

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

Transcript Of Oral History Interview With

Christopher Bollerman  
Atlantic Hook & Ladder Company No. 1

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

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pertaining to the subject being discussed

Q: Today is June 14th, 2004. This is an interview with Chief Christopher Bollerman. My name is Sally Olds. The interview is taking place at the Port Washington Library. Can you please say your name.

Christopher Bollerman: Christopher Bollerman.

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

CB: I'm a member of the Atlantic Hook and Ladder Company.

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

CB: I was one month past my eighteenth birthday.

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

CB: I guess all my life I've always wanted to be a member of the Fire Department. My father was a member of the Fire Department, so I grew up being around the firehouse, and it's just something I always wanted to do.

Q: What kinds of stories did your father tell you about his work?

CB: Mostly about the friendship that he made with so many different men and women. And then I became friends with their children. And, oh, you know, about the big—some of the big fires that there were in town and such.

Q: Were there any specific incidents that he talked about?

CB: He had talked, when we were little, about Christmas tree safety. There was a terrible fire down in the Bayview Colony. And my father always felt, because there were some children lost and it was from a Christmas tree fire, and he always was very—we had an artificial Christmas tree, and that was the reason we couldn't have a brand new one, because he says on Christmas he always thought about these children.

Q: And you had other relatives in the Fire Department, too, didn't you?

CB: Yes.

Q: Yes. What kinds of things did they talk about?

CB: Well, my grandfather is the only relative that was ever alive, that was a member of the Fire Department, during my time alive. And he—you know, again, he talked about some big fires and the friendship that he made with guys. And when I saw him in his late

sixties, he still had those friends.

Q: What kinds of things did you learn from your family members—your father, your grandfather?

CB: I learned a sense of commitment to the community. It's someplace that we live. My children are the seventh generation born in Port Washington, and we go back some five generations in the Fire Department. And it—it's just a sense of we're here to protect our neighbors and our friends, and it's not something that every single person in Port Washington can say, and say it proudly.

Q: Well, what made you decide to go into the Fire Department as opposed to the Police Department here in town or some other form of public service?

CB: The Fire Department answer is quite simple. You can become a member of the Fire Department at eighteen. You submit an application, and the membership decides if they want you to be a member. And it's the easiest route. Being a police officer in Port Washington is quite a bit different and more difficult. You have to be twenty-one years old; you have to take a Civil Service examination. And then you have to be called. And if you don't live in the Port Washington police district, which I don't—I'm in Manorhaven; we're in Nassau County Police District—you don't generally become a Port Washington police officer unless you score very, very high on the exam and they call you

after several years of their list being established. So, it's just something I—I just didn't decide to go the Port Washington police route.

Q: So, after you applied, with so many relatives in the, you know, in the Department, were you nervous? Did you ever think that you might not be accepted?

CB: Yes (laughs). That's funny you ask that. I was very worried that, oh, who did my father not—you know, who is he not friends with anymore? Who's going to vote no? You know, being fifteen, sixteen, seventeen years old, still being around the firehouse, did I—did I make any enemies with anybody, or anything like that? Did I get somebody upset? But, I'm proud to say that on July 3rd, 1986, I was elected to membership in Atlantic Hook and Ladder Company, unanimously.

Q: How did you feel at that time?

CB: Oh, it was one of the greatest days of my life.

Q: How did you find out? How did they tell you?

CB: It's very ritualistic, I guess. You—you apply for membership in one particular month, and a board of governors or board of directors has to approve you. And then you have to be sent—your application gets sent to the Chief's office for approval. And then, from

there, it gets sent back to the fire company. And you actually get brought up in front of the whole company, and the head of the meeting—the President of the Company—introduces you to everyone and opens the floor to any questions. And, you know, there was a couple of, you know..you know, little chop-breaking questions from the guys.

Q: Do you remember them?

CB: No, no (laughs), and then—and then you go downstairs, and they vote. And I guess it's the most nerve wracking three minutes of your life (laughs).

Q: Did you think that having relatives in the Department was a plus or a minus?

CB: Oh, I (laughs), I think I might have felt that it was going to be a minus, but it wound up being a plus.

Q: When you first joined, who was the Captain of Atlantic?

CB: When I first joined, the Captain of Atlantic Hook and Ladder Company was a fellow by the name of Jeff Borkowski.

Q: And who was the Chief of the Department?

CB: The Chief was a good friend of mind named Donald DeBari.

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

CB: I remember not enough things were burning (laughs), and which became a—you know, I changed my view on afterwards. But that it wasn't busy enough. There wasn't enough to do. I wanted to do more and more and more.

Q: So what would you do after you first joined?

CB: After I first joined, I would go to the firehouse every day after work and watch TV, waiting for there to be a call. And then you'd sneak home for ten minutes, take a shower, and go back and spend your night there, and—and wait for there to be a call. Then, go home and go to bed and go about it all over again the next day.

Q: What kind of work were you doing then?

CB: I had just got out of high school, and I was a carpenter.

Q: And did you have any problem coordinating your Fire Department involvement with your work, you know, with your job?

CB: I had no problem. Many of my bosses had a problem with it, but I had no problem.

I've—crazily, I guess, people might say—I've always put the Port Washington Fire Department ahead of everything, except for my family, and taking my—my vacation, I take around the Fire Department. I take days off around the Fire Department. And so I've always done whatever I could, you know, to do whatever I can for the Fire Department. And people, when I became a little older, they used to tease me, because they said I took two years off from work. I was partners with another fellow in the Fire Department, and we'd only work enough to pay the bills in a week, and then go to the firehouse for the rest of the day.

Q: Did you have any conflicts, though, with your bosses or other things on the job because you were so committed to the Fire Department?

CB: No, not—no. That's never happened. They understand completely. Anybody that I ever worked for used to ...

Q: What was your job assignment, when you first joined Atlantic?

CB: Oh, I was just a regular probationary firefighter. That's—it takes two years to satisfactorily complete it. Some members, it takes longer. It can't take any less. But, you are just—you do whatever the Captain tells you to do. You clean the fire truck. You go to as many fire schools as you can go to. You go to as many calls as you can go to.



After a meeting, you wash the dishes. When there's going to be a party, you set up and you clean up, and you just do whatever it can be to alleviate the older members from having to do anything.

Q: So, can you tell me about the first fire that you went to?

CB: The first fire. The first fire I went to was a dumpster fire in the rear of the Flower Hill School. And I remember my heart racing and beating and pounding, and it was nothing but a dumpster burning in the rear of the school. But I remember that like it was yesterday.

Q: How many trucks went there? ... Was there only one? ...

CB: I believe that it was just—we rode out on Protection's mack [truck] out on South Washington Street. And I believe that that was the only truck that went. It was a duty company call, so just the one pump would go.

Q: So you say your heart was beating. Was it—that the fear of fire?

CB: No, it was the excitement of being able to do it. It wasn't the fear (laughs) of the fire at all. It was the excitement of being able to do it.

Q: But how do you overcome the fear of fire? It seems so instinctual to human beings.

CB: Well, I would say that if anybody could tell you that they're not afraid of fire, then I don't want them under my command. It's one of the most deadly things there are. That and gun play, there's nothing more dangerous. And no one should be afraid of it. I'm terrified of fire. It puts a knot in my stomach every time I go to a real, legitimate call now. Especially being responsible for three hundred people. You have to respect it; you have to make sure that you are trained by people that are competent. And you have to—and the only way you can find that out is by listening to some guys, but then trusting the people that you're with. And never overcome the fear, but respect it and just learn how to handle it and know when enough is enough.

Q: By "enough is enough," what do you mean?

CB: When it's time to leave. And I've learned so many things from so many people in the Fire Department, and one of them is Larry Hatton. He's a retired Battalion Chief from the New York City Fire Department. And Larry taught me the term—amongst many things—risk versus gain. And many times our risk is too high for the gain that we'll have. So, I wish I had learned that younger in the fire service, but, you know, that's my motto now is, you know, you have to weigh the risk and the gain, and that's what everybody should be taught when they're in a probie. But once you have too much risk for what you're going to gain, then you just have to leave.

Q: Well, can you think of an incident where this became an issue?

CB: Yes. Recently, in early spring, we had a reported automatic fire alarm at a house in Sands Point on Soundview Lane. We go to six hundred of them a year. Most of the time it's malfunction or set off by the cleaning company, or set off by the workers in the house, or somebody burned toast. They're nothing. And it was late in the night, early in the morning. I think it was about twelve o'clock, twelve-fifteen. I was already in bed, and I pull up and the house is roaring. It's burning unbelievably. And there's cars in the driveway, you know, and the house is locked up tight as a drum. Sands Point Police are a wonderful police department. Their residents can call them and tell them, "We're going out," so they get put on the, quote-unquote, the vacant list. I called the Sands Point Police. "Are these people on the vacant list?" And they said, "We don't know. They didn't call us." But we had to, at that point, assume that the home was occupied by a family, because we had been there two or three times for faulty fire alarms in the past. So I know that there's two small children in the house, and I know there's a husband and a wife. And I had met—on January 1st, we met them for a call in their house. The whole Department did. The guy was very cordial to us. So I knew that I would have to risk all to try the gain of saving their lives. So, my two Assistant Chiefs are fantastic firefighters, and they took the men in, and they went into the house. And we had a limited water supply in the beginning, and they started searching for the occupants. And then I got a phone call, a radio transmission from the Sands Point Police that the family was indeed in

Las Vegas on vacation. That was confirmed by the father of them, who was a Sands Point resident also. So, at that point, I had my twenty guys deployed inside the building. I had a tremendous amount of risk, you know. And two of them are two of my best friends, you know. And what am I going to gain but a shell of a house? So I withdrew my men at that point, and we went to an ex—what we call an external operation. And we sprayed water from a tower ladder, knocked the fire down, and then we went in. But when it was out of control then, it wasn't worth, you know, risking the men's lives.

Q: Have you ever made a rescue of people who still were in a burning building?

CB: No, I have not rescued anyone that was in a burning building. Thank God (laughs).

Q: Were you ever called to a fire where not enough firefighters showed up?

CB: We've never had the problem in Port Washington where not enough firefighters have come. What we do sometimes, we're very shorthanded, I prefer to say, and at that point we have to rely on Manhasset-Lakeville, Plandome, and Roslyn Fire Departments to respond. So we do—we call that mutual aid. But we have very, very brave men and women in Port Washington, and they're willing to risk all. And it takes a command to hold them back, but they're willing to risk all. And if we're running shorthanded sometimes, we do whatever we can to save the home and people.

Q: Have you ever saved possessions from a burning building where people asked you to save photos or some special items?

CB: Yes. One of the things I pride myself on is I like to get a salvage operation going during the actual suppression of the fire. We carry tarps on our trucks, and we carry plastic. And we like to get in, and if we have a second floor fire, we like to cover everything on the first floor. When I was a young boy, my aunt's home—my Aunt Mary's home—burned down in Glen Cove. And the only thing she was upset about is her wedding album and all the photos and Social Security cards. Everything burned up, and that's irreplaceable. And then, before I was a Chief Officer, we had a terrible fire on Sandy Hollow Road at the Doyles' house—good friends of mine. The whole second floor burned. And as we were advancing up the stairwell, I remember all the pictures—they're from Ireland—there's old pictures from Ireland and everything. Black and white photos, old ones, and I remember yelling to one of the guys, "Just get the photos and get rid of them." And the guys were able to save all their pictures, you know, before the water started coming down. Because the fire didn't make it to the first floor, but all the water damage would have ruined their photos.

Q: Do you have a special nickname in the Department?

CB: Yes (laughs), I do.

Q: Can you share that?

CB: Everybody in the Fire Department calls me "Chubby."

Q: When did they start calling you that?

CB: There was a good friend of mine in the Fire Department with me in '86 and '87, named Mario Masi. And Mario and I hung out together through high school, with Anthony Avazis. And the two of them started calling me "Chubby" in about the eleventh grade.

Q: There's kind of a tradition in the Fire Department, isn't there, to call people nicknames by some physical characteristics?

CB: (Laughs) Yes.

Q: So, I mean, that's a common thing, right?

CB: Yes, that's a very common thing.

Q: Right. Yes, yes. So how did you feel about having the nickname?

CB: It didn't really bother me, and it stuck, and now pretty much everybody, that's what

everybody calls me at home and at work, except for my wife. And sometimes even my daughter calls me "Chubby," a little, you know, just to get me going sometimes.

Q: How many children do you have?

CB: I have two.

Q: How old are they?

CB: My daughter just turned five, and my son will be eight.

Q: And you started having special assignments in the Fire Department fairly early. The first one was being Assistant Secretary of Atlantic?

CB: No, I was elected first as Assistant Engineer.

Q: Oh, so what—can you tell me about what that involved?

CB: Assistant Engineer is just somebody that works—is supposed to work extremely hard for the Engineer of the company. Your job is to, whatever he needs done on the fire truck—clean it, wash it, fuel it, fix the saw, get the saw fixed, clean the axe. You know, take the ladders out and make sure they work. You're just a workhorse, or at least you're

supposed to be the workhorse of the company. Three of the most active guys, they just want to keep everything running right for the Engineer of the company. You work directly for one particular person.

Q: So you did that as Second Engineer—no, Assistant Engineer, and then Full Engineer, right?

CB: I was ...

Q: So what does the Full Engineer do?

CB: Okay, the Full Engineer has a responsibility, I believe it's in all four companies, their job title is quite clear. They have responsibility of all of the vehicles of the company. And they have to make sure that everything is running right. They report to the Captain of the company to make sure everything is right, and the Captain reports to the Chief that all his vehicles are in working order or if one of them's broken. And, you know, they have to have a little bit of a mechanical knowledge, I guess, although I can't fix anything with a motor. But you have to know the equipment inside and out. Now, we have portable pumps, and we have power saws, and we have hydraulic ladder systems. So you have to just know how it works and be able to call a mechanic and get it fixed immediately and understand that the most important thing is our equipment. And if the equipment doesn't work, you know, the firefighting—the fire department can't perform.



Q: What kinds of problems did you find with equipment over the years?

CB: We always had the best, I feel. The Port Washington Fire Department has always had the best. And there really hasn't been any problems with equipment. The people in Port Washington are extremely lucky for the amount of equipment that there is here and the condition that it's in. It's absolutely phenomenal stuff. And I never really had a problem with it. When it was broken, it was—the mechanic, whoever, whatever company is responsible for fixing it was called. They picked it up in twenty-four hours, and they got it back. And if it wasn't repairable, a brand new one was delivered.

Q: Were you responsible for deciding when something was fixable or when you would need something new?

CB: As Engineer and Lieutenant and Captain, you are—when something isn't repairable, you would sit down and discuss it and then discuss the alternatives. If something new was on the market now, what was the updated version of this. And then you'd bring it back to your Board of Directors to get permission to buy it. That's, at least, how it works in the Atlantic Hook and Ladder Company. You don't just buy—in the Fire Department, nobody just buys anything. It really goes through a very rigorous checks and balances. I can speak for, you know, Atlantic Hook and Ladder and the Port Washington Fire Department, and then I'm sure it's like that in all the companies. Nobody just runs out

and buys something. They have to go to the right people and get permission, and then the floor sometimes votes on it and things like that.

Q: And then, what did you do as Secretary?

CB: As Secretary, I handled the point system.

Q: What is that?

CB: The point system? Every company in the Fire Department mandates that their membership do something to remain a member. You have to participate. And as the Assistant Secretary of Atlantic Hook and Ladder Company, after I was done being Captain, I became the Assistant Secretary for a year. And my job was to just handle the attendance of the company at all the functions that there are. And that was—that was all my job was is to handle—all my job was, was just to handle the attendance. And it's quite a bit of work. I understand now that some of the companies have up to three and four people doing their attendance.

Q: About how many people are in Atlantic?

CB: Atlantic can have a hundred members. I believe we're down to the low eighties right now.

Q: And is that about the number it has been over the years that you've been in the Department?

CB: Yes, yes. It's always been in the eighties, since I was a member of the Fire Department.

Q: Okay, so then what about the First and Second Lieutenant? What are—were your responsibilities in those jobs?

CB: The responsibilities of the First and Second Lieutenant are to serve the Captain of the company. And serve the membership of the company and lead them at any type of a function from a fire to a parade. You have to—you have to lead the company. And that's, I think the by-law definition of the first Lieutenant is to aid the Captain in the execution of his duties. And that's it, and then, but you have to have—you have to maintain a very high fire attendance ratio. And you should be competent in your firefighting skills.

Q: How high a fire attendance ratio? You mean of all the fires ...

CB: If there—when I was Captain and Lieutenant, we were running about six hundred calls a year in Atlantic Hook and Ladder. You should probably go to at least three hundred of them. At least fifty percent.

Q: And then you say "to serve the Captain." Well, what specifically would you do to serve the Captain?

CB: If the Captain had to do a project, make sure all the attendance records are put in order chronologically. The man doesn't have time to do that. You just—you should go and ask him "Did you want me to do it?" But he could tell you, "You handle this." The Captain might decide he wants all the Scott Packs accounted for and serial numbers put into a new computer database. He would give that to a Lieutenant. The membership files. He might want to update them on the computer. Those are things I really handled a lot as a Lieutenant. We updated everything. We switched everything, with the help of Ira Chudd. We switched all of our paper files over to the computers, and I sat and entered every single member of the company ever, that there ever was, into this old Fox Pro program, so we would know what was going on with them.

Q: When did you do that?

CB: Oh, that was, I guess, like 1991, 1992.

Q: And so how has the operation of the Fire Department changed now that you're computerized?

CB: It's—the Fire Department has changed unbelievably, being computerized. We're able to

get better dispatch information. We're able to get information on a member at a moment's notice. We're able to get information out to members.

Q: Well, like what kind of dispatch information? Now, how would you actually use the computer information?

CB: We hire a service right now, who we call it pre-planning. The gentleman goes around and—goes to every business in town, every school, every church, and he's drawn them out on paper for us. He's listed all the different hazards. Listed the life hazards. The time of the life hazards. In the case of the churches, he tells us where the Bible is kept, where the Torah is kept. In the marinas, he tells us where they store gasoline, where the office files are, everything important about any address in Port Washington. It's an ongoing project. It's not completely finished yet, but it's ongoing, and once it's done they'll just start all over again. But what we're able to do with that is we are able to put that information into a central database at our fire headquarters. And when there's an alarm, they—we're able to print out a, we call them a “run ticket” at the firehouse. And it lists right on it what the hazards are, who the owner of the place is. So we're able to go there with more information than just knowing we're going to 123 Main Street. We're able to know that 123 Main Street is owned by this guy or that girl, that there's somebody sleeping in the basement, that there's gasoline stored on the first floor, that the roof is unusable—you'll fall through it. Things like that, we're able to get like right before we leave the firehouse, we're able to know that.

Q: And then, in terms of being able to contact your firefighting force, does the computer help with that, too?

CB: Yes, it does. It's a—well, I'm going to be very bold and say it's a brainchild of mine.

Q: Good.

CB: When I was an Assistant Chief of the Fire Department, we received several phone calls from residents of the community that were just sick and tired of the horns blowing and the sirens. And, you know, I don't want to say they can pound salt, but that's—it's kind of antiquated of notifying people that there's an emergency. However, it's fail safe. It's the only thing—sometimes our radios don't work. Sometimes our beepers now don't work. But the sirens are a radio signal from Mineola to an individual horn, and it sets it off. It works. Except when there's no power. That's the only time it doesn't work. But—so, the horns will be here for quite a while. At least 'til the end of my administration. But a gentleman grabbed me, and he was obviously quite intelligent, and he said, "There's so much technology available, why can't you have an alphanumeric beeper that tells you where the fire is?" And I said, "There's got to be a reason we can't, but I don't—I'm not going to accept it." So I lobbied quite a few politicians with the help of Craig Johnson, a great legislator that we have here in Port Washington, who put a little pressure in Nassau County. My friend, David Pfister, and I—I think we've revolutionized the Port

Washington Fire Department, and we came up with this computer aided dispatching system, available in many communities that had their own dispatching that cost four and five hundred thousand dollars a year to maintain. We put it in our free Fire Com. And we hired the Alpine Software Company who makes the Red-Alert package, and they were making it for places that have their own independent dispatcher. Again, it would be too astronomical to hire for Port Washington. But we told them what we wanted to do, and we got Craig on board, and we got Tom DiNapoli on board, and they called people to say that we have the right idea. And I remember speaking with Richard McCabe—God rest his soul—and Geoff Cole and Jane Weiss. Geoff was the Chief then. And they told me "You've got a go on it." And they gave me ten thousand dollars seed money in the first year. And we didn't spend it. And then the next year's budget came up. I said, "Guys, I'm going to need another ten." They said, "But you didn't spend what you have already." I said, "It's going to cost a lot, but it's going to be a lot cheaper than having a dispatcher." And they gave me another ten. And then I spent about half of that. Then I spent ten thousand of the twenty I had, and today we get, we call it real-time dispatching information to all three hundred of our members on an alphanumeric beeper. It gets displayed on television screens in the firehouses. Run tickets print out, and we have a computerized—we have—just as if we have our own dispatcher in our office at Headquarters in the Chief's office. Every call that there ever is comes up, and all you have to do is mouse-click the call and you fill out the New York State Incident Report, and it's phenomenal. And it's so catchy that I believe it's up to ten departments are now using it Nassau County. And Chief Meade, if it wasn't for his help, who runs Fire Com,

again, it wouldn't have become a reality. And Paul Simon, another fellow Fire Com. I mean, these are all behind the scenes, because you're talking about the bureaucracy of Nassau County. We invaded their computer system, and it was not easy. And it's not the elected officials. It's the bureaucrats that don't leave through administration. "You can't come and use our computer. You can't ..." So Paul Simon wrote a program in simple—it's just like print screen on the keyboard. The guy just press "shift, print screen," and he captures an image and sends it to a computer that Port Washington owns. And we had to write it out that way, too, that all he does: "Shift, print screen," and he sends this computer—captures the screen and sends it to a computer. Let Port Washington do whatever they want. Well, like I say, now it's up to almost ten departments are capturing their own screen, and then we strip it down and send whatever information we want via the internet to our main headquarters and then dispatch it. And if, right now, there was a call, within fifteen seconds of the dispatch or pressing "shift, print screen," I have it on my alphanumeric beeper, and it gives me cross streets and the nearest hydrants and who owns the home, and it's a phenomenal system. But I never thought I'd be able to see it come into action, but I guess I pounded the table enough and spent enough money and it's a—it's a reality now.

Q: That's great. You mentioned Fire Com. What is Fire Com?

CB: Fire Com is the Fire Communications Center of Nassau County. They're approximately fifty feet underground in Mineola. They say they can withstand a nuclear attack when it



was built, but now they're saying chemical and biological also. Because of the day and age in which we're in. And it's run by a fellow by the name of Chief Michael Meade. And he's a great friend of the fire service. And, I mean, Nassau County just didn't want to let us in, but we pounded on enough doors and called in enough favors.

Q: What are some of the other things that you became most involved in as an officer?

CB: As an officer. Well, after, you know, as Captain and below, as Lieutenant, then Captain and Engineer, my only responsibility and my only worry in the whole world was the Atlantic Hook and Ladder Company. I thought the sun rose and set on Carlton Avenue and Avenue A. I didn't realize that there was another world out there besides the Atlantic Hook and Ladder Company. But then, I dove into being Assistant Chief of the Fire Department. And I realized that the whole world out there, nobody in the public wants to know anything about Atlantic Hook and Ladder Company. They call the Chief of the Port Washington Fire Department, and I had a great one to learn from. I had Geoff Cole. Probably—and he's the best Chief the Port Washington Fire Department ever had. He's probably the best one there ever was in Nassau County, if not the State of New York. Businessman. Leader. Patriot. He's fantastic. And I was able to work two years under him as a Second Assistant Chief. And you just—you realize, as a Chief Officer, that the Port Washington Fire Department, everything has to function below it. Not just Atlantic Hook and Ladder Company. Protection Engine, Flower Hill Hose, Fire Medic Company. The police come into play, and that's three different police departments. And the Sewer

Department, you need their help, and you need the help of the Water Department. So you become like an orchestra leader. And so that's where everything was. But you asked about one other thing.

Q: Well, okay. Before we get back to that, what made Geoff Cole such a good Chief? What did you learn from him?

CB: I learned that everything wasn't a catastrophe. That the fact that something just didn't happen right didn't mean that the operation overall didn't go well. I learned how to not yell at people in a meeting (laughs) environment, where, you know, I guess the word "immature"--- I think I quickly lost that under him. I learned that everything is important to everyone, but some things aren't as important to everyone as they are to each other. I learned the budgeting process of the Fire Department very thoroughly. That if you want a dollar, you have to explain why that dollar is needed and where it would be spent. And if you don't spend it, what are you going to do with it? You're not just going to spend it. You're going to save it for that item when you get more dollars for it. I just learned how to—you know, you had to make friends with all the politicians and it'll pay off in the long run. And ...

Q: How do you make friends with them?

CB: You help them. You don't get involved in their political campaigns. We are—that's

another big thing that Geoff taught me—we are not a political organization, the Port Washington Fire Department. We do not support, just say the school board. We do not support the library. We do not support a mayor of a village. We are neutral, and when anybody needs something that could pertain to the Fire Department, we help them. And then when we need something, hopefully they'll be there to help us. And that's paid off for me in my six years in the Chief's office, dramatically. But you have to offer—you have to offer your services. We have millions and millions of dollars of equipment that the taxpayers have paid for. Lots of people like to think that the Fire Department owns it, and it does. And it does. It is owned by the Fire Department. But if it wasn't for you paying your taxes, we wouldn't have that equipment. And we have a very low tax rate, but we have the best of everything. So, an example is just the other day, Chief [Charles] Lang called me and he asked me if we could fix the flag pole at the Bar Beach Park, because they wanted to lower the flag for President Reagan. I have the right to say no. But I have now gotten a phone call from the Commissioner of Parks thanking me. And all I did was ask one of my fellows to bring a ladder truck down there with ex-Chief Lang and fix the flag pole. And, you know, hopefully now when I need to have a picnic at that park, maybe we'll get a little special attention for the members. And it always pays off for the member. You can't look at it for me as Chris Bollerman; I have to look at it for the member: What is the member going to get out of something?

Q: Do you keep your pager on all the time? Or beeper?

CB: As it just went off. Yes. I keep my Fire Department issued Nextel telephone and my Fire Department issued alphanumeric pager on twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. The only time I don't have my Nextel phone on is when I interview somebody at my job. But I'm available to the membership 24/7, and that's the responsibility that I took on as Assistant Chief. But I'm here to serve them as well as the community. So when—when they need to get in touch with me, I might yell and scream if it's over somebody's lost cat if it's two o'clock in the morning, but when somebody calls me, they should have a legitimate reason for needing me and I'm there to serve them and help them.

Q: What's the Nextel phone?

CB: The Nextel phone is just this new—Chief [Glen] Pedersen went out and got us direct connect telephones. You press a button, and it just, without dialing the telephone, it's just direct connect. Everybody when they listen to this is going to know exactly what it is, and it's probably going to be far surpassed by the time this is published (laughs).

Q: And the pager that you said just went off. I didn't hear it go off. Is it a vibrator?

CB: It's on vibrate, yes.

Q: Oh.

CB: It's on vibrate. And my—actually the greatest thing in the Port Washington Fire Department, Pat Schuh, our office manager, is looking for me, but she doesn't know where I am right now. So, otherwise, she would never have bothered me. But, you know, our office manager, Pat Schuh, was looking for me to conduct Fire Department business right now.

Q: Now, what do you do as a paid job?

CB: As a paid job, I am a sworn police officer in the City of New York. I am currently a Detective. I have been for the last five years. And I'm assigned to the 103rd Police Precinct Detective Squad.

Q: And how—how does that fit in with your being Chief of the Department and having to be available to the members?

CB: Right now, in what I'm doing in my chart—the chart is what my work schedule is—I think it works ...

Q: Your work schedule with the ...

CB: It's called a chart with ...

Q: ... with the Police Department.

CB: ... the Police Department, yes. It's probably the best work schedule a police officer could have to be the Fire Chief in their community. I work four days a week. I work two nights and two days. So I do my Fire Department business all day on my first night tour. All day on my second night tour. I'm available for meetings on my first day and my second day, and then I'm off for two days and I do whatever it is the Fire Department needs me to do then.

Q: Well, suppose, though, a fire call comes in while you're on the job as a police officer? What happens?

CB: Well, prior to having alphanumeric beepers, if you were outside of Port Washington, you wouldn't ever know that there was a call, unless your family member called you on your cell phone or at work. You would have no idea. But our nationwide beepers, as a Chief Officer, you have the right to call our dispatcher any time you want. So if a call comes over that sounds kind of crazy, I simply call our dispatcher and ask him what additional information they have, what's going on. And if there's no Chief in town, my boss, my Lieutenant, is a great guy and he understands my responsibility. And I'll just—as long as I'm not in a homicide investigation, I'll just come home, if I have to. But we have great ex-Chiefs. We have great Captains. And my other two Chiefs are—one is a police officer, and the other one is a firefighter. So we try to always, one of us in town all the

time. And if one of us is not in town, we notify an ex-Chief or a current Captain, and we give them an old Chief's car and then they assume responsibility for the Department. So we cover everything we can, you know, as best—we have a board in our Chief's office. It looks crazy. But everybody's work schedule that's involved in the Chief's office is on there. So, you know, one of us will call the other one. Like the other day, Johnny [Walters, 2nd Assistant Chief] called me and said that "All three of us are doing night tour." I said, "Okay, well call Tommy Cycan [Captain], give him the car." "Done." You know, he had already done it, you know. So, that's the kind of things that we do.

Q: So when you say the other Chiefs, you mean the First Assistant Chief and the ...

CB: And the Second Assistant ...

Q: Second Assistant Chief.

CB: ... Chief, yes. We—we run it as a—it's three guys, all out for the good of the Fire Department. But I have to, as [Sands Point] Mayor [Leonard] Wurzel said to me, "Chris, the buck stops here, and you're here." So, of course, I have to—I delegate my authority, but I don't delegate my responsibility, and we all work together. The three of us work together, but they understand that, you know, when the buck stops here, as Mayor Wurzel says. But next year it'll be Glen's responsibility for the buck (laughs), and then Johnny after that, and God bless 'em (laughs).

Q: Knowing what you know now about the responsibilities and the time demands of Chief, would you do it again?

CB: In a heartbeat. In a heartbeat. My son has asked me not to, and that's one of the main reasons that I'm not. Because Geoff Cole did it twice. And I love being Chief of the Fire Department. It's fantastic. But my son said it's time to be home more. So ...

Q: Excuse me. I have to turn over the tape ... [END OF SIDE A; BEGIN SIDE B] ... Sorry to interrupt. You say your son was asking you to be home more. What—how does being Chief impact on your family life?

CB: I don't think there's a word to describe it. If you are going to do the job the way it needs to be administered, the position of Chief of the Department, the commitment is un—there's no elected official in Port Washington that could imagine. No mayor, trustee. The supervisor of North Hempstead, he's making a hundred thousand dollars being that, so he cannot be home. But I have a full-time job, and I need to work overtime in my full time job to pay my bills. And to live in this very expensive, affluent community. So, I'm not home. I'm not home, is the simple answer. And neither are my assistants. We are at the office—we call it the office. We're at the office, administering the job of the Fire Department. So there are certain days that I've learned in the last couple of years that you need to take off. I don't go to my office on Saturdays and Sundays. If my day off falls on



Saturday and Sunday, I don't go the office. We have a voice mail system now, so if anybody—if John Q. Public calls, they leave a message for me; it automatically beeps me, and then I got to call my phone. And then I go and I have to call these people back. Because sometimes somebody will call you two and three times a day. I've already had five phone calls in my office, looking for me this morning.

Q: When you say your "office," you mean your Fire Department office, or the police?

CB: My fire office. My fire office, yes. It's just an unbelievably demanding job. And the public doesn't understand that about the Fire Department. Hopefully, one day they will.

Q: How about your wife? What does she have to say about this?

CB: She's (laughs), she's very understanding. She knows how much the Fire Department means to me. She knows how much the Port Washington community means to me. She's from Queens. So she's not used to this whole, you know, a radio goes off and you get out of bed and drive to a firehouse, and then go to a fire. Get on a fire truck and then go. She—you know, in the city, they dial one number and the police come, or the firemen just come, and they're in the firehouse or they're in the police cars. So it took a lot of getting used to. But, you know, she supports me in everything that I— everything that I do.

Q: How do you explain to your son, though, the fact that you haven't been around that much for him?

CB: Well, I guess I have to clarify that. I don't miss a baseball game, unless it's for work. Work meaning the Police Department. I don't miss soccer games. I don't miss dance recitals. I took time off just last weekend, just to be at a dance recital. And being off during the week, I stop my Fire Department business at two o'clock when I'm off during the week. So I'm at the bus stop, and I get the kids off the bus, and then—but at seven o'clock at night, if my wife is working—because my wife's a registered nurse, so she works into the night time from the day—my kids go to the meetings with me. And they go (laughs) in my office, and they watch baseball or “Sponge Bob” and while I'm in the next room in a meeting, you know. It's quite common. The members don't even bat an eye anymore when they come to the firehouse for a meeting and my kids are in another room playing and I'm conducting a meeting. But he understands. Just that—I guess he's very understanding for a little boy. He just says enough is enough. And, you know, "Don't quit now. But when it's over." But he loves the fact that when he goes to the firehouse, all the young guys, they treat him so nicely, you know. Because at the—when I was sworn is as Chief at the installation dinner, my wife has pictures. He's hanging out with his hands in his pockets with a suit on, with all, you know, the twenty-five year old guys, you know, they take such good care of him and they treat him like a king. You know, they make him feel like he's their friend, you know.

Q: Would you want him to be a firefighter?

CB: Oh, I'd love for my son to be a member of the Fire Department. That would be, you know, a great tradition to uphold.

Q: Can you tell me a little more about some of the other things that you were involved in. Like when you were Assistant Chief, and you investigated and acquired some new equipment, could you talk about that? The high band TAC-3 radios? What are they?

CB: Okay. Again, Geoff Cole, he wrote to the State of New York and he told them that we needed some radio equipment. And we didn't have the funding for it readily available. And through Senator—excuse me, through Assemblyman DiNapoli, we received a fifteen thousand dollar grant, and Geoff dropped it on my desk. He says, "Chris, we are the busiest fire department, talking on a radio frequency with Nassau County's other busiest fire departments. See what you can do for us." And we went out and we bought these VHF radios, and we call them the TAC-3 radios. And we put them in every vehicle in the Department, and it was groundbreaking because Port Washington Fire Department was getting away from a frequency that it shares with ten other fire departments, being 46-12, the members will know what that is. And we were all of a sudden going to have our own private thing. And the other groundbreaking part was there was such isolationism of the four companies owning all their own stuff. Here, we went down, and they allowed us to put—and I really mean they *allowed* us—to put radios owned by the

Fire Department—and it sounds crazy to somebody that doesn't know what we're talking about—radios owned by the Fire Department in their vehicle. And it was fantastic. And that's where it all—it all just kept rolling along right from there. And additional equipment being purchased for the vehicles and stuff out of one central location.

Q: So when you say that before these went in, each company would only have its own radios in their vehicles, so they couldn't communicate with people from the other companies?

CB: Oh, no, no. They could communicate, but they could have whatever they wanted. You could have—Protection Engine Company could buy the best radio there is, and just say then, Atlantic Hook and Ladder Company would buy maybe the worst one, the cheapest one. But not that they did, because we always buy the best. But they were all different—everybody had different styles and different kinds, and who has got a better volume control. Who's got squelch. The other one's got built-in squelch. And here it is they allowed us to, you know, I brought twenty-five radios in. We put them in pick-up trucks that we have. In vans. And we started this communication system, which we built upon over the last six years, and it's just worked phenomenally. And, you know, it took a lot of—took a lot of people understanding, you know, current officers understanding the need for a more streamlined way of operating to allow us to put the radios in the vehicles.

Q: Do you think that it's helped bring the different companies closer together, the fact that this is a piece of equipment that they all share?

CB: Yes, I do. Because now, members—two types of members are going to listen to this tape. Members that have—remember the old days, like I do. And I'm not old, and I remember the old days. And members that have no idea what—"What's the Chief talking about?" Since this one radio project that we did, we now buy our uniforms. The Chief's office takes care of giving everybody a uniform when they become a member. Turn-out gear. It used to be bought four separate ways in four separate companies. But I did a—you know, a written presentation and the membership went for it. Now, the turn-out gear all comes out of the Chief's office, the Fire Department headquarters. Everyone gets the same. Nobody gets something better; nobody gets five and this one only gets one. Everybody gets the same. Everybody gets their name on the back of it. Everything's the same. Peter Zwerlein had started the Air Packs like that, back when Bob Dayton was killed on Main Street, Peter Zwerlein started the—and got all the Air Packs. Charlie Lang was the Chief then. Peter orchestrated it. And we all bought Air Packs. And shortly after that, Charlie went out as Chief and Peter came in, and that's when radios first—the first radios were portable Handy-Talkies. Walkie-talkies were bought under one. The Chief's office bought them, and they distributed them and put them on the truck. But what I was talking about with the TAC-3 radios, it's actually mounted in, and it's actually, it can't leave the vehicle. It's a hard piece of equipment there. But then, you know, it came along to uniforms and turn-out gear, and now the alphanumeric pagers, and we have still Minotaur voice-alert pagers. They used to be bought by the companies. I would go to a firehouse as an Assistant Chief and see ten on the shelf in one firehouse;

the other firehouse, ten members don't have one. I said, "This is wrong. We can't have this. It's "Old Mother Taxpayer" paying for it. So let's just put it all into a pile, give it out, and when they're all out, we'll buy more at headquarters, and then we'll give them to whoever else needs them." And I think that's worked fantastic, in, you know, the big word is "consolidation" in the Port Washington Fire Department. It's not consolidating—it's consolidating spending and equipment; it's not consolidating the operation of the individual fire company, which I don't want to get involved with.

Q: And you talked about Bob Dayton. Were you at the fire when he died?

CB: Yes, yes I was.

Q: Can you tell me about that fire?

CB: The fire—it came over as an automatic fire alarm. And I didn't make any truck. I went in my own car. And I remember parking in front of Main Street School. I guess everybodyt calls it "Landmark" now. The Myron Blumenfeld—I actually parked next to Ghost Motorcycle, which isn't even there anymore, next to the Blumenfeld Park. There was just a lot of smoke coming out of it. And ...

Q: Out of the school?

CB: Out of the building, out of the building that he was killed in. It was at 165 or 163 Main. And I just remember we took a portable ladder off one of the vehicles. And I don't even know who I was with. And we couldn't get around—we went in behind Pepe [Joseph] Santoli's old building. And we couldn't get over a fence. We wound up knocking the fence down. But all of a sudden Woody, one of my best friends— Scott Wood—just came flying out of a window. And Jingles—Jimmy Simonson—he climbed up the ladder and he grabbed Woody, and he carried him down. And then—then shortly after that there was ... somebody pulled Bobby out, and he started doing some emergency work on him, but that was—that was it.

Q: Was it the smoke? Was it the smoke that killed him or ...

CB: I—I don't—if I said, I would just be, you know, theorizing. I don't know.

Q: But you said that you got new equipment, the Air Packs ...

CB: Well, we bought ...

Q: ... after—after that. As a result of that?

CB: We had—we had very good air packs. We had Scott Air Packs. We had very, very good ones. But I guess in the way we buy things in Port Washington, you would call them

antiquated by our standards. But we could sell them to another fire department in the country, and they would be brand new to them. So it was—we went and we bought the state-of-the-art, greatest air packs made, but that had nothing to do with Bobby dying. He wasn't even wearing—he was wearing a state-of-the-art-one. Scott was wearing an older one. Bobby had a state of the art air pack on that their company was testing. Flower Hill was testing great air packs out for their company. But then we all came together under Peter's leadership, we all came together, and we knew that it was the right thing to do was to buy all the same, the greatest that there are, the best on the market. But that's—I know that that's not what killed Bob, you know. It wasn't his air pack. He ran out of air, I believe. But, you know, just any—Scott ran out of air, too.

Q: Is that the only casualty of someone from the Fire Department since you've been in the Department?

CB: No, no, it wasn't. When I was, again, an officer in Atlantic's, I drove the rescue truck to an auto accident on West Shore Road in, pardon me, I don't remember the year. But it was a nothing accident. And we picked up right away. And a woman, her name is Ingrid Sowle, a nice lady from Fire Medics. I didn't know her. I just knew who she was. I probably never even spoke to her, but I had seen her, you know, casually to say "Hello, how are you?" And she was struck by a drunk driver as she was either entering or exiting her vehicle. But I—I called it in on the radio. We made a U-turn. I was driving the rescue truck. We made a U-turn, and as we came back by the—by the end of Hempstead



Harbor, guys were in the street, a couple of people there. And they were screaming and yelling. So I blocked the road with the truck and I started calling for help on the radio. And I must have sounded frantic, but, you know, there was just nothing anybody could do for her.

Q: So she was killed as she was responding to this other accident? Was that what ...

CB: She was coming to the auto accident, and I guess she got there very, very late and everybody was leaving. So she was—you know, she was getting back into her vehicle, and she got hit as she was getting—or walking to her vehicle. And it's a very dark road. I don't know, you know. So, she was struck by a drunk driver, who one of our police officers chased into Roslyn and caught him.

Q: Well, there're a lot of risks in this work.

CB: Right. Risk versus gain. We didn't gain anything that night. But we risked it all. So we have many procedures that people think the Chiefs are very, very harsh. But an auto accident on West Shore Road is all risk and no gain, you know. So, we don't allow members to go down there in their cars. If they do, they're subject to disciplinary action. We close the road and inconvenience the public, but, because of that incident, we do very strict auto accident procedures, and members don't like it because, you know, sometimes they get yelled at. But when you see what happened to this poor woman's

body, and I was there to see it, you know. And the members that we have now that are actively responding, the majority of them never even—don't even know that that happened to her. They're the young kids, and they think, "Oh, he's just a mean old guy. He's grumpy today." No, it's because I saw what happens.

Q: So, how do you respond?

CB: How do ...

Q: When you get a report of an auto accident.

CB: Of an auto accident?

Q: At West Shore Road?

CB: On West Shore Road? We close as much of the traffic lane that we're operating in down, and we don't mind completely. But sometimes, you know, an accident's off to the side, so we'll position the vehicles to close one lane of where it is. But you have to get the ambulance stuff off to the side. We have it in writing that no members are to take their own car there. And what we did for that also is Chief Cole and I and Chief [Walter] Trapp, we decided that we'd allow more vehicles, more fire vehicles to respond to an auto accident on West Shore Road, because we don't want the members going in their cars, so

we give more vehicles an opportunity to get members to bring them to the scene.

Because you wouldn't want to just respond there with one pumper and one rescue truck with only ten guys, when you might need twenty, you know. So we let more vehicles respond.

Q: And what about the fire safety trailer that ...

CB: On, that was Chief Trapp. He—we—again, we have the best of everything in Port Washington, and Chief Trapp, during his administration, we applied for a FEMA Federal Emergency Management Agency] grant. And FEMA, the Federal Office of Emergency Management (sic) and/or Federal Emergency Management Office. That's what it is. He—we kicked it around, and I couldn't come up with anything, and Chief Pedersen couldn't come up with anything. And Walter said, "Well, what about the children?" So, let's get a fire safety trailer. And he dumped it in my lap (laughs). And we got it. And then we had to pick, you know, we got the grant approved, so we had to pick this thing out. And, of course, me, you know, I don't think about the fire safety aspects too much. I'm not really into that part of it. So, we ordered this thing so it could be a potential command post for us, you know. We're going to put radios in it and antennas, and it's got a bedroom in it where somebody could go to sleep actually, but it's to teach the kids about bedroom safety if the door gets hot. But it actually could be for somebody to go rest. And it's got a living room, which could be a meeting room for—at a large-scale emergency. So, but that's what we did. We ordered this, and we have it now. It's parked

behind Protection's annex. We've only used it once, since we got it, at the Harborfest this past June 6th, 2004, and the community loves it. Unfortunately, I didn't get it lettered yet, because the guy that does it, he, you know, he's doing chiefs' cars and fire trucks that take more of a priority than doing that house. But pretty soon, we'll have it all lettered up, and the kids will know what it is when it comes there, and hopefully they'll learn to get out alive, you know, if their house goes on fire.

Q: And where will you take it?

CB: We'll take it any—we'll take it to all types of carnivals and community events. We're going to take it to the schools for Fire Prevention Week to let the children run through it. We'll, eventually, hopefully, it'll be made available to any class trips that want to come explicitly to us. But we have a vehicle suitable for towing it, and we'll take it any place that it needs to go. Any church bazaar, anything like that. Anyplace—it's twofold. It's going to teach the children to get out alive, but it also lets the community know that the Port Washington Fire Department is there for them and we're doing everything we can to help them so that they could do everything they can. And hopefully they'll help us.

Q: Is there one most important piece of advice that you would give children, in terms of fire safety?

CB: I—I guess they have to just stay low and, you know, don't worry about anybody else.

Just got to get out of the house, and, you know, make sure that the door's not too hot, and if it's too hot, don't open it. And they should all be taught to be able to get out the window. And this trailer has a nice window that they can learn how to climb out and stuff.

Q: What about educating the adults in the community? How much do you get involved with that?

CB: I don't (laughs). I don't, and I never have. We've had this wonderful Fire Marshal for the past ten years—Walter Clark. And Walter has run all sorts of different programs. He ran a babysitting workshop here to teach babysitters and gave them special, official certificates that they passed it, about, you know, what to do with a medical emergency or fire emergency. He's gone to Young Parenting classes. Once a year, he comes here to the library and during Fire Prevention Week, and he made himself available to anybody that would want to come and ask questions. But that's, you know, really about it with that.

Q: What exactly is a fire marshal?

CB: A fire marshal is a—it's a term used only by the Port Washington Fire Department. Fire Marshal. There is only one fire marshal in Nassau County, and that's a fellow by the name of Tom Tilly who is appointed by the County Executive. And he is the Fire

Marshal of Nassau County, and he works in the Fire Marshal's office, and he has assistants and they carry guns and they have authority to arrest people, and they give summonses. But each fire department in Nassau County has a Chief Assistant Fire Inspector. And that's the Fire Marshal in Port Washington, its official Nassau County title. But in Port Washington, they're our fire marshal. They handle all the stuff that the Fire Marshal office does, for Port Washington. So like we just went to an alarm now, and our Fire Marshal now is a fellow by the name of Jim Penrose. And I'm too busy to get involved in handling the alarm information and the training of the community, the education. So I just told Jim, you know, call the Fire Marshal's office, let them know that this alarm's still not working right, and, you know, Jim will take care of handling whatever—any liaison with the Fire Marshal's office. Whenever there's an event at the schools, they have to go up there and inspect it, because the Fire Marshal's office comes. So he's our representative and the Fire Marshal. Plus, he maintains the records of all the alarms in Port Washington. If you go—if you call in and say that car's leaking gasoline, we have to do a New York State report, and the Fire Marshal's job in Port Washington is to manage that report system through our computer-aided dispatch, and make sure that whenever I say, "How many times did we go to this place last month?" he can say, "Well, Chief, we went there fourteen times, but this is what I did about it." And he tries to rectify all those problems.

Q: And you were also involved in getting a police—a fire police truck ...

CB: Yes.

Q: ... when you—yeah, now what is that?

CB: We call them the Fire Police. They are the—a fellow named Virgil Zirpolo—we call him "Zippy"—he's been the Captain of the Fire Police since I joined the Fire Department. He's got an assistant, a Lieutenant by the name of Julius Picardi. And they're two older fellows, but their job is to like act as our police liaison, I guess you would say. They do traffic direction at the scene. Whenever there's a fire, they always try to keep the homeowners back, and they set up a fire line; they have the tape. But, we've always had a van, and the van, low mileage but high maintenance. And it just wasn't cutting it, and when Geoff Cole was Chief he says, "Chris, we're going to get a new Fire Police truck. Go out and get us suitable bids, and, you know, make sure you get the right thing." So, of course, I took it too far (laughs), and we got a—but it wound up—everybody thought it was too far then, but now the truck is too small. But we bought a Ford truck with a compartmentation body on it, and it's got a winch on the front, and it's got four-wheel drive, and it's—the cab is loaded. It's even got a CD player in it. And we spent a big hunk of money, but we bought the best piece of equipment. And it's now, I guess you could call it our terrorism response vehicle. We've been able to put—we have—we went out and bought extra bioterrorism equipment. Suits to put on to mitigate small problems. You know, we don't mitigate the problem; we assist. But we do have to have protective clothing, so we bought protective clothing. We bought—we have our regular face pieces,

but we bought canisters that insert into them that will protect us against anthrax and, not that we—we wear our air pack, but we never know if we're going to run into a problem at a school, and we bought stuff to like give to a custodian or a principal and say, "Just put this on," you know. We have our tactical rescue equipment on the vehicle. We have lots of extra Speedy-Dry [cat litter used to absorb liquid] on the vehicle and cones, which we really, really bought something that was a phenomenal—I believe, I guess, because I took care of buying it—a phenomenal piece of equipment. And buying a phenomenal piece of equipment, we dedicate our fire trucks. Most of our fire trucks are dedicated to people. And I felt that---it sounds crazy---the first fire truck, real fire truck that the Fire Department owns, because the Fire Department only owned Chiefs' cars. You know, the companies all own the equipment. But the Fire Department's first fire truck that we know the most suitable people to dedicate it to was to anyone that has ever served as the Chief of the Port Washington Fire Department. So, at our Memorial Day picnic a couple of years ago, we gathered all the living ex-Chiefs, and Tom Tobin, our Chaplain, read a prayer and he put holy water on it, and the truck is dedicated to all those that have served. So it's an open dedication. Because I was only an Assistant Chief at the time, so me and Glen [Pedersen] and Johnny [Waters], and whoever else gets to have the honor of serving as Chief of the Fire Department, that'll live as a testament to the hard work and dedication that we put in.

Q: Have you had to use it?



CB: Oh, we use it all the time. It's one (laughs) of our most popular vehicle.

Q: (Laughs)

CB: And we've got plans on the drawing board right now at the Chief's office, and when this tape is published, those plans will probably have already been used and have gotten more refined, but we're going to—people are going to start seeing a lot more of it, because it can do so much. It can mitigate problems up to something really burning.

Q: Well, what have you used it for?

CB: Right now, we use it for auto accidents. Containment of spills. If, God forbid, there's a technical rescue, it's got all the technical rescue equipment on it. That's ropes and harnesses, and a tripod for going into a sewer. It's got a Stokes basket that can be lowered off of a roof. Like I said, it's got the protective clothing for in case we run into some type of a hazardous situation. It's the lowest level of protective clothing, but it's the highest level that we can participate in. We've got fans. We've got a couple of air packs, and we've got rehabilitation equipment on it. If we get a large fire, during the heat, we've got a cooler that's got a fan on the top of it, and water gets sucked out of it and blows on the members. Chief Trapp bought that for us. And people say, "What the hell we getting that for?". And we had a picnic, and the cooks were all passing out (laughs) and we put that thing on, and they couldn't believe it. They said, "We should use this at a fire."

"That's what we got it for." Because, you know, sometimes all the guys, they don't understand why we buy something; they think we're crazy. But that's why we got it.

Q: But it got the cooks back up and running?

CB: It got the cooks back (laughs) up and running at the picnic, yep.

Q: Have you ever been part of an arson investigation?

CB: An arson investigation?

Q: Yeah, in Port Washington?

CB: I've participated in a couple, very low level. The Fire Marshal's office has a great arson team that works in conjunction with the Nassau County Police. And I've, personally, I try to stay out of it, because they could develop information that could be prejudicial, and I don't want to know what they do. When they come down, when they make their move to arrest whoever they have to arrest, I have to remove myself from that because I'm the leader of the men and the women. So, you know, I—I don't even try to help them, you know. They've asked me for help with a couple of things, and, you know, it just ...

Q: Well, why is it prejudicial? Are you concerned that they might accuse one of the

members?

CB: That's always a—it's happened. When I was the Captain of my company, one of my members was involved in an investigation. And I'll never forget the Detectives coming in, saying, "Can we just come in and look around at the picture board?" They didn't know what the guy looked like. And I didn't know. I wasn't a detective then. I had no idea until later, and they were able to—and the next day they locked the kid up. So, you know, I—I would never not participate with a police investigation. I guess, I'm sworn to do that. But let the police operate as the police, and we operate as us. We have the authority at a fire call, we determine if something is suspicious. And I've done that plenty of times as a Fire Chief and as a Captain. You know, right down to garbage burning in the street. "This is suspicious. This garbage should not be burning. Let's call the Fire Marshal for an immediate investigation. Let's call him for a routine investigation. You know what, it's just kids playing with matches. Let's not call them at all," you know. But when it comes to, you know, like a real arson investigation, I like to remove myself. Once the investigation starts, I got to get them there. I got to explain my conditions upon arrival. And, you know, I just ...

Q: What do you mean "explain your conditions"?

CB: The conditions you found. What was burning? Where was the smoke? Who was there? Who was acting peculiar? Should this guy be there first? And then you have to remove

yourself, because they have a job to do. And I know, as a Detective in the Police Department, your job is not easy, and it can get a little heavy at times. And I'm an advocate of the men and the women. I'm their leader. They elected me to lead them. So, you know, it just—it's just better just to take a step back. And it's just better to step away and let the police do—let the police do their job.

Q: Now, here you talk about an advocate of the men and the women. That's fairly recent that you had to add "and the women," right? So, how—how has the entry of women changed the Department?

CB: Only for the better. Only for the better. When I joined the Fire Department, there was already a woman, a good friend of mine named Janet Kimmerly was a member already of Protection Engine Company. And there were many women in the Fire Medic Company. I'm told that—and I know from just experiencing, you know, the sights and sounds of the Fire Department—if it weren't for the women joining the Fire Medic Company, the daytime response would have been finished many, many years earlier, but young women housewives that didn't have a paid job—of course, they're a housewife, of course they're taking care of the kids—they were able to join the Fire Department and help members of the community during the day. And Janet's been terrific. She's a wonderful addition. And I count on her. She gives me advice all the time, you know. Maybe it's a little womanly advice, you know, but, you know, "Oh, you can't do that. You got to do it this way." And I go to Janet. She's a confidante of mine.

Q: Well, now with so many women out working, have you found that there are fewer available to be fire medics?

CB: No. I think that the majority of the people joining the Fire Medics are women. I don't have the, you know, the raw data on that. But we're getting high school girls, and we're getting college girls, and they're giving us time between classes and on summer break, and they're doing a fantastic job. And they're more compassionate to the victims than the, we call them aided cases [sick or injured person]—the citizens of the community. They're more of a compassionate person. The way—when I look at it as a third party at them, what I might do is say something like, "Go on, get on the stretcher and go." They say, "Come on, sweetheart. Let's ..." you know.

Q: How old do they have to be?

CB: Seventeen years of age to join the Fire Department. And I believe the state says you can only be an emergency medical technician at eighteen. But that might have been lowered now also.

Q: Okay, well, there's still a lot more ground to cover, but I think maybe we should stop now for this session... Is there something else that you feel is important in terms of any of the topics that we talked about so far? Okay. Thank you very much.

CB: Than you very much.

Q: This is wonderful. ... [INTERRUPTION/CONTINUATION] ... Can you explain what a Stokes basket is?

CB: A Stokes basket is best described, it's a tubular steel, like stretcher that comes up on the sides, and then it's inlaid with chicken wire, so that you could put a human body into it and then hook ropes and harnesses to it and lower it from a high location or pull it from below.

Q: Have you ever used one yourself?

CB: Yes, we have used one. A couple of times we used it.

Q: To bring people from a burning building?

CB: Never from a burning building. Just from being sick or injured in a precarious location.

Q: Okay, thank you.