

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

Transcript Of Oral History Interview With

Louise Ligeri
Atlantic Hook & Ladder Company No. 1

conducted in association with the
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pertaining to the subject being discussed

Interview with Louise Ligeri
pk October 4, 2004

by Margaret Dildilian

Q: Today is October the 4th, 2004. My name is Margaret Dildilian, and I am interviewing Louise Ligeri of Atlantic Hook and Ladder Ladies Auxiliary, at 50 Crescent Road, Port Washington. Pronounce your full name.

Louise Ligeri: Louise Kathryn Bellafato Ligeri.

Q: Did you have a nickname when you were in?

LL: Yes, I did--Weezie and I still have it. A lot of them call me Aunt Weezie. But I--it's Weezie from Louise, cutting Louise short. Wee-zee on the end (laughs).

Q: Was that something that came about from the Fire Department, or ...

LL: No, no. This is many, many years ago, you know, when you were little kids and we called each other nicknames like that. And so Weezie was always for Louise. For Louise.

Q: Which fire company were you associated with?

LL: With Atlantic Hook and Ladder Company Number One, at 25 Carlton Avenue, Port Washington.

Q: And how old were you when you were--when you joined as a--Ladies Auxiliary,

LL: 1957. I have to think. From 1920, how old?

Q: That's fine. And how long have you been a member?

LL: Ever since 1957, when I started the Auxiliary with some friends of ours that--I have listed names. All firemen's wives, of course, you know, to get into ...

Q: And so you are a charter member?

LL: Yes. Yes.

Q: And what made you form the Ladies Auxiliary?

LL: Well, we felt like we wanted to be a part of something nice and help our husbands, you know, to be there, and things going on and preparing things for fires, and dinners. And I think they really wanted to have us to go along, too, because they were very happy about the whole thing when we decided to do it.

Q: And how did you, at that time, recruit your members?

LL: Well, I'll tell you, it was at a Christmas party in, I think, in December of the year before that we just talked to each other at the tables, you know, clowning around and saying "Hey, what do you think? It'd be nice ..." to do so-and-so. You know, have this, and so at the January installation of the new members--the men, you know, have their installation. It was, I believe, the third week in January. And that's when we really brought it up to them. And they--all of the men that were there, which, I would say, just about everybody, was very happy about it, said to go ahead. So we had a little officers'

meeting. We made up our own officers, because we had to found something up until they voted us in or out, you know.

Q: Who's the "they"?

LL: The Auxiliary ladies, you know. We didn't have--we only needed so many officers, but we did ask everyone to come to my house, but everyone just couldn't make it.

Q: So who were the initial charter members? Do you remember?

LL: Yes, I believe I--I--I listed ...

Q: Can you remember the names? Can you remember the names?

LL: Yes. I--well, of course, I was the President, Louise Ligeri. And then Mena Giresi was Vice President. Her husband was James. Sophie Whaley was the secretary, and her husband was John. And Victoria Salerno; her husband was Jess, Sr. Marie Vames. Her husband was Peter. Ruth Salerno; Anthony was her husband. Mary Devito--Anthony; and Anna Fico's husband was Joseph. Evelyn Jackson; her husband was Kenny. Virginia Marra; her husband was Nicholas. And Elizabeth Cella; husband, Joseph. And I was President. Mena was Vice President. Sophie Whaley was Secretary. Marie Vames was Treasurer. Ruth Salerno was Chaplain. And Evelyn Jackson and Virginia Marra and Elizabeth Cella were the three Trustees. And when we presented this at the first meeting in February, the ladies were--oh, we had a great attendance. They were all there, and we presented this, and we asked them to vote for--you know, make motions, if they wanted us or not. And each one was voted upon, and each one of these were accepted. So we were the first officers for the two years until, elections came up

again.

Q: Now, what were your--what were your goals? What was the--what was the primary function of the Ladies Auxiliary?

LL: Well, we--we ran--we had a lot of projects going on, and we did raise a lot of funds, you know. We held raffles, and we had bake sales and a lot of things. And then, of course, we had joined, then later on, we joined the--the other two auxiliaries and became a department, like the men had the Department with the three companies. And that enabled us all to--we worked together and had a beautiful thing. And I was the President of that also at one time. As soon as we got in. And it was really, really very--you know, it worked out very well. And it enabled us to parade in the Nassau County and State parades. We did parade as a unit, and we received three trophies for best appearance, and that is a very--a very--it has to be a perfect thing. The size of the clothing, so many inches from the ground and all that type of stuff.

Q: Can you describe what the uniforms were like?

LL: Well ...

Q: What they--the first uniforms?

LL: ... the first uniforms that we had, as our Ladies Auxiliary of Atlantic, the jackets were a pretty lavender, and the lavender hats. And we purchased those from Ken Jackson. He was a fireman also and well, I always knew him as Dusty Langner. They had the shop on Main Street right across, like from the Plaza. They were next to the bank in there. And

they had all equipment for any kind of sports, you know, including bats and balls and all that. And we did get our first jackets from them. We used them until we became a department. And we went across the street to Mr. Goldstein's and we bought the white material. And we had a big thing going at my cousin--Jess Salerno's house--Vicki, his wife. Because our basement, we were just getting ready to finish the basement, so we had the lumber all over the place. We went up there. We all carted whatever portable sewing machines we had, and we made the white skirts. And, with those, we paraded in Port Washington, which we have a few pictures of. But when it became a department, we all had to be in uniform all alike, so we all got uniforms like the men--the navy blue, the regular.

Q: What year was that, do you think?

LL: I can't be sure. I don't have a record of that. But I would say maybe two years after we joined. After we became an auxiliary. Maybe '59 or '60 or '61. Something like that.

Q: Now, on these parades, did you march with the men?

LL: Yes, but we--as separate units, of course. But we always paraded with the men, yes. So it would be like Port Washington, the men paraded and the ladies paraded. But ...

Q: Behind the men?

LL: ... yes. It was all the men--all the men first, and then all the ladies after. You know, it wasn't separate times. But the men would be first and then all the ladies. But if we had--then, of course, we had state parades. We belonged to the--we joined the state also,

which I still belong to--the State of New York. And I pay my dues, and I still belong to Nassau County Ladies Auxiliary, which, when I can make meetings I do, but they're so far out on the Island most of the time. Sometime, we have them back in Port Washington or Manhasset, and it's great.

Q: What trophies did you win at the parades?

LL: Yes, at Nassau County Firemen's--the parade—we've won the three--three different years, three different times, three different years. And ...

Q: For what?

LL: For best dressed. Not like some--they had most in line and all that type of thing. But this was for best dressed. Three beautiful trophies. One sits at Atlantic; the other one sits at the Flower Hill Hose Company, and the other one is in the Protection firehouse. So, each of the three companies was very nice that each of us got one.

Q: I'd like to ask you who the family members were that were firefighters in your family.

LL: Well, first--the first one that I recall, of course, is my brother Sal. My brother Salvatore Bellafato. He was a fireman. And--and along with my two cousins--my first cousins--Joseph Cella and Charles Cella. And, of course, my husband. I can't forget my--he--then came my husband after, later on, and I have--I still have a lot of second cousins and third cousins all in the--still in the Fire Department. The Cellas, the Salerno family, and forgot who I put in there. Ben Ligeri Jr., my brother-in-law--my husband's brother. And my cousin, Louis Macliochetti. And John Manso, my other cousin. And then of course,

there's the Peneski family also on here. And ...

Q: Now what do you remember--your earliest memories of fire and firefighting in Port? Was there anything that you remember that was outstanding in your mind? When they--for instance, when you first married and your husband was a firefighter, what did he ever tell you about firefighting?

LL: Oh, I don't think--I don't really know if he told me anything about it. I mean, I was born and raised here, and I saw it all, anything was happening as it came along, you know.

Q: He never told you about his experiences?

LL: No, not really, well he did--when he had the gas sta--we had--he had a gas station for ten years on the corner of Carlton Avenue. And he--my brother-in-law, Ben, Jr., they just dropped everything they did, and he'd just run off and leave the place (laughs) and the cash register, and he'd go right on up to the firehouse and they'd jump in the truck and wait for the guys to come and drive the truck to the fires. And we did have quite a few large fires. We had some fires in Port Washington with where lot of the older buildings, of course, you know. And I remember the Foreman Estate in Sands Point when that burned. That was--they were there practically all--a very big part of the day and the evening. And, of course, the Ladies made up coffee, and we brought all types of cakes and anything we could bring, you know, so they'd have and ...

Q: Could you describe what you actually brought when you went to these fires, as an auxiliary? The food? The real food?

LL: Well, it was always--it seemed like it was always--it would always be at night. It would be like coffee and cake type of thing. They had the coffee urns in the firehouse, and we'd go there and make the coffee. And all the ladies, whatever we had in the freezer, whatever we could find, or whatever store that might have been open, we would just grab some kind of cake and buns or anything at all so they could have something when they got through with the fire. If it was really bad and they didn't get back in time, we would--the men would come--they'd send one or two of the men back and they'd pick up the stuff and bring it to the fire.

Q: Did you women go there yourselves to serve them at the fires?

LL: Not usually. Not usually. It just seemed that--we could, and we have done it. I remember doing it one time around Haven Avenue someplace, and I can't remember the fire offhand. But we did. The men came and got the urns of coffee, and we took and brought the cake and stuff. And we went and poured the coffee for the men, and, you know, served them--handed them, so to speak, when they had the opportunity to grab something.

Q: Did you ever make any special recipes for them for these fires?

LL: Not for the fires, because they were always something that, of course, we know that, you know, we didn't--weren't prepared, like a dinner or something, you know, that we did do a lot of nice things and cooking and preparing things for the parties.

Q: We'll get to the parties. But at the fire, when that fire horn went off ...

LL: Right.

Q: ... what was your role as the men went to the fire?

LL: It was really nothing until we heard from the men that they would like us--because we didn't feel like we wanted to interfere, in other words.

Q: So, how--what was the procedure? You would wait for what?

LL: Yeah, I would wait--at the time when I was President, I would get the call, and then I already had a list that--of the women who were available, you know, to go to night fires, that could leave their home, in other words. Not everybody could do that. So, the ones that volunteered, so to speak, and that's the ones that I would get on the phone and call.

Q: But you would first wait for the men to let you know.

LL: Oh, yes. We never interfered and said--well, first of all, you wouldn't know how long the fire was going to last. You know what I mean? And it could have been a very short one. So, naturally, we didn't do anything. We weren't called to do anything, so to speak.

Q: Did you ever--have dinner on the table ready and your husband had to run out with the dinner there?

LL: Yes.

Q: And how did you feel about that?

LL: It didn't bother me one bit. I just closed it up, wrapped it up, did the best I could, and kept it until he got back, and just warmed it over (laughs) again if I had to. But it didn't bother me, because it was--fire was a--you know, getting to a fire was very important. You know it was. Because you never know what was involved or who was in the building, or whatever.

Q: Did you ever worry that something would happen to your husband?

LL: No, I--I never really did, because it seemed like they were always--they always had so much care for each other and help for each other.. And it wasn't like being in a sixty story--probably if it was in the City, I probably would have been a nervous wreck. But, because of the facts here, because of the type of the homes, the type of buildings and things like that, and the wonderful fire equipment we had, so there was really no problem. Naturally, you always thought about it, you know, God forbid something should happen. But, thank goodness, nothing--things have happened in the--since then in fires where firemen had problems--you know.

Q: Were there any deaths during the time that your husband was a fireman?

LL: No. No.

Q: Did you know if your husband ever took a lucky charm with him to the fires?

LL: No, no.

Q: Or any other firemen that you knew?

LL: No, I don't. I know they all have their little, you know, like religious things on their keys and stuff like that.

Q: What were those?

LL: Well, I wouldn't know, offhand. I mean, you know how some people have a--a certain saint that they pray to and things like that, you know. And I imagine that's what I would say you'd see on people's key chains sometimes. But, as far as them bringing anything, I wouldn't know myself, you know, because I've never seen it. I just know that the way, the type of people that they were, that they thought about things, I'm sure.

Q: I'd like to go back for a moment to the fund raising that you do, or did. Do you still do the fund raising? The Women's Auxiliary?

LL: No, we ...

Q: How has it changed from back then and now?

LL: Well, we don't have enough members now anymore, that we only just keep in touch, as an Auxiliary, over the telephone, the phone squad, and letting us know things that are going on. But we haven't been doing anything recently. But before that, we always did have bake sales and raffles, and a lot of things were donated to us, you know, and we'd get our TVs and stuff like that from Alpers [Hardware].

Q: What would you use the funds for? TVs and what else?

LL: You know, we didn't use the funds for that. We donated the fund. Everything that we made, we would donate to something--whatever it was. Like something--nice gifts for the Fire Department. If we knew that they needed something, we would try to get it for them, you know, just as a gift from us, so to speak.

Q: Can you give some examples of the gifts that you've given?

LL: Oh, I can't re--I really don't remember. I honestly can't remember. And, of course, we did give gifts, like, to the outgoing officer, the outgoing Chief of our company. We always did a nice little tribute of some type of thing. And we donated to other organizations that needed a little gift of some sort, you know.

Q: What were the parties like that you--did you have any parties within the Ladies Auxiliary? Or did you ...

LL: Oh, we did have, yeah. But we had our meetings, but whenever we had parties, it was something that we could invite the men to, if it was something special going on. That was all fine. And, like, at our meetings sometime, like I remember, we had a baby shower for Doreen Simonsen. She was so surprised. She didn't know. We got all the gifts together for her. And I can't remember all the things that we did. But we surprised certain people and made sure that they got to the meeting, and then if they were having a--we'd give them like a little shower of some sort. Whether it was a wedding, or whatever it might have been, we'd always try to do a little something extra nice for our members, you know.

Q: What parties did you go to with the men?

LL: Well, that would be like their annual dinners that they have, and, of course, to the other companies also that we were invited to. We would go to those. But it would be like installations and Christmas parties and, in the summer, the barbecues, the picnics. Sort of a firehouse picnic where all the members and family was invited, and they supplied all the food. But we always liked to bring--all the women would always bring a little extra cookies or extra something.

Q: And the Christmas parties, what did you do for the--anything special at the Christmas parties, for, let's say, children of the firefighters, or ...

LL: Yes, we did. We always got the--found out the nature--we found out the ages of the little--of the children, you know. Of course, we were all members, so we all knew, as one big family, so to speak, so we knew each other's family and each other's children. And--and we would always have a nice Christmas party, and we'd have one of the men members would always dress up like a Santa Claus, and the children would get their nice little gifts, you know.

Q: And how has that celebration changed over the years?

LL: Well, as I say, we haven't been that active. I'm speaking for myself and for other--but we still have Christmas parties. They still--oh yes, and they are very nice about--they have them for the children. They have them for the grown-ups, I'm sure they still have. Yes, because I get--as a widow, I get invited to everything that goes on in the Fire Department.

Everything. Whether it's just our company or whether it's the Department as a unit--all three companies--if they have something going on or if they--trips to Atlantic City or wherever, Mohegan's Sun [Casino] wherever, the widows are always invited. So that makes us feel real nice, you know, that we are really remembered. But they still--they all still have--because I--all the companies do, because we get invited to the Christmas parties.

Q: So how would you describe the Auxiliary now of Atlantic Hook and Ladder? Is that active at all?

LL: Well, not really. We don't have any meetings, but the group of women that are, that I have on the list there that are left, why we keep in contact with one another. Usually Marlene Sautkulis, she calls me. Or her father, Joe Salerno, was my cousin. And she would--she called, or Kathy Fico. I would usually get a call from those two, and they call all the women if there's something going on, or someone passes away and they want us to meet as a--as a group. We do show up as a group. There's always a nice little crowd there.

Q: What is your function at the funerals of the firefighters? Do you have a function as an Auxiliary at the funerals?

LL: It all depends. If it's a fireman, of course, you know, then they have a special--the firemen, of course, go in uniform, and the women just go, you know, themselves, the way they are. And the men handle that. But if it's a member of the--any members of the family or anything like that, or a wife of one of the firemen or whatever relative, then we just have a nice little--a prayer. We say a prayer. We don't interfere because there's so

much always going on between the churches and their other auxiliaries and what-have-you. But we do attend. We do go when we find out in enough time.

Q: Let me ask you about how the women felt about the other companies. You belonged to Atlantic Hook and Ladder, and there were the other companies.

LL: Right. And it became a department, as I said before. So, you know, then we were able to parade as a department, like the men paraded as a department. And we got along beautifully. We worked altogether. They--when, like you say, when the fire--when we had the fires, and each one went to their own companies. Everybody did something. In other words, it wasn't just our company. It was Flower Hill and Protection ladies would go--the ones that were available, of course. And sometime we'd all go to one firehouse, but all three of the ladies--the three companies--would work together at one firehouse. It all depended on how many people were able to show up. But we got along beautifully. We had our meetings once a month together every month. And, as I said, we paraded together and had the picnics and the, you know, a lot of things going on--parties at the beaches and stuff.

Q: Did you have anything humorous happen, like mascots. Did you have mascots? Did you know any ...

LL: As far as I can remember, I don't ever remember Atlantic, our company, having a mascot. But I do remember the beautiful big black and white Dalmatian that Protection Engine Company had. Just beautiful! And he would sit up high up on that fire truck and ride to every fire. And as a much younger person, before I even got into the Fire Department, I can remember--and, of course, he couldn't have been much older than me anyhow--but my son-in-law's uncle--Uncle Kenny--he would go to the firehouse. He just lived around

the corner, but he was there. Oh, he loved the firemen. He loved polishing the trucks and all, and the dog every day. And such nice memories to remember. The beautiful--this was a beautiful Dalmatian. They don't have any mascot anymore, as far as I know.

Q: What happened to the Dalmatian?

LL: Well, I guess it passed away after--because they had it for so many years, you know. I guess old age or, you know.

Q: And did you have mottos as--did the women have any mottos, sayings that they ...

LL: Not that I can--not that I can ever remember.

Q: No mottos at all?

LL: I don't re--I don't remember. I wish I could, but ...

Q: Now, what were the--what were you the proudest of in your work with the Auxiliary? What makes you the proudest of what you've done with the Auxiliary?

LL: Well, just being there as a part of the organization, as part of the Fire Department. To know that we were there to help them in any way we possibly could, or, if, for instance, there were people who needed a ride someplace, or someone wasn't well and you'd help them doing something. We just tried to keep busy all the time, and it was a wonderful feeling knowing that we were there and being a part of the Fire Department.

Q: What were some of the bad parts of being in the Auxiliary? Was there such a thing?

LL: I can't--I can honestly say I don't ever remember a bad part in the Auxiliary. I honestly--it just seemed like everything was always just happiness all the time.

Q: And what about--you never had a worst day or something bad happening trying to get the food to the men or ...

LL: No. I--no, I don't think so. I think everything always just worked out good. I don't remember any dishes toppling over (laughs), anyone tripping, or anything like that. It just seemed like we got everything going together very well.

Q: Were you holding down a job, as well during these years?

LL: No, not--most of the years--well, we did own our own business.

Q: What was the business?

LL: Well, one of the--at one time--well, while my husband was a fireman, he had the gas station. But it was before that, we had the grocery business that we took care of--helped my in-laws with, that my dad had started on Shore Road and then rented to them. They took over the business. And they built a new building next-door, and, you know, it was really nice. And our families were very close--my husband and I--were raised like kind of close together. You know, our families knew each other well--his family and our family. And so I helped out at the grocery store. And then, after that, for three years I--I was in the--I worked in B. Altmans for three years. And then, after that, of course--my husband's gone now twenty-nine and a half years--so there

was really no part of me being in the--when I worked the twenty-four years at Publishers Clearing House. So that was--I still kept busy with the Auxiliary and stuff like that the best we could. It's only the past couple--few years--past few years that we haven't been able to do all we wanted to do in the Auxiliary. People moving, people passing away, and the younger people, too busy. So we do the best we can.

Q: How do you feel about the younger women? Are they getting interested in being in the Auxiliary?

LL: Well, I haven't heard anything of them being interested in it, because we did have a lot of young women, and for some reason, we just didn't meet anymore. So, I don't know if it was because they all had jobs, they went to work. I really don't know what the reason was.

Q: The years your husband was a firefighter, what do you remember as the most vivid memory of him as a firefighter?

LL: I have to stop and think. I really--well, as I told you before, I remember him always in those ten years, running up and starting those trucks, and all the years always going to the firehouse, making sure that the trucks were taken care of, that they were well greased, and oiled, you know, anything that had to be done. He and my brother-in-law took care of a lot with some of the other firemen, also. But because he had the gas station those ten years, why ...

Q: And who would take care of the gas station when he left that for a fire?

LL: Well, he did have a couple, but sometimes there was nobody there. The boys were still in school, but he had Joey Pennetti worked for him for quite a while, and now he has his own gas station. And, with my cousin's boy, Charles Cella, they still have that gas station down on Valley Road. But Joey Pennetti worked for him, and my son-in-law's cousin. I can't think of his name.

Q: Let me ask you, did you ever want to be a firefighter rather than be in the Auxiliary?

LL: No.

Q: Why?

LL: Because I--I feel that's a man's job. I know we do have--we do have one lady. Not in our company. But I--I just feel that that was a man's job somehow, you know. And an auxiliary, the ladies should be the ladies, and the men should be the men. Just like, if I could bring up the Elks, I don't feel that there should be lady Elks, because (laughs) an elk is a male.

Q: How does your daughter's generation feel about that, about the women firefighters? How does your daughter feel about women firefighters?

LL: You know, she's--no, she wouldn't be interested, because she--she feels like I do. That's a man's job to do, and it shouldn't be taken away from him.

Q: And do you have any boys that are firefighter?

LL: No. I had one son, but Louis Ligeri, Jr. And a grandson, Louis the Third.

Q: Would you like them--would you like them to be firefighters? Your grandchildren?

LL: Well, they--I really don't know. I--my son was--he always was interested in doing things at the firehouse, but just not being a fireman. I guess, because of the fact of his job and things that he did. He worked out of town. He worked two years on the New York World Trade Center in the City. And he just--I guess it was always work, work, work, running someplace else, that--but he was always involved as a son, in anything that we did when he was at home when he was single. And even after he was married, if they were invited to things, or whether they were invited or not sometimes, things were going on where you could go, they would go.

Q: How did your husband feel about your involvement in the Auxiliary?

LL: He was very pleased about it. When I spoke to him about it, we, you know, thought about ladies--"How would you like us to have an auxiliary?" and he was very happy about it. I--that was the first thing I said to him, because they had--the other companies had auxiliaries, and I thought it might be nice for us to have one. And he thought it was a marvelous idea, and so did the husbands of the other women. They thought it was very nice of us to want to be able to do something like that.

Q: How do you feel about--I mean, how do you feel toward the women now that are in the Fire Department? You, yourself?

LL: In our company, you mean? Oh, I think the world of them. I keep in touch with them,

you know. They're all Port Washington girls and ladies, so to speak. And quite a few of them are, like I said (laughs), second cousins, third cousins, you know, generations that-- and a lot of very nice, dear friends. So we do get along very nicely, you know. We let each other know when things are going on and how is so-and-so doing and so forth.

Q: What are the annoyances of being a Ladies Auxiliary? There must be some annoyances for you, as a women's auxiliary, going to the men's group to serve them coffee at a time like that? I mean, was there anything?

LL: No. I just honestly cannot remember having anything like that. There was never--even never even any arguments. It just--I know it doesn't sound that it should be that way. But that's the way it was. I mean, everybody just got along beautifully. It was like--like everybody was blood related. You just had that feeling that there was so much love around you, that if you went to someone with a problem of anything at all, they'd be right there to help you. And it's been like that, which is very nice. Of course, years ago, when, I think, when we were smaller, people were--when I was younger--people were a lot--people were a lot closer. They kept more in touch. Not--not just fire department, just people. I can remember my mom and my two aunts every day when they got--the telephone came through, every day they were on the telephone, you know. And your neighbor was always there to help you. So it was very nice.

Q: Do you remember any pranks that you might have played as the women with the men? Did you play any pranks on them at all?

LL: No, I couldn't remember. No, I ...

Q: No humorous jokes or pranks?

LL: No, I cannot think of anything. I wish I could, but I just can't think of anything. I'm sure we must have done things (laughs), playing jokes on each other, I'm sure. But I don't remember doing anything, or any of us.

Q: What I really was asking you is did you feel any animosity at all toward women who became firefighters?

LL: I--I didn't like the idea. Let's put it that way. I just feel that they shouldn't have been-- can I use the word "infringed upon." I just feel that, you know, that shouldn't have been taken away from the men. They should have kept it as a male order thing. The firemen are firemen. But, of course, there are women out there that want to do those things. That's their prerogative. I was never for it. I--I'm really not for it. I would rather that it would just be the men. But it's not going to be, and we all know it. So ...

Q: And how did your husband feel about it?

LL: My husband knew nothing of this. This only happened very recently. I think, since women's lib came into, you know, meaning of some sort, I believe that that's what caused it.

Q: I'm curious to know if you have any unforgettable characters in the Women's Auxiliary, and why are they eccentric or odd or funny or ...

LL: I--I really can't think of any one in particular. I think we were all like that. We all had

our funny ways about us. We all have our odd ways about us and serious ways. But it was always in a joking form. Anything that went on, it always turned out to be really funny--something funny, you know.

Q: But you can't remember an example of that?

LL: I cannot remember any example. No, I'm sorry.

Q: I want to ask you if you ever went to the firehouse during the day when the men were there, during your early years?

LL: No, we never--I don't ever remember ever having gone to the firehouse, unless we were invited to do something, or if we were told like to come down, something had to be done, or we were invited down for something nice, you know, where everyone went there. Everyone--like I don't ever remember, so to speak, just going down there for any reason to walk through the firehouse, or anything like that. Even if we went down to go to a service, a funeral service or anything, women never really went and did anything unless their husbands were involved. And, as I say, if I were to go now, to be invited to do something, it would be because I was being remembered as a widow and not--knowing that my husband is not going to be able to be there to be with me, but they still invite the widows.

Q: Now, what did the--did you know what the men did in the firehouse when they were there when there wasn't a fire? How did they pass the time?

LL: Oh, they were always polishing, you know, like I said, my husband there and my brother-

in-law. And then, in the evenings, some of the men would go there and, in the firehouse and ...

Q: What would they do in the evening?

LL: Well, they took care of the trucks. They were forever--it was a lot of work taking care of the trucks, you know. And especially after a fire, everything--the hoses had to be-- everything had to be washed and cleaned, and wound up again and put back in place again. And they were forever polishing. And the firehouse had to be taken care of, you know. If they had any foods, anything going on, they'd--somebody had to be there to clean up and so forth, you know.

Q: Do you know what the perks were for being--what were the perks for being a fireman? What made people become firemen?

LL: Oh, well, I guess just being--wanting to be there to help. Somebody had to do it, and, you know, you have to have firemen just like you have to have policemen and stuff like that. But firemen, I think, were very, very important, because if a fire goes on in someone's house, people can't always get out of the house without the firemen and their equipment. Their ladder, their hoses and all that, you know. I mean, I always felt it was very, very important ... [END OF SIDE A; BEGIN SIDE B] ...

Q: ... B. I'd like to ask you what you think is the importance of this project we're doing in interviewing. How do you feel about this project that the Library and the Fire Department are doing?

LL: Oh, well, first of all, I think it was very nice that people of the Library--and I don't know how it came about. I'm sure that you would have a part, but whoever, it was very nice to be asked, you know, for us to be like kind of remembered in this type of thing. And feel that they were happy to know that people like us were around and still are around, you know, the Fire Department will always continue. They will always be there to help people. They'll never shut down. Never, never.

Q: I think it was Peter Zwerlein who has been in this ...

LL: Oh, my "Petsie." I sat on the porch and waited for him to be born.

Q: Tell me about it.

LL: His dad and I, we were neighbors when I lived on Shore Road, when I was like--I guess I was about five when we moved there. And the Zwerleins lived right behind us. And Billy and I kind of grew up together, you know. And it was nice, and I know we liked each other, but we were too much like brother and sister, raised, you know, and beautiful family. And Pete--Peter has the two brothers. He had--Bobby, of course, is gone. And they, then when they were married, and we were married, we lived next-door to each other. And our children--my Betty and my Louie Jr. and Ruthie had Billy and Bobby, and Peter. And we lived right next-door to each other. So we picnicked together, we partied together. We did everything together. Lovely, lovely family.

Q: So, was he instrumental, when he joined the fire company that your husband joined? Or how did that come about?

LL: Well, my husband--I'm sorry?

Q: Well, later on, in later years, were you still ...

LL: Oh, well, I don't remember how. I imagine Louie got in--my husband--I think my cousin, Curly Salerno--we call him Curly; he had that gorgeous head of hair--Jess Sr.--I think it was Curly and it was Flash Marra, he was--he was the Chief that installed us. My cousin Curly was going out in January. He was for two years--well, whatever he had. But he was the outgoing Chief, and Nick Marra was the incoming Chief. So he was the one that installed us that February.

Q: And can you describe the installation that he did? What did he do at the installation, Nick Marra?

LL: Oh, Nick Marra, I have--I wish I had the pictures. They took pictures of it. He installed each--well, they installed, you know, installed the members. It was nothing spectacular. It was at a meeting thing, and that was the extent of it.

Q: And when ...

LL: I mean, I would say not spectacular. What I meant was it wasn't advertised, you know, and all that. We made the papers and things like that, but as far as having a big bash, great big party--that type of thing--we didn't.

Q: Getting back to Peter Zwerlein, what were some of the more exciting things you did as families, together?

LL: Well, like I said, we lived next-door to each other. We ate together a lot. We swam across the street a lot on Shore Road. And sometime my husband would check my--take Ruth and her children and my children, and I'd say Aunt Nitta--my son-in-law's mom and with her two children, and he'd take us down to Sands Point and my two nieces, and we would pack a great bigt thing of, you know, of juices and take a couple of loaves of bread and a jar of jelly and jar of peanut butter and a bunch of cookies, and we'd go swim down on the beach in Sands Point. He'd drop us off there, take us all down on the truck, and then come and pick us all up. We had a wonderful, wonderful, even childhood and, you know ...

Q: I'd like to get back to your early childhood. Can you describe some of the things that you did then that you can't do now because of the changes in Port?

LL: Some of the things that I did then and ... ?

Q: As this, you know, when you were young, as you're describing with Peter?

LL: Oh, I really can't say, other than there have been a lot of changes.

Q: Well, what do you see as the changes?

LL: Well, first of all, changes on Shore Road where I lived some of the time. Not only just as a child; it was later on, after we were married--when I married Lou Ligeri--and then we lived there in the house also, next to Ruth and Bill. And, but everything just changed. There's no more beach across the street, you know. And there's all the condos, which,

you know, it's very nice to have all these things. I'm not criticizing. But I'm saying so many changes, that the trestle is gone, where we used to go up over the sand trestle.

Q: Where was the sand trestle?

LL: The sand trestle was where--well, I forgot; it has a new name now. It's on the corner of Mill Pond Road. It used to be Gildo's for many years. The sand--they used to bring the sand with the trucks.

Q: Sand mining?

LL: From down, you know, Sandy Hollow Road there in the back, in the sand bank. And they'd drive it down, and then it would go down in a--in a hopper. They dumped the sand down, and it went up over this great big bridge and went onto the scows. And that was across the street like from where I lived, right up high.

Q: What was your address then?

LL: My address then was 43 Shore Road. Then it was 45, which was Ligeris', and we were 47 and Ruth and Bill was 49 (laughs).

Q: Yeah. Ruth and Bill ... ?

LL: The Zwerleins. Yeah. And my sister, then, was on 43 Shore Road, which was originally where I went when I was small. My sister and her husband and her two daughters. My dad sold them the house, but, like, you know, for peanuts, so they could have it, you

know, like--like fathers and mothers do, you know. You don't ... [INTERRUPTION] ...

Q: What do you think of the oral history project for the firefighters and the Women's Auxiliary?

LL: Well, I think this was really--I feel like it's an honor. It's, of course, my pleasure, and I'm very happy that I was chosen to be the one to--one of the ones to be able to do this. And I think it's just marvelous to think that they should want to do something like this for the Fire Department and the Auxiliary. So, I could just say it's a fabulous idea--I can't thank you enough. I think it was a beautiful, beautiful gesture, and I'm sure that everyone that hears about it will feel the same way as I do.

Q: Thank you so much.

LL: It was my pleasure. ... [INTERRUPTION] ... brings the families all together.