureen's always been, "Oh, no, I can't do that. I can't ..." Well, she came on board, and we had an incident, Avianca. And Peter Zwerlein and myself went out--Peter was with the original group of what we call CISM [critical incident stress management]. And Peter and I went out to do a debriefing out in Locust Valley for the

firefighters from Glen Cove and Locust Valley that had participated in Avianca. That was funny, because Peter and I were coming back, and he called his wife Leslie on the phone. He says, "Listen, Tom and I are going to stop and have a cup of coffee. I'll be home about eleven, eleven-thirty." And Leslie says to him, "You will not. You'll come home right now." And I saw Peter's face went a little white like this. I said let me-- "What's she mad at? She knew I was coming out to do this." She said, "You get home right now!" Now I could hear her. He had the phone like this. But what she was telling us was that Shields was on fire. She said, "Your town is burning down. You are the Chief of the Department. You get home." And we pulled in, sure enough, the place is ablaze. But Peter and I had gone up to do that, and we ran into a situation we weren't prepared for, in that there were three women involved in that. I don't know whether we didn't relate to them, or they didn't relate to us that well. And Peter said to me in the car coming back, he said, "You know, we really need women in this organization." And it wasn't (laughs), oh, I don't know, probably two days later, that I was on a call with Ray, and he said the same thing. So, he called Maureen, and he said, "Maureen, would you consider it?" "Oh, I don't have any training, but ..." He said, "Don't worry about it. We'll train you." And I've got to tell you, Maureen and I did a lot of work with the firefighters from New York City who live on Long Island, after 9/11. And she is a mother to every one of these guys. We can go anywhere, and if we pass one of those young men, they'll always go and give her a hug. She has--you know, she's got the mother's instinct. And she's been trained. She's got formal training. But, she is so good at taking the formal training and just kind of mushing it in to being a mother for these

guys. We have a Lieutenant. I can't give his name. He's a New York City fire Lieutenant. This man has been a Lieutenant in the New York City Fire Department for nineteen years. Terribly distraught over 9/11; he lost a lot of friends. We were in Freeport--I can still remember, we were in the Freeport firehouse during the defusing. And this man walked out--and without violating confidentiality that goes on--when we set these defusings up, we go in and we'll sit--or a debriefing--and we'll sit around in a circle. And there's usually four counselors. And one of the counselors sits by the door. So if somebody has to get up and go out, they go with them so that no one can talk to them at the time and interrupt their train of thought. So, Maureen said to me, "I'll take the door." I said, "Well, that's the easy job. You're going to get ... [?] ... " So she's--to show you who the boss of the family is, she took the door. Well, she went out with this Lieutenant. He had to excuse himself for a few minutes. He went outside, and I don't know what happened. I never ask her what's going on, or anything like that. At the end of that night, this man came over--I thought he was going to break her back. He hugged her so hard that she literally lost her wind. And then he (laughs) got all red-faced and very positive. And he said to her, "Young lady, I have never had anybody care for me the way you did tonight." And, you know, here's a man who had never met her, and she just brought him along to the point where he was basically just sitting there. He wasn't participating, and that doesn't do him any good, you know.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A; BEGIN SIDE B]

TJT: First, I'm lucky to have my sons. We almost lost one in the first Gulf War. And Brian, the

city fireman, has had his share of injuries. But he loves it; he'd never come out.

Q: What are the other boys' names?

TJT: Tom Jr. He's with State Farm. He's director of bodily injury claims. Michael who is with Sultzter Metco. That's a fiber optic company, and that's (laughs) all I know about it. Because Michael doesn't talk that much. And he's not like his father. And Brian, and Brian's a New York City firefighter.

Q: Well, how have you integrated the demands of the chaplaincy and the Fire Department in general with your paying work?

TJT: I'm retired now. When I retired, it was Chase Manhattan Bank. That was Chemical Bank, and we took over Chase. We kept the Chase name, because it was more global recognition. But my involvement in the Fire Department, I was always fortunate. I worked for two people in Chemical, who were very pro-Fire Department. And whenever something big happened, I would call in and say to somebody, "I've got this going on." and "Not a problem. Take your time." They were very supportive. Chemical Bank, as a whole, is very supportive of the volunteer fire service out here, because they realized early on how much they were saving by not having paid firefighters. Now I know there's a big controversy going on, and, you know, if things keep going the way they are, I'm afraid Port Washington one day will have to go paid. Matter of fact, all of Nassau

County will. But I don't think that time is upon us as closely as some people would say now. But, again, I had to pull myself back and remember: Family, employment, and Fire Department. Again, my wife supported most of--oh, there were days when she said "That's enough," you know. "We've got a communion coming up. Get somebody else to cover." It wasn't always that easy to get coverage, because not many of the departments on Long Island had functional chaplains. They had the clergy. A few of them were very dedicated to it. Others were there when you needed them, but they didn't come around other than that. And that's not a criticism; that's an observation. I absolutely am amazed at the type of cooperation I get here in Port Washington. I can call Kurt Von Roeschlaub up across the street and tell him, "Listen, Kurt, somebody's--one of your parishioners, one of my firefighters got hurt. He's in St. Francis Hospital, North Shore Hospital. I know that within forty-eight hours, Kurt will be there. Reverend Charlie Vogeley is--I mean, there's a guy that, to me, is the epitome of clergy. I mean, you sit back and you say, well, wait a minute. He's a one-man band up there. Kurt, I believe, has an assistant, but I'm not sure of that. Somebody told me. Not being of his denomination, I don't know. John Horne up at the Methodist Church was just excellent. I mean, the guy went over the hill every time we needed him. Unfortunately, John has a better assignment up in Connecticut someplace now. Every one of the clergy, from Monsignor Simmons on down--Father Dobson was a little standoffish, but I served on his school board, so I got (laughs) through to him all right. But, every one of the clergy that I have had the pleasure to work with--and I don't consider myself a replacement for the clergy; I'm an extension of the clergy. I'm Roman Catholic. I run my chaplaincy as

nondenominational. I have to. And to show you how it picks up, I went on as chaplain in 1981, and about ten years ago, an ex-Chief, Joe Fico, came to me. And he said, "Tom, you know, I'd like to have some kind of a communion breakfast." And I said, "Well, all right." Atlantic's--that's Atlantic Hook and Ladder Company. He said, "We'll go to mass at Saint Peter's." I said, "Okay, Joe, but now do you want to limit it?" And he looked at me. And, you know, Joe's Catholic, and he was thinking --the firemen, the Holy Name Society--all that stuff. I said, "Joe, we're not a one-denominational department." I said, "Suppose we turn it around and we turn it into an interfaith breakfast. Would you be willing to do that?" "Yeah, not a problem." Well, I've got to tell you that the first year we did it, the big guy--John Salerno--that I talked about earlier, Joe Pennetti--Joe owns his own garage down on Valley Road. His partner is a fireman--Charlie Cella. These guys came up at five o'clock on Sunday morning itself to prepare the breakfast at Atlantic's. We had them--we--and the way we set it up was for two months prior to it--and we do it the Sunday before Thanksgiving every year--the way we set it up is I go to each company and I ask them to come to the breakfast. And I tell the Jewish members, "Go to Shabbas on Saturday, and you and your family join us for breakfast on Sunday." I've worked it out with Kurt. I've worked it out with Charlie Vogeley. I've worked it out with--I haven't met the new young lady up at the Methodist Church yet. But I explained--I didn't explain it. I encouraged them: "Take your family to services, and then come to the firehouse for breakfast, and we'll gather there." It has worked. And, you know, surprisingly enough--and this was not my idea; I just jumped on the bandwagon and helped them out. We did it through the Chaplain's office. Surprisingly enough, the wives

are crazy about this thing. They love the idea of everybody--and we have the kids there, and the kids are running around and the mothers are yelling, "Don't do this," and "Don't do that." And I'm telling them, "Leave the kid alone," you know. But they're up there, we've got them corralled (laughs). And the fellows, they'll take the kids down to show them the apparatus in the truck room. It's a real family operation. And we do this, and, you know, I have yet--it hasn't come to me that anybody criticized us--I have yet to have any criticism of it.

Q: You work with the local rabbis also?

TJT: Rabbi Donna Berman who was on--and this year, I did not get to go to the Council of Churches meeting, because I happened to be away. One of the pitfalls, or one of the things I got myself messed up in is it's, I guess--well, I don't guess; I know--it's a combination of my teaching the role of a chaplain in the fire service has been accepted nationwide. And I'm--I won't say I'm in demand, but I'm often asked to go out to another section of the country and address these organizations. And my time at Ground Zero opened me up even further. I did forty-two days--I was assigned to the temporary morgue.

Q: Can you tell me about your work there?

TJT: My function was twofold. My function was to bless the bodies or the body parts, when

they came out from the pit, and to work with the emergency service people. The pin I wear was given to me by the men that I worked with from the "Demort" Unit of FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency], and when I left, they gave me that pin; I wear it all the time. And I mean, they were just a great unit of people. I saw--I saw the American youth and in what I call--what I choose to call--their true light. They just churned out--I don't care whether they were getting you a cup of coffee or getting you a new mask to wear, or something like that. But don't criticize them to me. And I'll tell you a very funny story. I'm a little bit ashamed of it myself when I think of it. It was about three o'clock in the morning, and I was leaving. I had been on duty for about twenty-some-odd hours. My relief came in, and I had parked my vehicle on Warren Street. And I'm walking up West Broadway to get to my car, and I mean it was pitch black (laughs). It was black! And I was in "Na-Na Land" by this time. You get a numbness to you. And I had my turn-out coat over my shoulder. I didn't have it on; I threw it over my shoulder. I still had my boots and my bunker pants and my helmet on. And out of the darkness came this African American young bloke with the dreadlocks and I think--and I think, "God, I'm going to get mugged." But I think I had three dollars in my pocket; I don't know what I had. This kid came up, and he said, "You look awful tired. Can I get you a cup of coffee?" And I've got to tell you, I cried. I stood in that street and I cried, and I'm not ashamed of it. And he went and he got me a cup of coffee (laughs). He was with the Salvation Army, and I hadn't even seen the stand and their truck. I was so in Na-Na Land. He went and he got me a cup of coffee, and we sat on the curb, and it was about, oh, probably two or three in the morning. I didn't leave New

York until five o'clock. He and I talked, and you know, and I saw so much, so much good down there. You know, people say--and I ran into this a couple of times. "Well, where was your God then?" My answer to them, is "My God was in those people that were bringing those bodies out." I saw people that, they didn't even know one another, and they were helping them. I didn't get down there till ten o'clock the night of the incident, because we mobilized out here about five or six o'clock. And the procedure was that our firefighter apparatus would go to Belmont Race Track and marshal there. And our medical units would go to Shea Stadium. So, as chaplain, my--and I'm referring to "my" people--I went to Belmont first to see how our kids were doing there. And they were all right. They were all prepared. We had all the equipment we needed. Everybody had the proper mask and everything--so I'm going to go over to Shea and check with the medical people. We had two ambulances down there, fully staffed. And I've got to say, as I recall now, I think we had three kids down there that were maybe just eighteen or nineteen, and they were prepared to go in. They went in in dribs and drabs. They called them in as they needed them, because they didn't want them to clog up the city.

Q: These were ...

TJT: Port Washington firefighters.

Q: ... fire medics?

TJT: Fire medics, and we had Port Washington firefighters at Belmont. And we're with other units from the county. The city called us for what apparatus they needed, you know, they needed a ladder truck or they needed a pumper, they would call for it. And, on my way to Shea Stadium, the Nassau County Fire Commission called me. And they asked me my location. I told them where I was, and they said, "We're going to patch through a call to you." And it was my friend, Father John Delindek. And he said to me, "Tommy, can you come in and give me a hand?" I said, "John, I'd be happy to. I have to notify my command." He said, "All right. Give me a call back." So I called him back, and I said, "John, by the way, I'm in an unmarked car," I said. And they had sealed off the city. So, I said, I'm in my car. He said, "Well, what are you driving?" I said, "It's a light Buick." I said, "And it has my 8-5-0 license plate on the back of it," I said, "and a whip antenna on it. But other than that it has no markings." He said to me, "Well, I'll tell you what," he said, "We'll set that up with the police. Get out on the Belt Parkway." So, I'm riding along, and I see--he said, "Stay in the right lane and don't go too fast." I'm riding along, and all of a sudden, this car pulls up alongside me. The window goes down, and this cop--the other--I mean, this cop was a big guy! He was highway patrol, and he said to me, "Are you Father Tobin?" and I said, well, I'm not going to explain that to him now. I said, "That's me." He said, "Well, follow me." And I have to tell you, I wasn't going to follow that man. I think he was doing a 190 miles an hour. And I got my car up to seventy-five, and I said, no, I'm not going to die out on the Belt Parkway (laughs). He took me through the Brooklyn Tunnel--the Battery Tunnel, which they had sealed off.

And then he took me into--that's when I went to West Street. I got to the command post, and John was there. And I said to him, "How can I help you, Johnny? What's up?" He says, "Tom, I don't have anybody in the morgue." I said, "The morgue is up at 31st Street." I had already known that there were more above you[?]. He said, "No. The temporary morgue. Here." I said, "Well, if that's where you want me, that's where I go." Now, just to clarify the picture, as a Catholic, the Catholic religion teaches us that if the body has been pronounced dead, then a layman can bless it. I cannot administer a sacrament; that's not the last rites.

Q: The layman can do what?

TJT: I can bless a deceased body. So, I was prepared for that. I had my missal with me, and the holy water. So, I get up to the morgue and I'm walking up the street thinking that they've got some kind of tents set up. The morgue was a table like this on four chairs on the sidewalk. We had no protection whatsoever. There was a big refrigerated trailer truck there to--New York City Fire Department. And if the deceased was a uniformed person--police or fire--they were moved in the Fire Department, then they'd send a police escort. If it was a civilian, or if they couldn't identify -- which was the bulk of it, I have to tell you -- then they were put into the refrigerated truck until it got a certain number of bodies in it--the body bags. And they took them up to the permanent morgue. But I will tell you this story. There was again, I always say Mike Judge was there for me again. I worked my first tour, and I worked over thirty hours before we could get relief in there.

It was chaotic. And I, you know, I had the strength. I wasn't going to fall down or anything like that. And I got relieved, went and got in my car, started to come home, and the first body part that I blessed was a foot. And it wasn't until I was on the Long Island Expressway, I had just cleared the tunnel through the toll booths, and I remember I was just coming up over that bridge, and that foot came up right in front of me. And it wasn't until that time, that I realized -- whoever this poor soul was, that foot was naked. It didn't have a sock or a shoe on it. And I thought to myself, Dear God, how vicious was this thing. How terrible that a body would be blown apart that way. But -- I didn't get used to it. But, as I said before, I went back and I coped with it. I go away on retreat every so often. I talked to--there's a myriad of people to talk to, really. Nobody ever turns your back on you when you tell them or say, "You got a few minutes to talk?" But it was a-- again, it was an experience I hope never to see again. But it was an experience that, in a lot of ways, revived my faith in my fellow man. I mean, I saw one thing. I'm not trying to be facetious, but I saw a woman your age carrying a box loaded with underwear from a truck that had come into the harbor bringing us supplies. She carried that box up to the supply place, wherever it was. There were so many positive things that I saw down there. I'm not going to try to gild the lily and tell you that it wasn't very upsetting; it was. I saw--well, first of all, I saw the result of man's hatred for man, but then I saw man helping man. And it was just--I'm not sorry for what I do. I'll tell you that. Whether it's made me a better man, I don't know. I feel I'm a better person. I have a lot more understanding than I had before I became Chaplain. Before I became Chaplain, I was a tough nut. Ask my kids, they'll tell you.

Q: In what way?

TJT: I'm very strict. I was an old Irish Catholic. And that--in some ways--well, my father was a tough bird, but he was an understanding father, too. So, I--hopefully, I got a lot of him. But I (laughs)--it's funny because I teach for Child Abuse Protective Services now. And (laughs) I thought to myself, my sons, when I called up and told my sons I was going to do that--that's a voluntary job, but I do it; I like it--and (laughs) my oldest son said, "A: what's he going to teach them--before or after?" My middle son says, "What are those people thinking?" and my youngest son said, "It's a joke. Right, Mom?" (laughs).

Q: Well, what did you do to your kids?

TJT: Well, I was strict. I was very strict. My children were--they grew up to be boys and men. Because I knew what they did. That's something that's always charmed me was that they didn't think I did that before they did it. So I (laughs) always had a step up on them; I knew what they were going to do. But, you know, there were times when I used my hand. As I used to say, "I'm applying justice." But (laughs) I will say this, that I'm very proud of my sons, and I think anybody that knows them will have a good word for them. They turned out to be--they haven't gone without problems, as everybody does. But, by and large, I think that they're pretty good. And I will say this. I don't know how much of that I can attribute to myself, but I attribute most of that to my wife. Because

when we first came back here, I worked three jobs so that we could hold the house. We made a concerted decision that I would work and she would be home with the children. And we did that until Brian ended school and then Maureen became the physical education teacher at St. Peter's School. And it worked. It worked and it didn't work, really. There were a lot of times when I couldn't be home because I was working. And I missed certain things with the kids. But, by and large, I made an effort to be there for everything that was important for them. I coached the ...

Q: What's been the hardest thing for you about the chaplaincy?

TJT: The hardest thing for me, as far as that's concerned, is it's very--I mean, it's a little personal, but it's not secretive--is that I continue to wonder if I'm doing all that I can do. And let me just give you an example of that. I find that, more and more, my young people, they've stopped being active in the institutional religion. You know, that they don't go to their churches as much. —As a matter of fact, I had a [comment?] just last night, I was with them and I said to them, "Don't forget the ecumenical services this Wednesday, it's going to be down at Our Lady of Fatima. And they're, "Oh, I can't go into church, or the roof will fall down." And I said, "Well, when was the last time you went to your church?" And the youngster said to me, "I can't remember." And, you know, I don't walk around with a Bible in my hand. I don't get up and rant and rave about them going to church or not going to church, and things like that. I've always tried--and Mike Judge and I had this conversation and so did Chris Keenan--and I've had this

conversation, matter of fact, with Reverend Vogeley who I really hold very close as a friend--I've always tried to get them to do it, by my example. Maureen and I are weekly attendees at Saint Peter's, and I don't wave a flag about it, but I'm at mass.

Q: I'm sorry. You do what at Saint Peter's?

TJT: Weekly attendees. We go to mass every Sunday.

Q: Yeah.

TJT: And you hope that they're going to see you doing that. Well, they see me. I mean, they'll see us going in and out of the church and they'll see us coming home from mass, but I often wonder am I doing enough. Can I--well, why can't I get through? Why won't they do what I'm doing? I don't have the answer; I really don't, you know. And I've prayed over it. I really have. And, you know, I've talked with all the chaplains. We're all faced with that same dilemma. Are we absolutely doing as much as we can? And right now, I don't feel I am. It's not that I'm not there for them. It's just I'm not getting through. Now, maybe ...

Q: In that ...

TJT: ... in that they ...

Q: ... particular regard, in getting them ...

TJT: Yeah.

Q: ... more involved ...

TJT: Right.

Q: ... with church attendance.

TJT: And yet, they will come to me and say, "Padre, can you get us a priest to baptize the baby?" "Can you get me a priest; we want to get married?" "Can you talk to Reverend Vogeley?" "Can you talk to Reverend Von Roeschlaub?" So, they haven't turned their back on it, if you want to put it that way, but they just--they're just not active, and they just don't--I don't know how to--maybe if--Maureen said to me the other day, she said, "Maybe if you back off." She said, "maybe you're pushing it too hard." And honestly, I have not gone to them and said, "Look, why didn't you go to services on Sunday." "Why weren't you at St. Stephen's," or "Why weren't you at Lutheran ..." or at Savior. And, so it's not a question of me banging them on the head. But I--and, you know, as I say, it's common. Because the chaplains in Nassau/Suffolk meet every three months. We set that system up. And we all have the same dilemma, if you will.

Q: Well, what about the specifically fire-related chaplaincy? What do you find the most challenging aspect of that?

TJT: The most challenging there ...

Q: Or the hardest?

TJT: ... The hardest thing is to have enough time for them. You know, I found that once you have their respect, once they're confident that they can talk to you and not have it go beyond that room, it gets very busy. Now, I will tell them, now Maureen and I, we're not licensed marriage counselors. But we've been down the road. You know, my oldest son, when he was born, almost died on us, at birth. We know what it is to be upstate New York in the middle of a blizzard, have your son born, and have a doctor come out and say, "Well, he's a beautiful boy, but he's got a mass in his stomach, and he's got to go to Bellevue to be operated on." And you know he's not going to get twenty feet out of that building. He'll die in the ice because the truck won't move. We've been through all of that. And Maureen, she lost her sister at a very young age, to cancer. And we went through all of that. And her mother died eighteen months later, from cancer. She hasn't had an easy time of it, but she's never wavered. And she's had her tough nights; she's had her tough days. And, you know, that's what my shoulder's for. But her shoulder's always been there when I had mine. So, I have been blessed. I really have. There are days

when you say to yourself, "What are you, a jerk? What are you doing this for?" "Why do I keep going on?"

Q: And what's your answer?

TJT: Because I want to. I believe in what I'm doing. I really, I honestly do. I believe in it so deeply that I was approached--Father Thomas Sinnott, who I absolutely think was the best thing that ever happened in my life--he was the Chaplain at St. Francis. And, I mean, he was the epitome of a priest. And he--he wanted me--he was going to sponsor me--St. Francis Hospital was going to sponsor me into the diaconate of the Catholic church, which is--that's laymen who are specifically trained. They're called deacons. And you go through a rigorous four years of training--Bible study and homiletics, and other things like that. And I agreed to it. The deacon has powers that I can't exercise. Unless it's an absolute emergency, I can't baptize. I'm not permitted to perform a marriage service. I could, if I wanted to go through the town and become a marriage officer, but, to me, that's a little immaterial. There's no religious function involved there. I went to my first interview. I don't know if you remember Herman Dedemeyer. He used to be the principal down at Sousa school. He came to the house. He interviewed me with my wife. And he wanted me to go on. And I went for an interview with a nun. And she said to me, "Well, I think if you want to continue, you want to go into the diaconate, we're going to have to ask you to give up your chaplaincy, because it will interfere with your study." And at that time we had something around 340, 350

firefighters. And I sat there. And, you know, I know it had to be -- Maureen said to me, it had to be God-inspired. She said--because I looked her dead in the eye and said, "I can't do that." I said, "I can't leave those people. They need a chaplain, and if I go there's nobody there." So, I will give up--and I always wanted to be able to baptize; I really did. But, that's the way it goes. You can't win them all, as they say. But as far as the hardest part of being a chaplain, it, to me, is--well, it's twofold. I just physically can't do everything that I want to do. I can't be there as much as I want to be. And the other is there are times when I, as I said before, I don't know if I'm doing it--I don't know if I'm accomplishing what I was sent to do.

Q: What would you say was your worst day in the Fire Department, either as a chaplain or a

TJT: The worst day was in 1988 when Bobby was killed. And, unfortunately, thirteen months later, we had Ingrid Sowle killed by a drunk driver. Well, maybe I ought to qualify it. It probably was my worst day, and as I look back on it--at the time, it was my worst day. But as I look back on all the help I got, it probably fortified me to stay there, because in the middle--what happened was after everything was done at the fire scene, we pulled everybody up into Flower Hill Hose Company, which is the firehouse up on Haven Avenue. And that's when Charlie Lang said to me, "What do I do?" And I had only, oh, maybe a month prior to that, I had only heard about this guy Dr. Ray Shelton. So I said, "Let me call FireCom and see if we can get this Dr. Shelton." And he came over. I've got to say, Ray was on top of this. He came over, and he conducted what we call a debriefing. And we put the entire Department out of service. We had Manhasset, Great

Neck, and Roslyn, in our firehouses to fight the fires in Port Washington. And in the mix of what took place and having to deal with Pam, that's always going to bother me. She's a very gracious young lady. She's remarried and has a family. But she came to me at the end of it, and she said, "I have to thank you for getting us through this." And, to be honest with you, I don't think I did. I don't feel that I did. And, you know what it was? I didn't know how. I went from my gut, to be honest with you. I just did what, you know, what you would have done. We just walked along the path and, as things came up, we handled them. We addressed them. And I will say that-- that's another thing that makes me so proud of this Department. There wasn't an hour went by that somebody from the Department wasn't checking to see if there was anything they could do. And the merchants and the people in town, they just went--the outpouring of support that we got in Port Washington in those days, it can only--it could only be exceeded by 9/11.

Q: Do you think you would get the same kind of support today?

TJT: We just did. We just did. I'm sure you've heard of the Ashley Fund. Yeah, we did. Unfortunately, I had already been booked to teach out of town that weekend, so I wasn't here. But they tell me that the response from--not only from the people of Port Washington, but from people all over--we had fire departments from Suffolk County came in with a delegation. And the South Shore, Freeport, Merrick, Oceanside--you name it, they tell me they were there. And, yes, you know, it's really--to me, these things that, when you stack this up against what we hear in the media and what "This guy's

that," and "The other guy's that." But when it hits the fan, as we call it, everybody comes together. We're still Americans, and we're still Port Washingtonians, and we're still Nassau County residents, and we're going to be there to help. It's a bugaboo I have with the media. I think the media does us a great disservice. They play up certain things, and they overlook all the good that's going on. But, as they tell me, that doesn't sell, so ...

Q: Speaking of good, what was your best day in the Department?

TJT: My best day in the Department? I've had so many of them; I really have. I guess I could refer to the night I went to--we had a Department dinner, and Peter Zwerlein was the Chief. I remember that. And John Salerno was his Deputy. And we had Tom Gulotta, the Nassau County Executive [Thomas S. Gulotta, former Nassau County Executive], come in, and they presented Medals of Honor to two of our men who had really distinguished themselves, and they went into a fire and, quite frankly, they shouldn't have, I don't think. But they did. They rescued the person. And, thank God, they survived. And well, I was sitting there, and there was a third Medal of Honor award. And it was awarded to me. My Department voted on it. They did it in secret. I knew nothing about it. Here I was in the Polish Hall, and we had about probably 800 people crammed in that place that night. And Tom Gulotta made a very, very nice presentation, and at the end of it he said that, "Of course, we all know that the person I'm referring to is your chaplain." And I was totally floored. And my wife just sat there. I mean, her grin was as wide as that wall. And Pete Zwerlein stood up there and it was a typical "gotcha!"

You know, I mean, it was just ...

Q: And was that for one specific thing that you'd done or for your service?

TJT: No, it was for my total service, yeah. I got the Medal of Valor for service. And I cherish it; I really do. I have it; it's down at the house. I have it (laughs) wrapped in paper. I'm not putting it up so the grandchildren will knock it over. But it's a glass tray, and it's been very, very nicely inscribed. But I have to say, that was only one incident. The Department has been so good to me. I think, in the overall, if I were to sit back and look at my life as a Chaplain and member of the Department, I probably am one of the most fortunate chaplains in the United States. I don't know of any departments that do for their chaplain what this Department does for me.

Q: What does it do for you?

TJT: First of all, they support me in everything I do. I came into the job, we didn't have a funeral protocol. I wrote a funeral protocol. The Board of Directors accepted it. It's still in existence. I established the--and I hate to--this sounds like it's all me. But it's not. Because every one of these actions that I took had to be approved, and I never had anybody contest it. I established a welfare system where if your husband's a firefighter, or if you're a firefighter and you get hurt, or you go to the hospital, we send you flowers. Or the ladies, we would send them flowers; the guys, we would send them a basket of

fruit. Before that, if we didn't pass the hat and do it, you didn't get anything. Nobody cared. And I thought that was wrong. And I thought those were reasons why people left the Department. I happened to be at the University of Maryland at a course. And in the course, I picked this up from the course. They had done a study, and why do people join volunteer fire departments. And one of the reasons listed was that the fire departments had chaplains. And, at that time, I was relatively new--maybe five years as Chaplain. And I said to myself, that's quite a thing to say about the chaplaincy program, itself. And I just determined that I was going to build on that in Port Washington. And, again, I can't stress enough the support I got. Not only from the men and the women in the Department, but from the management of the Department--the chiefs and the boards of directors. But I wouldn't do it any other way. Have I had rough moments? Yeah, there were times when we knocked heads.

Q: About what kinds of issues?

TJT: I don't believe we should have training on Sundays. Sundays should be a day when the men and the women are home with their families. And yet, from a firematic standpoint, there's only just so many hours you're going to have for training. So it's kind of a Catch-22. Do you want them trained so that they can come back from the call, or, you know, and I have no problems with putting their life in God's hands, either. But, from a practical standpoint, or a worldly standpoint, if you will, they've got to be trained. And the hazards we face today, we never faced before. And I've been overcome. I've done

my time at St. Francis.

Q: Yes? What happened?

TJT: The fire at the old King Kullen, and they had a cement-block building where they used to keep their cardboard. They had a fire, and the thing was blazing. And I went in on the line; I had the nozzle of the hose--that's called "going in on the line." If the guys ever say they had the noz--that's the hose. That's the nozzle. And I went in with another firefighter, who went in the doorway, and the fire flashed over, which meant it went up behind us. And I woke up--I was laying in Soundview Drive and two guys were pumping on my chest, and I'm saying, "You trying to break my ribs?" So, they took me up to St. Francis, and at that time my wife was pregnant with our third child. And they put me in intensive care for a couple of days up there. But I came out. I've seen a lot ...

Q: Was that your only injury?

TJT: Oh, no.

Q: I mean, with the Fire Department?

TJT: No, no. No.

Q: What others?

TJT: I had a (laughs) beam drop on my head. I mean, it came down this way, and how does a beam hit a guy this short (laughs). And that was my answer to the doctor. And the doctor just said to my wife, "He's all right. Take him home." And I've been overcome twice and ...

Q: By smoke?

TJT: Smoke. Yeah, smoke and heat. Thank God, I've never been really burned. I got singed in the back of the head--one day when the cinders came down off a building. But God's been good to me. He's protected me, and I have no real aversion to saying that I wouldn't do it another way. First of all, it's helped me to help my fellow man. But I've met people that I wouldn't have met otherwise, you know. Good people.

Q: How would you like to be remembered?

TJT: I don't want to be remembered. I was just a fireman. Because that's all I am. I'm just doing my job. My job is a little more involved with the personal aspect of these people, but I honestly believe it's a job that has to be done. Right now, I don't know what to do, because I don't have a back-up. The minute you mention chaplain, next you hear the word God, pops up and then, for some reason--and I really don't know--I can't explain it.

But people today,---- I won't say they're anti-religious, or anything like that. But they're not that prone to showing their belief in God. I'm not saying they're not God-fearing and that they're not God-loving. But they like to keep it very personal. But that's my opinion. Because it's very difficult to get somebody who is going to do the job. Of course, here again, I'm predicating everything on myself. There's somebody out there. I know they are. God wouldn't leave these kids in the lurch.

Q: Are you actively looking around?

TJT: I'm looking around, but they have so many things going today, and I didn't. I made a conscious decision to be the Chaplain, and I was going to be the best that I could be, that God would allow me to be. And He didn't leave me in the lurch. He's been with me all the time, and, you know, even for the times where I may have gone off half-cocked, as they say. He jerked me up short and said, "Hey, I didn't put you down there to do that." You know, I get the message. But, first of all, I don't know men well enough to know if they have wives as good as mine. And I do know that if you're going to do this job right, you've got to make sacrifices. You and your family are going to sacrifice ... [END OF TAPE 1; BEGIN TAPE 2] ...

Q: ... the interview with Thomas Tobin on November 19, 2004. My name is Sally Olds. Now, you mentioned something about Father O'Rourke.

TJT: Father [Bill] O'Rourke was a curate up at Saint Peter's, and again, another man that was always there when we needed him, you know. As I say, the clergy in the town is spread so thin that we don't go to them unless we have something very--really serious to deal with. And it made no difference, time of day, if called and Father O'Rourke was in the rectory, he'd come out to see what happened.

Q: Now, I've heard you referred to as a Eucharistic minister.

TJT: Yes. That ...

Q: What is that?

TJT: ... that's a commission that the Catholic church gives to members of the laity that entitles us to distribute the Eucharist to members of the church.

Q: And what exactly is the Eucharist?

TJT: Eucharist is the body and blood of Christ.

Q: Okay. Can you tell me how you got involved with the New York State Association of Fire Chaplains?

TJT: Well, when I first when I first accepted the position as Chaplain in Port Washington, I was fortunate--it probably was about, I don't know, maybe a year--six months to a year--and I'm very fortunate. I had gone to the hospital to visit one of our people, and I ran into a couple--Bob and Ruth Vaughan--and they were majors in the Salvation Army. And they were visiting. And then somehow we ran across one another, and we got to talking, and he was the Chaplain for the Franklin Square Fire Department, and he was a member of the state association, which at that time I think we numbered about a hundred chaplains throughout the state of New York. And he encouraged me to join, and he introduced me to the secretary of the association, a fellow by the name of Hal Robbie from Plainview Fire Department. And I went to one of their meetings. And I could see that this was something that was going to grow, because these people, they were not only dedicated, but they were intent on getting the chaplains organized. And they had, at the time, there was a Father Vincent Kennedy from over in Garden City. And, as I say, I went to the meeting and I liked what I saw, and it was a regional meeting; it wasn't the state. And I got interested, and I joined the association. I've always been somebody who, if I join an organization, it's to be active. I don't join that many organizations. If I can't be active, I don't join. So, I started with them, and I went to my first meeting. And, at that time, I was working for Chemical Bank, and they had a budget. They had a bank account, but they were not what you would call financially--in financial order (laughs). Let's put it that way. Everything was helter-skelter. And I happened to say, well--I asked a couple of questions at one of the meetings, and: Mistake Number One, you know. And the then Chief of the organization came to me, and he said would I be willing act as the

financial advisor, which was not an office in the organization. They were creating it. I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, the guy that's the treasurer doesn't seem to know what's going on, and somebody's got to teach him how to do this." So I said "fine." And I figured, it may cost me maybe a day or something and that'll be that. And then, it wasn't too cumbersome. I took all the books, put everything in accounting order, and we got ourselves kind of on the straight and narrow. And, as time went on, I became a little more active and a little more active, and-- I think it was 1994-- they asked me would I be willing to take over the organization as the Chief. And I readily told them, I said, "You know, there's going to be opposition to this, because I'm not ordained to clergy." And it was very funny, because there was a Methodist minister by the name of Reverend Bob Thomas from up in upstate New York came to me, and he said, "What can I do that you don't do?" And I said, "Well, I don't preach." And I said, "And I'm not trained the way you are, and definitely I'm not ordained." He said, "Well, that's very nice, but you haven't answered my question." He said, "Why can't you run this association?" I said, "Because your bylaws call for the Chief and first and second Assistant Chiefs to be ordained clergy." He said, "Well, change the bylaw." I said, "Well, I don't think that's going to go over too big," but it did. Long story short: I became second assistant first, then I worked my way up to the Chief's office. And I made there, again, a conscious decision that we were going to grow. And I went all over the state. You know, I would ask these guys, "Get me invited to an area." And I spoke to fire department chiefs, because there were not that many chaplains. And we did. The New York organization now is about five hundred and--I don't know, 517, or some number like that. But with a

real push by the members, we have grown the organization. And, for the most part, as I understand it, the chaplains are active in their various areas. The only area of the state where we are lacking, and I don't know why we can't get a foothold up there, is between Albany--north or Albany, Saratoga Springs and the border. We just can't seem to get enough interest within the departments. But then again, you know, those are rural areas. And a department up there could be fifteen people, twenty people. Whereas down here, you know, a department, you're talking 400, 300 people. So, we don't--we don't have anybody in there. But and I continue to try. But, you know, sooner or later, that'll open up.

Q: And what motivated you to write the various training manuals?

TJT: We didn't have any. We really didn't. And I sat down, and, again, I was blessed because I had chaplains who felt the same as I did. And they said that I would write the manual and then copy and send it out for comment. I wouldn't say I wrote the manual. I put it together; they corrected it. And then we took the final copy, and, yeah, I put it on the computer and spewed it out, to the point where now, our manual--New York State manual-- is being used all over the world. We've got chaplains from fire departments in Germany that asked us for it. It was kind of funny, because when we got the letter, it was in German. And we took it to the high school (laughs), and they didn't have a German teacher out there. And lo and behold, we found somebody who had a connection with the German consul. And we went in there, and they interpreted it for us. But that was funny.

And I said to the consul at that time, I said, "Well, it's in English. We can't--what are they going to do with it over there?" "Don't worry about it. They'll transcribe it in their own language over there." "Fine." So we sent it. We did have two of them in last year, they came for our annual conference. They came in from Germany. They were in the United States for something else, but they did show up at our conference, which was very interesting.

Q: Where in Germany are the guys from?

TJT: One was in a town outside of Dusseldorf, and the other one, I think, was up outside of Bad Wertheim, I think it was. You spell that--I'd have to look: W-E-R-T-H-E-I-M. Bad Wertheim, which is in Southern Bavaria.

Q: Do we have copies of these various manuals for the archives in that department?

TJT: Oh, I can give them to you, yeah.

Q: That'll be great.

TJT: I have all of them.

Q: Okay, good.

TJT: Well, see, part of my training that I do is on the--it's not DVD, because I haven't been able to get that pushed through yet. But it's slides. Especially the training on death notification, it's all on slides. I teach them how, where, to be sincere. There's a whole program. Every chaplain in the State of New York, when they come to the first convention, their first seminar, they must take that class. That's a full-day class. And that's another thing about the chaplaincy. When we go to a seminar, we're in class all day. There are no, you know, tours, or anything like that. We may take them to the local fire academy to show them the academies. But, because one of our beliefs statewide is that if we're going to serve with these people, we have to know what they're doing.

Q: Would you say that's the hardest thing you have to do is notify a family?

TJT: Oh, definitely. Definitely. It's--it's--it never--it's never going to be easy to do. You're never going to get used to doing it. I've done thirty of them, and I have not--I've learned how to cope with it, as I said earlier in the conversation. It's never easy. I never have a good day when I do that. What I have learned to do--and again, Father Bill O'Rourke helped me with this--was to get a hold of myself and be absolutely sincere. Don't beat around the bush. Don't say things that you know aren't going to happen or don't promise--you know, when I was raising my children, my father told me, "Don't ever say anything to the children that you're not going to deliver." You know, "Don't promise them a bicycle and don't get it." And by the same token, don't sit in your chair and say, "If I get

out of this chair, I'm going to whack you, and then don't do that either." But that was the old Irish (laughs) way of doing things. But I've always kept that in my mind. When I'm going to do something, when I'm going to say something, I'm going to say it with the intent that I will carry through on it, and that's the way I train the chaplains. Don't go in there and be a phony. Because, if anything, a grieving person will spot a phony-- somebody who is just in there to--and I'm not proud to say it, but we have chaplains that go in; as soon as the television cameras disappear, they do, too. But they are few and far between--very few and far between. For the most part, all of the chaplains I know throughout the state are, as the kids would say today, they're into it. They really are. And it really--I'm very proud to be in association with these men and women.

Q: Excuse me ... [INTERRUPTION] ... Okay. Can you tell me about your involvement with erecting the monument at the cemetery.

TJT: Well, actually, the monument itself, was erected by the people at the cemetery. They started that. Their board of directors started that drive. And with the help of people like Frank Scobbo and--they put that whole thing together. And then they came to the fire departments and police department and said, "Listen, would you like to be involved?" And certainly we did. They were the first people there showing a real interest in those who had given their lives. And so we got involved in that because of, A) my father-in-law was on the board of the cemetery, and ...

Q: And the name of the cemetery?

TJT: Nassau Knolls Cemetery Association. And the Fire Department kind of took it over. The PBA [Police Benevolent Association] did not have the funding. We have an association of firemen, it's called the Port Washington Exempt Benevolent Association. And we picked up the ball, to the point where we paid for the installation of lighting around the stone so that you can see it at night. And we have maintained it. I mean, the cemetery physically maintains it for us. But, for Memorial Day and other days, we have a contract with the gardeners to go up there and they keep it beautified.

Q: What about the Exempt Association? What was your role in that?

TJT: Well, I'm past President of the Exempts, and I'm a trustee right now. And the Exempt Benevolent Association is not a fire department function. It happens the only bond is that we are made up of members of the [Department.] You must be a firefighter for five years to join the association. And the association is funded by what they call two percent money. And that two percent money is money that is a tax that is applied to the insurance companies who are not headquartered in the State of New York, but write policies in New York. And as a result, the State of New York takes two percent--I think they actually take four percent annually from those companies. And two percent of that four percent is used to fund the Firemen's Home up at Hudson. And the other two percent is distributed among the fire departments, and it's done by zip code. In other

words, for discussion--and I'm not sure that State Farm is a great indicator. I don't know where their headquarters is. But if State Farm writes two million dollars here in Port Washington, then we get two percent of the premium money allocated to us. We get that money here in Port Washington from the unincorporated area of Port Washington and the villages that we cover. It's all done by zip code, and we--and that's how--now, our purpose, and the only reason we do function, is to render assistance to indigent firemen and their families, and that's all we do. So if a fireman is down and out, they can come to us. And they have to fill out an application and do an interview, and then we help them out.

Q: And you meet regularly?

TJT: We meet quarterly. Unless, as we call it, a "case" comes up, and then we'll go into session.

Q: Okay. So if a firefighter applies for assistance, and it's right after the previous meeting, he doesn't have to wait.

TJT: No. No, no, no. And that's another great thing. The camaraderie on that board and the feeling--the understanding of every member of that board, is that we're here to serve, and we don't do it on a clock, and we don't do it on a calendar basis. If they need help, get the

application completed, get the back-up paperwork assembled, and we'll meet. We'll meet on a phone call's notice, which goes back to--it's funny because as I was speaking, I was thinking about, I told you when I first came in, they made me secretary. And in those days, we didn't have the paging systems we have today. Everything was done by mail. And the first thing (laughs) I learned about the secretary's job was that Lewis Oil had donated an old addressograph plate maker to them. And (laughs), the machine broke more times than it worked. But I would go up there and, at that time we had--we only had three companies. And we were chartered for 325 members, and we had 325 members. And I would have to send out a postcard to tell them that, you know, so-and-so died. We're going to have the funeral services here, at what time, and (laughs) it probably would take me--today, they kick it into the computer, and it's out in a matter of minutes. It would probably take me a couple of hours. But you'd get the plate--we had those steel plates. Are you familiar with an addressograph? We'd have that steel plate, and you'd be sitting there, and you'd be on the keypunch and that, and you'd be deaf by the time you finished making the plate (laughs) from the noise. And then you had to put them into the addressograph machine and hope it didn't tie up in the ribbon. Oh, God! We had such good times. These kids don't know what they're missing--what they missed (laughs). We're too modernized.

Q: So, but now, to get a message quickly to the membership.

TJT: I pick up the telephone, I give the office manager the message, and out it goes. We carry

this pager, which gives us the alphanumerical information. This dispatches us to the fires. And this phone that I have hanging to my hip, is a pain in the neck. But that's a must; I have to have that. That's their idea, not mine. I don't have to have it, but I have to have it as far as the Chiefs are concerned.

Q: Can we talk about some of your other ...

TJT: Sure.

Q: ... honors and awards.

TJT: Well, I don't think there were that many.

Q: Well, the Nassau County Meritorious Service Award. Is that the one that you talked about?

TJT: That's the one we talked about.

Q: Okay. And the Town of North Hempstead Citizen of the Month.

TJT: Yeah. That was sprung on me by May Newburger. I had been doing some work with the town people, and I got--I can't remember who called. I think maybe Tommy ...

McDonough called me. He says, "Boy, you're a big shot. You get your picture in Town Hall." And I said, "What are you talking about?" He says, "You're in the lobby of Town Hall." I said, "I don't know what you're talking about." He says, "Come over." So, I went over, and sure enough, there was my picture in the Town Hall. And it was right after the Blessing of the Fleet. And May and I had been down there on the dais or the reviewing stand. And we were talking, and she said she wanted to initiate this Citizen of the Month award. And I said, "I think that would be a good idea." I said, "You have an awful lot of people that are doing well." I said, "The PYA [Port Youth Activities] and the PAL [Police Athletic League], George Mahoney, and all these people." So, what she did was she had--when you go in as a staff officer of the Port Washington Fire Department, you sit for a portrait, okay. So, I had had my picture taken and it was up in Headquarters. And, all of a sudden, she had Headquarters--again, unbeknownst to me--my picture was forwarded to Town Hall. They put their wrapping around it, and she put a little saying underneath, it was "Our Leader; Our Counselor." And I said, "Dear God! If the Chief sees this, he's going to have a heart attack," because that particular Chief and I, we were coexisting. He wasn't really all that crazy about me doing everything that I was doing. But we got along. He never interfered with it. But I said, "If he sees 'Our Leader,' he's going to go through the roof!" (laughs). But that's what that was. And I went up to Town Hall that day, and I saw the picture. They had it on an easel in the lobby. And I said, "Oh, my God. What did they do that for?" And as I was leaving, she was coming back from some kind of a meeting, and I said to her, "I think you and I have to talk." And she's the most gracious woman. I like May. You know, we're not

politically connected, but I like her. She's a good gal. And she said to me, "I gotcha." I said, "That wasn't nice" (laughs). She said, "No, but that's the power of the Supervisor's office."

Q: Okay. What about the Roslyn Highlands Department Meritorious Service.

TJT: Well, that, again, goes back to a firefighter got killed. That was recently. That was about three years ago. Captain Allan Frey. They were conducting a training exercise, and they had shut off part of Glen Cove Road for it. And unfortunately, a young lady who was on prescription drugs and had had a couple glass of wine was at the wheel of a car and went through the barricades and killed Al. I heard the call come over the county monitor in my home, and I called into the desk and said "I'm on my way," because I knew they were coming. I was chaplain on call anyhow. And I started for the scene, and they called me and they said, "Listen, can you meet us instead at the North Shore Hospital." So I met the ambulance at North Shore, and then I met the wife and family. And then the firefighters were just--I mean, that's a scene that I can't--you can't do justice to it verbally. You have to see how--how these guys turn out. I mean, we had--with firefighters. Allan was still alive when they brought him in. And the call went out for blood. They do that automatically; there's always a call for blood. And we didn't even know what type he was, to be honest with you. And we must have had, I'm going to guess—I view between a hundred and a hundred and fifty firemen from all over the county of Nassau in the parking lot at North Shore. And, of course, we had to tell them that Allan had died, and

that was real tough. And then I went back with them to the firehouse that night, and I stayed with them until, oh, five or six in the morning. And we--I just listened and we did a defusing. And that was given to me in appreciation, I totally never expected that. Because, to me, I did what I was supposed to do. And I called my wife, and I said, "Maureen, this is going to be a bad one. So I won't be home till I get home." And again, you know, this woman puts up with that. She, "All right. Do you want me to wait up for you?" I said, "No, I don't think so, honey. Get some sleep." Because she works. She's with St. Francis Hospital. And I got home. The tea was on. We had a cup of tea together, and I ate a piece of toast, and I unloaded. And she was there (laughs). It was so funny, now that I think of it--you can put humor into these things. She got all finished. She says, "You done?" I said, "Yeah, yeah. I'm up." "You going to be all right?" I said, "Yeah, I'm going to be all right." "I've got to take my shower; I'm going to work" (laughs). Yeah, boom, boom. And life went on. That's just the way it should be. But, you know, when you're feeling like, did I do it all right? I mean, are those people going to be all right? But one of the things I believe in as a chaplain, and most of my chaplains--most of the chaplains I'm affiliated with--they practice it. It's not okay. Allan died, and I sat with the family for a while, and that's it. That's the end of my job. We go back. I've spoken to Mrs. Frey a couple of times since this has happened. "How're things going with you?" and "How are the children?" and--but I have to tell you, there were a couple of instances that, what this situation was-- she got to the hospital with the children. And the little girl, Susan, is eight. And Jennifer is six or five. Or she was back then. And Jennifer said to me, "Is Daddy going to be all right?" And fortunately for me,

I had been through the training on how to deal with children. And, contrary to popular belief, I think, those who don't do this--at age four, you don't lie to the children. They probably handle things better than anybody does. They hurt. There's always that. But their young minds are moldable, and they get to go on. And I said to her, I said, "Now, Daddy is having a ..." what had happened is the doctor had come in and advised Mrs. Frey that Allan had died. And I was with them, and that's another thing. The hospitals around there are great. They work with us. And I was with them, and then he told them, he said, "We did everything we could." He said, "The impact was just too much." And she cried, you know. I don't know, I put my arm around her, and I said, "Carol, we're going to leave you here in the room alone now. I'll go outside. I have to deal with the men." I said, "But I'm not leaving you. I just have to do that, and I'll give you a little time to yourself." And Jennifer said to me, "Is Daddy going to be all right?" She didn't understand what the doctor was telling them. So I said, "No, Jennifer, Daddy is gone to God. God has taken Daddy home." And she was so cute. She said to me, "Oh, I learned that today at Church School." And I wanted to die. I just wanted--I had a lump in my throat bigger than my head. And I said--so I, you know--I've never been one to show my emotions at the time. I feel--that's the old Irish in me. You know, you've got to be strong. But I've learned through my chaplaincy that showing people in pain that you are in pain with them--you don't experience--you don't try to tell them "I know what you feel." I don't know what you feel. I didn't lose my wife; I didn't lose my husband. But I understand that you're in pain, and I'm here for you, if you want me. And with children especially, I think that that's a valid thing to do. And I said, "Well, do you want to come

with me, Jennifer?" And she said, "Okay." And I said, "Carol, is it all right? Do you want the children with you?" She said, "No, if she wants to go, it's all right." So I took her out. And she was with me when I advised the firefighters. And I don't know if that was the right thing to do. I'll tell you. I had second thoughts about that later on. I never saw three hundred and some-odd firefighters crying in one parking lot the way they did. I mean, it was--it was bad, all right. Then, I thought to myself, "Gee, did I do the right thing here? Maybe I shouldn't have done it the way we did it." But I had already committed to Jennifer, and as they say, you don't tell them something and don't do it. So, I took her with me, and we had a--this was post-9/11. And I will say this. We had a delegation of 200 New York City firefighters at his funeral.

Q: Was he a New York City firefighter also?

TJT: No. No, he was not. He--these guys came out, and they sent their ceremonial unit. And I went to the Lieutenant at the church where he was buried, from St. Hyacinth's over in Glen Cove. And I said to him, "You know, Lieutenant, on behalf of the family, I want to really thank you." And this man looked at me, and he said, "Chaplain, this is the least we could have done." He said, "You guys have bent all over for us." And that's the way it works. There is a brotherhood. It really is a brotherhood. And, as I said earlier, you know, it's family. And like any other family, you're going to have your disagreements, your internal squabbles. But when the chips are down, it's a brotherhood. They're there for one another, and they stay there. And it's really--I haven't regretted a day. I really

haven't. And when I look back on my time, I thank God first for my wife and my family, but I wouldn't be--I wouldn't be a member of another organization. I really wouldn't. And ... [that would be enough?] ... but I helped start the Elks Lodge here, and then I moved away and I dropped out, and I never went back. But, I've never seen --and, again, it happened right here last weekend--I wasn't here for it, but the guys were telling me that, you know, guys who have argued as a matter of course (laughs) over the years as firemen —everything was just swept aside. John Salerno told me, he said, "You know, we got to the point where we were telling firefighters, 'Look, the kid--somebody at the table dumped something or something, Get the vacuum out.' It wasn't, 'I don't vacuum!' You know, 'Get the ladies to do it.' Guys went up, got the vacuum, cleaned up. Second wave of people came in, sat down and ate." John said he hadn't seen--he never--he said, "If I wasn't there, I never would have thought that it could happen the way it did." And it's--you know, I don't know if it's unfortunate or it's just the way life works, but only in time of disaster do we pull together the way we do. And these kids do. They really do. I couldn't be more proud of the organization.

Q: In the funeral services that you deliver, I know a lot of time you use humor

in talking about the person who died.

TJT: Yes.

Q: How does that develop? And how is it received?

TJT: Well, first of all, I never do the eulogy that I don't sit with the family, and I tell them, "I am not here to mourn your husband. I'm here to celebrate his life." And if you don't want me to do it that way, I certainly will not. First of all, my first rule is: We do what the family wants us to do. And the Department does it that way. I mean, they always have. We don't walk in and tell them we're going to do this, that, and the other thing. We go in. We offer our services. We tell them, if you would like, we will allow your husband to repose in the firehouse, if you would like. If you don't, fine, we'll use a funeral home. If you would like, we'll have a fire service. Not all families want them. But, if you would like, we'll do that. And then I sit down with them and I basically compose the eulogy right there with them. And I have found that in most cases, there are some ethnic groups that don't like that. And so I don't.

Q: That don't like what?

TJT: They don't like humor. You know, it's a very solemn--and it is. I can understand that. To the Irish it's not quite as solemn as it is with everybody else. We joke about, you know, put booze on the bottom of the casket and make it a bar. We do all of that thing. But I have found that, in most cases, because I'm there to celebrate the life of the person--am I there to mourn? Yes. I'm there to mourn. I'm there to be sympathetic. But if I believe what I believe, and I do, I don't believe this is all there is to it. If I didn't believe

in the afterlife and I didn't believe in my God, I wouldn't do this. And I do--but I don't try to force that down your throat. I go in, I sit with the family. I tell them what I have in mind. And as a matter of fact, a lot of the stories I get, I get from the family. I had an incident with George Mahoney where I witnessed it as a child. George was a police officer, and he came up to the--George's brother lived next door to us. He was a Sands Point police officer. And George was a big strapping guy, and he had just come home from the war. And he was on the Port Washington police force, and in those days they didn't blacktop the roads out here. They put tar down, and then they dumped gravel on it. And I can still remember as a child, it was a summer's evening, and George was driving a motorcycle. In those days, motorcycle cops worked until midnight. And George, being the big guy that he was (laughs), he came up to visit Kitty and check on the children while Tom was working at Sands Point. And I guess he forgot (laughs) to turn the motorcycle off, because he stood up, and it kept going. Didn't even hit in the legs. He just stood up and the thing wound up on our front porch, because we lived next door. And I always remembered that. And when I told that story, it just broke the place up, you know. And it wasn't my intention to turn it into a, you know, comedian night. But it was to lighten it, and to show that George was a human. And for all his--and he was a good man. For all his involvement, he always wanted the kids to be kept safe. It was almost a fanaticism on that. And he lived his life for the children--he and Tom Brown--lived their lives for the children of this community. And they did so many things where, you know, people didn't even know that the PAL [Police Athletic League] is not in the Police Budget. The PAL is out there on their own. They have to go raise their own funds. And,

of course, they do. The community has been very supportive. But I remember George Mahoney taking kids to ball games and then paying for their tickets out of his pocket. And he wasn't a Sergeant and the pay wasn't that great. It's not what it is today; that's for sure. Because I was on the job for a while, and it was next to nothing. And--but, to me, and again I discuss it with the families. I never do it on my own. I don't fly free. To me, that's what life is about. We celebrate with the good memories. Anybody can sit and mourn. I mean, they can moan about just about anything you could think of. We've all seen that. But when we're bidding a final farewell, I like to do it with--for lack of a better terminology--upbeat. Let's remember the good things about the person. And, let's celebrate the fact that we got to know that person. We got to be with that person. And that's what I do.

Q: Well, with a man of George Mahoney's age, you know, had lived a good, long life, you can take one attitude, but when it's a younger man, how do you deal with all that?

TJT: Well, you temper that a little bit. But you try, again, well, I don't say this during the wake service, but I'm a firm believer that God didn't guarantee any of us any time. He brought us into the world. He has a plan for all of us. And it's our--I always say, it's my job to reject the plan. He gave me free will. And that's what we refer to it as. And it gives me the right to know right from wrong and decide what I'm going to do with it. So, with a youngster, you may not get the--pardon me, you may not get to be, you know, that jovial or light, but at the same time, I got to know this youngster. Again, I had this time

with him. These are the things we experienced. I don't want to-- this is me--I don't like to put people in the ground for the last time--or for the only time, really--and do it as though they didn't accomplish anything with their lives. And ninety percent of the time, if you look at people who are deceased and you start to think about their lives, there are some real bright moments and jovial moments in there. And I think, to help them over-- to help those who are the victims, and the victim is the person that's left behind, to help them get by, you have to bring them back to that. They may, in their grief, they're going to forget the good times. Thinking, you know, I'm alone now. You take Pam. She was twenty-six. The baby, Kaitlin, was only eleven months old. And, you know, just how funny can you be about that? Well, you can't. But Bobby, as I said, was great with his hands, and he was--he would, in the course of renovating that house they were living in, he also built special cabinets in the firehouse down in New York where he was stationed in Queens, and we had stories about how he used the wrong wood, and hit the wrong nail, which means you hit yourself in the thumb. And we brought little things like that, just to lighten it up a little bit. And just to say, you know, Bobby Dayton was a human. Bobby Dayton liked to have fun. Bobby Dayton, you know, he raced with the racing team and he fell on his face when he was supposed to be holding the hose, and nobody knows why--but that was funny, because we didn't know why Bobby fell down (laughs). He was just standing there, and he fell over, basically. But, as you say when it's a sudden death like that, it's not easy to lighten it up. And you're really not going to lighten it up. And you're really not going to lighten it up a lot. But you try to bring, again, you try--and it's very difficult. You have to keep trying to bring them back to celebrating his life. And not

ignoring his death, but bringing forth his life. You really want everybody to remember that he had an active life.

Q: Now, you mentioned that people in some ethnic groups are not comfortable with that approach. Were you at all involved in helping ease the entry of firefighters from different ethnic groups? Can you tell me a little bit about that?

TJT: If we go back about fifteen years, I guess, now, at that time, we had--the town, the entire community had not learned to deal with the Spanish people--the Hispanic population. They had trouble in the school; they had trouble all over the place. And I'm not going to sit here and point fingers at anybody, because it was a question of a white Anglo-Saxon community being introduced to non-Anglo-Saxons. And none of us really knew--first of all, we couldn't understand them; they couldn't understand us. They came from cultures that we had absolutely no knowledge of, and we were--they were having some tough times. And we had a fire. I can remember it rather vividly, actually. We had a fire in Manorhaven. And, unfortunately, it was one of those places of apartments where it was so overcrowded it was criminal. We found thirty-five mattresses in the place, and the room was maybe this big. They were sleeping in shifts. We found all this out as we went along. And in the course of that fire--and they were burned out--I turned to the Chief, and I said, "We need the Red Cross here, because these people have no place to go." And Red Cross came in. We got them and they came and they took care of these people. And it was about maybe two or three months later. I remember it was a February night. We

had a terrible fire on Bernard Street. And the lady from the bookstore--Dolphin Book Store-- was so gracious. She opened the place and brought the people in. So, I went in with the fire investigator to talk to the people, and the poor people couldn't speak English. And I don't know--the light went on in my thick Irish skull all of a sudden: "This is wrong." This is wrong, you know. Suppose they were trying to tell us there were people in that building and where they were. We didn't understand them; we lost those three people. And it really started to annoy me and bug me, really. So I went to the then-Chief John O'Reilly, and I said, "You know, Chief, I think we ought to do something about recruiting in the Spanish community." And John said to me, "I agree with you, Tom. I just don't know how to get started." So, I said, "Well, you know, there's a young fellow joining Flower Hill Hose Company," I said, "and he's Hispanic." And I said, "Maybe he's our entrée." And this young man now works for the Port Washington Police Department. His name is Sergio Tardone.

Q: Excuse me ... [END OF TAPE 2, SIDE A; BEGIN SIDE B] ...

TJT: So I went to Chief O'Reilly, and I said to him, "Well, suppose I talk to him." And John said to me, "Good. Go ahead." So I sat down with Sergio, and I said, "You know, Sergio, I'd like to start recruiting from the Hispanic community, but I don't know how to do it." So, together we sat--we met a couple of nights, and finally I said, "You know, I have an idea." Every year, we put on what we call, Operation Edith, which is Exit Drill in the Home. it teaches people how to get out of the house in the event of a fire. I said,

"Now, that's run through the Fire Marshal's office, and I am not the Fire Marshal, and I can't speak for the Fire Marshal." But I went to the Fire Marshal about it. And I said, "You know what I'd like to do? I'd like to make a presentation down in Manorhaven where the Spanish population is growing." And he said, "I don't have any objection," he said, "but I don't think probably I don't have the time to do it myself." I said, "Don't worry about it. I'll do it. Just, I don't want to be treading on your feet. I want your approval." He said "Not a problem." And his name was Walter Clark, and Walter works for the school district. Walter got me all the material. He contacted FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Administration], and they put the material out in Spanish. And we got all the magazines and the booklets and the coloring books for the children and all the literature we could get in Spanish. And Sergio and his son and I went down--we talked to Sister Gerri [O'Neill] from Our Lady of Fatima, and she said, "Well, we have an outreach program, and," she said, "we have a Spanish lady working with us, and we'll announce it from the altar a couple of weeks ahead of time," and the Spanish mass at that time was at seven o'clock on a Saturday night. And I said fine. So we pulled in, while they were at mass. We set up the Youth Center with the backdrop for our program, and we had seventy families there. And Sergio did the whole thing in Spanish. And jokingly, I said to him later, "I hope you didn't say anything I'm not supposed to know." And the two of us are always laughing, we laughed about that. He said, "I told them things you don't know." And we have a good friendship. His two sons became firefighters. We then took that, and unfortunately, it looked like it fell on its face. We didn't get anybody. They had a lot of questions, but nobody was volunteering. And I went to Gloria Robles

who is the outreach lady at Fatima, and I said, "Gloria, what do you think we did wrong?" She said, "It's not a question that you did anything wrong, Tom. They're not comfortable. They think they're going to be treated as outsiders." And I said I can understand that. They don't know us; we don't know them. So we did another one the next year, and this time we we really got snowed (laughs). I said to him, "Tell them we're going to bring --" I said, I went to the Department, and I said, "Look, this time, I'd like to have cider and doughnuts down here for them." Because it was around Halloween. The Department said, "Go ahead. Don't worry about. We've got the money to do it. Go ahead. It's in the budget." We went down there, and I think we had about 150 people this time. And out of the 150, I think we got seven applications. And I'm not going to sit here and try to paint a rosy picture. We had those who objected to them, within the Department. And I said, well--we had a meeting about it. I said, "I'm not going to say anything about anything. But every one of us took an oath to protect the lives and property of all the people on the peninsula. We didn't say `Sands Point.' We didn't say `Beacon Hill.' We didn't say Irish, Catholic, Protestant, Jew, Polish." I said, "We said we would take care of anybody that's on the peninsula." I said, "We run ambulance calls on people in restaurants that don't even live in our area," I said, "And we should. They're in our area, and we're responsible to take care of them." I said, "Why would you object to it?" "Well, because they're always ... " the old suspicions of :Will they steal something out of the firehouse? Will they do this? Will they do the other thing? I said, "Well, let me ask you something. Have you seen them do it?" And dead silence. I said, "Then why do you accuse them?" I said--and all the time I was saying to

myself, I hope we don't get a lemon in this crop. So, sure enough, we had--we had Sergio Tardone and his son--I don't know, I forget the first--Gregory, I think it is. Anyhow Serge--and we met with the seven applicants in a room at the firehouse. And Sergio turned around and said, "I want an interpreter in the room. I'm going to speak to them in Spanish, and I want an interpreter." So we called County, and County--one of the county cops came over. He was Spanish. And he sat there and listened to everything. He was in civilian clothes. We told him, "Don't come in uniform." He said, "Well, we didn't say anything we shouldn't have said." But the two of them walked outside--he and Sergio walked outside. And now Sergio came back, and I have got to tell you, I almost died. He turns to the seven Spanish guys, and he says, "Now, we're going to talk English." And I thought--he said to me, "Your face went white, like you were going to have a heart attack (laughs)." I said, "Sergio, I thought we had everything all lined up." He said, "Baloney. If they're going to be firemen, they're going to speak English. I can't have them speak in Spanish. You won't know what they're saying." And I never thought of that. And don't you know, these seven guys in the room, said, "Okay." They all spoke English as well as could be expected, and only one of them has left the Department, and that's because he moved out of town. The other six are still very valued members. As a matter of fact--I won't put a number on this, because I'm not really sure. But we've taken in probably about thirty of them.

Q: In all the companies?

TJT: In all the four companies. A couple of very excellent Fire Medics. They have one little girl down there--I'm not supposed to call her a little girl. Young lady down there, and she is--she just--I mean, she's ice water at a scene. You know, she will come over and put her head on my shoulder and say, "Boy, that was a tough one, Pop." And I'll say, "Well, are you all right?" Then let her go. But, on the scene, ice water! She doesn't miss a beat.

Q: And these new recruits are accepted by ...

TJT: Yeah.

Q: ... their ...

TJT: Yeah. And it wasn't right away. It was like everybody else, you prove yourself. They had a little bit--yeah, yeah, there was-- there was discrimination there. I'm not going to say there wasn't. But it's not totally gone. It's shrunk to a minimal level, but you don't even notice it. We had one firefighter who decided he would use, you know, epithets at the men. I said, "That's going to stop, or you're going up on charges." And before long, it was all over. But we don't--I will say that. The Captains and the Chiefs--the company officers and the Department staff--Chiefs and Fire Marshal and myself-- matter of fact, there was a comment made couple months back that everything seems to have melded very well. And right now, we're--everybody's a fireman. That's just the way it is.

Q: Except for the women. And what about ...

TJT: Well, the fire ...

Q: ... were you at all involved with ...

TJT: Bringing the women in?

Q: Yes.

TJT: Yeah, yeah (laughs). First gal that applied, I first met her, she was five years old. And it was on an ambulance call. Her mother was killed up at Sousa School, or Manorhaven School. The mother had gone up to pick her up after school, and a car ran out of control and over the curb and hit the mother. And she's now my neighbor in the back. She lives behind me. And she joined Flower Hill Hose Company. And (laughs) that was a--that was--you talk about your culture shocks. My God! I think she was nineteen when she joined. And Renée is a beautiful young lady. And (laughs) but I think she joined Flower Hill because one of the fellows up there, she had an interest in one of them up there. But she was a good firefighter. She carried her weight. And then after her, there was a little girl--Susie Smith--who joined. And Susie left because she got hurt. And she just--it kind of made her shy away. And she said to me-- I was in the hospital with her. What happened, she fell and she had her pack on--the air pack. And it damaged her--it bruised

her spinal area. And I was with her mother and her father out--she got hurt in the Academy. And a couple of months after that, she came to me, and she said "This time I think I'm going to get out." And I said, "Well, I hope it's nothing anybody said or did to you." She said, "No, I'm a little shy now." And you can't be that. When you're shy, you're going to get hurt. And I said, "Well, then, by all means, you have to protect yourself and do what you think is right." But I honestly believe, had Susan stayed, she might have been--well, she might have worked her way into the line--what we call the line, which is the Captains and Lieutenants. I think she would--because she was very good, very intelligent. And it was just a fluke, where her foot slipped on a step in the Academy in a tower fight--fire fight. And she fell down and hurt her back.

TJT: We have to train them--matter of fact, we're trying to put together the funding to put our own training tower down in the Roslyn West Shore Road, because we waste anywhere from two to four hours getting them out to Bethpage and training them and bringing them back. Whereas, we can put them out there for the initial training, we can do continuous education here if we have the facility. But we have seven different types of buildings that we train them on, how to fight the fires. And I go out with them. I believe that I should. And I believe that--and it has borne some fruit. But they see me out there. Somebody cares. I'm not out here alone. I'm not just a number. Not that the Chiefs aren't out there with them, too. But, you know, they expect the Chief to be there. He's a firefighter. When the chaplain shows up and he says I'll go in with them every so often. I'm not allowed in anymore. I've been physically decertified. I can't go into a fire

anymore.

Q: When did that happen?

TJT: My last physical, what? a year ago. Dr. Levin found that I have a lung problem. There's something wrong with one of my lungs. I'm not inflating fully.

Q: But up until that point, you were still going into fires? Still working as an interior firefighter?

TJT: Well, the Chiefs would never let me be the firefighter. All of a sudden--you know, it's one of the things that I might say maybe was a drawback or it shouldn't have happened that way. But all of a sudden, they got very protective. And there's one Chief did say to me, he said, "What am I going to do if you get hurt?" He said, "You know, it's time ..."
Of course, they have to throw the age thing at me. "You know, Father, you're fifty-five. It's about time for you to stay outside." And I am--it's all in my own interest, and they mean very well--they mean well by it, and I take it that way. But I miss going in. I told you it was a sickness. I miss being on a nob. I miss--miss--I think we probably ought to turn the tape off, because this is going to make me sound crazy. I miss the heat and smoke. Because you get to see your accomplishment, you know. I knocked that fire down; it didn't beat me. And, as I say, it's a sickness. You know, the one thing that I have come to be at odds with the entire service about is I don't think we do these

youngsters a service by telling them that they have to make the rescue, or they have to get the fire out in the next number of minutes, and things like that. It causes them to take chances they shouldn't take. And when they lose somebody, it's horrific, you know. Especially if they lose a civilian. And, God forbid, if we lose a child. That's the toughest one, when you lose the children. We lost five children in a family--the Buckley family down in--Busby family, not Buckley--down on North Court years ago, and I don't think I've ever seen the men so distressed in all my life, outside of Bobby, when Bobby was killed. It's just I don't know whether it's the right thing to do anymore, to tell them, because when they don't make the rescue or with the Fire Medics, and that's one of the problems we have with burn-out with them. They take it so personally. You know, you get the call. We're volunteers. We have to get from here, get to the place, get our ambulance, and get down there. These are all--these are minutes. And a lot of times, you get the call, and really it's too late when you get the call. And these youngsters go down there, and they do everything that they can do to save that person's life and when they don't do it, some of them get very distressed. Some of the older people now, they've realized that if it's meant to be, we'll do it. If it's not meant to be, we can't beat God. And probably the hospitals tell them that, but ...

Q: So, how do you draw the line between ...

TJT: You don't. You know, it's each individual and how they can cope with what the event is and the results of the situation. And that's where I come in. I stand back and I wait, and

that's very frustrating. You can't get in between them and God. You stand there and you try to make them understand that, you know. And another thing: I hate the terminology, "It was God's will." It wasn't God's will. But you stand there, and you try to make them understand that, you know, there's a Superior Being here. There's a superior authority, and we we can't violate that authority. And, with the youngsters today--not just today, young people--they have this what the Marines call "*semper fi*," where they just believe that if I don't rescue that person, if I don't save that life, I've failed. And that's very difficult. Because if you can't get them over that hump, they're going to suffer what we call burn-out. And it's very selfish, in a way, on my part. But my job is to keep them from burning out. I can't afford to have firefighters not come back. I can't afford to have the Fire Medics not answer those calls. Although I will tell you this one (laughs). When I went down and I had a bout with bacterial pneumonia in both lungs. I was home when it hit me, and they put in a call for the ambulance. And we have a code 85, which means it's a firefighter or a member of the firefighter's family. (Laughs) My living room looked like the State convention. I had Nassau County representative come flying through the door--he was in the area. Heard the call come over the radio. He came in. All of my Chiefs were there. The Fire Marshal showed up. The ambulance got there with about--we normally roll with three people on the ambulance--Maureen said she counted fifteen. I said this is getting ridiculous. And at the time, I didn't realize that I was in bad shape. And they took me up to St. Francis, and that's where the bacterial and viral pneumonia of both lungs--you won't believe this, but I was only getting three words to a breath. And they induced a seven-day coma. They put me into a coma for seven days. They did all

they had to do. You know, I guess God said, "I don't need you up here; you stay there."

Q: When was that?

TJT: My son was how old? That's going to be ten years ago. Ten or so years. It's the first time I was away from my family for Christmas. I was in (laughs) St. Francis. But, you know, and again, that's when it was--you know, I even heard from the nurses and the nursing staff at St. Francis. I mean, the guys came, and they set up chairs outside in the hall. They wouldn't leave. And Maureen, you know, the women from the Fire Department came down, and Maureen, she said that she didn't cook a meal for about two weeks. She said, and they were at the hospital, and there were masses being said and services being offered in the Protestant churches, too, which all counts. That's what gets you through it. And I never realized--it was then, I think, really, that I started to realize that I was accepted as their chaplain. They really--they went all out. My kids--two of my kids were still in school. No, I'm sorry. No, Brian was in college. He came home from college. They called him and said, "You'd better come home." And he came up, and Michael was a Lieutenant at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and he came back. And Tommy was married and living at home. But the support that came out of that was just unreal. It got to the point where they (laughs)--and we got into a hassle over this. I didn't know it, but the Chief's office put out a "Do not call." When I came home from the hospital and I was recuperating, I was what they call "out of service." And then I had to go to the Department surgeon's office. They examined me and they put me through my paces and

they said, "Okay, you can go back into service, but you can't go back into the buildings yet." So, when the surgeon said I could go back, Chief Zwerlein said, "Oh, no, he can't." He put an order out: "You will not call the chaplain after six o'clock at night." And I didn't know it. And I said to Maureen one night, I said, "You know, things have really quieted down." I'm so happy, you know. Of course, I could hear the calls coming out over the radio. And I said, "Gee, they seem to be handling things pretty well." And (laughs) I'll never forget it. She just stood there and she said to me, "You ..." What'd she call me? "You Glom. You big Irish Glom." I said, "What are you talking about?" She says, "There's an order out they're not to contact you after six o'clock." And I went through the roof. And, you know, Peter was--you've met Peter. He is the most controlled person I have ever known. And he said to me--I said, "I want to meet with the Chief." And Maureen had tipped him. He said, "Yeah, I'll be down in a while." Okay. So he came down with Leslie, his wife, and Maureen and Leslie went in the den, and Peter and I were in the family room. And I said, "How could you do this to me?" I said, "Peter, I'm their chaplain. You can't put me out of service. The doctors are saying ..." He said, "The doctors are the doctors. I am the Chief." He .cut my legs right off from under me. But, Peter and Leslie, and John and Barbara, and Joe Pennetti and Eileen, we've been dear friends for years. And we have a--of course, we have an Eastern division, too. That's Frank Donohue, the old Chief of Police. But we've socialized for years. And Peter was-- Leslie told me later, she said, "Peter walked the halls of the house". She said, "I finally had to tell him, 'Peter, please come to bed'" when they took me to the hospital. She said he stayed at the hospital till about three in the morning. And then, you know, the rest of

it was kind of history, but ...

Q: Well, we're glad it's history and that you're back.

TJT: I am. But when I got back, though, they were so protective, it got to the point where at one point I had a driver. We never had a driver. You drove yourself, you know. You're a volunteer. They had a kid around the corner, he was a probationary firefighter, and "On all calls, you will stop at the chaplain's house and drive the chaplain." And this poor youngster wanted to be a fireman (laughs). He didn't want to be my chauffeur. So one night we went to a fire at Sands Point. It was going. And I had my gear in the car, and he had his, and I said, "Sandy, go fight the fire. You forget me." I said, "It's my car. I'll drive it." He said, "Oh, I don't know, Mr. T. You'll get me in a lot of trouble with the Chiefs" (laughs). And I said, "I'll handle the Chiefs." But as I say, it's just another indication of what a family we are.

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

TJT: I think it's long overdue. Because with all due respect, the public doesn't know a damn thing about us. If you would leave me now and go out on the street and talk to, especially the white collar workers and the blue collar workers that work in the city of New York, and you talk about the Fire Department--I'm going to guess at this. I mean, I may not be totally accurate. But I would say seventy-five percent of them would think

we're paid. It's time the story was told. Not mine. Mine, you know, this is minimal. Am I proud of —it? Yes, I am. I created, I defined the role of the chaplain. I just hope that they will carry it on. And then there's going to be a better guy than me. That's got to be for sure. Because somebody's going to come in here, take this thing, and keep it going, and run with it. And improve upon it, because there's a lot of places to improve. But, these men and women have, for lack of a better terminology--they've been taken for granted. For years, because we never promoted ourselves. It's our fault. I'm not criticizing the public. We never promoted ourselves. We never told the public who we are. We have never gone to the public in my forty years and said, "Look, I'm a volunteer. You've got to give me the consideration that I'm coming out of a job. I'm walking out on my job. I'm leaving the job. The employer that I work for says I--you know, he's allowing me to leave the job to go and fight your fires." Conversely, I say, well, but we're fighting our own fires, too, because if a brother fireman has a fire in his house, we're going to his house. And I go back to the years long before I got in. But I studied the fire service in the United States. Years ago, they had the markers on the house from the insurance company, and if you weren't insured by the company, they rode right by. Your house burned to the ground; they couldn't care less about it. And now we have-- you have youngsters and old-timers who-- you don't have to have any marker on the house. You call us for help, we're coming. People from outside the area, they don't understand that too well. We've had situations where we've had to have the police come in and keep the homeowner out of the way, because under New York State law, once the alarm comes in, your property becomes our responsibility. We run it, until we're

finished. And that's another thing that ...

Q: Well, what happens, I mean, what do these homeowners do?

TJT: They get in the way. You know, "I don't want you in my living room with those boots on." You know, "Well, I'm not going to change now. I'm sorry, ma'am. If your rug got dirty, call a cleaning service, you know." We can't walk a ... [??] ... out here. We've had situations and the one that comes to mind is one in Sands Point. We didn't know it. I mean, the people had gone out to dinner. The house caught fire from a cigarette in a wastebasket. We didn't put that cigarette there. Okay? I'm not--we're not looking to assess blame here. But the house goes on fire, and the fire had--they didn't have an alarm system. The fire had to be going for probably forty-five minutes to an hour before anybody saw smoke. Sands Point called it in. We went down there. They come back from dinner. Now, I can understand they're terribly upset, because i would be to come home and find my house on fire. What we didn't know was that they had artifacts in there from the Vatican. They had had visitations with the Pope. And the artifacts were involved in the area where we were fighting the fire. But, you know, our people went in, and they saw these things, and they said, "Wait a minute. This is not just a regular painting. This is not the ..." They took them down and safeguarded them and they carried them out of the area, covered them with tarpaulins so they wouldn't get water on them. And this man came in, and I have to tell you, it was one of the few times I forgot who I was, and I told the guy, I said, "If you make one more move, you see that cop over

there? I'm going to have him put handcuffs on you."

Q: Why? What was the man doing?

TJT: He wanted to get in the building. "You guys are stealing from us." And, oh, the other thing gets my nanny up, that's going to be it. And I said to him, "I beg your pardon." Because the Chief didn't want to talk to him. "Tom," he said to me, "Tom, keep that guy away from me. I'm trying to direct this fire operation. See what can be done with him." I mean, the man was accusing us of all kinds of--and I said, "Let me ask you something. Did you ever think about those young men up there?" and two of my sons were in that building. He said, "No." I said, "Well, I do." I said, "Two of my kids are in there trying to put your fire out, and they're not getting paid. They're risking their lives to put out your fire." I said, "And every one of these youngsters around here with that coat and the helmet and the boots, they're here for nothing. We didn't get paid for this. We came down to help you out, and you're going to make accusations at us?" I said, "If it was up to me, I'd stuff my helmet so far down your throat, your ankles would be swollen." The cop said, "Wait just a minute." I said, "No problem. I think you better take over" (laughs). I still--"I'm going to tell you one more time. You try to cross that ..." We had put up the fire tape. I said, "If you put your hand on it, I'm going to have this cop put the handcuffs on you." And finally, the guy's wife prevailed. She said to him, "Leave them alone." I mean, we had a working fire. And I think we had six fellows injured in that fire. It was, you know, it was heat and smoke-- it was a hot day. We took them out,

hosed them down, and they were fine. But, you know...but again, I blame us for this. I don't say we have to run up and down the street, but a lot of times--we used to have a fellow, Les Kent. He wrote for us a--what was his article? His byline: "Blue Light" or "Blue Flashing Light," or "Blue Light." And he would bring out things about the Fire Department in the column. He wrote it for Jackie Pierangelo [Editor, *Port Washington News*] who now is gone--he's alive, but he's gotten older and he kind of slowed down. Although I believe he wrote the letter for us, thanking the public for assistance with the Ashley Fund. But we have never really gone out and explained to the public who we are, and that's our fault. You know, the public has a right to know who is protecting them. And, you know, for us to just sit back and say--well, one thing we don't do. We don't get involved in the political circles at all. That's a bylaw in the Department. We do not get involved. We do not support. We do not endorse. Stay out of it. And I'm in full agreement with that. But to have the public know. You know, and quite frankly, again, there are those of the media who would have you think we're nothing but a bunch of beer-drinking slobs. And, no. We don't do anything to offset that. And I happen to think it's wrong. I think we should have a public relations committee or something within the Department. And we're now recruiting actively. We have a committee for that. But I think PR-wise, I think that the community is entitled to know that, you know, Christina graduated from EMT school. So you put a little blurb in the paper about, "We've got another EMT," or however you want to do it. But, you know, let the public know that we're constantly updating our training. These kids go to school after school. I'm not so sure I would have done it, if I had to do all of that. These youngsters, nobody--within the

Department, we accept that they'll... [?] ... Yeah, that's what we do. But as I sit there as their chaplain and I look back and I look over what they're doing, there's constantly a letter coming in from Nassau County Fire Commission saying, "Okay, we're going to hold this school." Well, that school is going to be held in Oceanside. It's not going to be held in Port Washington. Oceanside's going to have it. Ice rescue. They have to go out to Oyster Bay for that one, you know. And this is all time these youngsters give up. And they should be recognized for it. We're not going to give them medals, but you don't ignore them either. And I think the fire service, as a whole, suffers from this. We don't bother to--especially the volunteer fire service. In the city, they have their own way of getting their messages across. And I'm not looking for any type of accolades. But I do think we ought to tell them, "See that little boy over there that's a junior, or a senior at Port Washington High School? Do you know that last night, he spent four hours out at Bethpage at the Fire Academy, learning how to put out a fire." And, you know, again, I'm so proud of these kids. Oh, I get ticked off at them--don't get me wrong. I don't walk around and bathe them with holy water. There are times when I come in and I come down on them. But these kids--and not just the kids. I mean, we've got married men. And women. Who are giving up their time. They're not looking for spotlights to be put on them. But a little acknowledgment once in a while goes a long way. I don't care who you are. If you're a human, you like to be thanked.

Q: Okay, I'm going to take this opportunity to thank you (laughs) for a great interview.

TJT: Well, I thank you for bringing me in. I hope I didn't overstay my welcome ... [END OF RECORDED INTERVIEW] ...