

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

Transcript Of Oral History Interview With

Daniel Robert Buettner
Protection Engine Company No. 1

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

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Q: Today is December the 27th, 2004. This is an interview with Daniel Buettner. My name is Margaret Dildilian. The interview is taking place at the Port Washington Public Library. Daniel, can you tell me how you pronounce your full name?

Daniel Robert Buettner: Sure. Daniel Robert Buettner.

Q: Do you have a nickname?

DRB: Actually, around the firehouse, I have a nickname. It's "Bueller." When I first came around the firehouse, about two months before I started--I got in in July of 2002, and every single year, we have inspection at Memorial Day, so I started coming around, before I had gotten in, to get myself familiar with the trucks and the people--everything like that. And one of my Lieutenants named Raymond Ryan, I had given my name to him, and he jotted it down quickly on a piece of paper, and he hadn't crossed the two T's. So, when he was introducing me to one of the Chiefs--I believe the Chief was Glen Pedersen at the time. He was the Second Assistant Chief at the time. He said--he was trying to remember what my name was, and he kept saying, "Oh, I can't remember your--Bueller? Something like that?" And the Chief laughed. Everybody laughed. And it just stuck. And ever since then, all the guys around the firehouse would call me "Bueller!" "Bueller" from the--I don't know if you're familiar with the movie, "Ferdinand Bueller's Day Off." So, they always give quips from that line. And then, it's kind of amusing, and it's

taken on a life of its own. The kids at college call me "Bueller" now, and that's my official nickname (laughs).

Q: Well, your actual last name, what is the ethnic background of that?

DRB: It's German. The original pronuncia--the original spelling was B-U-T-T-N-E-R, with the umlaut over the U. However, when my family came over--I believe it was my great grandfather--when he come over from Germany, in second grade, one of the nuns came over, when he was in Catholic school and said, "That's not the way you should spell your name." So she changed his name, and his name became different from his brothers and sisters. So, we're the only sect from our family that has the E in there, but that's actually the way it was supposed to be written when we came over, but everybody else from our family lineages is B-U-T-T-N-E-R.

Q: So, then, the actual pronunciation is ...

DRB: Is "Butner."

Q: Not ...

DRB: It's pronounced the same. It's just written differently, which is kind of interesting. It's very odd.

Q: Were any of your relatives part of the Fire Department?

DRB: No. I'm actually the first. I had talked to my dad about it, and he told me that when he first moved into Port Washington--he grew up in Queens in Whitestone. And they moved here, I believe in 1984 or 1983. And he had toyed with joining the Fire Department, but he had been a member of other different groups and whatnot, and he wound up--he wound up running for the School Board. He was a member of the School Board for eight years and other things. But he--he never really was able to get into it. He already had a family and he was in his thirties, and that's something he wasn't able to quite do. So I am the first of my--of the Buettner clan to become a fireman in Port Washington.

Q: Can you tell me what it was like--do you remember Queens at all? Were you young?

DRB: I was actually born here. I have always lived here. My father and his family had grow up in Queens, and when he married my mother, they moved to Long Island together. And, actually, my grandparents wound up moving to Port Washington after we had moved here, which is kind of interesting, so the whole family wound up relocating to Port, which was nice.

Q: So you were actually born here?

DRB: Yeah, I was born in Long Island--LIJ Hospital in Queens, and then I grew up in Port Washington my whole life.

Q: Can you remember what it was like growing up in Port, a mere nineteen years ago (laughs)?

DRB: It hasn't changed too much, actually, considering it's only been nineteen years. I always-- I grew up in 66 Bar Beach Road, and when I was five I moved down the block and literally, we just rolled everything down the road. But, growing up here, it's--I don't know. I always enjoyed it. I dabbled in different things. I was in a number of different organizations in high school. I was actually a member of the drama club in high school. I wound up becoming the president of the drama club in high school. I was quite busy. And I played a number of different sports. I played hockey over on Seaview Boulevard for the Port Washington Skating Center. I believe it was Bryan Trottier at the time. And I wound up playing a lot of sports. I played baseball on Lions Field for the PYA. But then when I turned sixteen, I wound up joining the Explorer Program of the Port Washington Fire Department, and then I fell in love with it. And when I turned seventeen, I joined as soon as--I couldn't believe it was something like thirteen days after my seventeenth birthday, I was voted in as a member. And ever since then, this has become my life. It's--all my friends are firemen now, and it really is a lot--that's--this is what I do. That's part of my growing up.

Q: Now, who was the most instrumental in the Fire Department, for you to join?

DRB: The most instrumental? Hmmmm. That's a good question. One of my friends in high school, his name is Josh Davis, was a member of Protection. And he wound up--he was a member of the Explorers with me, and he wound up joining--he wound up joining Protection. And I didn't really know anyone at the time. So, he was the only one that I knew. We weren't very close friends, but he was someone I was able to talk with and kind of introduced me to a couple of people. And Josh was the main reason that I wound up joining Protection, which is kind of funny, because my best friend is a member of Flower Hill. His name is Scott Falconer. And if he had done a little bit better job of recruiting me, I may not be--I wouldn't have been a member of Protection. But no regrets. So ...

Q: Do you feel that there are major differences between the different fire departments?

DRB: Between the different fire companies ...

Q: Yeah, the fire companies.

DRB: ... within the Department? Not particularly. For the most part, I mean, to give you an example, I live on Bar Beach Road. And I ride out of Flower Hill every night, because it's the closest firehouse. And they give me a good ribbing every now and then and say,

"Oh, the foreigner is here," especially when I was--it was a little difficult when I had joined, at first, but--to get in with the guys, because they didn't really know who I was. I was in the rival engine company, and it was--it was kind of interesting. But there's really not much of a difference. I mean, everybody else trains on each others' apparatus, so we really get a good feeling. It's more of a Departmental--how should I say? What's the word I'm looking for--there's a lot, yeah, there's a lot of cohesion amongst the companies. I mean, there used to be a lot of competition, but now, with the younger guys, like all my friends--like Scott joined Flower Hill, because his father was a member there, over there for years. I wound up becoming friends with the guys over there. A bunch of my friends are in Atlantics. So the rivalry isn't there like it used to be back in the old days. So we're all pretty good friends. So, as far as that goes, I think we're all a pretty cohesive unit that really isn't about segmentation within the companies--amongst the companies.

Q: Now, you've been a member for how long?

DRB: Two and a half years now. I joined in July--I was inducted in on July 11th, 2002. So I'm coming up on two and a half years. I was just voted off probation in July of 2004. So ...

Q: I want to go back a minute to your Explorer experience.

DRB: Sure.

Q: I've had very few people who've actually gone through the Explorer system. Can you explain how that works and how you felt about it at the time?

DRB: Sure. The Explorers were set up, I think, around five or six years ago now. So, not too many of the--the younger members are the only ones who are able to go through the Explorer program. I joined later on. A lot of my friends had joined when they were fourteen, fifteen; I joined when I was--after my sixteenth birthday. So, at the time, I thought it was great because I was actually a member of the Department. And I thought it gave me a foot in the door, where I was able to view how the Department worked. I was able to see the apparatus...it was more just, I guess, appeasing my desire to be around the firehouse. We didn't get to do too much, which was kind of unfortunate, but we were able--at least I was able to see how certain things worked. I was able to take minor schools with the--and see how operations worked.

Q: When they came to the high school--I assume that's where you were introduced to them?

DRB: No, actually. I was--my friend Josh Davis, again, was the one who had told me about it. I learned about it through word of mouth. There really wasn't much of a--I guess, advertisement.

Q: So, generally, then, it was not through any speeches at the high school, but it was actually a person through whom you went into the Explorer system.

DRB: Right. There really wasn't too much of an advertisement. I think there was one banner that they put on the front of the--where the middle school is, at the chain-link fence right on Port Washington Boulevard. But that was all there really was. There really wasn't too much of an advertising campaign.

Q: So you joined actually a year after 9/11 occurred. Did that have any impact on your joining, at all?

DRB: Impact in terms of what?

Q: Deciding to join the Fire Department?

DRB: No. I had actually wanted to join for years. Actually, unbeknownst to me, my mother told me a story about how we had gone down to, I think it was the fireworks that had taken place for years down on West Shore Road for Memorial Day. And, there was a member handing out pamphlets that said, "Join the Fire Department." "Join the Fire Department," when, I think, I was eleven or twelve. And she--they gave one to my mother, and apparently I reached across and said, "I'm doing this!" And I grabbed it from her. And I guess there was a seed that was always planted in the back of my mind, but it never really--I don't think there was a moment where it occurred to me that it was actually going to happen until I joined the Explorers and said, "Wow! I'm actually going to do this. This is great!" I had submitted my paperwork in August of 2001 for the

Explorer Program. And, I'd already decided that that was what I was going to do. And I was supposed to be inducted into the Explorers the week after--my paperwork was supposed to be approved two days after September 11th, and obviously, that meeting did not take place. So, it wound up getting pushed back another month, and I got into the Explorer Program in October of 2001. But, I'd always wanted to. It was something that had always fascinated me. I always looked up to these guys and said, "This is great. This is something I want to do."

Q: Is there a particular memory of the Fire Department, as you were growing up in Port that made you feel that way?

DRB: Particular moment in Port Washington history. I don't know if I could actually pin it on one specific moment. I remember every single year, I think one of my favorite times of the year was the fireworks, again. Going down there, and whenever we went, we always saw the fire trucks leave, and I always was glued to the window, looking around, and said, "This is so cool!" So I always stopped to look at fire trucks on Main Street, when I was walking down. I always thought these guys were the greatest. So, I said--so it was something that I always wanted to do. Something that always appealed to me, ever since I was a little kid.

Q: Those fireworks are now no longer ...

DRB: Correct.

Q: ... (laughs) ... in progress.

DRB: Right.

Q: What were your expectations when you joined the Fire Department?

DRB: My expectations. My ...

Q: Did you have any particular expectations that you thought, well, it's going to be like "this," but it really turned out to be like "that."

DRB: I didn't know what I was going to expect. I was kind of--I was a little scared when I first joined, because there were all these older guys, and I mean, they were in their, you know, late twenties--the young guys were in their late twenties. And I'm sitting here, I'm seventeen years old, and I'm--it really--it was really a little nerve-wracking when you first joined. But ...

Q: Were you frightened by the older members?

DRB: To some extent, yes, because I didn't--like I said, I really didn't know anyone, and--but, when I first started coming around, then my Lieutenant, Raymond Ryan, wound up introducing me to a couple of people. And he--very friendly guy, and he wound up kind of taking me under his wing a little bit and introducing me to people. And through that I was able to talk to other people, and the guys were actually really friendly. It was just I had to get to talk to them a little bit, to know them and meet them. Once I did it, it was great. I mean, it really--it really wasn't as bad, as hard as I thought it was going to be, to make some friends in the Department.

Q: Were the crusty members willing to reach out to the young ones, such as you?

DRB: The ...

Q: (Laughs) Meaning the older, "crusty" members.

DRB: Well, it's kind of strange, because the Department sort of works in generations. So, it's--there's--or our company, I should say, because I know more members in my company than in the other companies, obviously, but we do functions together and whatnot. So, the older member--actually, I'll tell you a funny story. There was--when I first joined, when I came in, I really didn't know anybody. And one of the--the first meeting I went to, there's a guy by the name of Harry Hooper. And Harry, they said--everybody said, "Go say hello to Harry. Go say hello to Harry." I was like, "Oh, okay." I really didn't

know who this guy was. So, I go up to Harry, I said, "Hi, Harry. My name is Dan. I just got into the company." He goes, "How the heck are you?" and he spits his dentures into his teeth and reaches out to shake my hand, and everybody got a good laugh. And I started laughing. And it was kind of one of those moments where it was like everybody knew what was going on and said, "Oh, this is one of the guys. You can--he can laugh at himself." And once they realize that you can laugh at yourself, they kind of--they take you under their wing and say, "This is a good guy; this is a good kid." So, it was one of those moments where everybody just started laughing and laughing. It was a good time. It really was a funny, funny thing. They all knew what was coming, too. So ...

Q: What was your probationary status like for you, in the Department, as a young seventeen or eighteen, nineteen-year-old?

DRB: Yeah. My probationary status--well, the probationary status for the Department lasts for two years. And you have to go through a number of different courses. I kept saying that it was--through modern firefighting and everything like that, it--the probationary sentence or--I shouldn't say "sentence."

Q: ... [?] ... (laughs)

DRB: Well, the probationary period has become tougher and tougher, because there are more and more schools and more and more training with OSHA [Occupational Safety & Health Administration] regulations and NFPA [[National Fire Protection Association] firefighting requirements. You have to be trained better and better and better. So, the members who had joined before, they were integrated into all this stuff. I had to learn all this stuff within the two years. So, I always felt kind of--that I was kind of slighted in the fact that I was pushed through all this stuff that they never had to do during their probationary period. It was very demanding of my time. I had to go to a class called "Primaries and Essentials" over the summer, which was five consecutive Saturdays, where you went to class. Classroom started, you had two--you had four classes a day--eight to ten, ten to twelve, an hour lunch break, and then one to three, three to five. So you're at--you're at the Academy from eight to five on a Saturday. That's not including travel time, and also the physical exhaustion. You lost your weekends. And it was--that's only one of the classes we had to take is Department Ops--Department Operations. We call it Department Ops. We have to go and actually fight fires that they light for you. Or there's certain things where you have to learn how to wear the Packs. And just going from one school to the next. As soon as one was done, you had to go to the other. It's very draining, and you have to be very dedicated. Fortunately, I was in high school, and I was on top of my studies. I graduated with a very high GPA and wound up going to a pretty good school. But, at the same time, I had to balance the high--being in high--my high school obligations and also my other clubs that I told you that I was a part of, with all of these schools that I had to go to. But, at the same time, I didn't have a family; I

didn't have a full-time job that I had to go to. So I was able to work my schedule. I think, in my position, as a younger member, with less responsibilities, I only had a responsibility to myself, and I didn't even have a job, where I could actually do this, as opposed to a member nowadays joining at thirty or in your late twenties when you're trying to start a family becomes something very difficult. So, the probationary period for me, like I said, it was something I always wanted to do, and it was extremely demanding, but it, at the same time, this is--it was--what word am I looking for here?--it was extremely demanding. It was something that I always wanted to do. And I was able to do it. So, it really wasn't as much of a burden as I think I'm trying--as I think--as it's made out to be.

Q: Now, you also had summer jobs ...

DRB: Correct.

Q: ... which sounds very interesting, that you were doing along with all this. Correct?

DRB: Correct.

Q: What were some of those jobs?

DRB: All right. I worked for my--my father owns a scaffolding and ladders business in Long Island City, and I worked there for a number of summers. That was--sorry, could you repeat the question? Sorry.

Q: I was just asking you, you know, what were the jobs--your summer jobs. Where--you had several, as I recall.

DRB: Right. I had--well, I had two main jobs, which, for a number of summers, I worked for my father. I worked--I did some bookkeeping stuff. I did a lot of--I built a website for his company. I did a number of different odds and ends jobs, and then I also worked outside in the steel yards, depending. It was a very versatile position I was in. So, I was either inside working with the books and the finances, or I was outside physically moving steel beams around, moving ladders from different warehouses, taking inventory. It was interesting. I also worked for Hinck's Delicatessen for a time.

Q: What was that like?

DRB: That was--that was an interesting job. I worked there from--let me see. It was before--right before I got in the firehouse. I was hired in the spring of 2001. And I worked there part-time through school, and then I worked full-time over the summer. That was an interesting job. I worked for--there, as a stock boy. So ...

Q: In other words, you couldn't eat the sandwiches and ...

DRB: Well, I ate the sandwiches there. They don't have to know that, though (laughs)

Q: (Laughs).

DRB: No, I was entitled to one meal a day. I worked from--and when I worked during the school year, I worked from three-thirty to seven, and restocked the models for the company--restocked the paper supplies, everything like that. So ...

Q: Now, this was all during your probationary period.

DRB: Yeah. I worked for Hinck's during my first--in my first year in the Fire Department. I wound up quitting that job right before the summer of 2002 so I could work for my father again.

Q: What was your training--actual training--like? Do you have any vivid memories about your feelings?

DRB: Quite a few. The "Primaries and Essentials" class was the first class I ever took with the Fire Department. And maybe that wasn't the best thing, considering you were there for hours upon hours. And there was the classroom where--there was--during--I took the

combo place, which is "Primaries and the Essentials." They're two different classes, but ... [INTERRUPTION] ...

Q: Is that a call for you?

DRB: Yeah, that's all right. I skipped one before to come here. I had to make sure I made the interview. I didn't want to keep you waiting. So, it's all right. They should take care of it. If it's actually, if it's anything, they'll tone out again. ... [INTERRUPTION] ... They'll tone in. I'll just keep it on now just so, if it's some ...

Q: Did you want to turn it off during the interview so that you won't be disturbed?

DRB: No, I did turn it off. I'm turning it back on, just in case if it's something I can--I'm going to have to go, obviously, if it's a working fire. So, but chances are slim (laughs).

Q: You're very serious. Did you learn a specific skill that you felt you were the best at, when you were training?

DRB: The best at, in terms of my personal skill that I was--what my personal skill was the best, or better than some other people?

Q: Yours personally.

DRB: Best at. What was I?

Q: Well, the other if your wish.

DRB: Well, no. I'm just trying to think what I felt I'm best at. Well, I'm in the engine company, and I've done a number of--I've trained on a lot of different, and a lot of different aspects. But, personally, I think physically putting out fires, I have become very good at. I mean, there are some other things that I have trouble with, but I do a lot--I do a lot of reading--personal reading. I go to--I've done the Baltimore conventions, the fire convention every year.

Q: What is that about?

DRB: Every single year, there is a convention--a fire convention down in Baltimore. It's nationwide, and people from all over the country--firefighters from all over the country come together, and they meet in seminars. They have certain classrooms. They have a giant expo where they introduce new tools, equipment, advances, and such. I took a couple of classes down there. I just--it's something that I really enjoy. Also, I consider, this is--I'm dealing with my life, so I want to know as much about this as possible. So, I've read a lot about fire sciences and how fire reacts to certain things. I always pay attention. I just feel that one of the things that I've become the best at is putting out fires. I think that's my personal thing that I'm very good at.

Q: What are some of the memorable--have there been memorable fires in the last two years you've been part of the Department?

DRB: There was one fire. It would have been the Monday after Easter in 2004. So, it would have been this year yet. I was--I go to school at Boston University, and I come home for certain breaks, and I came home for Easter. Unfortunately, the week before Easter, my grandfather passed. So ...

Q: That's the grandfather that came from Germany?

DRB: No, no, no. That was my great grand--great, great grandfather or great grandfather. My grandfather was born here. He was--my father's father. He grew up in Queens. He wound up passing away, unfortunately, within the past year. And he died on a Tuesday or a Wednesday. And being devout Catholics, you cannot bury someone during Holy Week. So, we had to wait until Monday to bury him. So, originally, I was scheduled to fly back to Boston on Monday morning. I was going to catch the red--the six o'clock out of La Guardia and make it in time for a ten o'clock lecture. Kind of ambitious, but nonetheless. But, like I said, he passed away, so I was there on Monday. Lucky for me (laughs). Turns out that Monday night, I went out with--I went out to see a movie with a couple of my friends, and two of my friends who are in the Fire Department with me-- Alex Mott and Jeremy Hirschhorn. And so we dropped off my buddy, Alex, at his house.

And then Jeremy and I were sitting in front of my house at a quarter to twelve at night, and we're saying our goodbyes and stuff, you know. And he was a year younger than me, so he was still in high school at the time. I said, "I'll see you later. I'll see you soon." You know, "I'm flying back in the morning. So, be good," and everything and all that. So, I opened up the door and had one foot out, and we get a call for an automatic alarm on 19 Soundview Lane in Sands Point. Looks at me and says, "You want to go?" I said, "Yeah, let's go. We'll just go for the heck of it," and ninety-nine times out of a hundred, the automatic alarms turn out to be nothing. Food on the stove. A faulty head. Or something along those lines. We get to the firehouse. We're putting on our gear. We're the first ones there, because we were already in the car with the car running. We get the call, we hear the Chief get on the air. And the dispatcher says to the Chief, he says the homeowner across the street had reported a fire in the house across the street. So the Chief tones out again. And I said, "Did he say something about a fire?" And Jeremy goes, "Yeah, I think he did." Next thing I know, we're on a truck, and the Chief gets on and he says, "Signal ten!" And "Signal ten" is our code for a working house fire. We get out--so we start going to the call, well, we're putting on our Packs and everything like that. And, unfortunately, a week before, I had injured my knee playing baseball, so I was a little banged up. And we started divvying up the positions. And they pointed to me and said, "You got the--you got the knob. You have the hose." And I was sitting there. I was like, "Well, my knee's a little banged up. Maybe this isn't the best of ideas." So I gave it to my buddy Scott. And we get there, and there are flames shooting about thirty feet out of the roof. So I went, "Oh, my God!" Unfortunately, the way the trucks were

parked, they blocked our ac--one of the other trucks blocked our access to the hydrant.

So I said, "I'm going to help these guys get out. I'm going to help them stretch the hydrant." I helped them get there and--and ... [SIRENS] ... So I said, "I'm going to help these guys stretch the hydrant. And I was supposed to be the third man ...

Q: What do you mean by "stretch the hydrant"?

DRB: You have to stretch the hose off the back of the rig to the hydrant. That's called a stretch.

So, I'm helping them bring the hose to the hydrant. And, I was supposed to be the third man on the line, but I know we needed to stretch four hundred feet of hose of this thick rubber hose--it's really heavy--uphill the wrong way. I'm just sitting there like oh, my God! This is terrible. So, I was like, "But we need to get water." Otherwise, you know, you have a problem if you don't have water, obviously. So, we get to the--we stretch the hydrant. I get back to the rig and look out, and they had already taken the first line from the back of the truck to the front of the house. So, I run to the front of the house, and now my best friend Scott's already ahead of me. And he's got the hose with another one of the guys. So, I run in the house. I look in, and I'm following the hose towards the fire.

I look in, and all I see is orange over to my left. And then, I said, that's got to be the dining room. The only way you could tell is the whole back wall was orange, and you could see the outline of the dining room furniture from the flame. So, I keep following the hose around, and we go into the kitchen. And when I say everything on the kitchen was on fire, I mean, everything was on fire. Right before I'd gone in, there was the Second Assistant Chief, John Walters, John's sitting on the front of the steps. He says,

"We got--you've got five minutes! Get in and get out! Five minutes! Get in and get out!" I'm like, "Okay, okay." We're just going to try to knock the fire down a little bit, and this thing was just out of control. So, I'm the third man, and I just get inside, and the guy who's got the knob--my best friend Scott is backing him up--the guy who has the nozzle opens up and got hurt. So he shut it down and he leaves. And the Chief is sitting there going, "Come on! Come on!" So ...

Q: How did he get hurt?

DRB: He wound up opening--there was too much back pressure on the hose. So, when he opened up, he hit the wall and hurt his arm. So he had to leave. So, my buddy Scott goes up front, and I'm backing up Scott. So it's me, my buddy--my best friend Scott. We're both on the line in the biggest fire I've ever seen. Everything's on fire. The Chief is standing next to us pulling the ceiling. And the reason you pull the ceiling is to check where the fire is. To see how far it's spread. And the more and more ceiling you pull, the more and more fire there was. Which means it was spreading through the wall--through the ceiling and the walls. And we're like--we're sitting there going, "This is not good." Next thing we know, we look up, and there's fire just rolling across the top of our heads. And rolling fire is not a good sign. So, the next thing I know, Scott runs out of air. So, I'm sitting there, like, "Oh, no!" Like I'm all by myself. So, another guy comes up to me, and I'm on the line. And so I'm trying to put this fire out, and I was thinking back to my training--next thing I hear, I hear over the radio: "Everybody get out of the building!"

I'm just standing there, I'm like, "Oh, my God!" Some--I was like--like this--I was like, "This could be it."

Q: So, did your knees work?

DRB: Yeah, my--the adrenalin was pumping so hard that I didn't feel a thing. But I--so I was in the fire, and I hear, "Everybody get out of the house!" I was like, "Oh, man, this could be it. This could be the end." So, you don't think about it at the time. You're just thinking you've just got to get out and you just get out. And I heard the horns on the truck start blaring. And I remember thinking back to my training where they said, if you ever hear the horns on the truck, it's--that's the universal sign for "Get out. Something is wrong. Get out now!" I think I remember just sitting there in the classroom, I remember the whole thing, just sitting there like "This is never, ever, ever going to happen to me," and I was standing there, I was thinking, like, "Wow! This is actually happening. I need to get out of here." We made it out, and it was--it was pretty intense. The fire was just--the fire just consumed the house. It was out of control.

Q: So, was this your first real big fire?

DRB: This was the biggest fire I'd ever been to. This was not the first fire I was ever at. My first fire was, I had three months in the company. This was--actually, that fire was the first fire I had ever gone to where I was able to wear an Air Pack. I had been fully

qualified as an interior firefighter. So that was a first, in that regard. My first fire I was ever at was on--I'm trying to remember now--Inwood. Inwood Road in Manhorhaven.

Q: So, was anyone hurt at this fire at Soundview?

DRB: Actually, there were a couple of people that were taken to the hospital. I believe there were three of them. There was ...

Q: But you got out all right.

DRB: I got out all right. There was Thomas Cycin, the Captain of Flower Hill, was--he had, I think, back--he had a couple of back problems. Or he had chest problems or respiratory problems. Firefighter Mike Tedeschi got a little bit of glass in his eye. He was taken to the hospital. But no real serious injuries, thank the Lord. So, it was--we wound up pulling out--it wound up forming an exterior attack with the ladders over the building just shooting water down there. And we had to give up part of the house, unfortunately. But the fire was just so far gone by the time we had gotten there, it was ...

Q: Do you ever think about the fear factor when you're going into a fire like that?

DRB: I used to not. I just said--I'd think about this is--it's a rush. I mean, you just look at it and you're going--you look at it--you have to think about it. You're sitting there, looking at a

building that's on fire, and you're going--and you're saying to yourself, "I'm going in here.

This is insane. What am I doing?" But, at the same time, it's so much fun, because you know you've been trained. It's sort of like machine programming.

Q: So what happens inside of you? What is it that makes you go into a burning building? Do you know?

DRB: Sense of duty. Sense of pride. Sense of excitement. It's the most unbelievable thing. You think about it. You're running into a burning building, but you're doing it for a purpose. It's not something stupid that you're doing for, you know, for whatever. You're going in to save a life, to save someone's livelihood, the house, their property, their possessions. I mean, this is something that's truly noble. And you think about it, but at the same time, it's just--on the other hand, it's just so much fun (laughs). So, I mean, you think about it, like it's the danger aspect. But, at the same time, you know that you have been trained so much that you know you're going to be able to handle whatever they fire at you. And I always think that I'm going to be safe until--like, until I come home. My mother goes, "What did you do? What are you doing?" She ...

Q: I was going to ask you, what does your mother think about all this?

DRB: My mother was extremely afraid for me, at first. Still is. I used to run out in the middle of the night, and the horns would wake her up. And she couldn't get back to sleep till I

was home. She would--she would worry sick. And, so I'd have to tell her what I--I always tell her what I do, what I train on for certain days, to try to make her feel a little bit more comfortable with what I'm doing. I wanted to go into the Army for a while. That was one thing that I really--that I wanted to do. And she was dead set against that. She's--she's a little protective. A little selfish, in some regards, in terms of me. But that's okay. I'm her son. I mean, she can be selfish with that. So ...

Q: Do you ever carry any lucky charms in with you?

DRB: Lucky charms. No. Oh, no, I shouldn't say that. I always carry a lucky charm. I carry the crucifix around my neck. It's right here. And I usually carry another pendant. It's a Maltese cross with St. Florian on it. It says, "Protect us, St. Florian." And St. Florian was the patron saint of firefighting. So, we look to him to protect us. So ...

Q: Do the older firefighters give you advice in any way?

DRB: Yes. One of the things that I always liked doing was going to the Department Operations, where we go out to Bethpage where they have the Nassau County Fire Service Academy. And we always go out there, and I--I like fighting--they light fires within buildings that are designed to be burned. And I like going out there with my personal officers who know me on a personal level, but also know me as a firefighter. And they can give you the most candid advice. I think it's great. Where they can just

say, "Well, you did this wrong, you did that wrong." We can actually discuss it and talk about it. But, also, on regular calls. Every day we have stuff where people's alarms in their houses go off, where you have to learn how to reset those alarms. Certain techniques, when you're--like auto accidents. Cleaning up toxic spills--not toxic spills, but oil spills, gasoline spills. Just certain little things, where they come up to you and say, "Oh, you know, you should do it this way, or that way. It's this much--it's that much easier." And it's nice if you have that open relationship where you say, "Okay," well, you don't take it as offense and say, "Well, you know, what are you talking to me for?" Where they can come up to you and they can actually say, "Oh, this is the way you do this, or that or this." It's kind of interesting to get ideas from other guys. And they're usually pretty good about offering advice without being too pushy, saying, "This is the way you do it. This is the only way you can do it." So it's ...

Q: Was there ever a critique after that big fire that you were in, as to what was done right or wrong?

DRB: There was no official critique that I was aware of. I would certainly hope that the officers and the Chiefs would get together and critique their own performance. They might have even done it there, but I'm not exactly sure. That's something that's supposed to be done. But, as one of the junior members of the Fire Department, I'm not really too included--I'm not included too much on such matters. However, informal critiques happen all the time. Even--even today, I talk about that fire. In the past couple of weeks,

I'm sure I've talked about it two or three times with a couple of my buddies. We always talk about certain things that we did and that we saw. And you want to paint a picture--or at least I do--I want to be painting a picture in my own head of what everybody else was doing. So, and it kind of--with that experience and being able to talk about where you went and what you did, you know, and what you saw, you're able to see what everybody else's perspective on things were. And you know how the operation went. So, while I certainly hope and do believe that the officers did their formal critiques, I mean, I even went back that day when we cleaned up after the fire. You sit there and you talk about it, as you're cleaning up. You say, "Oh, we did this and that and this and that." So, or, you know, "We could have done this better or that better," and that sort of stuff always happens. Always goes on. You always talk about jobs that you've been to, or calls that--certain calls that you've been to, things that you did. So, in that regard, yeah, we do--we critique each other all--we critique our fire stuff all the time, without even thinking about it.

Q: What do you think you've learned the most from your elders? Is there any one particular thing that you feel has been of importance?

DRB: I don't think there's any one--any one significant thing that--one significant suggestion or--I think it's overall just how to--no, I think there the best answer's no. I really don't think there's one specific thing that they've said to me, one above the other.

Q: Do you value the book learning more or the practical learning.

DRB: Okay. That's an easy question. I am a hands-on person. I learn through doing. I always have. Even in my studies, for school, I always have--I have to do things. I can't read them. And I personally think that's the best way to learn, because if you watch somebody do it, you can see how they did it and say, okay, as opposed to putting an application in your head together and say, "Oh, this is the way you should do it," but then there's always certain questions. If you watch someone do it, and you do it yourself, you know how to do it. If you've done it yourself once, if you've seen someone do it and then you do it yourself once, you know how to do it.

Q: Tell me about your student life at Boston College.

DRB: Boston University.

Q: Is it Boston University? Sorry.

DRB: That's okay.

Q: Do any of your fellow mates at Boston University know that you do firefighting?

DRB: Yep. They ...

Q: What do they think about it?

DRB: Let's see. My best--one of my best friends at school--his name is Josh Anderson--Josh, well, I talk to Josh about it a lot. And he thinks it's pretty cool. And, I don't know, I'm very proud of what I do. I have a bunch of shirts. I have paraphernalia in my dorm room. I don't think they actually--I think they think about it, but they don't really know what I do. I mean, they say, "Oh, he's a fireman at home," but, you know, I think in the back of their mind, they go, "Oh, how much of a fireman could he be?" Or, well, you know, "What does he do? He's at school all the time. He's also a young kid." I remember, because I play for the Boston University roller hockey team. So, and I was talking to one of the guys up there. And he--we were driving down to Jersey a couple of weeks ago for a tournament, and he--and we were talking about it. And I said, oh, you know, I had missed a house fire here a couple of nights before, saying, "Oh, unfortunately, I missed it," you know, I was--and, like I said, at the same time, it's unfortunate that somebody's house burned down, but I would have liked to have been there to help put it out. And, like I said, it's the adrenalin and the excitement that, you know, like I said, I would have liked to have been there. And he said, "Well, you know," he was kind of skeptical about, you know, putting out the fire and stuff like that. And he goes, "You do this?" I said, "Yeah, that's what firemen do." He goes, "Well, I wasn't aware that you actually went into the building. Do you actually go in the buildings?" I

said, "Sure I do. That's what firemen do." And he goes, "Oh." And I think that's the general perception of most people that I meet. There are a lot--there are some people who are, they're just--when you tell them, at first, their jaws drop, they're like, "You're a fireman? You're nineteen years old. You go to school." And then they say, "You're nineteen years old," I say, "I've been a fireman for two and a half years now." They're like, "No way!" It's pretty cool. I like the reaction that I get from a lot of people. I think that's pretty neat.

Q: Are your professors as incredulous (laughs) as the students? What do they think? What do your ...

DRB: Most of them don't know. I think there was only one professor that knew, and he actually thought it was pretty neat. But, I think it was--with some of the kids that I've met at Boston University, they just do so many different things, where I met a kid who raced formula one Indie cars. Other kids who para-jump. Other kids who hunt and shoot. It's all these kids that have these extreme backgrounds coming together. So, I think it's kind of--you become numb to it after a while. It's like these kids do these amazing things, and they all come to one institution to learn. So, like I said, I think they become pretty numb to it after a while. It's old hat.

Q: Have you ever incorporated your experiences into your essays that you write in college?

DRB: Two weeks ago, I--it wasn't an essay. I took a computer science class. I had to build a website. And you could build a website on anything you wanted to build--anything you wanted to say or express. And I said, well, what do I know the best now? What do I know the most about? I decided the Port Washington Fire Department. So, I wound up writing an entire website about the Port Washington Fire Department, which was kind of neat. I did it in about two days. So, it was pretty--and it took no thought at all, because it's what I do. It's just--it's second nature. It's, oh, I'll talk about this. I'll talk about that. And I had a bunch of pictures that my friend Jeremy and I had taken, and I incorporated those. It was--it really was pretty neat. It was a lot of fun. So, in terms of that, yes I have. Also--oh, and another thing. I also wrote my college essay on being a fireman. So, and that's, I think, part of the reason that I got in because of the leadership experiences and leadership opportunities that I was afforded by becoming a fireman. I think that was--that was another thing that was--that was the only other time that, I believe, I've incorporated that into my studies or my academics.

Q: Now, you've just finished your finals. How does that feel for you (laughs)?

DRB: I can't tell you how happy I am to be home. I have never been happier to be in Port Washington. I'll tell you that much. Yeah, I locked myself in my room for about three days. No, more than that. It was about five or six days. And I went up to get food, go to a test, or to change study locations. Those were the only times I left. And I was up for sixteen or seventeen hours a day. It really is quite exhausting. It's--but, to come home

and see family and be home for Christmas and see all my friends and go on--you get to ride on fire trucks. I mean, what could be better than that? So, yeah, it's great to be home.

Q: You have a very high rate of answering fire calls. Tell me why you feel that you have to answer every single fire call at your young age?

DRB: I answer as many as I possibly can. I think it's because, well, first of all, I'm young. I don't have as many responsibilities as a person with a full-time job, a family. Also, and I like--and there's also a sense of duty to the community. I feel that every time we're called, someone's asking for help. Or they don't know what's going on; they need someone to investigate. And we have a certain level of expertise, where we can say, "Oh, this is what the problem is," or "This is what you need to do," or "We can help you out in this way," or "bring you to the hospital." Whatever it may be. Even if it's not a real fire. If there's--if their alarm is going off, they don't know what's going on, they smell smoke, they want something checked out, that's our job. That's what I signed up for. So, if they call the Fire Department, someone's got to be there. And if someone is out there--and that's what I signed up for. I--they--when they need--when they call for help, I'm going to show up. That's what they need. Also, at the same time, riding on fire trucks, for me, never gets old. It is--it is so much fun. But, at the same time, I think the more important aspect of it is that when I don't want to go, four o'clock in the morning, riding on a fire truck at four o'clock in the morning when I want to be sleeping, it's not the foremost thing

on my mind. It's that someone has called us. We have an obligation to go. We can't say, "No, we're going to forget this one. We're going to press the button and not go." You can't do that. And that's why I go. That's why I go to all those calls. So ...

Q: Have you had a large number since you've been home?

DRB: Since finals? I've been home for eight days. I think I've made at least twenty to thirty calls (laughs). So ...

Q: And how does your mom feel about this (laughs)?

DRB: She doesn't really--she doesn't really mind too much anymore. The only one I think she was really upset about was the one at ten o'clock on Christmas morning when the rest of the family was awake and I was still asleep. I wound up running down the stairs for a fire ... [END OF SIDE A; BEGIN SIDE B] ...

Q: And to continue, you were saying it was Christmas morning, and you were running down the stairs.

DRB: Christmas morning. I believe my sister and I were still asleep. The rest of the family was just getting up to cook breakfast. And I wound up running down the stairs, and Dad goes, "Where are you going?" I said, "They've got a house fire. I've got to go." And the

only impression that he must have had was either, A, well, if this is a real fire, two things are going to happen. One, we're not going to see our son for a while and our Christmas is ruined, and, B, the poor family whose house it is that is on fire, I mean, just imagine, on Christmas morning and you have a house fire. So, and that was the thing that was more on my mind. Because when we came back, my mother was like, "Oh, I feel so sorry for, you know, if there was a real fire, all the young--all these firemen are young guys. You know, they have families," or something like that. I said, "Well, that's not the point. The point is someone's house could have been on fire. Their house, you know, on Christmas morning. And this is--that is the tragedy of all tragedies.

Q: And what happened?

DRB: It turned out to be nothing, thank goodness. It was an oil burner problem, and we wound up getting turned around right away, and I came home. I was home within twenty minutes. So, which was nice. So I was able to go home and celebrate Christmas with the family. ... [INTERRUPTION] ...

Q: Were there any major programs that you have been involved in?

DRB: With the Fire Department, I was a member of the Road Runners racing team for a year. It really wasn't my speed. It was one of the things that ...

Q: And why was that?

DRB: Oh, I didn't get along with some of the guys too well. I didn't--I didn't think the competition was as good as it could have been. I gave up playing hockey over the summer to join the Road Runners. I thought it might be fun. And, personally, hockey, in my mind hockey is far better than the Road Runners racing team. But that, like I said, that's one man's opinion.

Q: And you play at college, right?

DRB: Well, I play hockey at college, as well. So, I was also on the recruitment committee and the grave committee for my company, as well. So, the grave committee is actually kind of neat. We get to go down to the graves at Nassau Knowles once or twice a year. And next to the graves of the firemen in the company is a brass logo, and we repaint them and we put some flowers next to the graves, which is actually--which is really nice. So ...

Q: Did you ever work while you were at school at the Boston Fire Department?

DRB: I had--I wanted to look--I had looked into it. And I--it was something that interested me. But, at the same time, it's very much like the FDNY in the fact that they're both paid departments and they have long waiting lists. So, it's not--it really wasn't an option for

me. And it was--it's a full-time job, with shifts. Forty-plus hours a week. And that's something that I just wouldn't be able to do.

Q: Now, you're going to college. Do you look forward to becoming, sometime, a full-time, perhaps paid, fireman?

DRB: That's something that's always been on my mind. I don't know if it's quite feasible. I enjoy living in Port Washington. I enjoy having some extra spending money. You'll never be rich by being a professional fireman. That's what I've always been told. It's a decision I'm going to have to make sometime in the future, whether I want to--because there's no job like being a professional fireman. It's the best job in the world, hands-down. But, at the same time, you have to make a sacrifice whether that's what you want to do or if you want to make more money, you have to go into a different field. And that's the decision I'm going to have to make sometime in the future.

Q: And what are you majoring in now in college?

DRB: I'm going to--I am on pace to graduate with a bachelor of science in business administration with a concentration in business law, and hopefully a minor in political science.

Q: And what do you intend to do with that, do you think?

DRB: I have no idea (laughs). There's always the possibility I could go work for my father.

But I really don't know if I want to do that. I don't even know if he--and that's a decision that he'd have to make as an employer. So, like I said, I really have no idea what I would do with that yet.

Q: When you tell your male friends that you're a firefighter, they're incredulous. What happens when you tell the female friends (laughs) that you're a firefighter?

DRB: The ladies like--how do I say this--the ladies are impressed. Many of the ladies are very impressed, which comes in handy from time to time. So it's nice. It's a good way to--it's kind of neat to meet ladies, introduce yourself, you talk to them for a little while, and then say, "Oh, yeah, I'm a fireman, too." "Oh, that's so great! You risk your life!" It's pretty neat. So ...

Q: Have your expectations been met when you--you know, since you've joined the Fire Department?

DRB: My expectations.

Q: One of the older firefighters asked me to ask the youth if their expectations were met when they joined the Fire Department. They're curious.

DRB: My expectations.

Q: Perhaps what you expected and what you got might be two different things.

DRB: The firehouse is more political than I thought it was going to be.

Q: In what way?

DRB: In terms of running for offices. Officers and positions. The Chief is a very political position, but he's also--he's a figurehead that has to interact with the community. Also, on the external level, as well as an internal level. And also with certain members within the companies who are running for positions. It can be a little bit of a--how do I say?

Q: Take your time.

DRB: Yeah. Yeah, I don't know.

Q: All right. I think you're having a little difficulty with this. What ...

DRB: Yeah, it's a bit of a shaky subject. So ...

Q: You don't want to go on record (laughs) ...

DRB: Yeah, I don't want to go on record; I don't want to offend anyone. So, I'll leave it at that.
It's a shaky subject.

Q: (Laughs) Okay.

DRB: I think really that's where the question for one of the elder members was trying to hit that.

Q: Is there anything as a newcomer that really frustrates you about the Fire Department?

DRB: What doesn't frustrate me (laughs). No. I think being heard.

Q: Hurt in what way? Physically, you mean?

DRB: No, heard. Not "hurt."

Q: Oh, heard.

DRB: Yeah, heard. I think, coming into the Department, I would consider myself a pretty smart kid. Like I said, I graduated high school with a 3.9 GPA. I go to a pretty good--pretty good academic institution. I have ideas. There are certain things that I think could change. Certain--just want to--I'd like to talk to people. But you can't talk to people

sometimes, because you're the kid. What do you know? You haven't been around long enough. You don't know anything. You say, "Wait, just listen to me." I think that's one of the bigger things. So, it's being heard by the people in charge--by the powers that be.

Q: Do they ever have any meetings, such as committee meetings and say, you know, let's have a brainstorming, or anything of that nature?

DRB: They do have committees, and it's the same people over and over again (laughs), so, and that's precisely the problem.

Q: And how do you observe the relationships within the firehouse, as a young person?

DRB: There are a lot of cliques within the firehouse. Certain friends. I think that's part of the reason why it's a little bit more difficult for a member to join in his late twenties and early thirties, is because he has to meet people. But there's already--he has to meet more people; he has to become friends with other people. And it becomes difficult when these other guys have been in the Department for ten, fifteen years already, and you're the same age, but you don't--you're not on the same level. It's a different playing field. Whereas I, when I joined, I had a bunch of guys my age who I was friends with--we all joined together all around the same time. And we were able to--we all stood together, and that's my close group of friends. I've met other people, am friendly with other people, but I think the Fire Department can be very cliquish at times. So, as far as the

interrelationships go, the only time that those really change is when you have officers or meetings and stuff like that. That's when people start to, I guess, those cliques, I guess, wash away and the boundaries kind of fade a little bit.

Q: Well, a lot of firefighters talk about the brotherhood. What does that mean to you, as a young person?

DRB: The brotherhood, I think, is--it's a very strong term, in my personal opinion, because a fireman anywhere is a brother of another fireman anywhere. You're a brother. It's--you're one of us. You know what it's about. You know, at least, the firehouse here is the same as the firehouse in Wisconsin. It's the fire--same as the firehouse in Texas. We all have a very similar mindset. I think we all come from the same breed, the same mold. So, I think it's--that's what the brotherhood is. The brotherhood also extends, although off-duty, I might hang out with different groups, but when we're at the scene, we're all brothers. We're all doing the same thing to fight--hey, we're fighting for the same cause, the same goal. We want to put this fire out; we're going to save lives. That's what the brotherhood's about.

Q: Do you find that most of your social life is with the firefighters, or do you have another social life?

DRB: No. In high school, I wound up hanging out with, I'd say seven or eight completely different groups, and one of them happened to be the firehouse. Now, when I'm home, a lot of my friends are also firemen, but we have a group of--the girls that are friends, most of them are not firemen. Actually, none of them are firemen or EMS personnel. So, although some of my friends--a lot of my friends are firemen, it's not--that's not the group, I think, per se. Also, since I go to college, I have a whole different life there. I live two lives, as I like to say. I have my life here in Port Washington; I have my life in Boston. And so, me personally, I--my horizons are expanded beyond the firehouse, so I do have social life outside the firehouse.

Q: What do you think, in your opinion, makes a good firefighter?

DRB: My opinion makes a good firefighter? Dedication. Knowledge. The willingness to do what you have to do. I know that's all generic. But, to be a good fireman, you have to know what you're doing. You have to be trained. You have to be knowledgeable. I think you also have to have communication skills. That's one of the incredibly important things that I think is often overlooked. Anybody can put the gear on and ride on a truck and say, you know, you're a fireman. To actually run into the--to run into a burning building and save somebody takes a little more, extra moxie.

Q: Do you feel that the less educated, in terms of book knowledge, can communicate as well?

DRB: There's--I don't think that really would--have as much of an effect. Sometimes they can communicate better. You have to express ideas. And expressing ideas doesn't necessarily come across with words. It can come across in gestures and other such things. And I don't necessarily think that the--to be educated in terms of book smart that you can be a better communicator. For one example, one of my buddies Jeremy--Jeremy wound up, during training one time, he said, "I'm ascending the staircase." So, I said, "Ascending the staircase? Is that up or down? I don't remember?" (laughs). And it was kind of funny. Where he said that word, it's just all you have to say is "up" or "down." Just get the idea across, just get it out. My buddy Jeremy--Jeremy's a very, very smart kid. But, it was just--you have to express the ideas, and I think he was trying to be a little bit too formal. All you have to do is just get it across. You have to communicate, and that's the name of the game.

Q: Do you have a five-year plan ahead for your life, in any way?

DRB: Do I have a five-year plan? I have two five-year plans, actually (laughs). That goes back to the question that you said before, whether I want to become a professional fireman, or not. The next written test for the FDNY is in 2006--I believe in the fall of 2006. I'm going to take the test. It would be at least three or four years from that point in my life, whether I'd be taking the job or not. It's a long process.

Q: This is the Fire Department in New York?

DRB: Yes. That's something I really want to do, but, at the same time, I'm not sure if I'm going to be able to do that. So, the other five-year plan is also to graduate college and join the work force. Graduating with a business degree and a concentration in law and minor in political science, it can open up a lot of doors. I'm going to be interning in the summer for Klingman and Associates which is a financial planning firm, which is the stepping stone for what I'm probably going to wind up doing in my life, I mean, working in the business field. But, at the same time, I'm always keeping that door open. And it also depends if--I mean, I'm nineteen years old, and five years from now I'm going to be twenty-four. And twenty-four is time when, you know, you can be working. I might finally find a girl that's--it really depends. It really is all up in the air.

Q: How does your dad feel about all this?

DRB: About all of what?

Q: Whether you're going to become a firefighter or whether you're going to go into the business world?

DRB: ... [WHISTLES] ... You know, it's one of those unspoken things. He always tells me, "Do what you want to do." And he knows I want to become a professional fireman. I

know it. But, at the same time, I think it's more of my mother, because I--you know, I kind of express the idea. Hence, I never really want to discuss it too much, because I don't know--I don't want to know what she wants--what she's going to say. So, she--I said, well, you know, being a professional fireman, I would enjoy--I think I would enjoy life a lot more. But, at the same, it'd be more difficult to provide for a family. Then, she brought it in; she says, "You know, there's a lot--a lot of happiness and joy in providing--being able to provide for a family," and I was like, "Okay." So, I think there's--I mean, there's some pressure there, but either way, they'll support me, or I know they--I know they will. And being a professional fireman is a very noble profession, so, and it's something that I know I can do. It's something I know I could handle. It's just, I have to make sure that everything works out. So, in terms of finances, family, and all that other stuff.

Q: How do you control your emotions when you're at a fire, as a young man?

DRB: I used to have a tough time. When I first joined, the pager would go off, and I'd race to the firehouse. Not think--no thinking. No thinking. And that really hurt me. I didn't--I never prepared correct--I don't think I prepared correctly when I first started, because I was just so excited. I was just, "Oh, let's go. Let's go, let's go, let's go!" I think going to--when I went to school, I got calls from my friends saying, "Oh, you know, we had a working house fire today." I would get so aggravated, like, "Oh, I can't believe I missed another one." And, after a while, it kind of--I was able to suppress the anger, and I was

able to say, "All right. Well, you know, you missed it. No big deal." So, when I came back, it's like I was able--I was a lot--I think I was a lot calmer and able to handle myself better. I was able to think more. At least the fire that I was telling about before up in Sands Point on Soundview Lane, I was able to sit there, I was thinking. I was like, okay, this is what we're going to do. This is what we're going to be doing. This is what I'm going to need to do. Versus, okay, let's go, let's go, let's go, let's go. Let's get there. Let's do something. I'll figure out what I'm going to do when I get there. I think just experience, just being experienced, being properly trained. My couple of years--my first year and a half or so--I wasn't fully trained yet. I didn't know what I was doing. That's why you're a probationary member. It says--the big sticker on your helmet says "I don't know anything." So, I think over those two years, I was able to basically harness my firefighting skills, become a better fireman, and just be able to sit down and--because you have to think. I mean, it's--it's a lot of adrenalin. It's a lot of emotions. I mean, you're watching a building burn down you, you know, you think somebody might be in there; you don't know. There's a lot of things where you just have to--that could be going on. You have to be able to sit there and say, okay, we've got to focus on the job here. And that's something I think I was able to do better over--over time.

Q: I just wanted to ask you, what do you think of the various traditions in the Fire Department? For instance, the initiations, the dinners, the parades, the--when you were initiated into the Department, what was that like for you?

DRB: The initiation really isn't too much of a big deal. They have monthly meetings at the Department, and the month before you join--the month before you're inducted, you're introduced. And you're expected to come around. They say, "These are the guys." You know, they introduce you, they say where you live and everything like that. And then, the next month, they vote you in, and there really isn't too much too it. It's all of a sudden, you're just--you're one of the members, and then you can start going on calls. I think there really isn't too much tradition in that. The annual dinners are ...

Q: What are they like?

DRB: They're more exciting. It's--the members put on their full dress uniforms and awards are given out. And every year, the officers are installed, usually on a two-year basis. So, every other year is usually the big dinner, or something to that effect. My first year, I didn't get any awards, because I had joined only in July. The following year, for the year of 2003, I was--I finished third overall in the company in fire response, and I won the award for my category, which was really neat. I was able to go up there and take pictures with a lot of people, which was a lot of fun.

Q: So, how many points do you have to have to have that?

DRB: For the award?

Q: Yes.

DRB: I finished last year with, I think four hundred and sixty--somewhere around there.

Q: And this was only in the--actually in the summer, because you're not here ...

DRB: Well, I was here for the first four months before I graduated high school. So it was my last four months of high school, then the four months of college, and then I wound up--and then I was gone for the last four months; I still finished third (laughs). So ...

Q: That must have been very rewarding to you.

DRB: It was nice. I was really appreciative of the acknowledgement. I got a plaque with my name on it, saying--congratulating me on what I had done. It was the first time that I had been officially recognized for my dedication and my service to the community. And I thought that was--that was really something special to me.

Q: Have you participated in any of the parades?

DRB: Yes. My first two or three parades were through the Explorers and the Fire Department. I did not march with them, because I was a member of the high school marching band. And that was part of your academic grade. So, the firehouse decided academics come first. You have to make sure you take care of your grades. It's a volunteer fire service.

We're not going to--you know, you have to do that. So, okay. So, I marched with the marching band, and then I was able to, as soon as I graduated high school, I wound up joining--marching in the parades here in Port Washington, which I like. It was Memorial Day this year, I was in the color guard, and I was an axe-bearer, which was really neat. Another funny story. There was--we--my family--my grandfather, before he passed, purchased a 1944, World War II Jeep. And we--my father drives it in the parade every year. It just so happened that he was right in front of the Fire Department last year. Or, sorry--pardon, this past Memorial Day. So, he was in front of me, and I was in the color guard, and he was saying how neat it was driving the '44 truck, and every time he looked in the mirror and I was on the same side--see, I was on the left side. Every time he looked in the mirror, he saw me in my full dress uniform with the axe in my hand, and he said that was so neat. I thought that was really cool, too. I was hoping--I was hoping he was going to notice, and he said that was one of the neat--the coolest things.

Q: Now, why were you holding the axe?

DRB: I volunteered. It was something I wanted to do. There's a lot of honor in holding--in bearing the colors. So--and being in the color guard. I thought it would be something neat to try, and I did it, and it really was quite nice.

Q: Now, what do you think of this oral history project?

DRB: I think this is really neat. My buddy Jeremy and I, who--he and I are very, very dedicated to the Fire Department. He happens to be--he's going to finish first in the company overall this year in points.

Q: Who is this?

DRB: Jeremy Hirschhorn. He's going to finish first overall in the company. And he's been going to school for four years--or for four months. This is his first year. But, actually, he was very jealous when I told him I was coming down here.

Q: He wanted to be interviewed as well?

DRB: Yeah, he wanted to be interviewed, as well. But, he and I both are very--very interested in the history of our town, in the history of Port Washington. And, he and I--well, one of the things that we've always been discussing is that we want to take more pictures. And we're very upset that more pictures of our Fire Department don't exist, or so we have a photographic history. So, what he and I have done is we've gone around to all the facilities, the trucks--everything like that. We have our own pictures. We're forming our own collection that nobody knows about yet. But, thirty, forty, fifty years down the road when we have these pictures nobody else does, we'll say, "Ha! Look what we've got." And we can put them up on the walls. I mean, it'll be really neat. Hopefully, we can do something like that.

Q: Isn't Frank Pavlak the historian? Do you feel that perhaps he's not taking enough pictures (laughs)?

DRB: Oh, no, no, no, no, no. Frank does a fantastic job. Frank is one of the more dedicated administrators of the Fire Department. Actually, it's funny. Frank is also--Frank also just joined the Cow Neck Historical Society. It's funny. My father is also a trustee on that.

Q: On which?

DRB: On the Cow Neck Historical Society. But, no, Frank does a very, very good job. It's just unfortunate that the stuff prior to now didn't exist before. I mean, you have--obviously, you have some pictures. You have formal pictures of the trucks, of the company, of the ranks. But, there's really not many of them. There's also with--in terms of the jobs that we go to now, we have--if we have a working fire, or a really bad auto accident where we need to use tools to extricate the person, nobody's taking pictures until--I actually just heard a rumor that the Chiefs office just purchased three digital cameras for the back of the Chiefs' trucks. So, hopefully, that'll change sometime soon. But, no, I just--I think this is great that we're actually doing history. And maybe there's a lot of stuff out there that I don't know about, and I really think it's great that we're going to be able to have a recorded history of the hundred years of our Fire Department being around. So, I really think this is great.

Q: You mentioned extractions ...

DRB: Extrications.

Q: Extrication from the autos. Have you worked on that?

DRB: That is the job of the Company 1. It's the Atlantic Hook and Ladder Company. They're the ones with the "Jaws of Life," and the Hurst tool. Those are the tools that are used to cut people out. I want to be trained on those, but I'd have to be home more, and also it's company cross-training. It's a little bit more difficult to get trained that way.

Q: Do you ever think that you will ever want to be Chief of the Fire Department?

DRB: Yes. That's something that I've always thought I could do. I've been a leader of everything--every organization that I've ever been a part of in my entire life. I've always been the leader of it even going back to a number of different clubs in high school. I always wanted to become the president or the director. If I wound up living in Port Washington, which I have no idea if that's--whether that's going to happen or not. But if that does happen, I think there might be some day down the road that I might become a Chief. Yes.

Q: I wanted to ask you about some of your other hobbies, aside from hockey and the Fire Department, obviously. Do you have other interests?

DRB: I was--in freshman year, I joined--my sister was a--my sister's two years older than I am. She was a member of the drama club in high school, and she always wanted me to join. I said, "No, there is no way I'm ever doing this," because I don't act. It's something that I don't do. However, there was the technical crew. And toys and gadgets and tools--that's always been my field of expertise and that's one of the reasons I joined the Fire Department. So, she said, "Join the technical crew." I said, okay. So, I wound up joining. There were only four of us that year, and they all graduated--and the three elder kids graduated that year. So, when I came back, I was the director, kind of by default. And I wound up teaching myself a lot of different things, and I stuck with it. And I wound up perform--I was the director of the crew for over fifty performances--sorry, over fifty productions and somewhere around a hundred, hundred and fifty performances at the high school.

Q: And you directed the ...

DRB: Yeah, I was the ...

DRB: ... technical ...

DRB: ... director--yeah, I was the technical director of the crew. I also did the lighting for-- those were all--all of the shows for the high school, such as the drama club productions,

the theatrical productions. Those were for free. When outside organizations came in, such as the Red Stocking Review or the Summer Show, I was able to get a little bit of extra cash, and that's something that I still do with the dance recitals that come into town. I've formed a very good relationship with the organizers of those shows, so they call me back every year. That's something that I still do, and it's kind of fun. It's--I keep in touch with the stage, the theater. It's nice.

Q: Of course, we're talking about Schreiber High School.

DRB: Right. Schreiber High School. Correct.

Q: Do you happen to know Penny Payne [Olson]?

DRB: No.

Q: She's in the Red Stocking Review and has been for some years.

DRB: Okay.

Q: What do you foresee as the future of the Fire Department in this town? Do you think it will remain a volunteer fire department?

DRB: That's a very, very touchy subject. There's a lot of heated debate going on in regards of what the future of the Department will be. There's a lot of people with a lot of conflicting ideas. It really is too soon to tell. I certainly hope it remains a volunteer organization. However, if our fire response lags, if we're not getting enough members, if we're not making it to calls, if we're not doing our job correctly, then someday, yeah, I think that it may turn into a paid department and a need for professionals. However, I think we're very professional volunteers. I think we do our job very well. We don't miss calls. We get out. We have enough members. And there's a very strong tradition there. And I'd hate to see that laid to waste. Therefore, I certain--that's where my preference lies. I really hope it stays a volunteer organization.

Q: Is there anything you would like to talk about that we haven't really discussed, that's really close to your heart or that you can think about?

DRB: We've touched on most everything, I think. I really don't think there's one specific thing that I, off the top of my head, that I--I think we--that I don't think we touched on.

Q: Have you yourself ever been instrumental in getting new recruits in? Do you--have you found anyone that's as enthusiastic as you are?

DRB: My buddy Jeremy. Jeremy was going to join, to begin with. He was a member of the-- he's a year and a half younger than I am. And he was a member of the Explorers about a year before I was.

Q: This is Jeremy Hirschhorn.

DRB: Jeremy Hirschhorn, yes. So, he was in the Explorer Program for about two and a half years more than I was. And he was always itching to go. And I always tease him about it, but I made sure that he joined Protection. I think he was leaning in that direction anyway. But, he came to Protection, now, he and I are going to be in a heated battle for the next couple of years, to see who finishes first in points. So, he and I are the most dedicated young guys that I know of. So ...

Q: Is there anyone younger than the two of you?

DRB: In the Department?

Q: Yeah.

DRB: Yeah, actually. There are two people in my company that are still in high school. Bennet Klion and Josh Krebs. They both just joined. So, they've been in for a couple of months already. And--but, like I said, they're still in high school. We always--we get a lot of

new members that join out of high school. Some stay; some don't. But there's always going to be someone younger than me now. So ...

Q: Has any advice stuck with you that came from an elder over these past two years?

DRB: Advice.

Q: Or perhaps they don't advise younger people (laughs) ...

DRB: I'm sure, there's got to be something. There's nothing that's coming to me off the top of my head.

Q: Well, it's just been a delight talking with you.

DRB: Thank you.

Q: And I wish you all the luck.

DRB: Thank you very much. I do appreciate that.

Q: Thank you for coming.

DRB: No problem.