

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

Transcript Of Oral History Interview With

Laurence Hatton
Flower Hill Hose Company No. 1

conducted in association with the
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pertaining to the subject being discussed

Interview with Laurence Hatton
pk

by Margaret Dildilian
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Q: Today is December the 20th, 2004. This is an interview with Laurence Hatton of the Port Washington Fire Department. My name is Margaret Dildilian. The interview is taking place at the Port Washington Public Library. Could you tell me your full name?

Laurence Hatton: It's Laurence Hatton.

Q: And have you had a nickname in the Fire Department?

LH: Just, well, around here, it's just Larry.

Q: And what is it anywhere else?

LH: Well, Chief (laughs).

Q: We'll cover that in a moment. You were born where?

LH: In Queens.

Q: And what was your--what was life like in Queens growing up? Do you remember?

LH: It was pretty much, I guess, like it would be out here in Port Washington. It was relatively suburban. We lived very close to the Whitestone Bridge, so it was mostly one-family houses. And I remember a little bit about World War II, but ...

Q: What do you remember about it?

LH: Well, I remember the two boys who lived next door went off to--one went into the Army, one went in the Marines, and my Uncle Billy who was my godfather, he died in World War II. He was a pilot of a B-17 that was--they made a movie about it--"Lady Be Good"--and he was the pilot of that plane. They found it sixteen years later in Libya, after the War. It crashed. And they found even the drinking water was still intact, because the desert--dryness of the desert had preserved everything. So ...

Q: What was he doing so far off course?

LH: He'd been caught in a sand storm, and the British had given him a bad bearing on the radio direction finder. They had already overflowed the bearing, and they were actually getting a bearing that was 180 degrees off--they had left Libya to go to bomb Italy. And they had engine trouble because of the sand storm, and they turned around to come back, and the British had the radio direction finder--the RDF station. And they assumed that he--from his flying time--that he was still over the Mediterranean. And, in fact, he had already passed over the station and the signal was behind the tracking station instead of

in front of it. And they gave him a bearing out into the ocean, into the Mediterranean, and he was actually over the desert when they went down. They found when the engines finally quit, they bailed out, and they found that they had kicked out the life raft, expecting to hit water. It was at night. And they crashed in land, and they never found them till an oil exploration team found them in nineteen--I think it was 1960.

Q: What was his name?

LH: William--William Hatton.

Q: How did that affect you? How old were you?

LH: I was only a baby. Well, you know, this was--I was maybe three or four years old. I vaguely remember him just sort of in, you know, in the way far reaches. You know, he was gone by the time I could remember.

Q: Is that what--did that influence you in any way to join the Navy?

LH: Not really, no. I think the main thing was I had a cousin that went in the Navy, and he had gone around the world on the air craft carrier, and that kind of tickled my fancy. So, as it turned out, I ended up on the same ship he was on eight years earlier. By that time,

the ship didn't go anyplace. It just went up and down the Atlantic. We were an anti-submarine warfare patrol in the North Atlantic.

Q: What years were these?

LH: Oh, that was in '57. I went in the Navy in '57; I was discharged in '60.

Q: What was it like for you in the Navy in those years?

LH: Oh, just, you know, normal ...

Q: Was there a draft at that time?

LH: Well, there was a draft, but I vol--I enlisted as soon--I got out of high school in June; I enlisted in July. Because, in those days, if you--if you hang around, they were going to grab you anyway, and you couldn't get a job. Nobody would hire you if you were--if you were subject to the draft, you couldn't get a decent job. So a lot of guys joined to get--go to school. There wasn't a lot of money going around, and, back then, unless you were in the top ten percent of your class, you didn't go to college. And I liked playing basketball more than I did studying, so I wasn't (laughs) in the top ten percent of the class.

Q: Did you--well, I want to go back for a moment to Queens. What was your ethnic background?

LH: Well, predominantly Irish. Mostly Irish, and on my father's side was all Irish; my mother's side was--there was, I guess, about three-quarters Irish and a little bit of German and French, and a little bit of everything.

Q: Were there any firefighters in your early life?

LH: Not--not firefighters so much. I had an unc--well, I never met him, but there was an uncle in my family that was a--he was an honorary chief in the City. But he was a--he was a court recorder--a court stenographer. And, of course, in those days, you didn't have the stenotypes. Everything was done in shorthand. And he was handicapped. And he got to know quite a few politicians, and he was made an honorary, but he's a real fire buff, you know. But ...

Q: Did that affect you in any way?

LH: Not really, no. I saw some old pictures and stuff, but we lived very close to the firehouse in Whitestone, and I used to chase the fire engines on my bicycle a lot.

Q: How old were you?

LH: Oh, I guess seven or eight when I started that and ...

Q: And is that why you joined the Fire Department?

LH: Yeah, I kind of got to like the Fire Department. That's all I ever really wanted to be. So ...

Q: And who influenced you? You've had a dual career, both in the City and here. Who influenced you in the City, then to go into the Fire Department?

LH: Well, it's just something, for some reason, it's just something I always wanted to do. I admired them, and, you know, there was a--liked to, you know, go and watch them work and then that was my--what I wanted to be when I got out of the Navy.

Q: When you were first in the New York City Fire Department, when you heard that--I assume that their horn blows like ours.

LH: No, everything is bells.

Q: Oh, really. Tell me about that.

LH: There was no--you know, everybody's--it's everybody's on duty in the firehouse, so there's no horns blown. The horns out here are to alert people to, you know, to come to the firehouse. But in there, you have an on-duty shift, so, I mean, in those days it was all by bells. It was a telegraph system.

Q: How did that work?

LH: Well ...

Q: I mean, how do the bells work? I don't understand.

LH: On each--about every other corner in the City was a fire alarm box. And each box has a designated number. So, when somebody pulled the alarm box, it went to a central office, and the dispatcher transmitted that box number to local firehouses, and the ones that were assigned to go, responded. And the whole thing--the whole process--took about forty seconds from the time a person pulled the box till the time the alarm was in the firehouse. And each box had its own separate number, and it would--you know, the bell would come in, like four-three-one-five. It'd be four, a space; three, a space; one, and then five. And then the man on watch would look up on the board and check, and if they were assigned to go, it would be on the board, and they'd tell the location of the box. And--very simple system, but it was very effective.

Q: And what years were these?

LH: Well, they--they still have the alarm boxes, but they don't use the bells at a firehouse anymore. They did away with those in the '70s or maybe--oh, maybe in the early '80s.

Q: So, when did you join in New York City?

LH: I started as a civilian dispatcher in December--actually December 13th, 1960.

Q: As a dispatcher, what did you do?

LH: I received the alarms from the alarm box, and sent them to the firehouse.

Q: And how old were you?

LH: And I handled the radio and--I was twenty-one. And we made sure that each alarm was responded to by the proper number of equipment--you know, piece of equipment. And if we got telephone alarms, we took the alarms and transmitted them out to the companies.

Q: Now, did you have to train as a firefighter before you became a dispatcher?

LH: No. I became a--you had to take a Civil Service test for dispatcher. And my Navy experience--I was an electronics technician--so, because of the electronics involved with the telegraph and the radio, you have some kind of background in that. So that was why--one of the reasons I picked the electronics field so I'd have a background for radio.

Q: So you took skills you learned in the Navy ...

LH: Uh huh.

Q: ... into the Fire Department.

LH: Yeah. And then I took the test for firefighter, and I was appointed in June of '62 as a firefighter.

Q: So what station were you assigned to? Right next to your ...

LH: Oh, no, that was when I was a kid. When I was a dispatcher, I was in Manhattan. That's in Central Park. And then when I became a firefighter, after I went through the Fire Academy, that was ten weeks. And after I went through the Fire Academy, I went to Ladder 28 in Harlem. That's on 143rd Street between Seventh and Eighth. I was in a ladder--hook and ladder company there.

Q: And when you went to training for the City Fire Department, where was that training?

LH: Well, at that time, it was held in three different locations. We had two weeks down in Pier A in lower Manhattan, and we had two weeks in 68th Street, the old--old, old Fire Academy. We were the last class to go through that--the Fire Academy on 68th Street. And then, the remainder of it was on--at that time was called Welfare Island. It's Roosevelt Island now. And the Fire Academy since has been consolidated on Randall's Island under the Triborough Bridge. It's all been moved. Because that was over forty years ago.

Q: Have the techniques of your training changed at all?

LH: Oh, fantastic, yeah, sure.

Q: Can you tell us a little about what the differences are ...

LH: Well ...

Q: ... there, and then we'll cover what the differences are in Port.

LH: Yeah. Well, back then, we didn't have any saws--any power saws for opening roofs or anything. Everything was done with an ax. Most of the ladders were wooden as opposed to being aluminum and steel today.

Q: So would they burn up in the fires then?

LH: Well, no, you--well, you know, if they were left--you know, but you didn't put them in the fire. I mean, there's no sense putting a ladder in a fire if you can't climb it. You know, you're not going to climb into the flames, you know. You put the ladder below the window and climb up to it with a hose line and maybe dampen it down with the hose line before you went in. And the hose has changed. It used to be cotton. Now it's all synthetic fibers. Used to have to take it out and dry it so it wouldn't mildew. Now you don't have to worry about that.

Q: Because it's made of synthetic fibers.

LH: Everything is radio controlled. You know, back then, there was--we only had two self-contained breathing apparatus on the truck for six men. And the other four, you know, you never wore a mask. You were considered a sissy if you wore--if you wore a mask into a fire.

Q: So were you injured because of that?

LH: Oh, a few times, yeah. I had two collapsed lungs over the years, and a couple of breaks and bumps and bruises and sprains and two bumps, couple of burns, and, you know. But the--now everything is very tightly controlled from a safety point of view.

Q: Now, you almost joined simultaneously with the Port Washington Fire Department. There was only about three years difference between ...

LH: Well, we--I got married in September of 1962 and we moved out here. And I had seen the Department operating out here, and I just figured I'd see what it was all about and started hanging out in the firehouse on Haven Avenue. And I joined in January of 1963 out here.

Q: And which company was that?

LH: Flower Hill on Haven Avenue.

Q: Now, why did you choose that? Just ...

LH: It's closest to the house where I lived at the time. We were living up on High--well, at that time, we were living on Fairview Avenue, and then we bought a house on Highland Avenue. And then we--after we were there for, oh, I guess, ten, twelve years, then we bought the house we're in now on Evelyn Road.

Q: So you were a career firefighter in New York City, and then you would fight fires here at night.

LH: Well, if you're off-duty. Because in the City you worked rotating shifts. You worked day and night. You know, you'd work two days on and then a day off and then two nights on and two days off. And so, the night tours were from six at night till nine in the morning. So you had a fifteen hour night tour.

Q: So tell me how that worked in the night tours, since you had to stay at the firehouse in the City. What were your duties while you were there. Let's say, a normal night.

LH: Well, usually about--got there about five-thirty, because the shift started at six. You'd change your clothes. Get into work clothes the uniform. And we'd get into about six-thirty you had the roll call and you'd be assigned what job you had that night. There's five or six specific jobs in both the engine and the ladder company. They're two separate trucks. One is a hose truck, and the other is a hook and ladder with the tiller on the back. And we had--you know, I was assigned to a ladder company, so it was either carry the extinguisher and a hook or the forcible entry--part of forcible entry team--or the roof team or the outside vent team, or, you know, depending on what the officer wanted you to do.

Q: Did you have to learn a specific skill that you were best at at that time?

LH: Well, you started off being what they call the "can man." That's the junior man carries the extinguisher and the hook and stays with the officer. And the officer directs every move he makes. And we had a tough old Captain who was a Marine Corps sergeant during World War II. He was a boxing instructor in Parris Island [N.C.]. And he used to--anybody gave him a hard time, he said, "Just remember, I punched the daylights out of five thousand United States Marines one at a time," (laughs). So, he was a tough bird. And the first thing he said to me was "I want to be able to reach out and touch you at any given time, and if I can't touch you, you're in deep trouble, kid. You got that?" "Yes, sir," you know. And then, as a probie, you cleaned the trucks and ...

Q: Were you ever abused by this captain?

LH: Oh, there's a ritual, a hazing involved.

Q: Oh, well, tell me about that? What did they make you do?

LH: Oh, it's--they play practical jokes on you, and it's ...

Q: And how practical are they (laughs)?

LH: Well, some of them are a little--the one they'd start betting--you know, two guys would start betting in the back. "I bet you he can't." "I bet you he can." "I bet you he can't."

You know, "I got five dollars says he can do it." "Do what?" "All right. Put a life belt on, kid." You'd put a life belt on. And they'd say, "Chin yourself up on the back of the ladder and hook onto the--hook onto the rung of the ladder." Hey, that's easy. Pull yourself up. You hook on with the rung of the ladder, and then, "Okay, let go." And you let go. The belt contracts the triceps and the lateral muscles here. And you can't--there's no way you could have the strength to chin yourself back up again. And they'd leave you hanging there," (laughs). Then, somebody would go and ring the bell, and they'd make believe they're having a run, and you're hanging on the back of the truck (laughs). That's--screaming, "Get me out of here!" you know. Stuff like--or they'd ...

Q: Did they have injuries because of that?

LH: Oh, no, no. That's--you know, it was always good-natured fun. Or they'd--they'd decide that they were going to have a drill, and they'd be pulling you up. We had a pole, used to slide down, and they'd hook you in that life saving harness, which is the way you tie the rope, and "We're going to pull you up the hole." And they'd get you half-way up the hole and they'd hit you with a bucket of water (laughs) in the summertime, you know. But, you know, it was good-natured hazing. Or they'd ...

Q: And how did that hazing compare to what went on in Port?

LH: Oh, it was--Port's a lot milder than in the City.

Q: Why do you think that is?

LH: I don't know. It's just--I think in the City, the guys are a little wilder, I think, than they are out here. They have a little--you know, like the company I was in, a lot of guys grew up in Hell's Kitchen. And they were a tough bunch, you know. And ...

Q: And the name of your company in the City was ... ?

LH: Ladder 28.

Q: 28.

LH: Yeah.

Q: And it was in Harlem?

LH: Yeah.

Q: Now, was Harlem basically Afro-American at that time?

LH: Yep, yeah.

Q: So, did you have any volunteers from that?

LH: No, there's no volunteers in the City at all.

Q: I mean, anyone come in trying to be a fireman from the Black community?

LH: Yeah, we had a couple. We had--we had Calvin Mordecai. He was a--he was in the Engine. He was a Major in the Korean War. He won the Bronze Star. We had Bobby Thweatt. He was a Captain during the Korean War. He was in the truck company. And we had--there was about, I guess, out of twenty-five guys, there was about three or four in each company that ...

Q: And how did they work together?

LH: No problems. No. They were all--you know, everybody--I mean, it didn't make any difference if you were white or Chinese or Black. If you did your job, you were respected. If you didn't do your job, they made life miserable for you. And we had a few guys over the years that, you know, they just couldn't hack it. And they got, you know, they made life miserable, because your life depends on the other guy. You can't, you know, with all due respect to the volunteers, you can kind of pick and choose out here who you hook up with. In there, you're assigned five men. Those five men are your

teammates, and there's no picking and choosing, you know. If one guy drops the ball, the five of you can die, you know, and it's a little bit different.

Q: So how do they make it so miserable that this person gets the idea he has to leave?

LH: Well, in extreme cases what they'll do is they'll cut him out of the meal. You know, "Bring your own food. You're not eating with us." You know, just socially shun the guy, you know. And the Lieutenant, the officer, will, you know, really get on his case and send him back for more training. And--because they can always send the guy back to the Fire Academy for more training. And then, eventually, what they'll do is they'll just start giving poor evaluations. And after three or four poor evaluations and the extended probationary period from, you know, from a year into two years, into three years, and then all of a sudden, they'll call him and tell him, "You're terminated." You know, they can't have somebody who's a--you know, who can't do the job. Either can't learn the manual skills or doesn't have the, I guess for lack of a better terms, the guts to get in and do the job.

Q: Now, who is the ...

LH: Most guys that--we had--well, every class in the Fire Academy, there's always, in the first two or three weeks, there's always five or six guys resign, because they realize that this job is not for them, you know. And most of the time, the Fire Academy does a very good

job of weeding out the people that don't really fit, as far as being able to handle the job.

You know, it would be like somebody who's an excellent concert pianist trying to play right guard for the New York Jets. You know, if he don't have it, he's not going to make the team. And that's basically what they do.

Q: Who was your mentor when you went in the City? Were certain people your mentors that helped you as a young firefighter?

LH: Well, the different officers--the Lieutenants and the Captain--they were mainly responsible for training and conducting drills. And usually one of the senior guys, one of the oldtimers, would grab you and start showing you the ropes. And or the Captain would tell one of the oldtimers, you know, "Break the kid in. Show him where all the tools are and everything, on the truck." But, when you get to the company, you already have a basic knowledge of how to work with the tools, because you've learned that in school, in the Academy.

Q: Now, how did you eventually become Chief of the battalion?

LH: Well, you start off with the--you take a test for Lieutenant. Then, you take a test for the Captain. And it's a Civil Service test. And it's ...

Q: So it's totally different than what happens here in was--Port right now.

LH: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Q: Can you kind of outline those differences?

LH: Well, what you have to do is you have to--well Lieutenant, you have to study for--well, I studied for about two and a half years and went to school once a week--or one day a week--for about, I'd say a year and a half anyway. And you have to study three or four hours a night. The test is a hundred questions, but it's a broad range of, you know, of material. You have to know it. You have to know chemistry; you have to know the rules and regulations and procedures, the building code, the fire prevention code, the Labor law. You have to--the multiple dwelling code. You have to know the transportation of hazardous materials. All of this--you know, that's just the book learning that you have to do. And then, you need the administrative code, some of the vehicle and traffic law, because you're involved in driving the apparatus, and there's certain things you can do and certain things you can't do. Then, you get into the firefighting end of it. And you have to be--a broad knowledge of that. And then, as you go up to Captain, it's the same thing, studying again. And the Lieutenant's test was a hundred questions, multiple choice. The Captain's test was fifty questions multiple choice, and ten essays. The Battalion Chief was a hundred questions multiple choice, and twenty essays. And that took all aft--that took all day. You took the multiple choice in the morning and the essay questions in the afternoon.

Q: So you became Battalion in what year? Battalion Chief?

LH: 1977.

Q: 1977.

LH: Yeah.

Q: Now, along with these Civil Service tests that you pass, and then you also have to have the practical knowledge ...

LH: You have to--well, it would be your seniority--your time in each particular rank--is graded, and you get so many points for each year. And that's added on. So, I mean, a fellow with three years on the job could write a very high mark, but somebody with twenty years on the job would write a lower mark but get promoted ahead of him because of his experience. So it's a combination of the written test and the experience level.

Q: So then, do you then get your--since it's a paid Department, do you then get raises with these tests?

LH: Oh, sure. Yeah, yeah. That's the main incentive.

Q: So when you reach Battalion Chief, that's the top level.

LH: No. The next is Deputy Chief, and then the rank after that is Chief of the Department.

Q: You didn't want to go for that.

LH: I was very happy where I was at Battalion Chief, because I had the best job--I think the best job in the City is the Safety Chief. I used to cover the whole city--the whole five boroughs, the whole City.

Q: Tell me what you do as the Safety Chief. You were Safety Chief in New York City. Were you also one out here?

LH: A Safety Officer out here.

Q: Okay.

LH: Especially since I've retired.

Q: So tell me about that. What does that entail in the City and here?

LH: All right. In the City, first of all, you had to be--when they formed the Safety Battalion back in 1981, it was the result of several serious fatal fires where firefighters were killed. And they went to this concept of having one Chief whose job is not to put the fire out, but to insure the safety of the members that are fighting the fire. And I could override the actions of some of the subordinate Chiefs that even outranked me, if it come down to--in other words, if I got on the roof and I saw the roof was unstable, I could order the men off the roof, even though the Chief of the Department just ordered them on the roof, you know. And I only had one incident--and I was Safety Chief for sixteen years--I only had one incident where we had a little nose-to-nose confrontation between myself and another Chief.

Q: What did he say?

LH: He--I wanted the front of the building cleared. I was afraid the wall was going to collapse. And his idea was if we clear the front of the building, we're going to lose the block. And at that point, I backed down for a short period, because I was looking at the construction. It was a church on fire. And I was afraid the ridge pole, which is the part that holds the roof up, was going to come down and push the wall down with it--the front wall. And we--you know, I told him that I want to be--and we had a big tower ladder set up in front of the building. So, what we did was we moved--we put another tower ladder on the side, and we pulled them--eventually pulled it out--pulled the tower ladder out from in front of the building. But the wall never did come down. But I was--you know, I

was always--I would err on the side of safety, and the idea was to make sure that, you know--my job was to try to make sure that no fireman got hurt or killed.

Q: Now, how does that compare to what you do in Port for safety?

LH: Well, basically, the same thing. But in the City, it's the rank of Chief; out here it's the rank of officer. It's the same thing. I mean, we can--according to the way it's set up here, if I see something going real bad, I can order the men out of the building. But the Chiefs out here are very good. You know, they're--we've never had a problem that way. But we don't have that many fires out here, thank God (laughs). See, when I was in the City, I was--when they--well, I started to say, when they selected the fire Chiefs for the Safety Battalion back in 1981, they picked five of us that had a lot of fire experience. And I had been a fireman in Harlem; I was a Lieutenant in Brownsville. So I was a Lieutenant in the busiest fire company in the world in 1970. We did over ten thousand runs with one pumper in 1970. And then, I was Captain of an engine company in the South Bronx, and we were the fourth busiest company in the City. And then, when I made Battalion Chief, for three years, I was in Williamsburg-Bedford Stuyvesant-Bushwick area. And at that time, Bushwick was burning to the ground. So ...

Q: Can you tell us some of the more memorable fires ...

LH: No.

Q: ... or are they so many you can't.

LH: Yeah. We had nights where, when I was in the squad, where we had--we had about forty runs on a night tour--on a fifteen hour night tour. Dispatcher would call us and tell us, "I'm holding three fires. How many can you take?" And you'd, you know, you'd stop down; you'd hit one. You'd go to the next one; you'd go to the next one. They just didn't have enough companies. Those were the years with civil unrest and the anti-war movement and we had race riots down there, and there was a lot of--a lot of problem.

Q: And what did the Fire Department do in the race riots?

LH: Got the brains--you got your brains beat in (laughs).

Q: You had your brains beat in?

[Note from LH: this was an expression like "we got our heads handed to us"]

LH: Yeah.

Q: Were you injured in any way?

LH: A couple of times. You know, they'd--the big thing was they used to--we got wise to them real quick. But they'd put a car across the front of the block--you know, park a car at the end of the block. And--because they knew which way you'd come in. And then,

they'd pull a false alarm on the corner, and then, just as you were coming down the street, they'd pour gasoline down in front of the building and light it. And when you'd get to the corner, you'd look, and you'd see the flames and you'd pull into the block, and as you pulled into the block, you realized there was an abandoned car blocking the street at the other end, and then they'd push another car in behind you, and then all the stuff would come off the roof, and the bricks and bottles and everything else would come off the roof.

We were riding with emergency service cops with shotguns and rifles on the truck. It was like a war zone down there in the summer of '70 and the summer of '71.

Q: When you say you were riding with guns, who had the guns?

LH: The police. We had a police car assigned to the truck and one police officer rode on the truck.

Q: So essentially, you'd be trapped in there.

LH: Yeah.

Q: And how would you extricate yourself?

LH: You'd run into the burning building. It was safer in there than it was in the street (laughs). Seriously. You'd grab a hose line and go in and put the fire out. At least in there, they couldn't hit you with a brick.

Q: And how many firefighters were injured in these times?

LH: Oh, we had a lot. We had a lot of guys who were injured. I know in my company alone, we had--well, we had certain blocks we just--we wouldn't go in without the police. Legion Street, Amboy Street, Saratoga. Well, Saratoga wasn't too bad. But Legion and Amboy, we wouldn't go in unless the police responded with us.

Q: Did you get hazard pay for this?

LH: No. No. There was no such thing. The guy in Brownsville who's doing ten thousand runs a year was getting--got the same pay as the guy in Douglaston that did three hundred runs a year.

Q: So, did anyone ask to be transferred out?

LH: No, they loved it down there. (laughs). Big boys have big toys; little boys have little toys. I always liked to play with fire engines.

Q: So, this in Port must have been pretty mild for you when you came.

LH: Oh, yeah.

Q: So, you were considered the guru of the Department. What kinds of questions did you get from the Port firefighters, when you were a volunteer here?

LH: Well, after I was in the Department a couple of years, I became a--I ran for office, and I became--I was elected to office. And we used to do--my main thing was, I used to love to take them out training and stretching hose and, you know, go for efficiency or getting hose lines in operation. Because that's what we were--a hose company. And we used to go up to the back of the high school on Sunday morning and we'd practice. And we'd have three teams--two or three teams--and go see who got water out of the nozzle the fastest, you know, and come in with like a regular fire. You'd come in, hit the hydrant, stretch a hose, get to the location, and then pull your pack line off and then go in and simulate going into the fire room. We'd go down to town dock here and crawl around onto town dock with hose line. And on Thursday nights, we'd go up in the fire house and stretch a hose line up the stairs and show them the difference between a dry hose and a wet hose. And, of course, during the summer, we--they'd always go out to the Fire Academy out in Bethpage.

Q: You reached the rank of what in the Port Fire Department?

LH: Captain.

Q: Did you retire from the New York City Fire Department?

LH: Oh, yeah. I retired in 1997.

Q: That's fairly recent. So how has life been since you retired?

LH: Well, I would say boring, up until 9/11, and then ...

Q: What happened then for you?

LH: ... we lost a lot of good friends.

Q: What happened to you on that day? Were you in the City?

LH: No, I was--I had my wife's car up on a lift over at Hempstead Ford, when the attack happened. And by the time they put it back together and I got home, I had gotten a call from two of the guys that I used to work with that two of the guys from our unit were killed, or were missing. And we went back--we did basically what we could, you know. We went down and did paperwork and tried to put the unit back together, and I was out three years already. And then about three weeks later, they started with the what they

called Family Assistance Unit on Pier 94 where they were taking the widows and processing the paperwork. And so I went in there and worked for three months.

Volunteered as a--you know, I went in in uniform, but it was just the retirees were doing that. They were helping the widows and their families.

Q: So how many members did you know that you lost there?

LH: Well, over forty-five.

Q: Personal friends?

LH: Yeah. Well, I knew of probably about sixty or seventy. But forty-five of them, I had either worked with or knew enough to be on a first name basis with them.

Q: And were these mainly from that Harlem unit?

LH: No, they were from all over the City? From all over. Because, you know, in those years, you know, the number of years I had in, I worked in every corner of the City, you know. So, and different guys you worked with, like, you know, one guy would be--if I'd be a Captain, he was a Lieutenant. He made Captain; I made Chief. He made Chief; he was, you know, he went one way, I went the other, but you knew the guy, you know.

Q: How do you resolve your internal feelings about all of this?

LH: Well, you really--you never get over it. I mean, I was only in the company in Harlem, I was assigned there in August after I got out of the Fire Academy. And in November, two days before Thanksgiving, we had a guy in our house killed at a fire. And, you know, you never really get over it. It's something you learn that's part of the job.

Q: Has that stress affected you in any way or your health in any way?

LH: I don't think so. But, you know, you still--you still have strong feelings about it, you know. But, you know, it's something that you have to accept. It's part--you know, that was never expected. You know, that particular attack on this country. But, I mean, the big thing was that, you know, all our guys that went in, half of them went in there knowing that they weren't going to come out. They had a Captain in one of the companies said, as they were leaving the command post to go upstairs, he had them write their Social Security number on their forearm with Magic Marker so they could identify their bodies, because he said, "We ain't coming out, guys."

Q: Going back to the race riots, did that affect the Fire Department, you know, badly with race relations?

LH: There was some animos--there was, you know, there was a lot of animosity between the members that worked there and the people that were doing the rioting, and the people who were stirring the trouble and everything. But that was such a small minority of the people who lived down there--I mean, the people who lived down there, most of them are down there because they could not--they had no place else to live, you know, to--it's a real down-trodden neighborhood. And they, you know, it never would have stopped the firemen from, you know, going in and doing whatever you had to do to get them out. But, I mean, most of the real problems down there were caused by outside agitators that, you know, they were promising these people that, you know, their organization was going to make life better for them. And they fell for it. And all they ended up doing was burning their own stores, burning their own houses, and, you know, it was a ...

Q: Do you know which organizations?

LH: Oh, they had the Black Panthers; they had the Black Liberation Army. They had the--I forget the name. It was a Spanish organization down there that was always fighting with the Black Liberation Army. They had the African Guerrilla Organization. They had all these wacky names that were, you know, and some of them were the anti-war and some of them were, you know, for, they claimed, for racial equality and everything. But most of it was--a lot of it had to do with the political nature of the times.

Q: Did the actual people within the neighborhood ever have a rapport with the Fire Department base?

LH: Oh, sure, yeah. We had a woman next door to the firehouse--big, heavy Black woman. And she was always, you know, chasing kids away from the firemen's cars. She'd holler out the window, you know. Kids would be coming down the streets, scratching the cars or doing something like that, she'd start screaming at them, you know. But, and she could scream! Oh, God! (laughs). You could hear her screaming. Hazel, her name was. You heard Hazel screaming, you ran out, because you knew one of the kids was doing something to the car.

Q: And how would you control that?

LH: Oh, you'd just chase them away, you know. But ...

Q: Do you have any--do you recall any specific stories of your years in the Fire Department that you could recall that would make either humorous or ...

LH: Oh, we had a lot of--a lot of, you know--yeah, we had one guy that he had been hit by a car while he was on duty and his leg was broken. So we had a promotion party and a bachelor party for one of the fellows. And everybody was, in those days, was pretty much into beer drinking. And he'd had a few too many. And one of the guys took his

crutches, made one long and one short, and he had to get up and go to the bathroom, and he kept walking around in a circle (laughs). You know, silly things like that. Another time, they had a bachelor party for a guy, and he was another fellow that drank a lot. And they decided they went to pick him up--it was going to be a surprise bachelor party--and on the way, you know, they said, if so-and-so gets..if we pick him up, he's going to come to the party, he's going to get drunk. Yep. He's going to get drunk; he's going to get nasty. Yep, he always does. He's going to get nasty, he's going to start a fight. Yep, he always does. He's going to ruin the party. Yep. To hell with him. They left him home and they come back and had the bachelor party without him (laughs). Next day, they told him, "Gee, you had a great bachelor party last night" (laughs).

Q: Now, these are stories in the City, correct?

LH: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Was there anything like that out in Port?

LH: Oh, sure. But, you know, there was--you had different, you know, little--little things. We always had the--they had the racing team out here, which was a big activity--the tournaments. And there was always a parade. And there was always generally a party after the parade. And, you know, guys--we had a picnic one time and one of the fellows decided he was going to--he was going to--he got a rubber raft, he was going to row

across Long Island Sound. Police boat picked him up by Execution Light and towed him back.

Q: Why was that? Because it was illegal?

LH: No, because he was--had a little too much to drink, and he decided that it was a good idea at the time to go across Long Island Sound. And he got half-way across there and passed out, and he was drifting. He's dead now, though, I mean, but this was a long, long time ago.

Q: Is there anything you recall about your very first fire experience--going to your first fire as a rookie?

LH: (Laughs) Yeah, I threw up (laughs). We had a--it was a--it was like a mattress that had extended into the bedroom, and had to crawl in, you had the extinguisher. And in those days, the extinguisher was a soda acid extinguisher. It wasn't the kind they use today, and you had to keep it upright. You couldn't tip it over, because as soon as you tipped it over, it made the chemicals react and the extinguisher went off. So when you crawled in, you crawled in by pushing the extinguisher in front of you till you got to where it was, and then you'd take the extinguisher and you'd turn it over, shake it, and then that would form--the soda acid would react and it would form the gas and push the water out. And I got down to the bedroom, and the Captain opened the door and I dumped the can over

and started putting the fire out. And as soon as it hit, I started coughing. And the next thing you know, up came lunch, you know. And he's in there, and this is the tough old guy I was telling you about.

Q: The Marine?

LH: Yeah. He gets all done, he says, "Well, kid, you did pretty good with the can, but," he says, "I'd hate to have to clean up your mess" (laughs). But that wasn't uncommon where guys, you know, you'd be taking in such an amount of smoke, you'd actually, you know, get sick and throw up, you know. It was a big punishment on your body, you know, before we had masks. Now, everybody wears masks, but back then, you know, like I say, you were considered a sissy if you did. Then, another time, I rescued a dog. I thought it was a body. But in the smoke you can't see anything. So I get to the--get in and I find--you know, you've got gloves on and it's hot and smoky and everything. And I find what I thought was a kid. I dragged the kid out to the window that I'd just come in from off the rear fire escape. Got him to the--got him to the window, got him out onto the fire escape and realized it's not a baby; it's a dog. Now, the dog starts growling and wouldn't let me out the window.

Q: How did you managed that?

LH: Well, I smacked him with the ax (laughs), because I was--I was choking in there.

Q: So you killed the dog?

LH: No, I didn't kill him. I just gave him a whack with the ax, and he ran down the fire escape stairs.

Q: And did you ...

LH: But, after I rescued him, he's standing there ... [GROWLS] ... you know (laughs). So that's a good attitude for you.

Q: What kind of gratitude have you gotten from the people you've rescued?

LH: Oh, there's only actually a few that, you know, you really would make good memories about. But most of the time, it was team efforts, you know, the unit working together. We had one job down in Brooklyn, we got twenty-one people out, and the building eventually collapsed. It was a three o'clock in the morning arson job. They burnt the stairs. We got portable ladders up, and we got twenty-one people out by ladder. So the unit got a unit citation for that. And, you know ...

Q: Since you were in Harlem, did you have a great many arson cases while you were in Harlem?

LH: Harlem, no. Harlem was--is a relatively stable neighborhood.

Q: Where was more of the arson?

LH: Brooklyn.

Q: Why was that?

LH: Harlem was basically a Black neighborhood from before World War II. And it was a much--it was a high crime area, but it was more stable. There was a lot of permanent residents in there. Where Brownsville and East New York, it was more of a transient--people coming through there. And a lot of the land at that time, the real estate values were tumbling, and a lot of it was insurance, where the landlords would set the fire to get the insurance for the building.

Q: Now, when you heard those bells in New York City, or you heard, or you hear the horn out here, what happens to you, inside of you? ... [END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A; BEGIN SIDE B] ... What happens inside of you to make you want to do what you do as a firefighter?

LH: Well, you know that you're helping people. It's probably a combination of that and there's a--you know, I'd be lying if I say there wasn't a lot of ego involved in it. I mean,

we're doing something that very few people do. Everybody runs out of the building; we go running in.

Q: How much of that is giving to the community and how much of it is ego?

LH: Well, out here it's giving to the community. I mean, in the City, it was something I always wanted to do, but it was a job. It was a career. It was a, you know, a way of life. But, you know, out here, it was--I felt that I had a skill in there that I could use to contribute to the community out here. And, you know, that's mainly what--the main reason I joined out here was I felt I had something, you know, a talent that I could offer, or a skill that I could offer the community.

Q: Would you like to tell us what the differences are in serving in the City and serving here as a volunteer?

LH: Well, in the City, it's a--you know, it's a way of life; it's a job. You have to go to work forty hours a week. You get four to five weeks, depending on your seniority, vacation. You plan your life based--everything is planned around your work schedule. You don't work nine to five, five days a week. Everybody has a calendar, and like if somebody says, "Well, you know, I'm getting married on May 15th," out comes the calendar, you know, and you check May 15th. "Oh, I'm working nights. Okay, I've got to check, and

I'll see if I can get a swap for that." Then, you'll get a hold of somebody that's working either the day before or the day after, and you ask them can you swap tours with them. And, you know, it's an obligation that you have, that you have to be there and there's no getting around it. Out here, if something happens, like if, you know, if you're getting ready to go to a wedding or something and it happens to be your brother and you're the, you know, you're the best man and the fire whistle blows, well, you know what? They'll have to do without me today. Because if I don't go to the wedding, I'm going to be in a-- you know. Where--it's different, you know. Your life is more structured in the City. You know that you go to work Monday and Tuesday and you're off Wednesday. So you plan on, "Hey, Wednesday, we're going to take the kids to the beach." Number one, there's hardly anybody there compared to the weekends. And, number two, I know I'm going to be off all day, and I don't have to worry about doing anything on that day. Now, you may be working Friday and Saturday or Saturday and Sunday. But who wants to go to the beach on Saturday or Sunday; it's mobbed. You know, so there's benefits to working the rotating schedule. Of course, I've probably worked more Christmases, New Years, and Easters than I was off, you know. So, there's disadvantages to it, too. But what we always did was, in our family, was if I was working Christmas, we celebrated Christmas on the 24th. And, or if--the hard thing was the kids' birthdays, you know. that was something that was their special day. But, usually you only worked, you know, either the day shift or the night shift, so you were home for part of the day. Now, the schedules are changed around where the most of the guys are working twenty-four shifts now. They work twenty-four hours on and seventy-two hours off. They work a swap

with another fireman to cut down on commuting. But, when it comes to Port Washington, or any volunteer department, it's like you're living your normal life, and then when an alarm comes in, you have to put your normal life on hold and go answer the call. And one of the problems that they're having in the volunteer departments today is not enough people are volunteering. I mean, we're down probably thirty-five, forty percent of what our full strength should be, or what used to be in this town. Of course, we've got more equipment and better equipment and everything else, so your equipment kind of takes up for the lack of manpower, but it's still, the community's really not supporting the volunteer fire departments out here anymore.

Q: Why do you think that is?

LH: Well, I think it's a comb--there's a number of different things. One of the things is most families today have dual income. The husband and the wife are working. So they're looking for--with the children, they're looking for quality time. And it used to be the man worked his five days a week and on Saturday or Sunday he'd come down to the firehouse and work. Today, it's the kids--you know, the wife is working five days a week; the man is working five days a week. And they take Saturday to go someplace together, because they don't get to see each other that much.

Q: How did your wife cope with your being away, in Port?

LH: Well, her father was--her father was a fireman in the City. So she knew the way the hours worked, you know, and that part didn't bother her that much. And she started--she was a teacher in St. Peter's for two years when we first got married. And then when the kids came along, she was a stay at home mom. That's what women did in those days. You know, they stayed home and took care of the kids. I worked three jobs. I was a fireman, and I used to work, drive a truck for United Parcel, or I'd drive a bus--school bus--or drive a taxi or used to get--sometimes we'd get shape-up jobs unloading railroad cars in Long Island City. Anything we could do to make an extra buck. Because when I went in the Fire Department, we were only making forty-two hundred a year, you know. And it didn't go very far, you know.

Q: And what do they make now when they start?

LH: Start is about twenty--it's in the mid-twenties. Twenty thousand. And it goes up to maybe about forty-two, forty-three, without overtime. But we never had overtime in those days. I mean, if you got stuck in a fire back in the City in those days, six o'clock came and your change of shift and you were still fighting a fire, you kept fighting the fire till seven, seven-thirty, when the incoming platoon got there to relieve you. And then you went home, and by the time you got out of the firehouse, it might be eight o'clock. You didn't get paid for those two hours. Now they do, you know, so there've been a lot of changes in that respect. But, you know, the concept of overtime was, you know, that's what you're getting paid for, you know. But out here, one of the other things that's cut

back on the--I think is the town is no longer--it used to be pretty well split between white collar and blue collar workers. And, because of real estate values and everything, it's become predominantly white collar. There's very few blue collar workers. The people are buying houses out here today, they're going to join the yacht club or the country club, or a golf club. They're not going to join the volunteer fire department. And, you know, it's a different--the demographics have shifted drastically in forty years.

Q: Do you have children who will be going into the Fire Department?

LH: My son-in-law is a volunteer fireman in New Jersey. And, actually, he got interested in it because--I think, because of me. Because when he started going out with my daughter, you know, they met while they were going to college in Albany, and I took a liking to the kid right away. Well, both my two son-in-laws are real nice guys. But he joined a volunteer fire department about ten years, down in where they live in New Jersey.

Q: How many children do you have?

LH: Three. Two married daughters and one single daughter.

Q: Would you have approved of them becoming firefighters?

LH: Probably not, but mainly because of the fact that, in New York City anyway, the women are really not accepted as firefighters, because of the--a few of them are, but many of them are--the first group of firefighters who were in were given an altered test. So, they weren't ...

Q: What kind of test?

LH: An altered test. The physical exam was made easier for the women to come in. And the result was they appointed forty-three women, and it was by court order. And there was a lot of animosity towards them, because of the fact that, number one, they didn't pass the same test as a fireman did. And, quite frankly, some of them just couldn't do--physically do the job. Two of them got hurt real bad in the Academy and never made it out of the Academy. Very few of them made it through to retire after twenty years. They all either got hurt, or they left the job early. They didn't stay in. Today, there's several--I've met several women that are on the job today that are very good. But it's--I wouldn't want to see one of my kids hurt, and I know that if they--if one of the women, one of the girls went in the Fire Department, they would not be happy, because they wouldn't be accepted, you know. It's just the way it is. Now that they've gone more towards EMS than straight firefighting, the women are being accepted a little better in the Department.

Q: Is that our here in Port, you're talking about?

LH: No, in the City.

Q: And how are they being accepted here?

LH: Well, we had a gal in Flower Hill that was--she just resigned because she moved out to Colorado. It's kind of--I guess the first woman to come in was a little--you know, they were a little stand-offish on, but it hasn't made that much of a difference.

Q: What kind of a bad time did they give her?

LH: Not that they gave her a bad time. They just, you know, basically she wasn't accepted socially as one of the boys, one of the guys, you know. And when she joined the first time, she joined predominantly to be a member of the Fire Medics Squad. That was before they formed their own company, over twenty-five years ago. And ...

Q: And you were part of that, weren't you?

LH: When they first started. Well, when they first started with the EMT program, I was. And then, when I became Captain of the company out here, I backed off it, because it was too much between going out on ambulance runs, being Captain of the company. You know, I was going to college at the same time, and I was working two jobs. So I kind of--I let my

AMT qualifications lapse, because it was just too much--burning the candle at too many ends.

Q: But initially when you--well, before the ambulance, before the Fire Medics were formed, you did ambulance runs.

LH: Yes.

Q: What was it like in those days. This was before the '70s.

LH: You had to know first--advanced first aid and how to pick up a stretcher, get them in the back of the ambulance, and go like hell for the hospital.

Q: And that's all that was required?

LH: Basically, that was it, yeah. Get them to the hospital as fast as you could. Today, the amount of skills that are required are--they're almost mind-boggling. And I think that's part of the problem that they're having too, is the amount of training that's required, the people just don't have the time for it anymore on a volunteer basis.

Q: Did you go in for that training?

LH: Yeah, I became--I was an EMT and then I went for the AMT training.

Q: And how did you feel about doing that versus firefighting?

LH: I liked the firefighting much better.

Q: Why was that?

LH: It's more--I don't know, to me, more physically challenging. I had no problem doing the EMS portion of it, but the--you know, mainly the firefighting end of it was what I really liked.

Q: What, in your estimation, makes a good firefighter?

LH: Well, first of all, as a firefighter, he's got to learn to take orders. And he's got to be able to take a little bit of hazing, and he's got to be--he's got to be intelligent. He's got to have manual skills. He's got to be able to overcome any phobias that he might have. We get guys that go part-way through and they find out they're claustrophobic. And you can't have that, because when you're crawling around in a fire, it's like skin diving in prune juice. You just can't see anything. It's total black. And everything is by feel. And if somebody's claustrophobic, they can panic and pull the mask off and die of smoke inhalation, or they can grab somebody--you know, panic is a terrible thing. I mean, we

did a study on panic years ago, and there's several different types. But you can't have somebody that's going to lose his composure in a fire. So ...

Q: And what makes a bad firefighter, in your estimation?

LH: Well, we have firefighters that can do the job very well, but if they have an attitude problem and they don't follow procedures and they do what we call freelancing, or they go out on their own and try to--try to become super-heroes, they put more people at risk. They'd be better off if they stayed home. And that goes with the City or here. We've had guys in the City that do the same thing. They go freelancing. They don't follow strict SOPs--standard operating procedures and standard operating guidelines. And it can cause problems. Somebody that won't do as he's told. A gossip can be devastating to morale. Somebody that gives--spreads rumors around or untruths, or ...

Q: Regarding what?

LH: Well, it could be anything, you know. Give you an example. I--well, "I saw so-and-so do something at a fire." Well, maybe he was told to do it. Or "He's a real dope," you know--you know, stuff like that. And it does--occasionally you'll get somebody like that. I guess they try to impress people by how much they know about somebody else's business, and it's bad for morale.

Q: Did you find that more here in the volunteer department than in the paid?

LH: Yeah, kind of. You don't see it that much, you know. But when you do see it, it's devastating for morale. In a paid department, it's not tolerated. You know, the guys will take care of a guy like that.

Q: What do they do to him?

LH: Well, they'll--mostly, it comes down to--well, you know, yourself, if you're working with a crew of people, you know when you're not liked, or you know when some--when the crew doesn't like somebody. You know, it doesn't have to be a specific thing. It's just cold shoulder. They get the dirtiest details, you know--"clean the toilets." "Well, I cleaned the toilets last week." "Well, guess what? You're doing them again this week," you know. "Well, I want to sweep the bunk room," or "I want to sweep the office." But it's, you know, "Wash the rig, wash the truck." "Well, I just washed it." "It's still dirty. Wash it again." You know, there's stuff--there's ways of getting the message across in a paid department. Out here, it's a little bit different. Out here, you know, the guy could always say, "I'm not going to do that. I'll quit," you know. "Good-bye," you know (laughs).

Q: What qualities do you think separate the oldtimers like yourself from the young ones?

LH: The young ones can dance a lot better than I can (laughs).

Q: At a fire?

LH: No. It's all--we have some very, very--matter of fact, we have a lot of very, very good young firefighters. We've always had an active crew--see, the difference with volunteer and paid, volunteers are out here and they're doing a--you know, they're not getting paid for it. It's not a job to them. It's an avocation rather than a vocation. And they--if they--you know, if they find they don't like it, they leave. They don't stay as a volunteer. There's really no benefit to stay if you're not doing something you like. We'll get paid men that they get the job, they really don't care for it that much, but it's the way of putting bread on the table and they have to stick it out. So, there's a difference in--I wouldn't say in morale, but in motivation with some of the younger men in the volunteer department as opposed to in the paid department. But in a volunteer department, the--usually, the kids are, today, are--and I hate to generalize--but they're--they're not as willing to accept a structured life that's required in a fire service. In other words, here's the orders. You do this. You do A, B, C, D, and E, and you have to do it in that order. "Well, how come we can't do it B, C, D, A, and E?" You know, "Because I said so." Well, that used to satisfy. Today it doesn't. Today, it's questioned, you know. They--you know, but they're all--you know, when it comes down to it, you have to make so many training sessions and so many--they'll do it. They'll make it. The oldtimers, on the other hand, they don't have to go to school anymore. You know what I mean? After you reach a certain point, I

wouldn't want somebody my age going through basic school again, because sooner or later, the guy's going to get hurt. You know, a guy sixty-five, seventy years old, shouldn't be running up hundred-foot aerial ladders and sliding down ropes on the face of a building. So ...

Q: Are you active today in the volunteer department?

LH: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Q: You go to the fire calls?

LH: Yeah. But I'm a Safety Officer (laughs).

Q: So, you're on the outside ...

LH: No, no, like--see, right now, another thing that's really hurt the volunteer department is automatic alarms. Probably ninety, ninety-five percent of the automatic alarms are false alarms, which is very bad for morale. Guys stop what they're doing, they run to the firehouse, they get on a truck, they go to the fire, and it's a false alarm. Now, we've had-- I mean, I won't mention any particular addresses or names, but we've had places that you know when you hear the address, it's a false alarm. So, you know, but yet you still have to respond. So, very often, like in the daytime particularly, I might be the officer in

charge of one of the trucks. So when we get to the scene, you know, it's a matter of go check the automatic alarm out and, you know, I'm acting more or less as a company officer rather than as a Safety Officer. Now, if it's a working fire, then I become strictly Safety Officer.

Q: When did the Safety Officer part come in? I mean, were there Safety Officers in the beginning, or is that something recent?

LH: No. New York City started it in nineteen-seventy--I'm going to guess in about '71 or '72. And then they disbanded it in the fiscal crisis of '76. And then they reintroduced it in '81 after there were several firefighter fatalities. From that, we kind of wrote the book on Safety Officers, or safety chiefs. I did several magazines articles on it. And it picked up--Phoenix started it. Seattle, Washington, a few of the major cities picked up on it--Boston sent their chief down and studied our way of doing it. And then, it then, the NFPA--the National Fire Protection Association--in about the late '80s, early '90s, came out with a standard for Fire Department Safety Officer. And they more or less formalized nationwide what we were doing in New York, what we kind of pioneered. The Port Washington Fire Department started it in about ninety--I guess, '90 or '91. And, let's see, Jimmy was Chief maybe six, eight--about eight years ago, so that'd be mid-'90s. And I first I started out as Assistant Safety Officer, because I was still working in the City. And then, when I retired, I became the Safety Officer.

Q: Now, you've also been legal witness, haven't you, for the ...

LH: Well, see, one of the other jobs in the City as its Safety Chief was that we investigate any injury--serious injury or fatality to a firefighter. And we investigate any motor vehicle accidents involving fire apparatus.

Q: As the Safety Officer?

LH: Yeah. So we've been through ...

Q: Now, how does that work into the legal system?

LH: Well, we went to school to become certified accident investigators. We went with the Police Department to their school, and then we went to--my partner and I went down to the University of North Florida in Jacksonville. And we went for reconstructionist school down there. And what happens is we'll be doing a--you know, we do an investigation, and then, two, three, or four years later, there's a law suit involving it, and I have to go in and testify as to what the cause of the accident was.

Q: Have you any stories to tell us about that?

LH: Well, nothing really. I mean, basically, most of them are--we did a lot of research on the effectiveness of the warning devices, and people--they just don't hear the sirens. You know, people in a car, they're driving along and they have the stereo on, they're talking on the cell phone, and that's ninety percent of our accidents are intersection accidents where the people, you know, they just don't hear the air horns and the siren, and they--you know, nobody's going to deliberately drive into a fire truck with the air horn and siren going, because it'd be suicide to do it. But people continually, in the City, continually have accidents. We were running about three to four hundred accidents a year.

Q: So, then they sue the Fire Department?

LH: Everybody sues everybody today.

Q: So, generally, then you are witness for the Fire Department?

LH: Yeah, yeah. And, since I retired, I've done some outside consulting work for different attorneys who were involved in, you know, law suits. But I've only done a couple of them. But it's something I really don't like doing?

Q: The private law suits, what do those involve?

LH: Well, most of them involves--the ones that I've done involve people who have been involved in accidents with fire trucks. See, there's a specific set of rules on operating fire apparatus and responding to fires. I mean, you're allowed to do certain things, and certain things you're not allowed to do. You know, there's no such thing as a fire truck having the right of way. The fire truck only has the right of way when everybody else has yielded to them. And there's certain little quirks in the law that the lawyers know about, and they try to manipulate it.

Q: For their clients?

LH: Yeah. That's what he's paid for.

Q: And how do you come in since you're with the Fire Department?

LH: Well, I did two jobs out--one in Illinois and one in St. Louis--where the lawyer for the Fire Department contacted me as an expert. I did one for a plaintiff who was suing the Fire Department, where the Fire Department did some real dumb things. You know, like I say, they really weren't following proper protocol responding, and I had another couple of jobs that involved accidents with police cars and civilians. You know, again, responding emergency vehicles--a couple of ambulances. But, like I say, I try to avoid them, if I can. I've got a friend of mine that he does that as a business, and any time I get something like that, I call him up and say, "Hey Stevie, you want a job?" (laughs).

Q: Is that because it's extremely stressful?

LH: No, it's just, somebody's going to get hurt, no matter which way you go. You know, somebody's already been injured in the accident, and if you testify for the Fire Department, somebody--the civilian is going to get hurt. If you're testifying for the civilian, the Fire Department's going to get hurt. You know, it's something I don't care to do. I'm not particularly fond of lawyers anyway (laughs), so they're--you know, I just--it's not a fun thing to do. I mean, I like to find out what the cause was. I like the scientific end of it. Figuring the length of the skid marks and the angle, and all the mathematical formulas involved. But then, when it comes down to assessing blame, I like to just present, these are the findings of the investigation, you go fight it out, you know. So, and then, the other part of it was whenever we had to do a firefighter fatality--an investigation on that--that can take up to three to six months. And then, just this past fall, I went back myself, and another guy went back, and we taught--we were hired by the Fire Academy to teach a group of thirty-two battalion chiefs on the proper way to do an investigation on a fire ground fatality, when firefighter dies, because they're all new guys coming up now, and they needed the training.

Q: Have you ever used lucky charms in going to fires?

LH: Just my rosary beads (laughs). I carry a miraculous medal in my wallet all the time. I used to have it on my neck and the chain broke, and it's in my wallet.

Q: Do a great many of the firefighters use that out here or ...

LH: Oh, I don't know about out here, but ...

Q: In the City?

LH: Well, Ernie Pyle [World War II Correspondent] once said there's no atheists in foxholes, and I haven't met too many of them in the firehouse either.

Q: What are some of the traditions in the Fire Department that you most value? You know, the dinners? Initiations? The parades?

LH: Well, out here, the dinners, you know, it's--these are all--I mean, when a man makes Captain, or a man or a woman makes Captain or Chief, it's quite an honor. It's an accomplishment. And the dinners are an acknowledgement. They're given in honor of the person who's being elevated to--and they're also given, at the same time, honoring the person who is vacating the office. And that part of it is real good. The--when I first come in the volunteers, I thought--I mean, like I say, I was working three or four jobs. We were going to a Department dinner, "Boy, I can get a free roast beef dinner" (laughs). We had roast beef about four times a year. But the--today, the dinners are--they're an important part of the tradition in the fire service. It's something that's--it's, you know, it's

acknowledging the accomplishments of one or more individuals. One of the things I value the most is the friendship of the people. What I used to say when I joined the volunteer fire department, I got three hundred friends I didn't have before, the day after I raised my right hand. When we moved from the house on (laughs) Highland Avenue to the house on Evelyn Road, of course, again, you did it as cheap as you could. Two guys had pick-up trucks. We borrowed the Department racing team pick-up truck, a trailer, and a couple of station wagons. And we had about twenty guys. And we started with stuff stored in the attic. We had a line down the attic ladder, down the stairs, out to the pick-up truck, and as one truck loaded, it went up, and then we all jumped--then we all got up to the new house. And it's like at eight o'clock at night this time of year, because we moved in just before--a week before Christmas. And the woman next door is looking out, and here comes these pick-up trucks. It looked like the Beverly Hillbillies moving in (laughs). Here comes these pick-up trucks with a bunch of guys, and, of course, we had had a couple of beers while we were doing it. And one guy's saying, "Hey, where goes this one?" and I'd holler, "Oh, that goes in the apartment, down the cellar. That goes in the second floor apartment. Oh, that's--that's Robinson's apartment. He's on the second floor." And the woman thought we were moving about sixteen (laughs) families into the place (laughs). She told us months later, she says, "I saw those trucks pull up, and," she says, "I didn't know what was going on." But, I mean, it was a case of--I went down to the firehouse, and I said, "I'm going to be moving this week. Can anybody give me a hand?" Bing. About twenty guys showed up. When I--one of the times I got hurt, I was in the hospital, in St. Luke's on 115th Street and Amsterdam Avenue. Every day one of

them drove my wife into the hospital. Because I had a collapsed lung, and I was in there, and I was in the intensive care unit. Then, just recently, when Richard McCabe was so sick, every day somebody from the firehouse drove his wife into, you know, NYU--not NYU; Columbia Presbyterian. But, I mean, that went on for months, when he had his lung transplant. So, I mean, it's a--you know, there's a bond there that doesn't exist in a lot of other occupations or a lot of other endeavors.

Q: How did they heal your collapsed lung?

LH: Well, the first time, they just--well, let's see--well, both times, they had to re-inflate it. They put a needle in your chest, and they put a vacuum bottle on it, and they suck the air out from--what happens when a lung collapses is the air gets between the lung and the chest wall. And that air has to be removed after the lung heals. The first time I had fallen down a flight of stairs, and I landed on a banister post. And it ruptured the lung. And the second time it happened, I was home, and it just spontaneously burst. And it was the scar tissue from the prior one that ...

Q: And how painful is that?

LH: Oh, it's like you feel like you're getting kicked in the chest by a mule. It's very, very painful. The first time it happened, I thought I was having a heart attack. You know, it's

that severe. And I couldn't breathe, and I broke out in a sweat and, you know, all the symptoms of a heart attack.

Q: And how is the lung now?

LH: It seems to be good, you know. It hasn't--hasn't happened in twenty years, so ...

Q: What do you feel about the parades?

LH: I like a parade. But I--I don't put as much stock in them as some of the members do. I march in every Memorial Day parade that I'm home for. I've been trying to march in the Pride in Port parades as much as I can. I don't go to too many of the out of town parades. But, you know, I enjoy the ones in town.

Q: Did you have a favorite uniform at one time, compared to what you're wearing now? IT used to be white and red, I believe.

LH: Oh, no. Our company was always the dark blue.

Q: Oh. Your company was ...

LH: Yeah. Yeah, Atlantic's had the red and white. Flower Hill's always been the same.

Q: You're also an instructor at the Fire Academy.

LH: I was, yeah.

Q: Can you tell us what that was like?

LH: Well, that was way back when. I was a Lieutenant at the time in the City. And I took it. It was a part-time job out in Bethpage. And I taught out there for about seven years. And I was basically teaching volunteers and hands-on skills needed to fight a fire. And I taught several different times in the City Fire Academy, but that was an assignment, where, you know, they called up and they said, "We want you to go and teach for a month, or teach for six weeks," or whatever. Like the last time was just this past--even though I'm retired, they called us back a couple of times and asked us to do training.

Q: How do you feel at this stage in your life when you're training these young recruits?

LH: Like an old fart (laughs). Well, I wouldn't try to train the recruits today.

Q: Why is that?

LH: I couldn't keep up with the kids. I mean, you could give them a classroom lecture. But, I mean, as far as hands-on training, you know, they'd run rings around me. You know, it's

a physically demanding thing, as an instructor. You have to be in there pushing the hose line in with them. Or getting--you know, if they're climbing the ladder, you run up the stairs and you're waiting for them at the top of the ladder, to make sure that they get off the ladder right. You know, then, you're--out there, they use live fire training. They use live smoke. So, you're constantly in a smoke atmosphere. So, they try to simulate actual fire conditions.

Q: Were you, at one point, teaching in North Carolina at an academy down there?

LH: No, I gave a seminar down there.

Q: What was that about?

LH: That was with *Firehouse Magazine* down there. I did two or three seminars for them. I used to write articles for them on Fire Department safety. And I did one on accident prevention fire to safety.

Q: Of all of your various careers within the Department, you know, in, not only New York City, in Port, as Fire Safety Officer, as Battalion Chief, as a Captain out here, you've done safety work, Academy work, legal witness. Out of all of that, what do you really enjoy the most?

LH: Being a grandpa (laughs).

Q: How many grandchildren do you have?

LH: I have four grandchildren. We just went to--they were just with us yesterday, we had the, at the Sportsmen's Club down there, Santa Claus comes in by boat every year. And we had a ball.

Q: How old are they?

LH: Well, eleven, nine, eight, and seven. And ...

Q: Do you think they'll be firefighters?

LH: Well, three girls and a boy. The boy might. He's pretty much--but he found--he discovered darts, and we ended up down in the basement playing darts for about--so my shoulder is aching (laughs)--"Come on Grandpa. One more game," you know. But, no seriously, as far as the firefighting end of it, I think it was a combination of being a Lieutenant in the City in Squad 4, because that was one of the wackiest bunch of guys I ever worked with.

Q: Why were they so wacky?

LH: Oh, they--you never knew what they were going to do. I mean, they were ...

Q: Wacky humorous, or wacky ...

LH: Oh, humorous. Tough. Hard-working. Worked hard, played hard. Great bunch of guys.
Great teamwork.

Q: Which team was this?

LH: Squad 4 in Brooklyn. That's the one that was the busiest company in the City--actually, in the world that year. It was about ten thousand runs. And, I mean, we'd get finished with one fire, and the dispatcher would be calling us on the radio. You know, "Let's go!" Not even thinking about taking a relief. If there was another fire, they wanted to go fight it, you know. And they were good. They were good. And then being the Safety Chief, that was great, because I got to cover the whole City. I got to go to every major fire in the City, when I was working for those sixteen years. We went to, you know, two-alarm tenement fires, five-alarm high-rise fires--everything. Oil yard--the gasoline loading dock down in Green Point. Ship fire--we had fires on ships. I mean, there was probably nothing that happened during those sixteen years on the shifts that I was working on, that we didn't get to and at least have a part of, you know, putting the fire out.

Q: What did you--what was most memorable for you out in Port, doing any of these things?

LH: Well, I guess probably the worst fire that I can remember was the one where the three kids were killed over here--Busby's fire on North Court. I think it was 11 North Court.

Q: Were you safety man there?

LH: No, I was a company officer. I was Assistant Engineer at the time. This was back in the mid-'60s. And three little kids died at that fire. And then the other one was up here-- Bobby Dayton, when he died--I was at that fire. And I knew Bobby. I was a Chief at the time. And I had seen the two of them going in--him and his partner going in. And I told him, I said, "Watch yourself up there. I don't like it up there." and we were pushing the hose line in on the first floor, and we found out that they were in trouble upstairs, and we just couldn't get to them. And that was a tough one. Then, we had Renga Brothers on Haven Avenue. That was the old furniture store. That thing was fully involved when we got there. We had a fire there at six o'clock at night--an electrical fire. And about twelve o'clock--that was before we had radios, and everything was by just the whistle and the sirens--and my bedroom window faced the railroad tracks up around Highland Avenue--way up on the top of the hill. We were next to the last house up there. And the fire--I heard the horns going off and the sirens for a general alarm and swung out of bed, and I looked out the window, and I said, "Uh oh." I could see the glow in the sky down there (laughs). And, at first, I thought it was the firehouse, because it was just in that general

location. And, I mean, we got there, it was like--that building, there wasn't a bit of that building that wasn't burning. And ...

Q: Was that arson?

LH: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Did they ever discover who it was?

LH: I don't think they ever caught anybody for it, but when the first company got there--when Protection got there in the rear, the back doors were open. And when we had closed the building up, we had closed the doors. So somebody had left the doors open. So ...

Q: Have you ever not responded to a fire call as a volunteer?

LH: Oh, sure, yeah. Yes, I mean, especially as you get older, you know. You've got aches and pains, and the automatic alarm, and, you know, I'll let this one go, because, you know, I know 55 Main Street's a false alarm. It's Dunkin' Donuts, and they get that alarm four times a week. But I listen to the radio, you know, and I hear the first due engine ...

Q: What would you like to be most remembered for by future generations?

LH: Oh, I don't know. I never gave it any thought.

Q: What would you like your grandson to think about you?

LH: Well, I hope he remembers me (laughs). Yeah, I still remember--matter of fact, the other day, we were looking for stuff, and I found a picture of my grandfather, and he died when I was very young, and I really don't remember him that much. And my other grandfather had died way before I was born. And I was thinking how lucky, you know, my kids are, because they remember both of their grandparents--all four of their grandparents. And these kids, you know, they've got their grandparents. It's something I think a kid misses if he doesn't have a relationship with his grandparents.

Q: What do you feel would be lost or gained by a paid fire department in Port?

LH: Well, eventually it's going to have to happen. And it's just a matter of when. What's going to be lost is probably the comradeship and the community pride that goes with a volunteer fire department. What's going to be gained is there's going to be a more rapid response. The truck is going to get there quicker. The problem is, they're not going to have, if they do it like they do all the rest of the country, there's not going to be adequate manpower. They'll be riding with two or three people on the truck instead of five. And the initial attack is going to be--when you get a good working fire--it's not going to be enough to suppress the fire. I see this all over the country, where they've cut manpower. Years ago, New York City used to ride with six on an engine and six on a truck. Now, they're down to four and four. And what they've done is they've increased the number of

trucks responding, but it takes longer to get the people there. So, you know, it's going to be--you know, New York City, years ago, was a volunteer department. But, you know, nineteen-twenty--I guess 1922 is when they finally did away with the last department in Queens and they made it all consolidated as paid. ... [INTERRUPTION] ...

Q: Is there anything you'd like to add or say, other than what we've talked about, that I might have missed?

LH: Not that I can think of. It's just that, I, you know, we're living in a town now, and I'm just hoping we're going to be able to continue living in the town because we really like it, but the way taxes are going and everything, we're seriously thinking about having to relocate to someplace where taxes are lower. You know, my pension is good, but it doesn't go up with the cost of living. It's a fixed income situation, and the taxes aren't. And, I mean, it's just becoming more difficult every year to be able to, you know, stay in the town. And, of course, you know, every year a couple more friends don't make it through the year. And the people that you're really friendly with--we just lost two very good friends this year. And ...

Q: And who were they?

LH: Well, June Lang was one, and then another fellow that we knew down in Manorhaven. And June was very good friends with us. Charlie Lang's wife. I don't know if you've

interviewed him. And she suffered with cancer for a long time. And then Bobby Lewis down there in Manorhaven. We used to go hunting together. But, you know, it's--your circle of friends gets smaller, you know. And you start thinking more and more of being closer to your family. So ... [END OF TAPE 1, BEGIN TAPE 2] ...

Q: Today is December the 21st, 2004. This is an interview with ex-Chief Hatton of the New York Fire Department and of the Port Washington Volunteer Fire Department. This is tape number two, side A. My name is Margaret Dildilian. The interview is taking place at 50 Crescent Road. To continue from tape number one, Larry, when you hear those bells in New York City, or the horns out here in Port, what happens inside of you?

LH: Well, nothing really. I mean, you go to so many alarms over the years that you just ...

Q: Well, what happens to make you want to do this? I mean, is there anything in particular that happens to you emotionally?

LH: Well, you know, when you hear it out here, you know that there's a chance that somebody might be in trouble, and you're going to do whatever you to do to go to them. You're going to have to go and see if you can help them out. You wouldn't have a cough drop, would you, or ...

Q: A cough drop? Yeah, I think I do ... [INTERRUPTION] ... As I was saying, I was thinking about, you know, emotionally what goes on inside of you.

LH: Well, what you do is--if you're going to a normal alarm, and we really didn't cover this yesterday. But if you're going to a normal alarm, you're just thinking about where the address is. If you have any indication it's a working fire you size it up. At least I do, a mental size-up. In other words, you start thinking about it's two o'clock in the morning, there's a possibility that, if it's a residence building, that people are probably in bed. There's probably going to be a life hazard on the second floor. It's cold out. The rooms are all going to be shut. Delayed discovery. Ice on the roads; it's going to take longer for the trucks to get there. These are all things that you think about as you're going to respond to the firehouse or respond to the fire.

Q: Is there--you don't think about the fear involved?

LH: No. No, I've only had about three or four fires where I was really--really, really scared.

Q: And which ones were those?

LH: A couple in the City. But we had a fire in a sub-cellar at Hunter College and we got turned around. We got lost in there. We were two levels below ground, and the mask was running out, and we had a problem. Another one in Harlem, we got trapped in the

elevator, and again, the masks were running out, and we figured we were going to have a problem. We had to force the elevator door and climb out between floors.

Q: Were you injured there?

LH: No. No, but you're trouble--you realize this could be nasty, you know, and we've got to start, you know, really putting the brain in high speed and thinking your way out of this. And I remember when I was in a collapse, when the building come down. But, there were a couple of guys injured--seriously injured. I got--well, what happened to me was I had blew my knee out. I was out sick for a couple of weeks. But one guy was injured. He went out of the job. He got a badly broken leg. You know, you start--all your training kicks in. I mean, it's not--you're doing a lot of things--normal run of the mill routine. You do it without thinking. It's like driving a car. And all of a sudden, something goes bad, and all your training and experience kicks in and you start really working on how to get out of this thing.

Q: You mentioned that, you know, wearing masks in the early days was considered being sissy.

LH: Uh huh.

Q: What is considered being sissy, having fear?

LH: Well, in the old days, back in the '50s and '60s and, you know, the early to mid-'70s, the amount of smoke that you could take was an indication of how tough you were. And guys used to--that was an ego thing, more than anything.

Q: Was that very wise?

LH: Oh, of course not. It's not wise to go running into burning buildings (laughs). You know, that's ...

Q: Well, is that how you injured your lung?

LH: Well, no, the first time, I guess, we got blown--I use the term we got "blown" down a flight of stairs. But what happened, the fire come out on the floor, and everybody dove, and I ended up going down, like straddling the banister with my body, like in free fall. And I hit the banister post, and it ruptured the lung. You know, instead of--normally, when you see a kid sliding a banister, there'd be one leg on each side. I was laying, trying to keep from going over, because there was four or five stories down. And when I hit the ban--you know, everybody had--a couple of guys are on top of me, you know, and when I got up, it didn't hurt until maybe two hours later. I started getting the shortness of breath and everything.

Q: And how painful was that?

LH: Very painful. Like I said yesterday, it was like, you feel like you got kicked in the chest with a mule. So ...

Q: Have you ever stood on the back rail of those fire trucks in the early days?

LH: Oh, sure, yeah.

Q: And what is that like?

LH: That was the only place you stood in those days--on the back step.

Q: Can you describe what that was like?

LH: Well, it's like, you just get on, you hold on, and hope the guy driving knows what he's (laughs)--knows what he's doing. In the early 1970s, they came out with an order in New York City that nobody rides--no, I'm sorry, it was about the mid-'70s, they came out with an order that nobody--nobody's allowed to ride on the back step anymore, because by that time, they had come up with what they called bucket seats. They were the semi-enclosed in those days; now they're fully enclosed seats behind the driver. Before that, everybody rode on the back step. Or if you were on the ladder truck, you rode on the--hanging on

the side of the ladder truck. That was more dangerous than riding on the back step.

Because if you were ever involved in a side-swipe, you just got wiped right off the truck.

Q: Were there any such injuries?

LH: Oh, yeah, yeah. Couple of times a year, we got a guy killed falling off the truck. They're pretty--falling off a truck at thirty-five miles an hour is the same as falling out of a car, you know. You're just going to tumble and roll, and sooner or later, a vital part of your body's going to hit something that's not supposed to be hit.

Q: Were there law suits then?

LH: I really don't know back in those days, whether they--it wasn't as litigious a society as it is today. You know, it was generally felt if a guy fell off the rig, he was stupid. He should have held on better, you know. So ...

Q: Were you ever given any awards or citations?

LH: Yeah, we got--I could a couple.

Q: What were they?

LH: Well, one, we had a fire in the Bronx, and I was on my way home. I used to play hockey for the Fire Department team. And when they first started. I wasn't good enough to make the full team. But we used to go out and play on the way home. And I came on a fire, and the companies were just getting there. And [I helped them stretch to get the hose line in operation, and I went up on a roof, and I was venting and had a backdraft, which was a smoke explosion in the top loft. And a couple of guys got pinned and I went down there and helped bring them out, and I got a Meritorious for that. And then ...

Q: A Meritorious Award?

LH: Yeah.

Q: What is that?

LH: A little bar, a little ribbon, you know, to wear it on the uniform. And then we got several unit citations, and I got one Class A when I was working in Harlem. That's the next step up, for that grab I made. And it's just, you know, part of the job. But in the old days, you--some of the officers were very tough on, you know, guys would make a rescue and they'd say, "Look, that's what you get paid for" (laughs).

Q: And what's the attitude in Port regarding that?

LH: They only started a few years ago with Meritorious awards. I don't know, maybe ten years ago or so. Before that, there was nothing. Now, it's a county-wide award system that they have, and it's very good for morale. You know, a member makes a rescue or does something out of the ordinary, and there's actually five levels of awards. And ...

Q: Here in Port?

LH: No, in the City. There's three out here. They have the Gold Medal, the Silver Medal, and a Bronze Medal. And they're given at an awards ceremony every year over at the County. But in the City, they have five awards there. But Medal for three. Then they have Class A, Class B awards ... [INTERRUPTION] ...

Q: How did you juggle your career as a firefighter in New York City with being a volunteer firefighter here in Port? What does that entail--your hours and your personal life?

LH: Well, it's just, you know, be like going to any other job, whether as a truck driver or a school teacher, or whatever. You go to work. And if you work outside of town, you know, you wait--when you get home, you're back on duty as a volunteer. But, while you're working--you know, some people that work in town have permission from their employers where they can take off and go to fires. But most people--today, most people work out of town. Years ago, thirty-five, forty years ago, a good percentage of people worked in town. You know, you had your shopkeepers and Chadow Brothers--Melvin

Chadow was a member. And Alpers, you had Ray Liotti was a member. You know, different people would leave the store and run to the firehouse. Where, today, it's mostly, with the amount of alarms they're doing today--there are over twenty-five hundred alarms for the year--which is, years ago, you had maybe like two hundred for the year. So, economically, the employers, very few of them, allowed their employees to go to--leave and go to fires.

Q: Did you do other jobs besides firefighting in the City in the early days?

LH: Oh yeah. I moonlighted at a number of jobs. I drove a truck for UPS. Drove a taxi. Drove the--one of the school buses. Used to shape up on those railroad cars during certain times of the year. Anything where you could make an extra buck, because in those days, the salary was so low, you needed it when you had a family to support.

Q: What was the starting salary of the New York firefighters at that time?

LH: When I started as a dispatcher, it was forty-two hundred dollars a year, back in 1960. And when I went on as a probationary fireman, it was forty-eight-fifty. And then, it went up to fifty-six, and then seventy-two, and it gradually over the years went up. And the big jump is when you make--go from firefighter to Lieutenant. That's about a thirty percent pay increase, which is really nice. Especially with two young kids at the time.

Q: What are the increased hazards of being a Lieutenant as you go up?

LH: Well, if you're in an engine company, as a Lieutenant in the City, you are on the nozzle all the time with the nozzle team.

Q: And what is that?

LH: Well, you are in at the seat of the fire. Where the firefighters, you have five--well, we used to have six firefighters; now they're down to four. But you rotate the men. One time Jones would have the nozzle. The next time, Smith would have the nozzle. The next time, Black would have the nozzle. But the officer's always there. He can't rotate. He has to be with the--at the--in the eye of the storm, so to speak, all the time.

Q: And what does a nozzle man really do?

LH: He's the one that turns the water on and off. He's the guy that's closest to the fire. And then, there's a back-up man, and the officer is right with the three people together.

Q: And generally, you are inside the building.

LH: Uh huh. Inside the room where the fire is--where it's on fire. And, you know, you make the frontal attack on the fire, and you just--the key to it all is to keep moving with the line

and keep putting the fire out as you're going and hope it doesn't get around behind you.

Then you're in trouble (laughs).

Q: And has that happened to you in Port or in ...

LH: Not in Port, no. In the City, a couple of times, it happened.

Q: And what did ...

LH: But what you always do, I always used to leave a man back like ten feet behind me, and when you start--we used to be--we used to tell the guy, "Watch my back." And, you know, if it started coming around behind you, because sometimes you had alterations, where when you're moving in this way, there's two entrances. So you're putting the fire out this way, and it comes around behind you. And that's what you have to watch out for. Then, you have to back up and, you know, either get another hose line and go in and get the fire on this side, and then come back out and hit it again.

Q: How did you work up the ranks to being Chief of the Battalion?

LH: Well, I was, as a fireman in Harlem from '62 to '68. I got promoted to Lieutenant and I went to Brooklyn, and I was a Lieutenant there, until in '74, I was promoted to Captain. Then, I went to the South Bronx, and I was Captain there for three years until I made Battalion Chief. Then I went back to Brooklyn and went to Williamsburg--we covered

Williamsburg, Bedford Stuyvesant, and Bushwick. And then, in '81, I went to the Safety Battalion. That's where I was when I retired. That was a good--that was the best job--that was around every fire in the City.

Q: As a Safety Officer.

LH: Uh huh, yeah.

Q: So when did you retire?

LH: I retired in '97--March 1st of '97.

Q: Now, you were a Safety Officer from--you're doing that out here now.

LH: Yeah.

Q: What are some of the comparisons, being the Safety Officer in Port versus what you were doing in New York.

LH: Okay. Well, the Safety Chief in the City, it's a full-time job. When you're not going to fires, you're involved with research and development; you're involved with training. You're involved in writing Department policy, safety bulletins, researching new tools and

equipment. Making sure that the training that goes with new tools is--like lesson plans and everything--follow certain practices. Any new equipment that comes in, we've got to look at it to make sure it's not going to compromise the safety of the men. That--like at one time, they decided to go for chain saws. And the rocket scientist that decided this went out and bought, I think it was forty or fifty chain saws and sent them out to ladder companies. And we put a stop on it right there. You know, you're not going to issue those tools unless the guys are properly trained on how to use them. Well, anybody can learn to use a chain saw. Yeah, that's right. Anybody could learn to use it, but they haven't learned. And you're putting them out there. So we had a big to-do about that, and they held--held on the issuing of them until they were all properly trained, because the chain saw's a very dangerous tool.

Q: In what way?

LH: Well, I mean, you can tear a leg off with it if you're not properly schooled in how to--you know, you don't know the way to use it. So ...

Q: And what about ...

LH: ... and that was just one example. We had--there's always people who are inventing things and trying to sell them to the Fire Department, or to different fire service departments. And many of them are well-intentioned and very good ideas and everything

else. But they--where they might work in, you know, someplace out in Missouri, they don't work in New York. And these are different things we had to--that was Research and Development's job, but we had input into the safety aspect of the tools and equipment.

Q: And how safe are things in Port?

LH: Very--very good. The stuff that they have is top shelf. They have--matter of fact, a lot of things they have is as good or better than the City. And more of it. They're not stingy when it comes to getting proper tools for the men.

Q: What were some of the major programs you were involved in here in Port, other than being Safety Officer? Were you on the truck committee?

LH: I was on a couple of truck committees, purchasing apparatus.

Q: Did you do that for the City, as well?

LH: I was on the apparatus selection committee in the City, yeah.

Q: Is that very demanding?

LH: It can be. The difference is the City has a very different bid process than they have out here. They write a set of specifications, and then the manufacturers have to bid on them. Where out here, we sit down with the manufacturer and see what their particular manufacturer has to offer the buyer. Like the City, turns around and tells people, "Here's our set of specs. I want Ford, Chrysler, and General Motors to build me that truck." Out here, we go and we look at a Ford; we look at a Chrysler, and we look at a Chevrolet, and we decide which one we like. Because they're not going to--they're not going to tool up and build one fire truck exactly the way we want it. Where the City, when they're buying eighty or ninety trucks, the manufacturer will tool up and give you what you want. So it's a different type of selection. It's more--I won't say it's more demanding, but it--you have to have a very strong awareness of what each manufacturer has to offer.

Q: So, going to your early years, you also were, when you first came on in Port, part of the ambulance squad.

LH: Uh huh.

Q: What were your experiences in those early '70s in that?

LH: Well, back in, I guess, right around 1969, 1970, they came out with that program that was on TV, "Rescue 8," and that was really the start of publicizing the fact that firefighters could become paramedics or fire medics and do both firefighting and EMS operations.

Before that, in some portions of the country, the local ambulance was owned by the funeral home, and it was a hearse. And when it wasn't being--it was fitted out as an ambulance with a red light on the roof, and then when they had a funeral, they'd take the stretcher out and take the red light off the roof, and use it as a hearse. And whenever they needed an ambulance, they called the funeral director, and he'd bring the ambulance to the scene. And that's the way the ambulance service was in a large portion of small-town America. The concept of merging EMS--emergency medical services--with the fire service came about in the early 1970s where they realized that during the Vietnam War, trauma victims that were treated very rapidly by on-scene, trained medic personnel had a much greater chance of survival than somebody who was just thrown in the back of a station wagon and run to the hospital--particularly in areas of cardiac care, sudden--a stroke, trauma--bad, serious trauma. The survival rate was much higher if they were treated on the scene. In other words, what this was, was, instead of bringing the patient to the emergency room, you brought the emergency room to the patient. And the concept spread very rapidly through the fire service, and they started in New York with an EMT program--that was Emergency Medical Technician. And then AMT, which was Advanced Medical Technician. And Dr. Calvelli who used to be down the road here, was very instrumental in getting this problem--in getting this program started.

Q: Were they doing the same in New York City?

LH: No. New York City had their own EMS Department. It was run by the Department of Hospitals. It was totally separate. And they were many--I won't say many years, but a lot of years behind in providing care--timely care--because of the way the system was run. Now, it was taken over by the City Fire Department, and it's merged together and the response time is much better.

Q: So, you're saying that it was a weaker system when it was run by the hospitals than it is now by the Fire Department.

LH: Yes. It started off being run by the hospitals. And then, in other words, each hospital had a couple of ambulances. Then, they went to an EMS system within the Department of Hospitals, and it got better. And then, now the Fire Department's merged and taken over, and it's run a lot more efficiently.

Q: Did you enjoy that work in ...

LH: Not as much as firefighting. But I enjoyed the challenge of it, the fact that you were really--you were doing something for the population. But it was more--it's, in a lot of respects, in this town, it's deteriorated down to the point where it's a glorified taxi cab. You get people--yesterday, they had one run. Injured finger. Now, twenty years ago, thirty years ago, forty years ago, you'd either have somebody drive you to the hospital, or you'd call Dr. Calvelli and he'd come to the house, or you'd go down to his office and he's

put a couple of stitches in. Now, everything is taken to the emergency room. And they've had over twenty-one hundred ambulance calls already this year in Port Washington. And the people just can't--can't give that much time on these silly nonsense calls. I mean, some of them are valid emergencies, but a lot of them are not.

Q: When did you quit being in that ambulance in Port?

LH: Well, it wasn't that I quit. I decided to let my certification as a technician go, in about '75. I was Captain of Flower Hill. I was going to college. I went to college under the G.I. Bill. I had three kids. I was still trying to work a side job. And I was studying for the Chief's test. And I just didn't have the time. And I would have had to go back, because you have to recertify every three years, which at that time was an eighty hour training course. And I just didn't have the time to do it, and I said, you know, I have an obligation to the fire company as Captain, to put all my efforts into the fire company. So I gave up on the ambulance. And, at that time, right around that time, was when they were forming, or talking about forming their own--their own company.

Q: And do you feel that, today, that the men or the women are better in the Fire Medics Department?

LH: I would say that the training--the ones that complete the training and go through the training--they're equal. They have equipment that is much better than what they had

when I was in there. And many of them are--I mean, there's quite a few of them in there that are nurses.

Q: We're turning now again to the Safety Officer that you were. We didn't cover Port. What were some of the challenges as a Safety Officer here in Port?

LH: One of the biggest challenges is, I think, is promoting safe driving--both personal cars and driving the apparatus. Making the members aware of the dangers of driving a fire truck or emergency vehicle--an ambulance. Some of the younger fellows come in with the idea that once they get in the truck, they turn the lights on, they turn the siren on, that they're totally impervious to injury or, you know, they're immortal and they can get to the fire like a--you know, like a person in a flying car, you know. And there's a lot--there's a science to driving any vehicle. Has to do with reaction time and stopping distance, and knowing the vehicle, knowing the capabilities of the vehicle. And a lot of kids, the biggest thing they ever drove was possibly a four-door sedan or a sports car or pick-up truck, and now they're behind the wheel of a sixty-seven thousand pound ladder truck. And it's like having a row boat out here and then having to take over and drive the Queen Mary. There's a totally different technique involved in driving it. And that's part of the thing is making them aware of the dangers of driving. Most of the other things are pretty well handled by the company officers--the safety at a fire, proper wearing of the equipment. The full--what they call personal protective equipment--P.P.E. The boots, bunker gear, pants, fire retardant pants, fire retardant coat. Years ago, all we had was

rubber boots and a canvas coat.. Now it's--everything is fire retardant. So that aspect of the safety makes it a lot easier.

Q: What did you call it? P.P.E.?

LH: P.P.E.--personal protective equipment. It's just an abbreviation for it. And that includes the helmet, the mask.

Q: But, how do you personally see to it that each person wears these things?

LH: Well, at the scene of a fire, the company officers are responsible to see that their men are properly equipped?

Q: And what's your job?

LH: And I make sure that, you know, if I see somebody that isn't properly equipped and not--working without a helmet or something outside, you know, "Get out and get your helmet on." Or when the decision is made at some point in a fire, particularly in the summertime, when they can do it, they call "Gear down." In other words, the fire is out, we're in an overhauling process, and everything else, we'll take the--"Okay, you can take your masks off now." We'll go around and we check with the carbon monoxide meter, make sure that the carbon monoxide level is down to the point where you can operate

without a mask on. And then we make sure that, you know, if it's a hot day, that they have proper rehab facilities, physical rehabilitation, hydration, bottled water, a rest area where they can come out, take their clothes down, strip back down to their regular street clothes, cool off. Because one of the dangers that goes along with this protective equipment is that, although it protects you from the outside, the tremendous heat of the fire, and you can actually be caught in an active flame flashover for up to seven seconds with this gear and be fully protected, by the time you get outside, the body core temperature has raised to the point where it becomes dangerous to the health of the individual. So we have to bring them out, cool them down, and rehab them. And that's part of the Safety Officer also, that he monitor the physical well-being of the members, as well as the safety from trauma.

Q: Do you also look at the safety of the buildings?

LH: Oh, sure. That goes--that's the same in the City or here. Like if it gets to the point--different type of construction has a different what we call allowable burn time. In other words, if we roll in, say, to this house next door, and there's fire coming out of every window, the first thing you go into is what they call a risk management mode. And, well, you have to make a decision. Is the risk that we're going to take worth the benefit that we're going to receive from this? If I send three men in that building, are they going to--first of all, is there any savable human life in there. And if there's fire coming out every window, it's obvious that if we're having trouble getting in with our protective gear and a

mask on, the people in there are dead. And it has to be accepted that there is no savable human life. At that point, we don't commit people to the inside of the building. We'll pump water in the windows until the fire is darkened down. A building like that, after ten to twelve minutes, from heavy fire involvement, we can expect collapse--structural failure. And that's what we have to look at is, you know, that structural failure collapse is one of the biggest killers of firefighters. More so than smoke--and the biggest one is heart attacks, motor vehicles, and then structural collapse.

Q: Do you remember some of the more memorable fires in Port that you were at?

LH: Well, we had Renga Brothers down on Haven Avenue. That was fully involved when we arrived. We had the one on Main Street where Bobby Dayton died. We had a couple of--I'm trying to think. There was one other one I mentioned yesterday, and I forget which one it was now. We had a couple of boat fires--boat yard fires that were pretty memorable. We had the lumberyard. We had the one down in Sands Point Bath Club where a three hundred pound propane tank exploded and scared the living daylights out of everybody (laughs). We had a series of arson fires back in the, I guess it was the late '70s, where somebody was setting fire to the boat yards. And about once every two weeks, we would have a real bad fire in the boat yard. And they finally caught the kid. But the problem with them, all the boats were in storage, and, you know, like in the wintertime when they store boats, they store them with full fuel tanks. So you had--some

of these boats had a hundred gallons of gasoline in them, in addition to the boat itself burning. And, you know, there was a lot like that.

Q: Did you ever take any lucky charms into any of these fires with you?

LH: No. I just have that miraculous medal that I carry in my wallet all the time, and that's my--I guess, my lucky--it's not superstition. It's just I have a strong belief that, you know, whatever God wills is going to happen.

Q: Is there a quote you can quote?

LH: Well, like I said yesterday, Ernie Pyle said, "There's no atheists in foxholes," and I haven't seen any in firehouses either.

Q: What are some of the great traditions that you value in the Fire Department most? Like initiation dinners, or the ...

LH: Well, we have the annual or semi-annual now--we used to have them every year and now they have them every other year, when the new Captain is initiated, is sworn in. They used to have them every year, but they got so expensive that we have them every other year, now. It's an honor to the new Captain coming in, and it's also to honor the retiring Captain. And the same thing with the Chiefs. They have one for the Chiefs, when the

new Chief comes in and the old Chief goes out. It's quite a gala affair, and there's awards given out and gifts and things like that. And then, at the Chiefs' dinners, then they give out any Department awards for performance during the year. And if the company is--the company awards are given out at the annual dinner, like the person that's the most active, made the most fires during the year, gets a little plaque, and things like that.

Q: You're talking about dinners. When you were in the New York City Fire Department, you lived in that firehouse.

LH: When I was working, yeah.

Q: What was that community life like in the City in the firehouse? Did you have to cook dinner?

LH: Oh, yeah, yeah. Well ...

Q: Tell me how that worked.

LH: ... I was a terrible cook. So, when I was--as a fireman--generally, as an officer, the firemen do the cooking. The officers don't do the cooking. It's kind of tradition. And the same thing, you know, the officers--but, of course, you take your plate to the sink and you wash your own plate, and now they put in a dishwasher. Years ago, the probie--the

new kid, he was in the sink, washing everybody's dishes. Same thing with the Chief. I mean, even if the Chief of the Department was to come in and eat dinner with you, he's expected to bring his own plate to the sink. You know, you don't--like they say, there's no rank in the kitchen, you know. But I used to do, generally, most of the time, peel potatoes, peel carrots, get the salad ready or something like that, because I had trouble with instant coffee, when it came to cooking. So ...

Q: What do you mean by trouble?

LH: I never really learned to cook well, you know, and I had trouble making instant coffee, you know. I got that right once. But ...

Q: So, they didn't look forward to your dinners when you cooked.

LH: No, they didn't let me cook (laughs). There were three or four guys that were the regular cooks, you know. They'd plan the meal and buy the ...

Q: And how is that run? I mean, do they ask the firefighters, "What do you want to eat?" or ...

LH: No. Whatever the cook made, that's what you ate. And if you complained about it, you were out of a meal. You didn't eat that night (laughs). Cooks were very temperamental.

And you have to be, because these guys are--they're crunchers they really were, you know, then the cook--like, let's say you had a roast beef, he'd bring all the food in with him for the night tour, and after roll call and everything, go back in the kitchen and start preparing the meal. And you always wanted to get the meal done before drill time, which was seven-thirty, or sometimes when you were in a busy house, we'd wait until after drill. And drill time was from seven-thirty to nine-thirty.

Q: What'd you do at drill time?

LH: Or seven-thirty to eight-thirty, rather. Practice, you know. In other words, you'd take a particular phase of firefighting and discuss it, or on a Saturday afternoon or Saturday mornings, you'd go out and actually do these things as a drill. Stuff that you didn't normally do as a normal run-of-the-mill operation. Might involve setting up a special ladder hoist, or the ladder pike--the heavy duty nozzle at the end of the ladder. And you'd practice things like that.

Q: You'd do that before the meal.

LH: Well, you'd go through the--generally, it was like a classroom session before the meal, while the meal was cooking. In other words, if, you know, and then the cook would have to get up every once in a while and stir the--stir the pot or check the meal, whatever was on. But then once eight-thirty came around, quarter to nine, was when you pretty much--

I mean, we learned to eat later, because you had a long night. And if you ate at six or six-thirty, like normal people do, by two-thirty in the morning, you're starving. So this way, by eating--I used to eat a sandwich about three o'clock before I went to work, and then nine o'clock, nine-thirty, you'd have your regular good-sized meal, and then ...

Q: But then how do you sleep on a full stomach in the firehouse?

LH: Well, generally, the only time we'd--in the busy places, we--mostly we didn't go to bed until--you know, you laid down maybe two o'clock, three o'clock, because you were running up until that time, you know. And then, it usually calmed down about that time. About four o'clock ...

Q: Did you have a pole that you slid down?

LH: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Q: Well, tell me about that. How did you slide down those poles?

LH: Just put the--grabbed it with your hands, wrapped your legs around it, and down you went, you know. There's a rubber mat at the bottom, and you've got to grip and slow yourself before you hit the rubber mat.

Q: So, did you ever have anything humorous happen on those poles? Any pranksters ...

LH: Oh, yeah. They--sometimes, they'd have a drill, and they'd tie a guy up to see if they could hoist him up like in a rescue. We used to get him halfway up and then hit him with a bucket of water. And that was more of an initiation for the new kids. Because the oldtimers, they wouldn't fall for that, you know. But then, after the meals, we were, you know, clean up the kitchen and everything else. And you always ate your vegetables first.

Q: Why was that?

LH: Because if you've got to run, you could always make a sandwich out of the meat when you got back. But the--like cold mashed potatoes are terrible. We didn't have microwaves in those days, so there was no way of heating stuff up. You just--there was always a roll of aluminum foil on the table. And if you got to run, the junior man in the truck--because the engine went out first, then the truck went out, or if you had a Chief in quarters, the Chiefs, say, would probably--they'd grab the aluminum foil and tear it off and cover each plate up as you went out, to try to keep it. And then, at one time we had a dog--a mascot. And the probies' job was to get the mascot out of the kitchen during the meal, because if he was in the kitchen and you went out on the road, you'd come back, there was no food left. He ate everything (laughs).

Q: Were there any mascots here in Port that you remember?

LH: Years ago, Protection had a Dalmatian. I think her name was Smokey.

Q: Did Flower Hill have any?

LH: John Duncan, who was an oldtimer and just passed away a few years ago, he had a Dalmatian he used to bring down to the firehouse. But the--it's very hard for a volunteer department to have a pet like that, because somebody has to--you know, the dog has to be walked two or three times a day, and there's nobody in the firehouse. And if the dog has to go, you know, and he's whining at the door and there's nobody there ...

Q: Were there any specific stories that you can remember that are humorous or otherwise, either in the City or in Port at the firehouses when you were ...

LH: Well, I think I mentioned yesterday about the fellow with the broken leg and the crutch.

Q: Yes.

LH: Yeah, I don't know if that's on this tape or the other tape. He had a broken leg ...

Q: We had already talked about that one.

LH: They shortened his crutch up.

Q: How does your family deal with, when they were younger, when you used to be away a lot in the Fire Department? How did your wife deal with the situation? Was she a member of the Women's Auxiliary?

LH: Oh, yeah. She was president of the Ladies Auxiliary for--and now she's--she still a Trustee of the Ladies Auxiliary. She's still very active in it. They meet once a month, and they have committee meetings. And the role of the Ladies Auxiliary has changed over the years. It used to be that they would come out whenever there was a serious fire and set up refreshments for the firemen or cook a meal for them, if it was going to be a long, drawn-out affair. Again, as I said yesterday, with the demographic shift and everything, they--what they do now, usually, is they'll--you know, Burger King is open; they'll send down and get fifty hamburgers or something like that. And the women basically are--they do more charitable work now, like they'll run a fashion show and things like that and make a donation to the Burn Center. But it's a social thing, and it's--it's still fairly active in our company in Flower Hill. As far as dealing with it, she was a fireman's daughter. My father-in-law was a fireman in the South Bronx. He'd come on the job in 1937, and he retired in '63, I think it was, when he made Lieutenant--shortly after he made Lieutenant. And she was already used to the hours. She knew what they were like. So, that part wasn't a problem. And when the holidays fell on Christmas, or, you know, Christmas fell on a day that I was working, we'd celebrate Christmas the day

before, or if it was Thanksgiving, if I was working nights, we'd have dinner at twelve o'clock instead of at six. Or if I was working days, I'd get home at seven o'clock, and we'd have Thanksgiving dinner at seven o'clock. You know, there was always a trade-off. But, by the same token, you know, you'd often, during the summertime when the kids are off from school, want to go to the beach, I'd go on Wednesday instead of on Sunday when it's mobbed. You know, so there was pros and cons to it.

Q: You recently have been active in some of the funerals. Mrs. Lang's funeral and ...

LH: Well, yeah. She was a very good friend of ours. We used to go camping together. I mean, the two families grew up together. And Charlie and I were--you know, we met through the firehouse, but he's probably our closest friend in the whole Fire Department. And she was in a lot of--she suffered terribly from cancer. And the last, you know, couple of weeks were not pleasant with her, with that. We used to go camping ever year. We bought a boat together. You know, we had a lot of fun over the years together.

Q: What were some of the ...

LH: Well, I don't know. Did you interview Charlie?

Q: I didn't interview him, but I think someone did interview him.

LH: Well, he's--turn that off ... [INTERRUPTION] ...

Q: What do you feel when you walk in the parades for the firefighters?

LH: Well, I enjoy the Memorial Day parade out here, because we're honoring the veterans, the service people that have died in the service of their country. Having been a Navy veteran myself, I have a strong feeling about that. And I enjoy that parade, and I enjoy the Pride in Port parade. Years ago, I used to go to some of the County parades and stuff, but pretty much now, it's my feeling, I just go to the ones in town.

Q: Did you have big parades in the City as well?

LH: Well, when I was younger, we used to go up to the St. Patrick's Day parade. And that was ...

Q: Did you march as a unit?

LH: Well, I mean, we marched as firefighters, there, too. There'd be three or four thousand men from the Fire Department marching. But then, you know, afterwards there'd be a party someplace, and as you get older, you're kind of not as prone to go partying as you did when you were young and single or foolish, you know.

Q: What does the Fire Department do special at this time, at Christmas?

LH: Well, we always have the party ... [END OF TAPE 2, SIDE A; BEGIN SIDE B] ...

Q: This is Side B of tape number two, as we were talking about Christmas. What does the Department do?

LH: They've always--they have a Christmas party for the children. Santa Claus comes on a fire truck, and it's kind of like giving something back to the kids for the kids loaning their fathers to the Fire Department. So, they all look forward to it, you know, as long as the little ones, they really don't believe in Santa Claus anymore and then a couple more years after that. And they usually have a magician or a comedian or a little entertainment for the kids to keep them occupied for an hour or so. And then there's usually a Department get-together Christmas--like a cocktail hour, couple of hours, where everybody in the Department comes and, you know, gives everybody season's greetings. I mean, husbands and wives, where the firehouse it's all usually just the men or, in the case of Fire Medics, a couple of the women, you know. But this way, the spouses get a chance to socialize and wish each other happy holidays.

Q: How was it done in the City?

LH: Well, most of the firehouses in the City, they have the same thing. They'll have the Christmas party for the kids in the firehouse. And usually Santa Claus--the older firehouses, he'd slide down the pole. Like, and they have a--they'd build a frame around the pole and make it look like a chimney, out of, you know, that crepe paper that looks like brick? And they'd slide down the pole, and Santa Claus could come out from under the fireplace. And it's basically the same thing. Other places--when I worked in Brooklyn, they used to put Santa Claus on the roof of the store. There was a row of stores across the street. And Santa Claus--all of a sudden, somebody would let out, "The sleigh just landed across the street!" And they'd bring the truck out. And they had a bucket. You know, a tower bucket. And they'd put the bucket up and Santa Claus would climb into the bucket, and then they'd just bring it over and put it in front of the firehouse (laughs).

Q: You mean, a firefighter would not go down an actual fire place?

LH: Well, no, this was different, because in this firehouse, they had two poles, but they were--there was a new firehouse ...

Q: No fireplace (laughs).

LH: And they had no fireplace, no.

Q: I'd like to touch a little bit on your legal witness ... [INTERRUPTION] ... As I was saying, I'd like to start again on your legal witness career, in terms of what you did in the courts.

LH: Well, it's part of the job as a Safety Chief in the City was to investigate accidents and fatalities and serious injuries to firefighters, motor vehicle accidents involving apparatus. And when we'd complete an investigation, find the causes of the accident. And then, very often when there's a law suit involved, you'd have to go in and testify, usually for the City. But, you know, it's a case of whatever the investigation was. Sometimes we advised the, you know, the City attorneys. You know, it was the Department's fault. It was the fault of the driver of the fire truck. He did something dumb or something improper. And, you know, the best thing you can do is not let it go to trial. Settle out. And ...

Q: How stressful was that on you?

LH: Well, it depended on--a lot depended on the lawyer--the lawyer that's doing the questioning. I mean, their job is to do the best job they can for their client. So they're going to try and discredit any expert witness that the City produces. And you have to be really on your toes to--not to make a mistake that's going to cost--you know, you may be thinking something, but if you turn around and say it and it influences the jury in the wrong way, it could be devastating to the case.

Q: Did you ever ...

LH: You had to be very careful not to lose your temper. And I'm Irish, and I've got a (laughs)--I have an Irish temper, and sometimes you'd like to grab one of these lawyers and just strangle him (laughs).

Q: How do you qualify as expert? Because of your forty years in the Fire Department?

LH: Well, we had specialized training?

Q: For court work?

LH: No, well, part of it was for court work, but for accident investigation and fire ground mishap investigation. We were trained by the New York City Department of Investigations on how to conduct fatal fire investigations, continuity of evidence, control of the scene, capturing evidence, recording evidence, and producing a document--a report at the end of the investigation that is totally objective in its findings. You know, we don't use--we never use the term "conclusions," because conclusions imply that it's an opinion. Where findings imply fact. And they do look for nuances like that that you have to be very careful when you're making a statement that you don't open the door for another line of questioning when you don't want that door open.

Q: Does it ever--do you ever find out what the end results are after you've been an expert witness?

LH: Oh, yeah, sure. Usually, the lawyer will call you in a couple of days, or if you're really interested in it, you could go call the lawyer and find out. And a lot of times, it ends up in the paper, you know, if the City, you know, was found at fault or the case was thrown out or whatever. I had a guy that fell out of a truck. He was a Captain. He was in the front seat, and the whole thing had to do with the fact that he didn't have a seatbelt on. But during the early stages of the investigation, we found out that the door had been improperly assembled. And when he went to roll the window down, it opened the door. And we took several doors apart, and we found out that this one particular door, one of the parts had been put in backwards by the manufacturer. So that took the burden off the City and onto the manufacturer. So the manufacturer--their attorney was trying to crucify me, you know, as far as qualifications and everything. But we had it document and everything. We'd taken pictures. We had a certified mechanic disassemble the door and record everything on film, as we did it. And, you know, it was incontrovertible as to what the--he was kind of accusing the Fire Department of deliberately turning this piece around and that the manufacturer didn't do it. But then we found two other ones from similar cases where they were put in the wrong way also. So, I mean, you know, it's things like that ...

Q: So was this in the City or in ...

LH: The City, yeah.

Q: And what kind of cases have you worked on here?

LH: Oh, nothing like that. That's not really in my--I mean, if there was a serious accident, I would do the investigation on it, then turn it over to the Department attorney. But, fortunately, we haven't had that type of accident around here.

Q: How does that stress affect you?

LH: It's not really stressful. It's--it's a challenge really, because you're sitting there and you never know what the next question is going to be that the lawyer's going to ask you. But I just--it's something I don't really care to do. I've done a few of them outside the City and hired by attorneys. And I try to avoid it as much as possible. If I get a case like that nowadays, I usually call this friend of mine in Connecticut and give him the job.

Q: A good friend.

LH: Yeah.

Q: What have you been instrumental in in terms of changes here in Port, since you've been here, as a Safety Officer?

LH: Well, we instituted a--well, the one thing the Safety Officer has to do out here is stay abreast of, particularly OSHA [Occupational Safety & Health Administration] regulations and changes that come up through NFPA standards and OSHA, to make sure the Department's in compliance. And we've instituted and kept the driver safety program going. We've got--OSHA has a very strict requirement on training on what they call blood-borne pathogens--in other words, protecting the individual against hepatitis, AIDS, HIV. When you're in contact with a patient or in contact with a fire victim, you know, you could come down and have a victim trapped in a car covered with blood. And well-meaning persons try to move that person--patient out, and contract the disease from that patient, because of exposure to the blood. So, you know, it's a matter of how to protect the individual, wearing proper rubber gloves or Latex gloves; in some cases, face masks with breathing protection. And that has to be--that training has to be renewed annually. So, we keep that on an ongoing basis. We made a couple of training tapes. One time, we had a--Fire Medics had a Captain from the New York City EMS--he was a New York City Fire Department EMS Captain. And he produced a training tape. That's viewed annually by all the members. Driving, as I said, we sent two fellows up to Montour Falls--the State Fire Academy--and they're certified emergency vehicle operator course instructors. And they're--you know, it's things about get--mainly organizing different programs is what you try to do.

Q: Now, you've also been an instructor in the Fire Academy. Can you tell me what that ...

LH: Well, I taught at Bethpage, in the Nassau County Fire Academy for about seven years.

And I taught in the New York City Fire Academy in probie school for a couple--for about six months just prior to being promoted to Lieutenant. I had been injured when I had the collapsed lung, and they put me on limited duty there and made me an instructor over in the probie school. I taught, as a Lieutenant, we had--well, I taught down at NYU in the high-rise fire safety program. I was teaching civilians on proper evacuation and fire procedures in high-rise buildings. I did that for several years down in New York University down by Washington Square. I did some seminars in *Firehouse Magazine*. But Bethpage was a lot of fun. That was teaching the volunteers how to put fires out.

Q: What did you do for *Fire Magazine*?

LH: Well, basically, I wrote articles on--it's a combination of driver safety and the duties of a Safety Officer. And I guess I did about six or eight articles for two or three different magazines. *Fire Engineering*, *Firehouse*--our own WNYF [official magazine of NYC firemen]. And I'm still the editor of the Retirees Column for WNYF. I write that every three months.

Q: And where do you get all your information?

LH: On the internet. I contact all the--throughout the country, there's retiree organizations--local groups of guys that live in--like particularly in the Sun Belt. In Arizona, California,

Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina. Guys--and they gravitate together and they form little clubs--retiree clubs. And I have all their e-mail addresses. And every couple of months, I start pestering the daylights out of them to give me information, and I put together a column. And that's a lot of fun, because you get to communicate with old-time friends. And, it keeps everybody current as to what the--because you develop friendships in the fire service that last forever, you know. It's not like guys move from one job to another. I mean, these are life-long friends, even though you only worked with them for six or eight years in one place out of a thirty-five year career. I mean, you still end up being friends with these guys for the rest of your life, you know.

Q: Now, you write the column for the retirees. As the older generation, and an ex-Battalion Chief, how do you feel about the younger generation that comes in. You've taught at the Fire Academy. You teach these younger people. What do you think of them?

LH: Well, the ones that come into the, you know, into the volunteer system out here in Port Washington are--they're going to be--nobody joins a volunteer Fire Department unless he wants to. I mean, it's not like he's looking for a job, and this job just happened to come up. These are kids that usually one of their friends is in, and they join because their friends are joining. And they have their own little internal friendship groups. But the most of them are very well--they're very dedicated, very--they want to learn. They want to learn the right way to do it. Some of the downside, the thing I see with some of them is that they--not, none of them--well, almost none of them have had any military training

or military experience. And you don't know until you're taught that an order is an order; you do what you're told. You don't like it, you keep your mouth shut and you do it. Sometimes these kids have a little problem with accepting authority (laughs). And I'll kind of let it go with that (laughs).

Q: So, have you any stories about that?

LH: Well, not really. I mean, I've had a couple, but not that I'd want to relate. Usually, the kid ends up getting his butt chewed out a little bit, and it's explained. It's explained to him that this is not the proper conduct, and ...

Q: Do they show proper respect for the older generation?

LH: Not like we did.

Q: And why is that?

LH: I think it's--well, even up in the church up here, it's "Father Dan" and "Father Bob," you know. In my day, it was "Monsignor Dillon." And the other priests called him "Monsignor Dillon," you know. There's a lot more familiarity today, you know. Even in the City, I never called my Captain anything but Captain. And I never called my Lieutenant anything but Lieutenant. And, even when I was a Lieutenant, I never called a

Chief by his first name. Today, it's Joe, Bill, Tom, and Harry, and Dick, you know. And it's a less formal structure, which may or may not be good. But when the crisis--when you're in a crisis mode, the automatic obedience to orders and acceptance of direction is critical. And sometimes it reflects back on--in a professional matter, a friendship shouldn't even have--shouldn't be a--have anything to do with it, you know. But familiarity can be detrimental to the discipline sometimes.

Q: What do the rookies ask of you, as a guru in the Department? You're viewed as the guru of the Department.

LH: Well, I don't know if I'd go that far. But, you know, I always try to--at a fire, I've never had any of them question anything I've ever said at a fire. One kid, one time at a vehicle accident, wanted to do things his way, and we had a slight discussion about it. But the--most of these kids are, you know, they really want to learn, and they do the best they can. And the main thing--my main job is to make sure that they don't get over-zealous and do something that's going to hurt themselves or hurt somebody else.

Q: In your opinion, what makes a good firefighter?

LH: Dedication. Ability to take orders. Guts. Willingness to learn. You've got to have a certain amount of manual dexterity--manual skills, being able to handle, you know, physical--strong, heavy, physical tasks, as well as being able to be mechanically able to

operate a tool. Some people just don't have it. You know, they just don't--you give them a chain saw, they're going to cut their leg off, no matter how much training. So you don't give that person a chain saw. You give them a typewriter, or make them a Department secretary.

Q: How do you feel about the women in the Fire Department?

LH: Well, when women first came in the Fire Department, it was--they were not accepted well at all, because of the manner they were selected in. There was a court order that they had to be given a less stringent test, and that led to a lot of problems. But the ones that are coming in now are--they're--the ones that can do the job are good. You know, there's as good as a man. But the problem is making--I mean, we have firemen that can't do the job as well as other firemen. I mean, some guys are strong, big gorillas, and some guys are little. But when I went on the job, when I first went to Harlem, I was the smallest guy in the company. I was five-eleven, and I weight two hundred and ten pounds. And I was the smallest guy in the fire--in the truck company. The engine company had all the little guys, and the truck company had all gorillas.

Q: Now, explain, why is that?

LH: In those days, truck work--we had no power tools to speak of. The only ones that had power tools were the rescue companies. So everything was manual strength. If you had

to tear a door off, you had to be able to tear a steel door off using manual, physical strength. Now, they take a saw and they cut it, you know. But the hose line was--you know, little guys pulled the hose line and put the fire out, and the big guys ripped the building apart so they could get in. When you're--particularly when you have to make a rescue. When you have to try and move somebody that's unconscious, the--you know, I could probably pick up somebody weighing a hundred and fifty pounds--of course, I can't do it anymore with my back. But thirty years ago, I could pick up somebody weighing a hundred and fifty pounds, just pick them up like a baby. But you pick somebody up that's dead weight that is a hundred and fifty pounds, that's totally unconscious and uncooperative, it's a totally different--and, plus the fact, that you're eating smoke and everything, and you're trying to crawl, and the person has clothes on, and you're dragging him across a rug, you've got friction--two fabrics together--it's not like dragging him across a linoleum floor. It requires a tremendous amount of physical strength. And some of the women don't have the physical strength to do it.

Q: So what happens to these? Are they told that they should get out of the Fire Department?

LH: No. Generally, you know, a lot of them stay in engine companies where there is a tremendous amount of roles today, you're rotated around. And, plus, we've developed different techniques as far as rescue and so forth, that we didn't have back when I was a fireman.

Q: Now, were there women in the New York City Fire Department as well as out here in Port when you went in, or is that fairly new?

LH: The women came in, I think it was around 1982 in the City. That was the first women that came in. It was '82 or '83.

Q: And when did they come in here?

LH: I guess we got our first woman--well, actually, the first woman we had was Mary O'Reilly. She was--but she joined Protection Engine Company predominantly and specifically to be in the ambulance end of it. And that was--she was the first woman. Well, she--in those days, you had to join a regular fire company to ride the ambulance. So she joined Protection, but all she really did was go--was do the ambulance.

Q: Now, you have been in the Navy. You've been in the New York City Fire Department. You've been an ex-Chief. You've done ambulance squad. You were instructor, Safety Officer, Legal Witness Program. Of all of these, what do you savor doing the best?

LH: Right now, playing with my grandchildren (laughs).

Q: And how many grandchildren do you have?

LH: Four.

Q: And what are their names?

LH: Brian is my grandson, and then I have Nicole, Christine, and Megan.

Q: And would you ever want them to become firefighters?

LH: I would think Brian, my grandson, would probably want to be one. But Megan and Christine, I don't think--they're into ballet dancing. I don't think they'd want to become firefighters. I really don't know if I'd want the girls to be in the Fire Department, but actually, as far as Brian, you know, if he wanted to become a fireman, that'd be great, but I would hope he'd do something that'd be a little more financially rewarding, and he doesn't have to work two and three jobs, like they do now.

Q: Why wouldn't you want your girls, for them to go into it? Were your own daughters interested in becoming ...

LH: Not really. No, my oldest daughter was a member of the Fire Medics for a while. But not on the firefighting end of it.

Q: And what was her name?

LH: Peggy. She was a--she joined the ambulance squad when she was in college. And then, when she graduated, she joined down here.

Q: And were you ever at fires together?

LH: Not that I recall. You know, she'd do the duty nights up here, because she was--at the time, she was teaching over in West Hempstead, and she was going out with my son-in-law. And she really didn't put--she'd go on ambulance calls, and I'd go on fire calls, you know, so ...

Q: What are some of the perks to being a firefighter?

LH: Out here?

Q: Well, in comparison with New York to Port Washington?

LH: New York City, really, you know, it's--you get a--well, number one, it's a steady job. I mean, it's a constant source of employment. They only had one series of layoffs during the fiscal crisis of 1976.

Q: They laid off firemen?

LH: Yeah. They laid off fourteen hundred firemen.

Q: Does that put the City in some sort of risk?

LH: Uh huh. They closed firehouses, and they just didn't have the money to pay them. And it was just a case of they were trying to get more money out of the State and the State wouldn't bend. So they laid off firemen and closed firehouses. But, most of them were hired back in a, you know, certain period of time. But, since then, they haven't had that happen. It's a great comradeship. Tremendous feeling of accomplishment when you put a fire out. You're doing something that nobody else can do. You know, that part of it is-- both volunteer and paid--it's a wonderful feeling. And out here in Port Washington, I feel, you know, you're giving something back to the community. And ...

Q: Do you feel that the Port community is appreciative?

LH: Probably not as much as it used to be. We have a serious recruitment problem in Port now. And, you know, we've had some people join. Right after 9/11, there was a few people that joined up, and some of them stayed and some of them didn't last too long when they found out the amount of training necessary and the amount of work involved. There's a tremendous amount of time involved in being a volunteer fireman. It's not just jump on the truck, take off (laughs). Funny story. We had--one day--as you know, Flower Hill is right across from the railroad station. And right around train time, the

train--the fire whistle started blowing and the truck got out on the ramp and guys were putting their gear on. And this businessman comes over and grabs a coat and a helmet, and he gets on the back of the truck. And I said, "What are you doing?" He said, "Well, I'm volunteering to help put the fire out" (laughs). You know, we got to the fire, and we had to tell him, "Stay right here. We'll take you back to the firehouse." But he thought, you know, oh, that's a great idea. I can help. Everybody's running to the firehouse (laughs). True story. You can't make these up, you know.

Q: What other stories come to mind. You must have a wealth of them.

LH: Oh, God. I probably would if I sat down and thought about them, but we had, you know, different people over the years--we had a guy, when I worked in Brownsville--Steve Black. That was his name. He was the nicest guy in the world, but not the brightest light on the Christmas tree. And I'd like to change, you know, manipulate the name to protect the innocent. Guys used to be unmerciful with this guy one time.. But I come in and I hear a big commotion going on in the kitchen. And I walk in, and they have him chained with a padlock and chain around his neck, chained to the radiator. I said, "What the hell's going on here?" "Well, he's not in on the meal." And "We caught him snitching ..."
They made cheese and crackers. "So we'll have to leave him tied up until after we eat." I said "No ..."
(laughs). I said, "What happens if we get a fire?" "Oh, he's useless at a fire, and besides, we've got an extra man tonight. We'll leave him back." "No, unlock him." You know (laughs), stuff like that.

Q: And did he retaliate in any way?

LH: No, he was such a big, big pussycat. I mean, such a nice guy. But he just--he didn't think along the same lines, you know. He was always--like I sent him out, I said, "Stevie, go start another hose line." Meaning, get a couple of guys and get another hose line. I go out, and he's pulling the hose off by himself. I said, "What are you doing?" He says, "I'm starting a hose line." "Get another line up here. Get four guys to help you" (laughs). Then, we had a guy, when I was in Brooklyn, he loved working on cars, and he loved tinkering with Volkswagens particularly. And at that time, Brownsville was a dumping ground for stolen cars. And they'd bring the car--they'd steal them all over Queens and Nassau and drive around Brownsville, and then they'd dump them on the street down there and light them on fire. So we'd go down there, put the fire out. And John would see a carburetor. Take--he always had tools in his pocket--he'd take the carburetor off the old abandoned car (laughs). ... [INTERRUPTION—call comes over pager] ... Another ambulance call.

Q: Do you have a call on the ambulance?

LH: This is the third one today for the ambulance. They're running ...

Q: You don't respond ...

LH: I don't go on ambulance calls, no. Matter of fact, with this, I don't go to fires either.

Q: What happened to your leg?

LH: I was up hunting and I slipped on a rock, and I tore a tendon in the ankle. So I've had this on for two weeks; I've got one more week to go. I was about half a mile back in the woods, and I had a big--just about this much snow on the ground, and I didn't see it. There was a rock under the snow, and just snapped the ankle.

Q: So what did you ...

LH: Took me an hour to walk out half a mile. A couple of steps at a time. Tears rolling down my eyes. (laughs). But this fellow with the Volkswagen, he was--his best buddy, Charlie Ritchie, he had put a new--John had put a new carburetor that he had rebuilt, and--well, the first time he was rebuilding a carburetor. And he's got the--you buy a kit to rebuild the carburetor. Charlie went up, and he got some parts from another carburetor, and he swapped--you know, Charlie's just trying to put the carburetor--nothing fits (laughs). So, he finally gets the car all tuned up and everything--his own Volkswagen all tuned up. And we had a gas pump--gasoline pump in the firehouse. That's how we filled the--before they had diesel, we had gasoline. Charlie'd go over, and he'd take a quart of gasoline out of the pump. And when John was upstairs or wherever, he'd pour it into the Volkswagen in to the gas tank. And the next week, he'd put two quarts in. The next week he'd put three quarts. And John was saying, "I'm getting fifty-two miles to the

gallon. This is fantastic," you know. But after a while, he started--instead of putting three quarts in, he'd put two quarts in. Because a Volkswagen had a very small tank. I think it only had an eight-gallon tank. And so the mileage would go from fifty-two to forty-eight to forty-four. And he'd get it down. Then, he'd start siphoning gas out (laughs) and putting it in the fire truck. And he kept tabs of every quart that he took. And, because he didn't want to be accused of stealing gas from the City. I mean, that's how devious this guy was. So, finally, after about a month of this--and now he's down to about fourteen miles to the gallon. He rips the car apart and everything. And this went on all summer. He'd rebuild the carburetor. Charlie'd start putting more gas in. Then, a couple of weeks later, he'd start taking gas out. He'd rebuild the carburetor (laughs). Finally, one day, John looks out the window and sees him putting the gas in. I thought he was going to kill him (laughs). And he's chasing him around the truck with an ax handle (laughs).

Q: So was he accused of theft or ...

LH: Oh, no, no. It was just, like I say, if he--if maybe he took a gallon over the course of a month, he'd siphon the gallon out, and then he'd pour it into the fire truck. So the Battalion always evened up. It was just that he borrowed a couple of quarts for a couple of weeks, and then put them in John's car. Then took them out of John's car and put it in the fire truck again (laughs).

Q: Did anything like that ever happen in Port (laughs)?

LH: No, I don't think so. No. But, I mean, there were some funny--another time, they took a--a guy got a brand new car, and they took his--you know how they balance tires? They put little wheel weights on. Well, this guy come in, they took all the wheel weights off one wheel and put them on the opposite side. He's going home--it goes, "bump-bump, bump-bump." Takes it back to the dealer. They re-balance the tires. He brings it into the firehouse. We change the wheel weights. Right? "Bump-bump" (laughs).
Everything was up for grabs. You know, anything for a laugh. But they were a great bunch of guys down there.

Q: How do you deal with the loss of some of your buddies from 9/11?

LH: Very hard. If a guy gives his life at a normal structural fire, it's a tragedy. But you feel he's doing it--this is an accidental fire. The people that are in that building were depending on the Fire Department to get them out. The guy tried his best. Or, in the case of like when they lost the twelve firemen down on 23rd Street, they were going in to put the fire out, and the building--the floor collapsed, and twelve firefighters died. Six guys died at the Waldbaum's fire in Brooklyn when the roof collapsed underneath them. These are tragedies. But it's a fire. It's an act--this was an act of war. And I had the greatest respect for the military. They go into war knowing that they may be killed. Firefighters shouldn't have had to expect to be killed by an act of war. They went in that building that

day. A lot of them knew they weren't coming out. And, I think, like I said yesterday, the one Captain even had his men take an indelible Magic Marker and write their Social Security number on their arms, so that if they didn't come out, they could--the bodies could be identified easier.

Q: Were those bodies ever identified by that mark?

LH: Some of them were. A couple of them were. Some of them were never found. The guy who took my place--Larry Stack--they never found him. I retired in '97. He took over as Battalion Commander from me, and he died in 9/11. One of my drivers--Bobby Crawford--died. He was scheduled--he was scheduled to retire October 1st. We had one guy from Rescue #1 that was downtown in headquarters waiting to retire. He was down there on an assignment. His retirement was coming up in a couple of days. He heard his son was at the fire. He went over there, and they were both killed.

Q: Could they have refused to go in, knowing how dangerous it was?

LH: I don't think that thought ever enters into your mind. The first--one of the big problems--and we really don't have enough time to get into it--was the condition of the radios that were--that was ...

Q: Explain that a little.

LH: That was--that should never have been allowed to happen. The technology is there. We have the technology in Port Washington. The technology was available at the time of 9/11, and it wasn't utilized. And a lot of the guys didn't hear the orders to evacuate. One of the Captains--Patty Brown from Ladder #3--one of the cops told him on the way up, he testified later on, that he told the Captain of Ladder #3 that they had an order to evacuate. And he said, "I didn't hear the order, and we've got to get more people out." So, you know, that's the type of person you're dealing with.

Q: Would that person be reprimanded in the end for having not listened to this?

LH: Well, I guess he got the final reprimand, you know, he and his men didn't come out. You know, they were killed. But if he honestly, on his radio, didn't hear the order. It was the police radio that worked. And the police were trying to tell the firemen that they were ordering everybody out of the building. And he just ...

Q: Why ...

LH: ... could hear people above the fire that were screaming to get out, and he just kept going.

Q: Why do you think that they didn't have the radio system that we have out in Port? Was it because they were ...

LH: Money. Politics.

Q: And that hasn't really changed, has it?

LH: Well, it--a lot of it come out during the hearings into 9/11, and they're working on it now. But Nassau County had the technology ten years before the first Trade Center. Back in the mid-'80s, they had the technology to transmit a Mayday electronically. The technology existed, but New York didn't choose to get it. They had all their eggs in one basket. They had their radio repeaters were in the World Trade Center.

Q: They had what?

LH: Radio repeaters. That's part of the radio system--the transmitter, where it receives a signal and boosts the power and sends it back out. And it was destroyed. The Emergency Operations Center was in 7 World Trade Center, and that building collapsed. So ...

Q: What do you think is the major difference between the firefighters--the people that are firefighters in New York and Port?

LH: Well, in New York, it's a job. It's a living. You know, you do it. It's a great bunch of guys, great comradeship. But the main purpose you're there is to support your family. But you're there to earn a living and hopefully to advance yourself, and support your kids and put them through college, and everything else that anybody wants to do. The fact that you might have to work two jobs is--well, that goes with the territory. Out here, with the volunteers, it's a, I guess people would say--I don't want to use the word hobby, but it's an avocation rather than vocation. And the people that do it out here, do it, not because they have to do it, or because it's a way of supporting their family. They do it because they enjoy doing the different aspects. I mean, some people enjoy the firefighting end of it. Some people enjoy the medical end of it. Some people enjoy the administrative. Frank Pavlak is probably the historical guru and the administrative genius of Protection Engine Company. You know what I mean? That's his--that's his bag. He's into the paperwork end of it. The younger kids that come in, there's also other--there's other benefits. They have a bowling team. They have a softball team that took state championship a number of years.

Q: Are you active in any of the drill teams ...

LH: No, no.

Q: ... or were you at any time?

LH: No, I was always afraid if I got hurt on there, it would affect my job in the City. And, you know, I mean, somebody that, say, works well, maybe in a desk job someplace, but they were injured on the racing team, they could still go to work with a cast on their leg. If I got hurt and I went to work with a cast on my leg, I'd be put on medical leave or I'd be put on limited duty. And if it was a serious enough injury, I might not be able to come back to work, and they might put me out. See, if you can't do the job physically, you're put out of the job. You're retired on medical disability. And if it's not line of duty, it's a very small pension compared to the normal twenty year or thirty year pension. And that's something that can be devastating. You know, even when I got hurt the first time, and they were going to put me out with my collapsed lung, even though I would have gotten three-quarters pension, three-quarters of a fireman's salary in those days, within five years, I wouldn't have been able to support my family. And ...

Q: Is one of the perks--is a perk out here the pensions that the volunteers get?

LH: Well, to call it a pension is really--it's kind of a misnomer. It's what they call a LOSAP [Length of Service Award Program]. It's an incentive program to keep--not so much to recruit new people into--but to keep the older men and women more active and to keep them--see, in order to qualify, in order to get what they call a good year, you have to produce--you have to respond to so many fires, attend so many drills, attend so many work nights. So, it's an incentive program to keep the present members from dropping out of the Department as they get older. And I guess you could call it a pension, but in

my case, it comes out to a little over--well, it's not quite three hundred a month, which is--I mean, I'm not going to throw it away, but it's not--you're not going to live on it, you know. It kicks in when you're sixty-five. So it's--you get twenty dollars a month for every year that you have active duty. But they didn't start this until I guess the mid-'80s or '90, in the '90s. So ...

Q: And it's not retroactive for the whole time.

LH: No. So, you know, it probably has done its job in the fact that it keeps people active. It keeps people coming to fires that may have dropped out, that may have gone inactive or decided that they didn't have to go to as many drills and things of that nature, because it's not just going to fires. It's also administrative, and it's also attending drills, keeping current, keeping your firefighting skills and your medical skills up to current standards. And that was one of the problems that we were having. The older people weren't going to school, and they weren't learning. You know what I mean? They're, "We've, been there, done that, you know. I'll just go to a couple of fires a year and ..."

Q: You mean, here in Port?

LH: Yeah, yeah.

Q: And that helped bring them up.

LH: And it helped maintain the level of skill necessary. And, you know, from that point of view, the community, naturally, they benefit by this, because you've got more experienced people around to do, you know, what has to be done.

Q: What would you most like to be remembered for in all these years as a firefighter?

LH: I don't know. I thought about this after you asked that yesterday, and it just, you know, the fact that I was a good fireman and I did my job and raised my family to be good kids and, you know, and I never tried to hurt anybody. I always tried to help somebody. And I heard Danny Thomas one time, he said that there's givers and there's takers. The takers are well fed, but the givers sleep better. So, you know, I have no problem going to sleep at night.

Q: What do you think would be so lost if Port became a paid fire department?

LH: Oh, that's a hard one. A part of the community, you know, there'd be a void there in terms of social and community involvement into the firefighting end of it. Eventually, it's going to happen. I mean, it has to happen. The amount of training that's required now is so much--the skills that are needed to be maintained. People--particularly older people--when they're getting into their forties and fifties, a lot of people today have where they've downsized different jobs and everything, they're forced to move, and, you

know, you lose--they don't have the time to continue taking the training--all of the training that they need. Even with the LOSAP program, the--as you called it--the pension program. And eventually, we're going to have to have at least a paid crew. You know, basically, we have three paid maintenance men now, and they're using them to supplement the ambulance company during the day, because they can't--don't get enough people out to handle all the ambulance calls that we get, you know. So we're actually using the maintenance men to respond on the ambulance. They're all trained AMTs. That's one of the requirements to be hired is that they have to be a medical technician. And they supplement the ambulance call when they can't--when an ambulance call comes in, one of them responds right to the scene of where the ambulance call is, with a truck that has a complete what they call a jump kit, or a stabilization kit that he can stabilize like a cardiac patient. And then, the ambulance responds to the scene, he's already there working on the patient. So it's upgraded the response time. It's made it much more acceptable and much more rapid to have a technician right on the scene. And then it only requires one person to drive the ambulance to the scene ... [END OF TAPE 2] ...