

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

Transcript Of Oral History Interview With

Scott Wood
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 December 6th, 2004. This is an interview with Scott Wood. My name is Sally Olds. The interview is taking place at the Port Washington Public Library. Can you please say your name.

Scott Wood: My name is Scott Wood.

Q: And which company are you affiliated with?

SW: Protection Engine Company.

Q: How old were you when you joined the Department?

SW: Twenty-one.

Q: And so you've been a member for how many years now?

SW: Almost eighteen years.

Q: What made you decide to become a firefighter?

SW: Family tradition.

Q: ... [INTERRUPTION] ... Okay, you were talking about family tradition.

SW: Yes. My grandfather was a firefighter, my dad, and myself. So, my grandfather had over fifty years, and this is my father's--coming into his fiftieth year with the Fire Department. And there's myself and my brother who has, I believe, eight or nine years in.

Q: What are your family members' names?

SW: Well, my grandfather is George Wood. My father's Richard Wood, and my brother is Glen Wood.

Q: And what did your grandfather and your father tell you about being a firefighter?

SW: They didn't tell me much. I just knew, because I've been around the firehouse my whole life.

Q: What are your early memories of it?

SW: My earliest memories are my grandfather bringing me to the firehouse on the weekends and also watching my dad on the racing team--my earliest memories from the firehouse.

Q: And what about--did you ever see a fire or see any of the members fighting a fire, when you were a boy?

SW: No. But, you know, I just remember my dad running--you know, going out all times, of the day and night, to go to fires.

Q: And how did your mom feel about that?

SW: I guess she was just used to it, you know. She married a fireman, so ...

Q: So, she knew that ahead of time.

SW: Yeah.

Q: Yeah. Are you married yourself?

SW: Yeah. I'm a newlywed. I got married last January.

Q: Oh, congratulations.

SW: Thanks.

Q: So, do you talk about, you know, what you're doing--the firefighting work--with your wife?

SW: Yes. She's--I let her know what's going on. She knows.

Q: And how does she feel about it?

SW: I think she's more worried about me being a cop than a fireman (laughs).

Q: You are a New York City policeman?

SW: No, Port Washington.

Q: So, how does that work out, you know, integrating your volunteer work as a fireman with your work as a policeman?

SW: Well, obviously, my work as a policeman comes first, because that's my living. And I volunteer.

Q: Have you had any conflicts of time or anything?

SW: No, my--you know, you volunteer, you do it when you can do it. That's basically what it

is.

Q: Yeah. Okay. When you first joined, who was the Captain of Protection?

SW: Oh (laughs) ...

Q: It's hard to remember.

SW: When I first joined, a person actually I actual work with--Al Paxton--was the Captain.

Q: And do you remember who the Chief of the Department was?

SW: The Chiefs were Charlie Lang, John Salerno, and Peter Zwerlein.

Q: Did you have to wait before you were accepted into the Department?

SW: No. I got in in March of 1987. I believe I put my papers in in February. And--or maybe January. I got introduced at the February meeting, and then they vote on you. I got voted on in March.

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

SW: The first days--the camaraderie, the new friends. You know, after work every day, just going, meeting the guys, and learning to be a firefighter.

Q: And what about the training itself. Was there anything that surprised you about it?

SW: No. They train you on everything from A to Z, you know. And, actually, the training now--I don't know--it's a lot tougher than it was when I started.

Q: You say it is, it's tougher now ...

SW: Yeah, they ...

Q: ... even than when you started?

SW: ... the new guys have to go through a lot more than we did. But the best training you could have is, you know, the actual firefighting work itself.

Q: Did anybody in particular sort of take you under his wing, and show you what to do?

SW: Yeah, I would say Bill Zwerlein taught me--taught me a lot. He was the driver of the truck I used to go on all the time. So, he was an experienced member.

Q: Which truck was that?

SW: Right out of Protection's main house over here on South Washington Street--8-5-1-5.

Q: And what about the first fire that you went to? What do you remember about that?

SW: There's been so many, I ...

Q: Yeah. So the first one ...

SW: I don't--I don't ...

Q: ... and then first big one. Well, what were some of the ones that stand out in your mind?

SW: I don't remember my first one. I don't think I remember my first one. I'm not sure. But the fire on Main Street was, you know, my most memorable one.

Q: Yes. Yes, can you tell me about that?

SW: Yeah. There was a fire on Main Street at the Cat Lady Antique Store. And I don't really get into it that much, because it was a bad experience for me.

Q: Yeah. So, you really ...

SW: Yeah, no, I don't really talk about it, too much.

Q: Okay. Would you say that was your worst day ever as a firefighter?

SW: Oh, yeah. Yeah, by far.

Q: Yeah, yeah. So what--can you tell--and if you don't want to talk about it, just say so. But can you talk about afterwards, how you dealt with--you know, with the feelings that came up and with the trauma?

SW: All right ... [??] ... they had a--helped us a lot. They had the guy talk about stress come in and counsel us at Protection. And that helped, because, you know, we lost one of our members.

Q: Sure.

SW: And that helped a lot. And then it just was a little--it was a little rough trying to get back into fires. I had to kind of force my way through it.

Q: Yeah.

SW: Which I did.

Q: Did you stay out for a while?

SW: No, I went back right in the first fire that we had. I went right in. It was a tough situation, but--tough on the family, too.

Q: Your family.

SW: Yeah.

Q: Yeah, yeah. I guess everybody knew--knew Bobby.

SW: Mmm hm.

Q: Yeah. What would you say was your best day as a firefighter?

SW: Best day as a firefighter? I assisted in the rescue of a person down in Manorhaven.

Q: Oh, can you tell me about it?

SW: I got an award for that. Yeah, that came over as a house fire with the person trapped on Kirkwood Road. And I lived in Manorhaven at the time. So myself and my roommate went right to the scene. And we were one of the first firefighters there.

Q: Who was your roommate?

SW: Chris Voulo. He was Captain of Protection at the time. And we heard screaming from the upstairs, and a woman was trapped up in the smoke, and we went up and--without any, you know, breathing equipment on and brought her down. And her dad was trapped in the basement, and I assisted in getting him out, also. But he succumbed to his injuries. He didn't make it.

Q: But when you got him out, he was still alive.

SW: He was still alive. Yeah, he lived for a day or two, but didn't make it after that.

Q: And what award did you get for that?

SW: I got the Silver Medal of Valor for that.

Q: You also got the Gold Medal of Valor, didn't you?

SW: Yeah, that was for the Bobby Dayton fire.

Q: What's the difference between the Silver and the Gold?

SW: The Gold is the highest medal you can receive.

Q: But do they set certain criteria for them?

SW: Yeah, I'm not sure how they do it. I'm not sure.

Q: And, how do you think the people in Port Washington perceive the Fire Department?

SW: I think they like the Fire Department. You know, we go to all the schools in October for Fire Prevention Month, and we're pretty visible.

Q: Do you speak, yourself?

SW: Yeah, I go in.

Q: So what do you tell the kids?

SW: You know, we tell them, you know, fire safety and we show them the different rigs and

everything.

Q: And do you go in your full equipment?

SW: Yeah, full equipment. And we even put the breathing apparatus on. We put everything on. So, even the littlest kids sometimes it could be a little threatening. So we tell them like, "Don't be afraid if you see this." We tell them, of course, not to hide; get out of the house. The whole pets thing--don't go back for your pets. Stop, drop, and roll, kids know.

Q: Do you go to all the levels of school from the early grades up through the high school?

SW: No, it's just the grade school. Just the grade school kids.

Q: Yeah. About how often do you go?

SW: We go every year around Fire Prevention Month.

Q: What kinds of questions do the kids ask?

SW: Oh, they just ask kids' questions, you know. "Can you put the lights on?" "Can we hear the sirens?" And stuff like that. But they know, because the school tells them pretty

good.

Q: Do they ask any questions about what to do in fires?

SW: No, because they're really not familiar with fire, you know. Most people just panic, and kids try to hide. So, we try to-- we have a--they just got a new trailer. It's a "Get-out-alive" trailer, it's called. And that trains kids. But it fills up with fake smoke, and some of the kids freak out when they're in there. So, it helps.

Q: And do you take them--do you take that with you when you go to the schools?

SW: Yeah, they do that sometimes. They set them up different. They set up for fairs and stuff, you know.

Q: What were your early jobs in the company, like when you first joined?

SW: Well, for two years, you're on probation, and you have to make work nights--four work nights a month--and pretty much every meeting. And all your schools. And then you get off probation.

Q: How often are the meetings held?

SW: The meetings are the first Thursday in every month at Protection and Atlantic's. And the first Monday in every month for Flower Hill and the Fire Medics.

Q: Do you ever go to the other companies for any reason, or do you always just go to Protection?

SW: Oh, no. It's all the Port Washington Fire Department, you know, you get to know everybody.

Q: Oh, you mean, the meetings.

SW: No, the meetings are separate.

Q: Yes.

SW: But there are--there are Department meetings also.

Q: And you have to go to those also?

SW: Yeah.

Q: And how often are they?

SW: They have an annual meeting every year, where all four companies get together. And then they have special meetings once in a while, where they call the companies together if they're going to, you know, get something new or tell us about some program they want to start trying, or stuff like that.

Q: So which Fire Department activities have you been active in?

SW: I've been on the Fire Department softball team now.

Q: Yeah, so tell me about that.

SW: I guess it's going to be seventeen, eighteen years now. Since I got in, so, my first five years in the Department, we won in the New York State championship and multiple tournaments around Long Island. And these past two years, we've also won the New York State championship.

Q: Where do you play in New York State?

SW: The New York State championship is up at the Firemen's Home in Hudson, New York. The Volunteer Firemen's Home, which is all the great facility they have up there.

Q: So you go up there regularly with the softball team.

SW: Right. And I also go up to--we have a couple of members that are in the Firemen's Home now, and we go up and see them once in a while, also.

Q: What are those visits like?

SW: They're great. You know, the guys appreciate you coming up there. And just seeing the firemen from all over New York State, you know, retired guys. And they're happy to see you. You just sit down, you have lunch with them, and you just, you know, shoot the B.S. with them.

Q: Do you usually tell them ahead of time that you're coming?

SW: Yeah, they run a trip up there, where they know we're coming up. Then once in a while, we just drive up and get a couple of the guys in the Department and drive up and say hello.

Q: That's great. Back to the softball team, so which position do you play?

SW: First base.

Q: And have any funny things come up at the games that ...

SW: No, actually, our fun was winning. That's what we always said. If we came in second place, we weren't happy. So, but we were--we're a pretty serious team. A lot of teams go up there just to have fun, and, for us, winning was fun.

Q: What's the name of the team?

SW: Just the Port Washington Fire Department softball team.

Q: And when you go up there, do you stay overnight?

SW: Yeah, we stay overnight a couple of nights and play a lot of softball.

Q: And are there parties afterwards?

SW: Well, the party's afterwards, right at the field. But, it's just you're so tired, you know, after playing all weekend. And--but some of the teams party pretty hard. You know, the teams that lose (laughs).

Q: Do you think that's why?

SW: Yeah, you know (laughs).

Q: And you've been active in some of the--well, wait, before we leave the softball team, so the competition is between teams or ...

SW: Yeah, and other ...

Q: Other fire departments.

SW: Other fire departments, yeah. We used to have an Eighth Battalion softball league, which was the towns around us--Great Neck, Manhasset, such as Great Neck Alerts, Great Neck Vigilants, Manhasset, Williston Park, East Williston, and Albertson. And that was fun. That was every Sunday morning we played--actually Sunday around noon. And that lasted for about, I guess, about eight years, nine years. And then the league went under. Couldn't get enough teams to play. The teams got tired of us beating them all the time (laughs).

Q: (Laughs). Have you gone out for any of the task and drill tournaments too--the racing team?

SW: Oh, yeah, I go. I support them. I raced one year; that's it. But when I was growing up, my dad was a big racing guy. He was captain of the Road Runners when they won the

state championship in 1969 and 1973. So--so I went to a lot of those, growing up as a kid. But I never got into it so much myself. I was more of a softball guy.

Q: And you didn't have time to do everything.

SW: Oh, it's tough. You can't do all the stuff.

Q: You can't do both.

SW: Guys I know--I know guys did. A lot of guys, growing up, I used to go and watch--when I was a kid, I used to go watch them race, and the next day I'd watch them play softball.

Q: And you've been active in other ways, too. You were, what, master of ceremonies ...

SW: Oh, yeah.

Q: ... for the--yes, can you tell me a little about that?

SW: My--yeah, when one of my best friends--Chris Bollerman--became Chief two years ago, he asked me to be his master of ceremonies, and that was a great honor. The dinner was at the Huntington Hilton. And then I also was master of ceremonies last year when my friend Donald Reese asked me to be it for his installation as Captain of Protection. And

I'm going to be, coming up this year, master of ceremonies for my dad's fiftieth. So that'll be nice.

Q: What do you have to do to prepare for that?

SW: You just--they give you like an agenda to follow, and my wife types everything up for me. And we sit down at the computer and we just do a program. And it was a little nerve-wracking the first time; it was in front of four hundred people. And then the next time wasn't so bad.

Q: Then you don't have to ad lib or ...

SW: Oh, yeah, you ad lib, say some jokes, get the people laughing.

Q: What kind of in-jokes go on at the firehouse? Funny pranks.

SW: Oh, yeah, there's always pranks amongst the companies. Once in a while you have a water fight. We used to--if Flower Hill left their door open, we would get some foam and foam their truck room.

Q: And then ...

SW: There's all those little competitions between, you know, all the companies. Every Super Bowl Sunday, we have a football game against Atlantic's--Protection versus Atlantic's. And that's bragging rights for the whole year until the next year Super Bowl. And that started about, oh, ten, twelve years ago.

Q: Where do you play?

SW: We play--well, last year we didn't play because there was too much snow. But we play up at the high school field. We used to play down on Thomson's Field. And, you know, a friendly game of football. Then, it's just bragging right.

Q: Tell me some more about this foam. Where do you get the foam from, and how does that work?

SW: Well, the foam is on the engine itself, for oil spills or fighting oil fires, and mostly, you know, we do it as a prank.

Q: Yeah. So, when you shoot the foam into the firehouse, how high ...

SW: Well, you shoot the foam in, and then you take a hose--we also wet down the firehouse. You know, it's just a good joke. Then, you know, the foam doesn't get that high, but just doing it was fun.

Q: Then what happens? I mean, do people slip--slide on it, or they just can't walk through it or ...

SW: No, they could walk through it. Just have to clean it up. Just makes a mess.

Q: Do you remember any of the other pranks that you would play?

SW: Yeah, well, some of the pranks I can't say, you know (laughs). There was a lot of pranking when we first got in. I was a twenty-one year old when we got in, so we had some fun.

Q: Yeah. How did you get your nickname in the Fire Department?

SW: That's not a ...

Q: What is your nickname?

SW: Well, everyone calls me Woody. My last name's Wood. So, my grandfather was Woody; my father was Woody. My sister, they call Woody; my brothers. My brothers-- everybody but my mother.

Q: So that was before you got into the Department, right?

SW: Yeah.

Q: Yeah. And any other nicknames?

SW: No, that's it.

Q: Do you ever do anything for good luck, like a charm or ...

SW: No, I'm not that superstitious.

Q: And, let's see, what else? What about the biggest changes you've seen in the Department since you joined?

SW: Oh, biggest changes. Like I said earlier, the schooling now for the new guys.

Q: Well, how is that different from what you had?

SW: They have a lot more. So it's tough.

Q: In terms of time?

SW: Time. Yeah, time commitment and the studying you have to do. And what other changes?

Q: Do you have to keep up with the training? You know, once you've been admitted and you've had your initial training, do you have refresher courses?

SW: Yeah, they have--yeah, they have refresher stuff. Yeah, they have refresher stuff.

Q: And you have to take that?

SW: Yeah, you take them. And there's stuff you do every year. You have to have a certain amount of training.

Q: And your job in the Department is what? Like when you go to a fire, what do you do?

SW: I'm a--I am a firefighter. I'm not an officer. I'm mostly just one of the guys that gets dirty.

Q: (Laughs). So--I mean, do you hook up the hose or, you know, do the nozzle, or do you go inside?

SW: Whatever needs to be done, you know. Basically, everyone's trained in everything.

Q: Yeah, but how--like how do you know when you go there? Like how many people would go to a fire--a working fire?

SW: Oh, all depends. You can get a working fire, you can get fifty, sixty guys there.

Q: And so how would you know who does what? Who determines that?

SW: Well, whoever--if you're on the engine, if you're on the truck, you know, there's different jobs for everybody.

Q: And you know if ...

SW: Some guys go to the roof. Some guys ...

Q: Yeah, but like how do you know if you're going to be the one to go to the roof? Does somebody tell you to do that or ...

SW: Yeah, it's whatever truck you're on, yeah. Your officer in charge, you listen to him. And hopefully, everyone returns home safe.

Q: Yeah. So that would be your Lieutenant or ...

SW: That's the main thing.

Q: ... right.

SW: Yeah, Lieutenant or Captains, or Engineers. Or ex-Chiefs also. You know, it's nice to see an ex-Chief when you're at a working fire, because they know what's going on.

Q: What was the last fire that you went to?

SW: Last winter, we had a lot of fires. We had a few fires down in Manorhaven. The last working fire I was in was in Bayview Colony. There was a fire on the second floor. It was on North Court; I'm not sure of the number.

Q: When was that?

SW: I guess it was last spring. That's the last real important fire. We've had a couple, you know--the other night we had a fire down on Soundview; it was a mattress fire. But there wasn't any extension. It was extinguished fast. But normally--if, you know, the guy--the kid threw cigarettes in his garbage can in his room and started, you know, his table and mattress on fire. That could have been something if they left after that.

Q: That was a teenager?

SW: Well, I say kid, but actually I knew him as a kid, so he's probably in his thirties now
(laughs).

Q: And he called in right away, realized right away what had happened?

SW: Yeah.

Q: Well, wait, so he threw the cigarettes in the wastebasket, then how did the mattress catch
on fire?

SW: Well, the basket was next to the bed.

Q: Oh.

SW: So, I guess the contents of the wastebasket caught the bed and his night stand.

Q: And what did you do when you went there?

SW: Well, I was on the second engine. So, when we got there, the first engine had already

extinguished the fire. So there was a little bit of overhauling, you know. You get the mattress out and the stuff that was burning, and then you just open up the wall to see if there's any extension. That's it.

Q: And extension means ...

SW: Extension means, if fire gets inside of walls, it goes up or down, and that's not good. So, you check for extension. You open the holes until the burning stops.

Q: What have you done on the anniversary committee?

SW: Oh, yeah. We just started a hundredth year anniversary committee. And we've had only one meeting so far. It's still a few years off. But I think I think I am in charge of the parade committee. So ...

Q: This is for the whole Department.

SW: Right.

Q: Yeah. That's what this project is for.

SW: Okay.

Q: The hundredth anniversary. What about the new equipment that you use? Is that really hard to carry? Is it very heavy?

SW: No, it's actually a little lighter than the stuff we used to carry.

Q: It is lighter?

SW: But I'm getting a little older.

Q: (Laughs).

SW: So (laughs) ...

Q: And is that one of the big changes that you've seen?

SW: Equipment's better, you know. I guess everyone's issued, you know, full turn-out pants and helmet and jacket and gloves. So, we're pretty much covered up.

Q: And going back to, you know, integrating your police work with the firefighting work, what kind of schedule do you have as a police officer?

SW: We work twelve hour shifts at the Police Department. So I work two days on, three days off, and then two off, two on, three off, two on, three off, and then three on to four off. We have good schedules, and all the guys like it. It's twelve hours; every two days we get three day weekends off.

Q: Is it always the same twelve hours, or is it ...

SW: Actually, we do three months of days, then three months of nights. Tomorrow night I go back to nights.

Q: And how is that? Is that hard to get used to?

SW: It takes a couple of weeks to get used to the switch. Working nights is a little tough.

Q: What would you say makes a good firefighter?

SW: That's a good question. A good firefighter. There's good firefighters in different ways, you know.

Q: Like what?

SW: I don't know. I just know for myself. Obviously, you would have to want to do the job.

A lot of guys--a lot of people sign up for it, and then they realize it's a lot more than they thought it was going to be. But, you also need the people that run the inside, you know, maybe--we have-- guys have to do the inside interior firefighting and the outside stuff. And even the guys who, you know, the older guys are important for the Fire Department who don't fight the fires anymore. You know, the business aspect of it, which I'm not into too much. So (laughs)

Q: But mostly it's wanting to do the job.

SW: Yeah, that's what it is. I guess it takes a certain kind of person.

Q: How important is the social aspect of being in the Fire Department?

SW: The social aspect of the Fire Department – it's good. It's a brotherhood. It's a life. I mean, I'm friends with the new guys, and I'm friends with the old guys, you know. It's fun.

Q: And when did you first feel you were part of a team, all pulling together?

SW: As soon as you go to a fire, you know, it's part of it. As soon as you get on the truck. You look around and you see who you're with. You know you can trust, you know.

Q: And how can you tell who you can trust?

SW: Just by--just by--just by--just going on calls with the guys, you know.

Q: And so how does somebody show that he's trustworthy?

SW: Well, you could see what they do at a fire. The person you've got to trust is yourself the most. That's why I learned that the hard way. So, that's about it.

Q: Now, were you already in the Department when the first women came in?

SW: I don't know about the Fire Medics. The women were in before I was, with the Fire Medics. And the first woman firefighter was Janet Kimmerly. She's with Protection, and she was in before I was, I think. Pretty close. Yeah, pretty close.

Q: So, you didn't have any adjustment to make there, in terms of accepting women in the Department.

SW: Oh, yeah, no.

Q: What about people from other ethnic groups?

SW: Other--yeah, we've had--now we have--we never used to have any Spanish firefighters, and now we do. And my good friend Albert Butler, he's a black firefighter. And, I guess Albert was the first person of color in the Fire Department. He's a good firefighter, Albert.

Q: And is he accepted by the other members?

SW: Oh, yeah.

Q: There hasn't been any strife or ...

SW: Oh, no. No. And there's been--you know, there's been others after him.

Q: Would you want your son or daughter, when you have children, to be firefighters?

SW: Yeah. I would want my son definitely. I don't know about my daughter (laughs).

Q: (Laughs). What kind of annoyances have you experienced with other firefighters? There've been any, you know, kind of locking horns?

SW: I pretty much get along with everybody, but I've seen some locking horns of different guys, you know, different positions. Being Chief of the Fire Department, I know, is a

tough position, because everyone beats on you, and I wouldn't want to go through that.

Q: So, you're not interested in becoming an officer--a line officer?

SW: No. I'm just happy fighting the fires. Come and go.

Q: What do you think the future of the Fire Department is going to be? Do you think it's going to stay all volunteer?

SW: Yeah, I think it's going to stay volunteer for now.

Q: And have you ...

SW: There's always talk of, you know, combining into one big Department and get rid of the companies. And, I don't know if that's going to happen.

Q: How would you feel about that?

SW: As long as the job gets done, you know, that's the most important thing. That's the way I look at it. And I like being part of my company, you know, you have pride in that. But, if it came down to it and we had to, then the most important thing is getting the job done.

Q: Have you recruited any people yourself to join the Department?

SW: Yeah, over the years, I've sponsored a few people.

Q: And how did you find them?

SW: Just friends, I guess. Friends and once in a while someone'll just come down to the firehouse and say, "I'm interested in joining." You tell them to come down Thursday nights; it's work nights. And they come in, see if they like it, and give it a shot.

Q: Did you ever think about quitting the Department?

SW: Oh, no. No.

Q: Have you served in the military at all?

SW: No.

Q: Were you at all involved at 9/11?

SW: Yeah, I was at 9/11.

Q: You were. Can you tell me about that? How you first heard what was going on?

SW: Yeah, my girlfriend at the time--now my wife--I was home sleeping because I worked the night before. And she called me and told me that a plane hit the building. It hit--a plane flew into the--so I figured, oh, wow. A small plane must have hit the building. You know, I'm like, "I'm tired. Leave me alone. I'm sleeping. Why'd you call me," because when I work nights, my sleep, like especially in the morning, is like sacred, you know. It's not easy sleeping during the day. Like "Yeah, yeah, okay, great." And then I just flipped the TV on, and I saw when the second plane hit. And then I just responded to the firehouse because I figured that we would be responding, which was a big fiasco.

Q: Why?

SW: Went to the firehouse, and, you know, of course, all the guys who showed up there wanted to help. And they took a bunch of our rigs. We went to Belmont Park with all the other Nassau County fire departments and just waited, and they never called us. So it was kind of like, everybody wanted to help and--and we stayed there all day. All day up till about eleven o'clock at night. Then went back. And they told us not to go in, but the next morning, on the 12th, early in the morning, a bunch of guys met, and we drove in on our own, to see if we could help out.

Q: Who did you go in with?

SW: I have pictures, so I can show you pictures. That's what I brought today.

Q: Oh, good. And, so you went in on the morning of the 12th.

SW: Yeah, on the advice not to go in, from the Chief's office. They called us free-lancers, but we went in. I went in like about four days in a row.

Q: And what did you do down there?

SW: Just worked at Ground Zero. It was sad.

Q: Yeah. But, I mean, specifically, what did you do?

SW: Digging in the pile.

Q: And all day long?

SW: Yeah, for four days.

Q: Yeah. And what was the hardest part of that?

SW: Just knowing the people that got killed, you know. It was just pretty sad.

Q: Did you meet up with other firefighters, too?

SW: Yeah, we met up with other policemen and firefighters from Port Washington. Kind of had a little staging area of our own. And we hung out at like the same spot, you know, to take our breaks.

Q: So, again, how did you know just what kind of work you needed to do? Was there somebody who was directing ...

SW: Well, the first couple days was just everybody just going and trying to dig through, see if they could find, you know, any survivors.

Q: And you never did?

SW: No. I helped carry a couple of dead people out. One guy was a Port Authority police officer. Actually, there's a picture of me in *Time Magazine* at Ground Zero, as we took that Port Authority officer out.

Q: And did you have any follow-up things that happened after that? Did you go back down

to Ground Zero later?

SW: No, I haven't been down there since.

Q: Well, what do you think about the plans for the memorial that they're building down there? Have you followed all that discussion?

SW: No, I think--I think it's great. I think they should just erect another building there.

Q: Another tall building?

SW: Oh, yeah.

Q: Why?

SW: Just so we could show them that, you know, we're still here and putting another building up.

Q: And you don't think that would be too dangerous?

SW: I don't know if it's dangerous. You know, they say everywhere now is dangerous, so (laughs) ...

Q: Yeah. Did you save any objects from the building?

SW: No. Just the pictures.

Q: And did you bring any, you know, any of the objects that were there out, as you were down there? I just read in the paper that they've pulled together different pictures or things from people's desks or offices, and are trying to get them to the families.

SW: Oh, yeah. No, no, I didn't see-no, I was just there to try to find people.

Q: Yeah. What would you say the most important lesson you've learned in firefighting?

SW: Trust yourself. Trust your own instincts. Rely on yourself the most.

Q: And what would you say that you've learned in firefighting that's helped you in your other life--your profession as a policeman or your family life?

SW: Well, there's a lot of comparisons to the Police Department and the Fire Department. You know, we hang out with the guys and, slash, the girls.

Q: Yes (laughs).

SW: Yeah, there's comparisons there.

Q: Like what?

SW: Oh, the camaraderie, you know. That's huge.

Q: Yeah. Somebody was saying to me the other day that they thought one type of person went into the Police Department and one kind of person went into the Fire Department. And, what do you think about that?

SW: No, no, that's not true. We have a lot of firemen that are also cops in New York City and in our jobs, Port Washington. And we have a lot of firemen that are also paid firemen. So ...

Q: So, what do you think is the motivation for most of the people going into the two kinds of work?

SW: Well, I don't know. I just became a police officer, because I'm not really, you know, a desk guy, type of guy. Okay? I couldn't see myself taking the train into the city every day, and I became a volunteer, just family tradition, like I said earlier. I enjoy doing that also. And there's a lot of family tradition in the Fire Department, as you probably know

already.

Q: How would you like to be remembered?

SW: Hmm. I guess just as a person that gave to his community.

Q: And what do you think the value of this project is? This oral history?

SW: I think it's nice. It's going to be in the archives forever, right?

Q: Right.

SW: That's great. Maybe in another hundred years, they can bring this out and listen to what we're saying.

Q: Is there anything else that you think we should talk about?

SW: No, I think that's about it.

Q: Okay. Well, all right. Well, thank you very much.

SW: All right.

Q: Okay.