

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

Transcript Of Oral History Interview With

Jacqueline Walters
Protection Engine Company No. 1

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

©2006



Text enclosed in a blue box is linked to graphics
pertaining to the subject being discussed

Q: ... January 25th, 2005. This is an interview with Jacqueline Walters. My name is Sally Olds. The interview is taking place at the Port Washington Public Library. Can you please say your name.

Jacqueline Walters: Jacqueline Walters.

Q: And which fire company are you affiliated with?

JW: Protection Engine Company Number One.

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

JW: It was a lot of fun. I grew up by the water. And so, we were known as the clamdiggers. I mean, I've lived in Port all my life, and so has my husband.

Q: What are your childhood memories about fires or firefighting?

JW: Well, I don't remember too much about fires when I was very young. I wasn't much into the Fire Department at that time. I do remember that--I grew up on Manhasset Isle--and that the racing team did use the entrance, Manhasset Avenue, for practice. I remember that when I was young. My uncle was, at one time--Ray Maloney--was at one time in the

Atlantic Hook and Ladder Company, years and years and years ago when I was very young. My father had a local business in town, but he never had time--he was very involved in sports. He never was involved in the Fire Department.

Q: Do you remember anything that your uncle told you?

JW: No, I don't.

Q: At what point, then, did you join the Ladies Auxiliary?

JW: Well, my father-in-law belonged to Atlantic Hook and Ladder years ago, but it was a short time that he was in, and I don't remember that at all. My husband joined the Fire Department in 1967, and I joined the Auxiliary in 1968, I think--in the beginning of '68.

Q: What was your husband's name?

JW: John. John J. Walters, Jr.

Q: And so what made you decide to join the Auxiliary?

JW: Well, at that time, we were friendly with a lot of the people that were in the Fire Department, and the Ladies Auxiliary was quite big at that time. And there were a lot of

girls that were very active. It was a social outing and also helping the firemen and local community charities, and so on.

Q: What kinds of things did you do to help the firemen?

JW: If there was a fire, the women went out and they would make coffee and cook for them. There were fundraisers for them. There were several little things that they did. The Auxiliary would help out if there was an illness in a family or something; they would help out that way.

Q: So, are there any particular fires that you remember working at?

JW: Oh, I guess the saddest one was--I can't think of his name--Bobby ...

Q: Bobby Dayton.

Q: Bobby Dayton. Yes, when Bobby Dayton was--and then Ingrid was killed--one of the members of Fire Medics down on West Shore Road. And my son happened to be standing right next to her, so he was lucky that he didn't get hit, too. But there were several fires. The fire down at the marinas--I honestly don't remember a lot of them. There were so many of them, and we did do a lot at that time. We did fashion shows. Murder mystery dinners. We did a lot of fundraising and different things. The Auxiliary

was very big, but, as anything else, it petered down after, you know, I guess maybe in the '90s--middle '90s--it started kind of not being too active anymore; there weren't too many members left.

Q: Why do you think that was?

JW: I think that the girls today had young children, but they went out to work, so they didn't really have--they don't have time. That's really what it is. And we did try to hold it together for a long time--a few of the girls and myself. We actually took offices, you know, two times around, and we tried to keep it together. But, you know what, if you only have four people there at meetings, you can't do much. So, I guess it was maybe in 2000, 2001, that we no longer had any meetings.

Q: Did any of the members of the Ladies Auxiliary from Protection move over to join the Flower Hill group, because they're still active.

JW: No. Every company has its own rules for the Auxiliary. At the time when Protection was formed, it was to be a spouse of a fireman. In Flower Hill, I believe you can be a family member. So they were a little bigger because of that. And, yes, they are active. We tried even joining together at one time. And then, years ago, there was a Department Auxiliary, and that--it became a little bit too involved, because you can't go to your own Auxiliary meeting and to the Department Auxiliary meeting, because it's just too many

nights out, and you have young children. And at that time, it was fun while we did it, but it just kind of petered out also, because there just wasn't that much of an involvement in it. So, they went back to the respective companies, and it was disbanded. And then the companies kind of fell apart because of the lack of involvement. Everybody's just too busy.

Q: The companies--you mean the Ladies Auxiliary in the companies.

JW: Yes, yes. I do.

Q: Well, what did you do to try to attract new members?

JW: Well, you just--it's a voluntary thing. So, you go and you ask them, and it was always--most of the girls, you know, "Well, I can't join ..." The big bone of contention was "I can't join because what's the point of me trying to help out if there's a fire if my husband goes to the fire? And who stays home with the kids, then I can't go anyway." That became a problem. I happened to be very lucky. My sister-in-law lived next door, so one of us--she also belonged to Flower Hill Auxiliary. So we would take turns. One of us would watch all the kids and go, and the next time the other one would go. Or sometimes, as the kids got older, one of the older children would watch the younger ones and we'd both go.

Q: What's your sister-in-law's name?

JW: She was a Cysan. Barbara Cysan.

Q: And how many children do you have?

JW: I have five children. My oldest son is in the Fire Department. He's one of the..he's a Deputy Chief right now.

Q: And what's his name?

JW: John Walters, III. John J. Walters, III. And my younger son, Tim, was in the Fire Department, but he has moved to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, and he's in the Fire Department in Myrtle Beach. So, yeah, they're all firemen. And my son who's going to be Chief in 2007, he wanted to be a fireman since the time he could walk. When he went in as Captain in Protection, he--I have a picture of him in a little pedal fire engine when he was like two and a half, and I had it blown up on a big poster board and brought it to the dinner, and I really thought he was going to be upset. But they all loved it, and so--and my grandson, we have pictures of him, because he's now--everything's Fire Department with him.

Q: How old is he?

JW: He's a year and a half. And he just had his picture taken in one of the places--my daughter took him to one of those places, and they had a fire truck, and he immediately went to the fire truck and had to sit in it. So, of course, my husband has a room of his old Fire Department memorabilia, and that picture's right up there in the middle, with our grandson Connor sitting right in the fire truck.

Q: What other kind of memorabilia does he have?

JW: My husband?

Q: Yeah.

JW: Oh, my goodness. He has an old--I don't know what they're called--a ladder from the New York City Fire Department. A scale ladder, I think it's called, or something, that you go up. He's got nozzles, hose, lamps, every kind of fire truck you could possibly think of in scale models, and some toy fire trucks. And, yes, the room is very crowded. And we've just recently moved, and our whole basement was a finished room with all of this in it, and we had to give a lot of it away and pack up a lot of it, so we don't have a lot of it--as much as we had--although we still have plenty.

Q: Where did you give it to--or to whom?

JW: Some of my children. Some of the things are packed up, and my husband's going to contact Nassau County--they're building a fire museum--Nassau County's building it. And he's going to donate it to them. There's a lot of things we can't fit in this--where we are now.

Q: Have you spoken to Frank Pavlak?

JW: Oh, yes. He's well aware of it, yes.

Q: Because I know they have ...

JW: He's a good friend of ours. He and his wife Beverly and, you know, was active in the Auxiliary with me.

Q: So, you talked about the social life there. Can you tell me a little bit about how involved you were in the social life of the Fire Department?

JW: Yes. We were very involved. The installation is an annual dinner that everybody always looked forward to. The meetings were a social outing, and every so often we'd have like a pot-luck dinner just for the girls. Sometimes, we'd do a craft. It was a wonderful way to get out, especially when your children are small. And you could leave whenever you

wanted, so if you could only go for a couple of hours, you could just leave when you had to. And some of us would stay late, and some of us would go out after the meetings. It was a lot of fun. There was a big crowd, and it dwindled down as time went on, but yes, it was--it was a lot of fun.

Q: Like when it was big, how many women would be there?

JW: Oh, forty. Mm hmm. Yeah, at least thirty-five, forty.

Q: And what kind of crafts did you do?

JW: Let's see. We did pillow-making, sewing, needle-crafts, I guess you would say. I don't remember them all, to be honest with you. What else did we do? A couple of us joined a ceramic class, not at the Auxiliary, but together from the Auxiliary. We went together. I don't remember them all.

Q: Then, you would make these things for your own homes.

JW: Yeah, we did. And it was just something to sit and do while you were chit-chatting. Or knitting or crocheting. We did that, too.

Q: And can you tell me about some of the fundraisers?

JW: We usually did--we did fashion shows. Sometimes they'd be a dinner fashion show; sometimes they'd just be a coffee-and-cake fashion show.

Q: And where did you hold them?

JW: In our firehouse.

Q: And where did you get the clothes?

JW: You would go around and ask who would be willing to sponsor it. Dress Barn or-- actually, and at the time, years ago, I don't remember the name of it, to be honest with you, but there was a store on Haven Avenue used to do a lot for--you know, do the shows for us. And then one on Main Street. I don't remember the names anymore. What else did we do?

Q: You mentioned a mystery ...

JW: Oh, we did a dinner mystery.

Q: What was that?

JW: Where you participate--you have dinner, and you hire a group, and it's like a play -- and you participate in it, just like the ones they have, only on a much smaller scale. That was a big hit. That was a lot of fun. I was involved in a lot--my husband and I were involved in the drill team--fundraising for them, also. We had dances. That's another thing the Fire Department--the company did, was dances and ...

Q: And where would you hold the dances?

JW: Mostly in Protection. Yeah. And Protection, at that time, had been--not--well, I think it was one of the first ones that was redone, I would say. And then Flower Hill was redone. Or maybe it was Flower Hill and then Protection. And then--now Atlantic's is redone. And it was a wonder, because some of the older members have a lot of problem getting up the stairs. So they now have elevators in the firehouses. Protection doesn't have one yet, but they're getting one in. Some of the older members find it difficult to climb the stairs. And, actually, my husband had back surgery, and he couldn't go to the meetings at Protection for a long time, because he couldn't climb the stairs. But then, when he was getting better and the doctor okayed him, they put him on a chair and carried him up and down. So, yeah.

Q: About how much would you raise from these fundraisers?

JW: Oh, it depended. Anywhere from fifteen hundred to three thousand, to four thousand. It

depended how big it was- how much of a profit you made. Usually when there was cake and stuff, we all did our own. We did--that's another thing we did. We did bake sales, and we would make all the food for the--whatever was going on, whatever occasion it was. Most times, we did our own cooking.

Q: Did you have a specialty?

JW: Did I have a specialty? No, we all cooked together in the firehouse. We would decide on a menu, and then we would all cook together in the firehouse. In the firehouse kitchen.

Q: Can you remember a typical menu?

JW: No, I don't (laughs). I really don't. As time went on, we had the children's Christmas party, and as there were less and less children born for a while--now, there's more children being born again, but for a while it was on the decline. And the men came in one year and they cooked lunch, and I think they made spaghetti with clam sauce, because that's what they liked. And we had a salad, and they had hot dogs for the kids and ice cream and everything. And that, for quite a while, was like a family thing. And that was a lot of fun. We'd go down, and we'd all go down, and of course, it was a little difficult when you had young children and they didn't get their naps in, and you'd hear a lot of crying. But most times, it was a lot of fun. And the men had a good time cooking, while the kids had Santa Claus, and the younger firemen dressed up in costume and they

went around. And even now they still do it. And they go around to the nursing homes and the shut-ins--whoever's in the company that can't get out, they go and visit them.

Q: Do you still go to the Christmas party with your grandson?

JW: No, I haven't been. My daughter lives out in Huntington, and he couldn't come in this past year, but we will in the future. Yeah, he loves his uncle's truck. You know, he just loves it. So--both of his uncles.

Q: What was it like--going back to the early days, did you have to be voted in to the Ladies Auxiliary?

JW: Well, I'm not so sure you'd call it voted in. If there was a big obstacle, I think they would bring it up. But, no, they usually just filled out an application. And, as long as your husband was a member of Protection, that was what entitled you to get into the company.

Q: And was there any kind of formal ceremony--an installation ceremony or anything?

JW: I'm trying to remember. There was just a swearing in at a company meeting--whatever company--the following--you would fill in your application. It would be okayed, and then you would come to the next meeting.

Q: Do you remember who the charter members of the company were? Or who the Captain of Protection was when you first joined?

JW: No, I don't. Actually, when my husband got in and I first joined, there were still a lot of charter members alive at that time and coming to meetings. You know, they were elderly, but they were coming to meetings. And, no, I don't even remember the names. It would take me a while to have to think about all of that (laughs). It was so long ago.

Q: Did you march in parades?

JW: No. The comp--well, yes I did. Yes we did. We did in a few parades. And then they had a Department Auxiliary. And then, as years went on--and I honestly don't remember the years--but in the '60s, yes we marched. In the '70s, I think it declined a bit. And then it would be--it would look kind of silly if you only had--in the '70s and '80s, if you only had four members marching, so they opted not to march. But at one time, we did have uniforms.

Q: What were they like?

JW: Skirts and jackets and white blouses and hats.

Q: Any kind of insignia?

JW: They had the Fire Department logo on it. Company logo. Department logo.

Q: Was there a sense of camaraderie among the women?

JW: Oh, absolutely, yeah. And it was always a scary thing, because, you know what, as much as you say these guys all have a party, and they have a good time and everything, it is a very dangerous thing to do to go out to a fire and fight it. And, you know, until something really happens, nobody thinks that way. But it is. And even today, my son is a New York City fireman, and right now, he just left to go into the city, because of the three men that died.

Q: Yes, yes.

JW: So, and he lost nineteen of the fellows in 9/11. Thank God, he wasn't working. Because if he was, he wouldn't be here today.

Q: From his company?

JW: From his company, yeah. But you never think about these things, and I think that's why-- I can remember as a young child--well, I guess I was a young teen--my grandmother's best friend, her husband died on, I think, Avenue A. He was a fireman, and he just had a

heart attack. And that was one of the most--that was the most devastating thing I remember from the Fire Department. And it was--Dargen was the name. Mr. Dargen. Mr. and Mrs. Dargen. She lived on South Bayles Avenue--17 South Bayles. She lived there--my grandmother's best friend. And I think her husband and her daughter--her daughter joined [the Ladies Auxiliary]. They were in Flower Hill, and her husband joined because her father was in. In Protection, they didn't take in family members. It was just the spouse. But in Flower Hill, they did.

Q: So the man who died of the heart attack, was that at a fire?

JW: Yes, it was. I mean, he wasn't hurt at a fire, just fighting the fire, you know. And that was one of the first things I remember. And I remember everybody being-- how sad they were and everything, and how they were talking about how stressful it is to go to a fire. I do remember different fires, but I don't remember the details of any of them.

Q: Did you work at the fire--the one in which Bobby Dayton died?

JW: We were always at the firehouse. We weren't at the fire. And no, I was not there. We transfer food back and forth. You know, a lot of the girls--a lot of them had spilled coffee in their cars (laughs) and everything, you know. And, no, I did not work at that fire.

Q: Did the Ladies Auxiliary take part in the programs afterwards where they had counseling?

JW: Oh, a lot of them did, yes. A lot of them did.

Q: Did you?

JW: No, I did not. I--no, I did not.

Q: What was it like being the wife of a firefighter, having small children, making dinner, and suddenly a fire call comes up and your husband rushes out.

JW: Yeah, that happened all the time. Usually, when you were about to sit down for dinner. I don't know why, but that's it. Or the middle of the night, he was out a lot, and he worked long hours. And I had the kids, you know, myself most of the time. And they were very used to it after a while. It's amazing, but the kids would get used to the radio going off--the Plectron going off--and they would hear it. And sometimes they would wake up and sometimes they wouldn't. And even now, you become oblivious to it, unless--it goes off, and people will say, "Well, where is that?" and I say, "I don't know. I didn't hear ..."
And yet, if it's an address you know or something, for some reason, you pick up on it.
But I don't always pay attention to it.

Q: Does your husband still go out to fires?

JW: No, not right now. No, he's got a little bit of a health problem, so he's actually on the enabled [inactive] list right now. He just had some heart problems, so ...

Q: What are the biggest changes you have seen in the Department, both the Ladies Auxiliary and the Fire Department?

JW: Rules, regulations, and paperwork. The paperwork is astronomical. I don't know how these fellows do it. I know that when the Ladies Auxiliary was starting to kind of fall apart, I guess you would say, there was still a lot of paperwork. I was in the County--Nassau County Auxiliary--for a while. Everything is paperwork, for some reason. And all this paperwork is no follow-up. And OSHA [Occupational Safety & Health Administration] came out with all their new rules and regulations, and the Fire Department had to follow up on it, and a lot of it is paperwork--filing and changes.

Q: Like what kinds of forms? Did you have to fill them out yourself?

JW: Not for the Auxiliary, no. No, the men--the Fire Department, the men do that. But they have to make sure you're at a--when you're at a fire and whether you've been there and all the--there's so much paperwork involved now. It never was years ago. But, it's like anything else. Years ago, you could walk around in Port Washington and know almost

everybody that was in town. And now (laughs), you could walk on Main Street for two hours and not see anybody you know. The population has increased so much. And I guess that's what it is.

Q: So, how do you feel about the changes in the community?

JW: You mean in Port Washington, in general? Sad. I think it's just way too populated. There's too much traffic. It's very difficult to get around. I was really unhappy when they closed Salem School and Main Street School, and all the elementary schools were down in one end of town. And my children were down there, and you think, well, what happens if something happens down at that end of town? You cannot get out of that end of town. So I'm glad they've reopened Salem, and hopefully they'll get another elementary school somewhere else, because they're all in the same area down there. I'm glad that I don't have young children in the school system (laughs) now. It was difficult enough years ago. But now, so many things have changed. I guess just the population is just too overwhelming for the town. That's what I think it is. You can't--it takes you forever. We lived on Neulist Avenue, which is up on--by Trunz. And it was nice. You could just get right out of town. We now live on Avenue B, and it adds at least fifteen, twenty minutes; depending on the time, it could be even a half hour just to get up to where we used to live. Yeah, it really is. There's no way out of Manorhaven or Manhasset Isle, or anything, except Shore Road --there's only two exits, really. And now, with all the supermarkets down there and everything, it's become pretty congested.

Q: Were you at all involved in producing the newsletter that the Ladies Auxiliary put out at one point?

JW: That newsletter was the Department Auxiliary, and, yeah, I guess I was, years ago. We had our meetings up on Port Washington Boulevard. Yeah, I was very involved in the Department up there.

Q: What did you do, specifically?

JW: It's so hard to remember. I believe I had an office for a while, but I couldn't swear to it. I had offices in the Protection Auxiliary. I was President twice, and I was Vice President twice. And I was Financial Secretary and Treasurer and Recording Secretary and-- several times around. And up there, they had, in the Department, they had, very much like they do now, each company had a different office to fill. And I believe I was Secretary up there at one time, but I honestly don't remember.

Q: Do you remember any controversial issues that came up, while you were active in the Auxiliary?

JW: In the Department?

Q: Either way. In the Department or the Auxiliary.

JW: Yeah, there were some. Well, I don't remember them. I remember there was a--one of the reasons why they disbanded the Department Auxiliary. But I honestly don't remember. I can tell you somebody who probably does know, but I don't.

Q: Who is that?

JW: Beverly Reese would probably know. Have you talked to her?

Q: I haven't, but I think one of the other interviewers has.

JW: Yeah, Beverly's got a--and Beverly, Janet Chudd, and myself, and Kathy Mahoney were instru--they--we were the last ones to kind of be in the Auxiliary. You know, be active, I guess you might say. Beverly was in and out. Beverly, because she's been steward for the Department for so long, is very busy with the Fire Department.

Q: Now, do you remember, the *Readers Digest* used to have a feature called "My Most Unforgettable Character."

JW: Uh huh.

Q: Would you say there was anyone in the Department or the Auxiliary that you would say ...

JW: You mean female or ...

Q: Either way.

JW: Well, I have to tell you that probably Harry Hooper is probably the most memorable person in our company anyway. He's just a character.

Q: In what way?

JW: He's just a lot of fun. He was an instigator and troublemaker and everything at the parties, and unfortunately he just lost his wife not long ago. And Doris was very active when she was in with us, and a lot of fun. And--but Harry, my goodness, he was--I don't even want to tell you stories about Harry, because the things he did were unbelievable. I mean--and he did it to me and he did it to many other, you know--it would be nothing to be sitting at a dinner and, all of a sudden, see his teeth floating in your glass. Harry, he's done it to me. He did to many, many of the girls (laughs). And he'd think it was funny. And after a while it was--he was funny.

Q: Anything else that he did?

JW: No, I can't remember. No, he just went--he goes around collecting cans. Everybody knows that.

Q: Collecting cans?

JW: Oh, yes. My goodness. He's called "The Can Man." He's got business cards that say "The Can Man."

Q: Now, he does that.

JW: Yeah, I don't think he's doing it so much anymore. He's pretty much up in age now. But, yeah, he did it for years. And he would be--you know, if you were going to have a party, you'd let him know, and he would come and take away all your empties the next day (laughs). He was just a character. He's a colorful character. That's all I can say about him. I mean, that's the one that stands out the most in my mind, for the outrageous things, I guess you might say.

Q: Did you ever want to be a firefighter yourself?

JW: No. No, never had any desire (laughs).

Q: Well, what did you think when the first women joined the Department?

JW: Well, how do you mean, when the first women joined?

Q: Well, there was a woman firefighter.

JW: Oh, yes. I did know her. It was our company that she joined, yeah. I've got to say ...

Q: And who was that?

JW: Janet Kimmerly. I really think it was great. There was a little bit of obstacles for her, but they came around, and now there's a lot of them. And even in the city and all over there is. I think it's great. Why shouldn't they, if they want to? I mean, I don't know why they would want to; but, if that's their desire (laughs) ...

Q: Well, you said there were obstacles. Did you hear people talking about it, or ...

JW: Well, in any organization, if it's all male, they--most men don't like changes regardless of what it is. And so, to have the female come in, I think that was really a big thing. I think, in her behalf, what helped her was that her father was a fireman. And she was very familiar, and she was very active, and she was very active and helped out in the headquarters in secretarial work and stuff. You know, she was very active. I don't if she

still is. I never asked.

Q: At the very beginning, when you first joined, was there anybody in the Auxiliary who sort of took you under her wing and showed you what to do, taught you the ropes?

JW: Some of the older--Anita Urban, Doris Hooper. Oh, I can't remember them all. Yeah, they all were very, very glad to have other people in there, too, I think. The more you have, the more fun it is. And the less everybody has to do. You know, everybody shares the burden, and it makes it so much easier. And, yes, they all were very welcoming. I will say that.

Q: What are you proudest of, in terms of your work with the Auxiliary?

JW: It definitely was a commitment, because you had to go out on cold nights, even, you know, there were a lot of commitments to be done. It was difficult, when they were doing fundraisers, if you had a sick child or something and you had to go out. And my husband had his own business, so it was difficult, with him not being around a lot, to get someone to watch the kids, to go out to do these fundraisers, when they were young. It was very difficult. I guess the most--proudest of my husband and my sons joining the Fire Department, and my son coming up as Chief; my other son loving it so much that he, you know, went down to Myrtle Beach and joined there. And my husband would be more active--well, he also would like to be more active, but he can't be, because of his

health. In 1990, he started having back problems; he had serious surgery. And so he's been on the decline since then, so he really can't do much, as far as being active in the Fire Department. And he's a little bit stubborn, too, where what's the point of going if you can't do anything.

Q: So he doesn't--does he go to the meetings still?

JW: Some of them, yeah. Yeah, he went--they had a meeting last night; my son talked him into going. He wasn't going to go. And he only stayed for, you know, an hour and a half, two hours.

Q: What was his business here in town?

JW: He had--it was called Walter's Truck and Auto Service. It was on Davsd Avenue.

Q: Is that related to the current "Walt and Walter's"?

JW: No. The only thing is the fact that Walter Martinek and my husband are both Polish. But other than that, and they know each other. But no. However, they did get each other's mail a lot. Yeah, no. No, he was on Davis Avenue for many years, and then we sold that. We owned the building. We sold the building, and he moved across the street. And then he had serious back problems. My sons took over the business for a while. And

then, my older son was able to get into the city Fire Department, so he left, and then it was just too much for the boys. So, we sold the business.

Q: What was your worst day in the Auxiliary?

JW: I don't honestly remember. I remember a lot of sad days. Any time someone that you know--and there was a--it's a big family. When you're in the Fire Department, there's a lot of camaraderie, and you become one large family. So, anyone that dies in the Fire Department, it would be sad. I think probably one of the saddest days was Bobby Dayton's, that I remember, because at that time, we knew so many people involved. Friends of ours, their son was blasted out the window. He could have been--you know, I mean, it was just--it was devastating. And I don't know as if there was anything worse than that before that. That's just as far back as I remember now. I know that there was a lot of fires that men were hurt at. But I don't remember anything more than that right now.

Q: What was your best day?

JW: I guess I loved doing most was the children's Christmas party. And Beverly Reese and I did that for years. We did the children's--and we used to go out--and that was another difficult thing. We used to go out and buy all the gifts for the kids. They don't do that anymore, but years ago, that's what we did. And it would take a lot of ingenuity, because

you'd have to sit down and think about: What do you want for two-year-olds and what do you want for the three-year-olds? And then, what did we get them last year? And so, we had to keep a lot of records. And it was a big shopping expedition. And usually, three of us went. And there were, I think, probably about 124 kids at one time. You know, that's the biggest I remember. But mostly, it was around sixty, seventy, and then it went down--you know, declined after that. But I remember that as being a lot of fun, and we really thought a lot about it. It was a lot of work, but it was really worth it.

Q: And you knew the names of all the kids and their ages. You would ...

JW: Yes, we did.

Q: ... know this ahead of time.

JW: We had a book, and every year, you updated the book. And we had to update new children in the Fire Department, too--new families.

Q: And where did you go shopping? Where'd you buy the stuff?

JW: Usually Toys R Us (laughs). And we'd usually go--well, it got so that it became so difficult and so crowded, we'd go and have dinner somewhere and then go--when Toys R Us would stay open late--you know, we'd go at like ten or eleven o'clock. And they'd be

open till two o'clock in the morning or whatever; we'd shop then. And then, storing it became another problem--especially if you have young kids. How could I take them in my house and--there was a year we had no place to store it, and we had--my kids were sleeping, and we had to pull down the attic and hide them in the attic and then get them out. But then, the men helped us out, and they would store them in the attic at Protection. We also, on our December Auxiliary meeting, we also wrapped all those gifts and put tags on them and everything. And I think I was very proud of that. That was a very, very difficult thing to do to have to try and please all these people and all these children. And it wasn't just the children you were pleasing; you had please the parents, too (laughs). But, yeah, and it was a lot of fun. It was always fun to see the kids. In fact, I have a lot of pictures of my kids with Santa, and friends' kids with Santa. And I enjoyed that a lot.

Q: Did--you said you had to please the parents. Did you ever get any complaints?

JW: Oh, yes.

Q: What (laughs)--what kinds of things would people complain about?

JW: Well, "You got him a truck this year; you got him a truck last year." Or "That's too noisy," or "Why did you ..." you know, that kind of thing. But you never please everybody anyway. And after you have five kids, you know that (laughs). If you can't please all five kids, then how're you going to please anything more than that?

Q: Right. Let's see. Oh, when you went to--you know, when you went out when there was a fire, did you keep clothes available to jump into to be called ...

JW: Well, we never went out on an emergency like the men do.

Q: Yeah.

JW: And you would have to be called in. The men always called. You didn't just go on your own. The men would call up and say, "Get the Auxiliary out to make coffee ..." and everything. You would always have to be called out. Yes, we did, though, jump into clothes and run down there. Because usually it was a fast thing, and the coffee urns are so big that you have to start them. So, you know, we had big coffee urns, smaller coffee urns, and they take a long time to perk. And then, at different fires, we had portable urns where they would take them down and --and soup and hot chocolate.

Q: So, you would take them to the site of the fire.

JW: It depended. It depended. But, yes, we did a lot. Sandwiches. And then, depending on what time of night when the fire was, or day, you'd--you know, there was daytime fires, too--they would have food back at the firehouse also. They would also, when it was real, real cold weather and it was a bad fire, they would alternate the men. You know, let

some of the men come back to the firehouse, warm up and get something, and then go back out again.

Q: And so, how long would--on a typical fire--would you be there?

JW: Oh, I can remember being as much as eight hours. Yeah. I mean, I was lucky in that my sister-in-law would take the kids; I didn't have--my mother was not well, and my mother-in-law, they didn't take the kids that often. But I had a friend that would take them. And sometimes, the girls would-- we'd take each other's kids. When we had the ice fire, the firemen--it's one--the camaraderie is wonderful. To this day, I know that, even though I haven't seen some of these men in a long time, I could call them up and say "I need help," they'd be there immediately. I know that. And I think that's one aspect of being in the Fire Department. You have a very big extended family. And I think that's very important.

Q: What was the ice fire?

JW: The--which ice fire? I don't ...

Q: I don't know. You just mentioned, "When we had an ice fire," you went out there.

JW: Yeah, I don't remember. I'm sorry. I don't remember. I know when the barge--the

houseboats blew up down on the bay, that was big fires. There were several ice fires as a matter of fact, but I don't remember all the details about any of them.

Q: When you were active, what kind of age span was there ...

JW: In the Auxiliary?

Q: ...in the Auxiliary.

JW: Probably from maybe nineteen, twenty, to, I would probably say, in the sixties or seventies at least. I know I was probably twenty--well, let me see. I guess I was near thirty-- in my early thirties when I got in. And a lot of the charter members were deceased, but a lot of them were still there. And they did come to the meetings, too, some of them. And even after a few of them went into the nursing home--in fact, one of them was in the nursing home for a long time--the Sands Point Nursing Home. And, in the beginning, we would go down and visit her and everything, but then after, she didn't know anybody and we'd go and always try and make the rounds at Christmas and visit them, and take them a tin of cookies that we'd make or--and that was another thing we did socially. See, it's coming back to me now. Where we'd have a cookie night, and we'd all make cookies and swap--cookie swap. You know, those things. That was another, and actually, that was really nice, because nobody wants to stay home by themselves and make cookies. And it's nice to get away from your kids, if you can manage it. And they

still do that today. They still--the younger girls are doing it. I know Atlantic's had a cookie swap.

Q: So Atlantic's still has a ...

JW: They do have an auxiliary. They're not--I don't think--I honestly have not been involved in it in so long now. No, they're not too active, but, yes, they do. And the girls from it, the camaraderie is starting to build up a lot again; I see that. And I think probably because of the age differences. Like my husband and I and our friends are now considered to be the seniors at our firehouse. And when we went in, we were the babies. And I see that happening again now. I think there was a lull for a while. There weren't--there still isn't that many volunteers that you get anymore. But they're starting to come around. And as these younger boys that came in are now getting girlfriends and families and children, they're starting to now have that same camaraderie and extended family. Where before, it was just older people or young kids that didn't have family. They had a good time with the boys.

Q: Excuse me. I have to turn over the tape ... [END OF SIDE A; BEGIN SIDE B] ... Have you been active in any other community organizations in Port Washington?

JW: Port Washington Lions. My husband's a Lion. Community organizations? Girl Scouts for quite a few years. My girls were in Girl Scouts. I don't remember what else.

Q: What would you say is the most important lesson that you learned from your involvement with the Auxiliary?

JW: Well, probably, how difficult it can be to have differences of opinions and have to learn how to iron them out. I think that's probably the biggest thing, because there was--it was a large group of women who all had their own opinions on everything, and you had to come to a decision on a lot of things. And I think that was probably the most difficult especially if you had an idea that nobody, or three-quarters of them didn't agree with or anything and you had to see the other side, sometimes it's hard to do that. But it was a good learning experience. I think it was a great learning experience. I think that's how you learn to compromise.

Q: Do you remember a particular instance where there was this difference of opinion?

JW: No. There was usually a lot of them, I mean, if you were going to have a fundraiser and you're going to have a fashion show, it was always, "Should we have a dinner?" "Should we have a luncheon?" "Should we have ..." You know, it was always--everybody had a different opinion. And so you had to discuss it all, and sometimes those discussions got really long. And sometimes they'd even have to table them, because when it got to be like eleven-thirty everyone's saying, you know, "We've got to go home" (laughs). They would table a lot of them. But, in all, I think you really learned to appreciate others'

opinions and listen to them. Which, I don't think, if you're not in a big organization, you don't do, because you mostly get your own way.

Q: So, aside from that, is there any other way in which your being in the Auxiliary affected your life, your life outside the organization?

JW: Oh, I made a lot of good friends. My children made a lot of good friends. There was a lot of social activities that the kids love and they still talk about to this day. You know, they had an annual picnic. They loved the picnics.

Q: Where was the picnic held?

JW: Well, they used to have the picnics on estates in Sands Point, and then, in later years, I don't remember all the places, but then it would be at the firehouse or Manorhaven Beach. And this past year--unfortunately, I didn't go--but this past year, they had it at Hempstead Harbor, and they said it was wonderful. So, I'm looking forward to going again, taking my grandson.

Q: Is there anything else that you can remember ...

JW: Times change--no, time has changed so much, I think, you know, in 1988, I went back to work after raising my children, and I think everybody became involved in work, and

nobody had time for anything else. And as you grow older and you're working a full-time day and you get home, you don't--you know, it's bad enough you have to come home and make dinner, and then, you don't want to go out again. And I think that's what happened to the majority. And these young girls--you know, we stayed home with our children when the children were young--but the young girls today go out and work, so it's really difficult for them, and they don't have time to put into the auxiliaries. Which is sad, because there is no camaraderie like there used to be. We did have a lot of fun. A lot of fighting, too, but a lot of fun. And I think it was a great experience; I will say that. And I'm sure any of the girls would say the same thing. And I learned a lot. I learned a lot of crafts (laughs). I did.

Q: Do you do any of them now?

JW: No, I don't. I've just recently retired. So--and then we moved. So, I have quite a bit to keep me busy. I'd like to take up crocheting again.

Q: What kind of work were you doing?

JW: Secretarial. I was an administrative assistant.

Q: Here in town?

JW: Actually, I worked for Lewis Oil for many years. And then they moved to Plainview. So I moved to Plainview.

Q: Oh, so you went out to Plainview?

JW: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

JW: And then Lewis Oil bought Kurz Oil, who was a local oil company here. And the girl that worked for Don Kurz came out to Lewis's, and she took over my job, after she was there for a while.

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

JW: The value of it? I don't think you could put a value on it. I really don't. I think when it's all tied together and all the information is tied together, and--I mean, I would love to read it, because I can't remember anything anymore. I mean, there's so many--I could tell you about fires. All of a sudden, things are coming back to me. But you'd have to sit for days and let me think about all these things. But there's some wonderful experiences. There are some very sad experiences. Exciting experiences. And I wish that everybody could have the experience of having an extended family, because people don't. And even

though there's times when you really hate everybody in there, you know, and you say, "How can they do that?" that's life, you know. You get over it, and you say, you know, like "I guess I was looking at it wrong." I wish we still had the same camaraderie, but we don't, because we're all older and we don't--the men aren't involved anymore. The men aren't in their best of health. Neither are the women, you know. That happens. But I'm glad to see that my sons are so happy doing it, although I think it's a very dangerous job. Not so--well, every one of them is. Every fire is dangerous. You never know. You never know. A lot of sad fires, though. It's coming back to me now, the one we had on Bernard Street where the little girl died. You know, all of those things are so sad. And, truthfully, when my son--my older son--got in the Port Washington Fire Department, within six months, my husband made the statement that within six months, he had seen more tragedy in those six months--the first six months he was in--than my husband had seen in most of the time he was in the Fire Department. It just seemed in that one particular time, there was the Dayton fire and that, and then the Bernard Street fire, and there was a lot. And we had a couple of other bad fires, you know. I don't like fire (laughs).

Q: Have you ever had a fire yourself?

JW: Oh, yes.

Q: What happened?

JW: We were living on Neulist Avenue, and I was pregnant with my second--no, my first child. Actually, yes. And I was actually overdue. And my sister-in-law and I had been out somewhere. And we came home, and as we walked in the back--my back kitchen door--my husband came up the cellar and our kitchen, well, we were just building the kitchen. I had no upper cabinets. And he broke a hole in the sheetrock and flames came leaping out. And I said, "What's going on?" and he said, "Well, we have a fire downstairs." So, I immediately just calmly walked over to the phone and picked up the phone--at that time you called the Police Department--and told them we had a fire, and the cop was there instantly. And he grabs me, and he says, "Don't worry. We'll get you to the hospital on time." And I said, "No, it's not me!" (laughs). I guess I had a, you know, a big belly. And what had happened, my husband and his father were doing some soddering downstairs, and the balloon house--it's a balloon framing on the houses--the insulation caught fire and came right up. But they put it right out. And, of course, we had to have the Fire Department come and check it out. So, that was exciting.

Q: Oh, yeah. Okay. Is there anything else's that's come up--come to mind or ...

JW: No, I can't really think of anything else.

Q: Okay.

JW: As we're talking, a lot of it is coming back to me now. I just don't talk about it a lot, I guess. But I'm remembering a lot of things now. It jogs your memory, I guess.

Q: Sure. Okay, well, thank you very much ...

JW: Well, I'm glad I could be of help.

Q: ... it was a wonderful interview ... [INTERRUPTION] ...

JW: ... at one year, and it would have been in 1973, a lot of us girls that were friendly, and from all companies, all were pregnant at the same time. So, there was nine boys and one girl--or ten boys and one girl, I'm not sure--all born within that year. And that was very exciting. And, ironically, to this day--my younger son Tim was one of them--and to this day, they are all still very close friends. Tim, Glen Wood, Billy Davis, and Ricky McCabe. And, at every occasion they go to, they take a picture of the four of them, from the time they were in--we started it when they were in middle school, or junior high at that time. And my son Tim just got married in October. That was the last time that they did it. And my refrigerator has pictures of each occasion. Glen got married; they had the four of them together. And that was a big year. We had a lot of kids that one year. But I think that was the biggest explosion year (laughs) that they had. That's all I wanted to tell you.