

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

Transcript Of Oral History Interview With

Julius A. Picardi
Atlantic Hook & Ladder Company No. 1

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

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pertaining to the subject being discussed

Q: Today is June 8th, 2004. We are at 50 Crescent Road, Port Washington. My name is Margaret Dildilian, and I am interviewing Julius A. Picardi of the Port Washington Fire Department.

Jules, I'd like to ask you when and where were you born.

Julius A. Picardi: I was born and raised—born and raised in Port Washington, educated at local schools. And I ...

Q: Did anything specific happen in your childhood that made you want to join the Fire Department?

JAP: Well, it was always—always exciting when I see the fire trucks going through for a fire scene, and someday I always said to myself, hopefully someday I'd be able to help the community out and give back some services.

Q: So, how old were you when you joined?

JAP: Oh, you had to be eighteen to join, and you had to have—you had to have sponsors.

Q: And who sponsored you?

JAP: Well, they're all deceased now, but Mr. Edward Piccardo—P-I-C-C-A-R-D-O—Mr. Charles Frappaolo—F-R-A-P-P-A-O-L-O—and Mr. Salvatore Frappaolo is his brother.

Q: And Jules, which company did you join?

JAP: I joined the Atlantic Hook and Ladder Company Number One of the Port Washington Fire Department.

Q: And what makes that so different from the others?

JAP: Well, each company has their own equipment. We had—we had specialized in the aerial hook and ladders, and the hydraulic aerial ladders. Hundred-footers, hundred-twenty-five-footers. And plus the rescue equipment.

Q: And did you have to have special training ...

JAP: We had to have special training on that, and just in case, at a fire scene, they need additional help, we were there to assist them. We'd normally be with our firefighting gear fighting a fire.

Q: What rank did you achieve? You were a Lieutenant, I believe? [in the Port Washington Fire Department Fire Police].

JAP: No, right now, and after so many years service, OSHA gets in because of your age and the stress, they said to me, "Okay, now you can still be a member of—stay with the Department," so I joined the Port Washington Fire Department Fire Police. I am now a Lieutenant. Now Fire Police are to keep, at the fire scene, to keep people away from the fire scene, so they could help the firefighters do their job, plus traffic control.

Q: So you're called the Fire Police?

JAP: Fire police.

Q: And you control traffic.

JAP: Traffic and pedestrians.

Q: Pedestrians. How many years have you been with the company?

JAP: Oh, I have been—I'm in my fifty-eighth year.

Q: And how strenuous were the initial years?

JAP: Well, the initial years were tough. You had to—it was round the clock, seven days a

week, winters included. You had some real cold nights there, believe me (laughs).

Q: So what would happen on a freezing night when you got the call?

JAP: Well, I was—I was equipped with my equipment, heavy equipment, warm equipment, warm sweaters, and what-not, and you'd wear it with that. You had that special equipment.

Q: You had that ready at your bedside?

JAP: Yeah... Yeah.

Q: Can you explain what actual steps that you would take in order to ...

JAP: Well, for instance, as soon as we heard the alarm—let's go back a little bit. The alarm in those days used to be called in the Port Washington Police Headquarters. They would push the button and that would send the alarms. Today we have pagers. I got my pager with me. And we have that so we know where the fire locations are. But what happens, once I heard the alarm, I'd go right in, put my clothes on, maybe dress with boots, whatever time of year it was, and get ready to go. And I'd be out the door within maybe less than ten minutes. [It weighed approximately 15 pounds when you had it on, you know]...

Q: And what were some of the most memorable fires that you attended?

JAP: All right. We had one which was a fatality. Two children passed away and a woman in my neighborhood, and there was a ...

Q: What is your neighborhood?

JAP: North Maryland Avenue. And then there was a Sands Point Bath Club cabanas were burning one winter in the middle of February, and it was cold. Of course, we had the one where we lost one of our fellows [Bobby Dayton] down here on Main Street or Main or down where what's his name is now right across from Dominos. And that's where it was. And many—we had many brush fires and house fires, but they were about the only ones I remember vaguely. Yeah.

Q: Now, were you holding down another—you were holding down a regular job while you were doing this?

JAP: Yes.

Q: Where were you working?

JAP: All right. I was employed—I worked electrical contracting for many years. Then, I finally applied and got hired by Long Island Lighting Company [in Hicksville], which I spent forty years there as a building maintenance technician. [There were 2000 employees in around ten buildings] And yes, I retired from there, yeah.

Q: And did anything you learned in the Fire Department help you in your work?

JAP: Also, we were—we had a fire brigade which I was a member of the Fire Brigade [at work], in case of, you know, if we had hoses placed in various locations.

Q: At the Long Island Lighting Company.

JAP: In the buildings.

JAP: This was building maintenance, yeah.

Q: So you directed any activity if there was a fire.

JAP: Well, we all had an assignment. If it was Building so-and-so, then we would know just who to respond. Whoever was there by there would come over the loud speaker and say, "Building so-and-so, so-and-so fire." And we would respond. But there's always somebody available. We also had training sessions there also to ...

Q: To keep up.

JAP: Yes, with changes.

Q: Now, when you were taking care of the medical site before the Fire Medics Company, did you have any interesting cases that you can remember?

JAP: Well, we had—we had a few auto accident injuries, and we had people with falls and fractures and stuff like that. But the gentleman in charge at that time was Mr. Edward Piccardo. He was—he was a certified technician, and he was the one who was always teaching us. But he was always there with us to assist us when we were assisting him. And we had a few of them. We had one cave-in one time. Thank God it wasn't serious. It was when one of those digging a trench caved in. But aside from that, we had quite a few, you know, tough calls.

Q: Now, were you ever chosen to drive the fire truck?

JAP: Well, I did—it's a funny thing. I did drive it sometimes, but then I got—I was a little nervous in traffic. Of course, when they hear sirens, they panic. They don't know which way to go. You ought to see it today as a fire police, people get at fire scenes, they all seem to panic.

Q: They don't just pull over to the right?

JAP: Unless we tell them. Now, of course, you know, we have to—by the way, as a fire policeman, we have to be certified twice a year. We go through seminars. We are actual, what you call peace officers. Now, I can give a summons at a fire scene only. But not on a regular street. But, usually we work with the Port Washington Police Department, and we work with them. So if anything goes wrong, we tell them then, because they know the laws.

Q: Have you ever given summons?

JAP: No, but I came close.

Q: You came close. Tell us about that.

JAP: Well, what happened was sometime when—like I said, when you get by them, they bad-mouth someone and they give the finger. When you're starting to picture the scene—in other words, you got a scene, and you got two lane traffic to one lane. So we got so many this way and so many this way, holding them. What's that? Everybody's in a hurry. And they go shwew! right through. And then, you yell at them and you hear someone say something and you get the finger, and they get mad but they're gone!

Q: But at an actual fire scene, when you're in control ...

JAP: Yeah, right.

Q: ... as a fire police Lieutenant for the ...

JAP: Yeah, yeah.

Q: ... have you had anybody disobey you to keep away from the scene?

JAP: Oh, of course. You tell them the line: "Well, we're here to protect you as a driver, plus the fire scene." Of course, at a fire scene, everything's already—they got equipment, they got the trucks around there, hoses. Now, if the hose ruptures, you're in trouble. I mean, you know.

Q: What happens?

JAP: Well, it'll burst. But I tell you, this thing'll go ... [??] ... it'll blow right out.

Q: And what'll happen?

JAP: The chances of it [whip around] happening are one in a million. But our equipment is always tested. And to make sure that everything is just fine. But people don't realize this. They're in a hurry to go. See?

Q: Now, if they're not in their cars and they're crowding around a fire scene, what is your duty?

JAP: Fire tape. Yellow tape you see at an accident scene. We put it around and we keep personnel there to keep the people out of there. They're all excited. They want to get in and help you, with their cameras. "Stay behind. I don't care what you want to do. Stand behind the scene."

Q: And have you had to arrest anybody?

JAP: No, not really. But we had to get the police on the call. They get very—I don't know what it is. Very vulgar for some reason. I don't know why. They don't realize the fact that we're there to help protect us. We got a fire scene here. We got a job to do, see. And our fellows here are here to do a job, and we want to protect them. See?

Q: So when 9/11 happened, what happened in your ...

JAP: We were all called for standby at our fire stations. Now, we had—we were fully

equipped with our trucks and equipment. Ambulances, all, everything that we had—First Aid equipment and everything else. And we were dispatched out—not me, I was at the fire station. We were dispatched to Kings Point Marina—Kings Point Merchant Marine Academy with boats coming in. Shea Stadium was a command post. And then there was another location I don't remember offhand. And our fellows worked there, and we were called in as they needed them.

Q: And how many were called in?

JAP: Oh, we had—I'm not exaggerating. It was—our group, we had about two, three hundred of our fellows there, driving as far as—and loading stuff up, and then we also—and later on, we had food there for the fellows when they'd come in and whatever, you know.

Q: Now, when they were that many for 9/11, who was protecting Port Washington?

JAP: Well, our fellows, we had enough people here in order to have the equipment available and to be able to maintain the safety of the town. We had people here available. So it was enough—we weren't left out with anybody. See?

Q: Now, going back to the early years when you were in—first came to the Fire Department in the late '40s, I believe ...

JAP: '47.

Q: ... what was the culture like? How different was it then than it is today?

JAP: Let me see. At that time, we had a waiting list for the Fire Department members to get in. Today, it's very tough. I mean, it's—younger groups today, they are married, they got two jobs, and go to school, and all that. It was a very good—a very good relationship. Even today. And, of course, today where you have anti-discriminatory laws. No, we don't do that. We have Blacks, we have Jewish, we have Hispanics. As long as they can do everything and they're qualified and maintain their fire status duties, and you're welcome. But if they don't, then they're asked to leave. Because then you're not doing us any favors. See what I'm saying?

Q: Now, in the early days you were voted on, right?

JAP: Oh, absolutely.

Q: And how was the voting system? Was that a secret ballot? I mean ...

JAP: (Laughs) Well ...

Q: ... there were ...

JAP: ... at first you could call it the blackball system.

Q: Tell us about it.

JAP: It was like little marbles. Now, if you got voted, if you got one black ball you were out, see. So, I do not recall at the time that I was in, they got it, but today it's secret ballot. So that's—and it's been secret ballot, now for the last thirty-five years, maybe, or so. Forty years. In those days, it was black ball. If you got one black ball—if you got fifty balls and one black ball, you're out. Now, if this was someone that didn't like somebody, I don't know, really. I don't know if it was, you know, discriminatory or what. But not—very seldom—I don't remember, since I've been there, to be honest with you, that I saw somebody rejected. But, again, I specify, if you don't maintain your firematic system, point system, you're out.

Q: What is the point system?

JAP: The point system is you get so many points for meetings, work nights, which you do on the trucks, fire schools. It's very important. And then local equipment checks and stuff like that. And then, you just have to maintain the desired, you know, numbers.

Q: So, when you do the fire trucks, what do you do to the fire trucks?

JAP: Right.

Q: Explain what the work involves.

JAP: Oh, the work involved was to—well, first of all, you clean them.

Q: With what? Water?

JAP: Water and soap after.

Q: Inside and out?

JAP: Inside and out. And also, all the equipment. We have the roof saws that cut holes in roofs.

Q: You have what?

JAP: Saws that cut ...

Q: The saws that ...

JAP: Yeah, the power saws cut holes in roofs to get fire hoses—to get hoses down in there.

Q: And Pike poles?

JAP: Pike poles. Exactly. You got it. Yeah. And then we have emergency generators, which some people, if you didn't have any power here, we'd get power to our trucks, or there'd be the flood lights here, so we could see what we're doing. We have places where people will have, who are on let's say—people on the machines. What do you call them?

Q: Life support machines?

JAP: Medical machine. And sometimes they have no power there, because then we give them temporary power. So we bring that to help the community.

Q: Right

JAP: Because we were working with the community, and the community like myself and you, we pay taxes. I'm a volunteer and still pay taxes. See? So ...

Q: So—and how do you polish those trucks? What do you polish them with?

JAP: Well, I believe there's a special—a special polish, I guess. I don't know. The engineer in

the Department takes care of that. The engineers do that. And they will use the buffing machines or to polish the chrome.

Q: How often is that done?

JAP: That's done, I would say, they got a work night every Thursday night. Okay? So this way, they—I would say that is done about at least three times a month. And like for Memorial Day, they would get it done and it was spotless. See? And then, of course, and we have to take equipment in for safety checks. The ladders especially. Because when you got a guy up on a ladder, fifty—a hundred foot ladders, hydraulic, you want to make sure it's in working condition. We get it certified at the fire repair station, it's okay, then we get a certificate on it.

Q: Where are these stations that certify you?

JAP: I think ours, we bring it back to the company that manufactures. There's a couple on the Island. I'm not sure. I don't know the names. I'm not sure.

Q: And tell me how the hoses work.

JAP: Oh, the hose. You go on each street, you see hydrants, fire hydrants. The tops have got different colors, okay? Green, red. And that tells us—me or the hose company people—

that the size of thread that's on there for the hose.

Q: Is that for the coupling?

JAP: Coupling. You got it. They got a coupling for the hose. And it tells you that it's a two, two and a half, three, four-inch thread depending on the volume. You're pumping water into the pump, and the pump ...

Q: The color tells you what size.

JAP: What size, yeah, you got it. Yeah.

Q: Okay. So once you know that size, what happens?

JAP: Well, they pull up to the scene. Then, the hose is pulled out, and they couple it right away. And use it as they need it.

Q: Okay. Now, how many men have to handle that hose?

JAP: Oh, I would say—I'm sorry, excuse me. Oh, it all depends. Two or three, maybe. And once when the hose is pressurized, you've got three or four guys on it, and on the end, you got to hold that nozzle, because that thing'll—if it let's go, you're gone. That thing

whips like a ...

Q: If it whips out of your hand, what happens?

JAP: Yeah, when you got it out—well, of course, if it whips out of your hand, it's going to injure somebody.

Q: And have their been injuries?

JAP: Not really something serious, but the guy sometime, the guy will jump on it and lay on it one time, because what happens is that the pressure when they boost it from the truck, it could be, oh, it could be ...

Q: How many pounds?

JAP: ... I would say seventy-five, a hundred pounds. And then, of course, they get larger, there's more volume. And the larger the fire scene, the more water you need? And then, when the fire's out, the hoses are drained and cleaned and put in and they're dried. And we have a special dryer for them.

Q: What is that? Are they hung or what?

JAP: Yeah, they are hung. But once they are dried, they get put in the trucks. You see them in nice rows. Sometimes you see a truck, you'll see them laying the length of the truck. But they're nice and neat because when they pull off, when they pull off the truck, that's it. ... [MAKES NOISE] Chew, chew, chew... ... [They turn out] ... see? So, in other words, you can't lock once you're in trouble?

Q: What do you mean by "you can't walk"?

JAP: In other words, you're going to have to—when you pull it, that makes it loose. It comes out. Because if they're crossed, then you got this.

Q: They're tied in knots?

JAP: Exactly. And so, everything is done—and they check them—oh, I would say they check them monthly, at least. Maybe weekly. That's the hose companies.

Q: Now ... [when you're talking about the hose ?] ...

JAP: We're hook and ladder. Engine and Hose Company is down—the Protection, they're down opposite the Landmark. Flower Hill Hose is also hose and engine.

Q: So, do they just take care of the hoses?

JAP: Well, hose and the pumps. And also, we have—they—they assist us any way they need us. I know the—like in my case, around there, the Fire Police say, well there's a hydrant on this corner or something like that in front of your house normally. But over New York, the Nassau County Fire Commission, they come up a hill, there's a hydrant in front of the 50 Crescent, or corner of Crescent and Summit. Something like that, see. So there's—they got everything down to save time, in other words. Time is a very important element for us.

Q: Now, how do you study the address locations in Port? I mean, to go ...

JAP: All right. We have maps. Now, we're all computerized, by the way. We have computer ...

Q: When did that happen?

JAP: About maybe three years or so. And they also have the street number, the name, and we also have a map there. Most of—all of us—ninety-five percent lives here in Port Washington. You have to be a resident of Port Washington Fire Department to live here in Port Washington. We have maps. A lot of people know the Terrace section, or my section, or Flower Hill, or wherever.

Q: Before you were computerized, how did you know where the addresses were?

JAP: Well, we still had maps. And the police would tell us also on the police call.

Q: So the minute you get this call that there's a fire ...

JAP: Yeah.

Q: ... everybody is told where it is on the map?

JAP: Right. Yeah, all of it's computerized on my pager, see.

Q: And they tell you the fastest route to get there?

JAP: No, we—all of us know. Because our Chiefs are local. All our officers are local. And the police always are out there with us. So we—we're always—there's always somebody there. There's not a question about it, you know.

Q: Now, what is a five alarm fire? When they have the—they say a five alarm fire, what does that mean?

JAP: That means we got a fire going that's so bad, we get mutual aid, which means that now

we have mutual aid. First of all, we have battalions. We're eighth battalion, now. Great Neck, Manhasset, East Williston, Albertson, and Plandome. Now, if it's a five alarm, we have to call people in, which we do. That's called mutual aid. They come, assist us. And we do the same thing with them. We have command posts there. They say well call on so-and-so and so-and-so, and that's the story. When you hear that, it's bad. It's a bad one.

Q: And how many of those have you experienced?

JAP: Oh, we had, actually in my time, and let me explain to you now. A signal eight, we call it, comes over my pager, is a—you just need a truck or a two. So, it might be a brush fire or a dumpster fire. Now, a signal—a general alarm fire, everybody rolls.

Q: Now what's the signal for general?

JAP: The alarm goes off. All the sirens go off, and the horns, and it comes over our pager, general alarm fire.

Q: And what does that mean?

JAP: That means everybody rolls. Everybody goes. And if we get there, if it's a bad fire, we call mutual aid immediately. Depending. Our Chiefs will determine that.

Q: And what's the lesser one of the general alarms?

JAP: Signal eight.

Q: Single ...?

JAP: Signal.

Q: Signal eight.

JAP: Yeah.

Q: Signal eight. And what is that?

JAP: That's where you need a truck or two, and it's just a—the fire's of small origin. It's nothing large. And also, there's what they call a Duty Company call where there's most of our—they go to auto accidents or cave-ins, or somebody fell down or something like that. And that's called Duty Company call.

Q: A Duty Company call?

JAP: Duty Company call. Yeah. And we are assigned to that. So many people are assigned to

that.

Q: Now, have you ever had to extricate someone from an automobile?

JAP: All right. I'm glad you brought that up. I assisted. Because I'm here as a police officer. I keep the place clear. We have what they call now the Jaws of Life.

Q: What does that mean?

JAP: All right.

Q: The Jaws of Life?

JAP: Jaws of Life. Do you know what a can opener is?

Q: Yes.

JAP: Well, this thing is hydraulics. A huge thing. Very expensive. I have seen cars where they're crushed in, people up against the steering wheel. They cut a hole in that top, and they cut that steering wheel in half and pull the person out. Pull it out. It's amazing. If you ever want to see a demonstration, Fire Prevention Week as a rule you keep that in mind.

Q: What?

JAP: Fire Prevention Week at ...

Q: Fire Prevention Week?

JAP: And they have demonstrations at every fire station. And this Jaws of Life ...

Q: Where do they have a demonstration?

JAP: Usually at the fire stations?

Q: At all the fire stations?

JAP: Maybe my company. But anyway, it's usually in the paper. The *Port News*. And this thing is amazing. You have no idea. This thing is huge. The jaws could be half of this table. Big thing. And they got something they can cut—and no matter what position that person is in the car, they get them out. They can get them out. Yeah, it's amazing. Believe me. You won't believe your eyes. And they also demonstrate that, and they also have fire schools on that. And you got to be certified as a technician to get in there and to assist.

Q: Now, before they had the Jaws of Life, what did you do?

JAP: Well, we (laughs), we used to—you had to get, break the windows and use some equipment and make a bigger—I would say hooks and somebody got a hatchet to cut around to get in there. But today, it's half the time, you're within several minutes time by then, because by that time the person who's got injury. You know, they've got injuries now. And the Fire Medics roll to every fire or fire call. They're always there.

Q: They come regardless?

JAP: Regardless.

Q: They don't wait until ...

JAP: No, no. They come there all the time just in case.

Q: So when your alarm goes off as a fire call, the Fire Medics come ...

JAP: Always.

Q: ... regardless.

JAP: Regardless, yeah. Yes. There's always somebody on duty. And they're certified. You have to be certified by the State. You have to be certified by New York State Firefighters Association, I mean, every—twice a year you have to go to a seminar. And then we have to wait for the certificates. But there's so many rules. There's changes that you'd be surprised how—and these folks are retired police, state police, and some are attorneys. Depending, you know, on ... [??] ...

Q: So, are you still active?

JAP: Very active, yeah.

Q: So when the alarm goes, you still go?

JAP: Yes.

Q: How has that—has this taken a toll on you physically ...

JAP: No, no. No.

Q: ... over the years?

JAP: I've slowed down a little bit, granted. I mean, I don't (laughs), but when we get to the alarm system, I will bring you up to date, when you want to ...

Q: Yes, tell us about the alarm system.

JAP: Okay. When the first alarm system went off, first of all, you called the Fire, or the police headquarters, they would push all the buttons and the alarms would go off. "Fire at so-and-so place, so-and-so place." All right. About thirty years ago, they gave us home—they gave us—they gave us home, little pagers. We call them Plectrons...

Q: Plectrons?

JAP: Plectron. Yeah. And they were—and it's come over there then. The Nassau County Fire Commission took over, the police wanted to govern it.

Q: Why?

JAP: Well, because I guess it was, I don't know, they had a new Fire Commission, and they handled all the fires in Nassau County. All the Departments, and also get the response out. And then about two years ago, they come up with these Skytel pagers all right? Now this I can't ... [I'll have to get one out] ... so I can show you. But just, they would have tones and also have a buzzer on this. Now, I want to show you. You see. You see

what that—I can't see that.

Q: You would press a button, and what happens?

JAP: All right. Press a button, and it says, okay, it says "Signal 9" which is ambulance.

Q: Signal 9 is an ambulance.

JAP: Ambulance, okay. So, I push this down. Harbor Links Golf Course, Fairway Drive, West Shore Road, that's down here. I think it was.

Q: What's happening there?

JAP: A laceration in the clubhouse. Somebody got a laceration.

Q: Right now?

JAP: 6/8/2004, yeah, 8:06.

Q: Right now, somebody has a laceration ...

JAP: Yeah.

Q: ... in Harbor Links Golf Course.

JAP: Six minutes after eight this morning, it went off.

Q: Yes.

JAP: You see?

Q: Uh huh.

JAP: And then ...

Q: And what happens with this now?

JAP: Well, what happens is ...

Q: This is the pager.

JAP: This is the pager, yeah.

Q: Yes.

JAP: And then what happens is that whoever the response—this will be strictly ambulance only for now, unless they call for additional help. Now, of course, it'll be the EMTs, you know, because it's a laceration.

Q: EMTs?

JAP: Yes. Emergency Medical Technicians.

Q: So that's how it works now, right?

JAP: Now, yes, right. You see, eventually, what they want to do is eliminate the siren system, because at two, three o'clock, or four o'clock in the morning you hear that, and then, you know, it wakes everybody up. But I'm used to it. But ...

Q: People complain about it?

JAP: Well, sometimes the children get scared. Blah, blah, blah, but ...

Q: That's sort of a tradition, though.

JAP: You're right. But eventually, like I say, it'll all be pagers, eventually.

Q: And we won't hear the horns at all.

JAP: Down the—I can't give you a time, date. But down the road, maybe. That's what they're working on, yeah.

Q: And how do the firefighters feel about that?

JAP: Well, you know, I guess—I don't know. It depends on if any people are complaining, but by the same token, counting the people who get out there because of the fact they have the pagers off. I keep mine on all the time, and during the night. But that's down the road. I can't tell you. Five, ten years maybe. ... [???] ...

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

JAP: All right, okay. Dedication, number one. Being interested in learning. Very important. Especially the latest techniques. It's very important, because there's so much out there. I mean, like today, for instance, we have an ultraviolet camera. And if you look through a wall you could see if there's a fire. That's why there's a glow.

Q: There's a glow?

JAP: And then, we could chop a hole there for you. Because we don't chop holes unless we have to, you know. And then, it's amazing, because we can sometimes, you get an odor sometimes with something burning. And then they'll go in this area and they'll check all the walls with this camera, and it will show you. It's amazing. You'd be surprised. And then, also, when the firefighters go into a basement, dark basement, they go down with this camera and they can see fellows walking, their silhouettes. See? Like I say, expensive. But it's the latest technology, and you have to maintain, you have to stay on top of that.

Q: Now, have you ever had smoke inhalation or ...

JAP: I—yeah, I had a little bit, but nothing really too—we all have masks. You have to.

Q: Did you have that back in the early days?

JAP: We had masks in the early days, yes, but today, they're more sophisticated. And every time, you know and that fellow's got to go through a training session about three times a year, how to use it. In other words, on how to test everything out. And the canister's on your back. They're a little heavy, but—and I think there's about three minutes of amount of oxygen. But you always go into a fire two at a time.

Q: Two at a time?

JAP: Yeah, because ... or more. Because if one guy goes in and he don't come out—and also we have ID.

Q: Because what happens if one man goes in?

JAP: Goes in and—two go in—if one goes in, they don't see him. "Where is he?" you know. You got somebody with him, something happened. We also have ID.

Q: Tags?

JAP: ... tags. And they put them on the truck. And they say, "Well, I saw ..." "Where's Mr. Picardi at?" Then they go after you. Because I would be inside ... [??] ... That's how they find out. When they come in, they tick off, and then they know where to go who's safe. So safety is a big feature. One of the biggest things they tell you. A lot of guys get all excited, they want to go right in. But, you can't. Your Chief and your company officers, they're the ones that call the shots. They're the ones that tell you ...

Q: And what makes you a good team person? How do they instill that?

JAP: Well, they evaluate you. They evaluate you. And when I say evaluate you, they say, "Okay ..." well, me, I don't have to go. I don't have to go anymore. I could stop

tomorrow morning. But I can't; it's in my blood (laughs).

Q: Is that because you had relatives that were also firefighters?

JAP: Firefighters, yeah. But I mean ...

Q: Who are they?

JAP: The Frappaolo brothers. Three of them. There were two there with another brother.

Q: Which brothers?

JAP: Salvatore and Charles Frappaolo.

Q: Oh, Frappaolo.

JAP: Yeah.

Q: Related to you?

JAP: Yeah, they're first cousins. And Morey, their brother, you see. And then, a lot of my neighbors were members and fellows I grew up with from various companies. We have

police officers. We have city firefighters who are also volunteer.

Q: And is your ethnic background, or any religion have anything to do with ...

JAP: No.

Q: ... being so giving?

JAP: No, I don't know. I—it's a funny thing. I always was—when I did something when I was growing up, I always loved to show something for it. I just wanted to—I never let the next guy do it. I always—if I couldn't do it, I'm going to try to learn. And like I say, they have these classes. They have these seminars you have to attend. Even now. We're having this driver training.

Q: And what training is that?

JAP: Driver training. Well, for licensing. In other words, our truck drivers have to have a certified—what do you call it—big truck license, it's a Class A license in order to drive the trucks. And they have to—and they're given tests once in a while to take the truck out to see if they ...

Q: If they can handle it.

JAP: Yeah, exactly.

Q: They can handle it.

JAP: That's right. And then, if a new vehicle come in, new session.

Q: So how many classes do you generally attend then?

JAP: Over the year?

Q: Yeah.

JAP: I would say, in my case—and the new guys, the rookies got to go almost every morning.
I'd say about six a year. Six or seven a year.

Q: Six or seven a year.

JAP: Yeah, seminars and stuff like that. Latest techniques.

Q: But when you're a rookie, it's even more.

JAP: Oh, you have to. It's mandatory. No, see, you—and the guys. "Oh, the heck with that. See you tomorrow." And there was that. And if you—if you don't attend, then you're reprimanded. They would say, "Hey, listen, you joined the company, you want to be active or don't you? There's the door."

Q: There's the door?

JAP: You know, I mean, because certain other people wanted to get into it. We average about two and three new members a month roughly.

Q: Well, your probationary period was five years.

JAP: Five years, yeah.

Q: But now it's two.

JAP: Two.

Q: So, how do you feel about that?

JAP: No, I don't know, I mean ...

Q: Is that fair?

JAP: ... not really. I don't really—it was tough for us. Because they were on your back. If they say they want you Sunday morning, nine o'clock, you'd be there to—for some reason or other. They would have a march, or the equipment, or whatever. You know.

Q: So, are the new rookies less trained?

JAP: No, no. I'd say they're pretty good. They're pretty much—like I say, if you don't have it, you're out, you know.

Q: Who makes that judgement? The Chief?

JAP: The Chief or a company—each company captain or company representative. And the Chief is in charge of the whole Department.

Q: Do you have review of each person? You have actual reviews on what they're doing?

JAP: Yes, right. They are. Our company officers, trustees, board of directors, they'll sit you down, and they say, "Okay, hey, you did pretty good. You're lax on your point system. You didn't do this. Can you do any better?" And they work with you and say if you can't make it during the week, how about Sunday morning for a couple of hours?

Q: And has anyone complained that that's really their own time?

JAP: That's right, but so, I mean, they work with you. They don't say "Get the heck out of here," you know what I mean? They work with you. And they try to get you so you maintain your interest. But, unfortunately, we have had a few of the people to pass out and had to be dismissed, you know. No hard feelings. Matter of fact, down the road, if you feel you can get in again, and with a clean slate, you can be re-brought in again.

Q: So, in other words, if someone says you're not cutting it, but you—they show you the door ...

JAP: No, they'll give you, okay, well, they'll give you sixty days or ninety days to get your act together.

Q: And if you don't?

JAP: You don't, then they say okay, no, you have to resign.

Q: And then if they want to come back, what happens?

JAP: Down the road? Well, they would have to guarantee, not guarantee, but say, "Okay, I'm

ready to come back in and I promise you I will be there or do my duties."

Q: How do you feel about the women who have come in?

JAP: They're doing excellent.

Q: Are they carrying their weight?

JAP: We have two, three, four actual firefighters—women. But the biggest percentage of them are the technicians, EMTs, the Fire Medics. I would say about fifty percent are women. Nurses ...

Q: They're in the Medic?

JAP: Yeah, they're down on Harbor Road.

Q: Are they in the Fire Medic Department?

JAP: Fire Medic. That's the Fire Medic ...

Q: I'm talking about the real—the firefighters. Are there real—with the men?

JAP: Yeah, we have—we have two ...

Q: You have about two women?

JAP: ... four, I think they don't have any in my company, but the other two companies, excluding the Fire Medics, they have about four or five.

Q: There's about four or five women ...

JAP: Women, yeah.

Q: ... in the other companies.

JAP: Right.

Q: That would be what? Protection, Flower Hill ...

JAP: Protection. Flower Hill. That's it.

Q: And that's it.

JAP: Yeah.

Q: And how were they initially—how were they received?

JAP: Well, at first, you know, you say to yourself, "Gee, what can they do?" But, let me tell you, they're good. They're there. They're ready to fight.

Q: And they can carry—they can carry those heavy hoses?

JAP: Oh, sure. And they got to go by the rules, too. I mean, you got your training, and you got to keep going to class and stuff like that. In other words, you don't stop here; you keep moving.

Q: Do you think that any of these women will ever become a Chief?

JAP: I don't know, because there's so much involved. A Chief is 24/7.

Q: What does that mean?

JAP: Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. And our Chief—see, our Chief goes along—when he first goes in, he goes in, he's the Second Assistant Chief, they call it. He goes for two years. Then, he moves to First Assistant, then he's Chief. So, you got six years as Chief. We had one fellow went twice. He had twelve years.

Q: And that's Mr. ...

JAP: Geoff Cole. Yeah, yeah. Yeah Geoff's a good boy. He's really dedicated.

Q: Now, how is—how do your families accept that you're gone so much?

JAP: I don't know. It's a funny thing, you know. When I first got married, I used to go to night fires, and I'd come home, I'd be—but most of the nights you'd come in, your eyeballs are just hanging. So I'd go in ...

Q: And you're probably smelling of smoke.

JAP: Oh, sure. So I'd clean up. Smoke. Of course you are. So then, the wife, I'd get in bed one morning: "Where you going?" "I just got back from a fire." "Oh, you did? Yeah?" Thank God that she accepted it. When I was home living with my parents they'd say "Just be careful." They told you, "Just be careful," you know, at the fire scene. But my wife, she did think like that.

Q: And how did your children feel about it?

JAP: Oh, they're—they're—they have no complaints. I have three.

Q: And what are they?

JAP: Two girls and a boy and one grandchild.

Q: And do you think they'll ever be firefighters?

JAP: I doubt it.

Q: Why?

JAP: I don't know. It's a—it's a lot of—well, my son lives out of town, out of the fire district. My daughter lives out of town and one daughter's home. And no, I don't think that's going to be a ...

Q: You don't think that they would want.

JAP: No.

Q: So how does that bode for Port, when the next generation is not ...

JAP: Well, like I say, they're recruiting now. They try to recruit as much as they can. And it's

a ...

Q: But, if you, being in a firefighting family are not producing the next generation ...

JAP: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: ... where are they coming from?

JAP: Well, they would have to come probably from the personnel in town, maybe. Young group or something. I'm not sure, you know. And then the local fellows. We also—you got to step back a minute. We have what they call Explorers. From thirteen to seventeen, these guys, they work at all four companies that we have. And when they become seventeen, now at seventeen you can join. When I was, it was eighteen, see. Seventeen. But they have four years of training.

Q: And you recruit them in high school?

JAP: Recruit them all the time. Some family members, their children, brothers and sisters, whatever. And also what happens there is that they—they have to—they go through training, but they can't fight fire scenes. They can't be in a fire. But they're learning the equipment and everything that's going on now. When they're seventeen years old, they got that much under their belts. So they can go on probation now.

Q: So do they come to the fire station?

JAP: They come to the fire station ...

Q: I mean, to hang out?

JAP: Oh yes. And then to work. They work, too. And they work nights taking care of the equipment, because the guys will show them the equipment and see, you know, how they're dressed and all, you know.

Q: Now, the fire station was a sort of social center during the early years. Can you explain what you did as a social center?

JAP: Yeah, at the time, we always ended up doing something, going on. A lot of time, it was a birthday, or the guys get together. But thank God, there was never any violence of any kind. Any kind of, you know, personal matters. If a guy had a gripe, they'd go outside and settle it. Go someplace else and settle it. We don't want it inside here, you know.

Q: Well, what kind of grips would they settle ...

JAP: Oh, I don't know. For some reason, a kid would say, well, you did this or you did that, or

"How come you ran against me for an office?" Something like that, you know. And they would get a little hot under the collar.

Q: So, personal animosities?

JAP: Yeah, personal. Yeah, yeah, right. But it would not be really serious. We never had anybody, you know, punch each other out. But then, social-wise, we get together sometimes, we get down there, we have pizza, and we have a bar down there, but you got to be of age naturally. When I say a bar, beer, probably soft drinks. We have soda machines for the kids. And there's always something going on, you know. You go down there and watch television, a football game or something like that, you know. Baseball, whatever.

Q: So you watch TV together.

JAP: As a rule, yes. Yes.

Q: And you went out with the fellows?

JAP: Fellows. You went out with the fellows. You'd go somewhere. We went—like ... [little hobbies] ... we used to—the group used to go out to dinner, but we'd pay out of our own pocket, which is just to get together. And we used to have a—we have during the year,

we have two picnics. One, we have this after Labor Day; Memorial Day we had it down at Manorhaven Park. And we have another one sometimes, at the local ...

Q: And what happens at the Memorial Day, Manorhaven Park party? What—do you have games there?

JAP: Well, we have games for the kids. A little street car. They do big—what would you say—they jump. What do you call that big ...?

Q: Trampoline?

JAP: Yeah, trampoline. One of those huge things. And they have rides for the kids on the fire truck, if we had an insurance policy for them.

Q: So they would get rides in the fire truck?

JAP: Oh, yeah. We had a special insurance policy for that.

Q: You have to have a special insurance policy for that?

JAP: Oh, yes. You have to. Anybody gets hurt, yes, sure.

Q: That's rather expensive, isn't it?

JAP: Well, just for the one day. You get to have the kids, you know, gives them—it keeps them average happy kids so you don't have to watch over them every five minutes. And they have—and our fellows cook. They cook wonderfully.

Q: And what do they cook? What are some of your favorite dishes?

JAP: Well, sausage and peppers.

Q: You have what?

JAP: Sausage and peppers.

Q: Sausages and peppers.

JAP: Steak or burgers. All kinds of salad. Of course, they cater that. And there's always something there. I mean, pretty much, and you had the seats there. You sit down and talk, to the people. And they have volleyball for the kids, or they have rides for the kids on those little trolley car that runs around in a circle. But you have to keep the kids happy too, because the parents feel they want to. (laughs).

Q: So, at the Memorial Day services at each fire station, where you have the, you know ...

JAP: Well, we all have it—four companies have it at one location. We used to have it individually, but it was, you know, it wasn't that good, because now we have everybody together.

Q: Oh, you have them all together?

JAP: All four companies down at the Manorhaven Park.

Q: No, I meant to say the actual morning services.

JAP: Oh, yes. We have services ...

Q: You have those at each station?

JAP: Station. We have the—they read off the deceased members and we raise the flag. And this year I put a wreath—we put a wreath in front of the place. So they all have their own—we have two chaplains in the Port Washington Fire Department, and they ...

Q: Chaplains that are part of the Fire Department?

JAP: Yeah, part of the Fire Department.

Q: And how are they chosen?

JAP: They are—they're part of our members.

Q: But do they volunteer ...

JAP: They volunteer, but they're very active in church. They're very good. Both Catholics.
And very active in the—they know the—they also participate at funerals, stuff like that.
And they also say prayers at the Memorial Day, you know, services.

Q: And at your funeral services for the firemen?

JAP: Full dress uniform.

Q: You were all in full dress uniform, and you meet at the ...

JAP: We meet at the—sometimes it's the fire station, or sometimes at the funeral home, yes.

Q: As a show of respect?

JAP: Absolutely. We just lost a member. Richard McCabe. I don't know if you read in the paper. And they said it was a—I couldn't make it that day, but I went to the services. They said they had about a hundred and fifty personnel, Fire Department members at St. Peters. You've been to St. Peters? They said it was a huge amount.

Q: And how does the ceremony go? You line them ...

JAP: Well, we get up, you line up, and you're seated. And then they go through all the services and things, and a couple of our fellows, you'd walk out with the casket. And then the trucks follow them. That's what they do. So it's tradition in New York. Both our aerial ladders, the big ladders, the high ones, they make an arch, and they go through the arch up on the Boulevard. Yeah.

Q: So you stop the truck and then ...

JAP: No, they're up there already. They're up there waiting by the time that church is out. And the police are there to help in traffic, and then when they ... [do that's enough] ...

Q: So they make the arch with the ladders.

JAP: The ladders on each side.

Q: On each side. And that's in front of St. Peters?

JAP: No, no, that's in front of the cemetery. Nassau Knolls Cemetery on Port Washington Boulevard.

Q: In from the cemetery on the Boulevard.

JAP: Yeah, yeah. Before they get into there. And they have the—it's a tradition in New York City. They do it, the New York City firefighters, they do that.

Q: What happens, Jules, after the cemetery, from these funerals?

JAP: When the funerals are over, we usually go back to the fire station and have refreshments for the personnel and ...

Q: Is that like an Irish wake?

JAP: Not really, no. It's a general, you know, general food and social gathering, and they talk about you, because everybody's sad, of course. You know that. But then after a while when everything is done, then we all go home after that.

Q: The company officers, what are your feelings about them?

JAP: Well, the company officers usually come from the ranks. They work from the engineer up to Lieutenant, First Lieutenant, and to Captain. And they have to go to school to qualify for that. And down the road, they also can run for Chief if they feel like it and up to it. But in fact, now, they're all qualified, and they come up the ranks.

Q: Are they voted on?

JAP: Oh, voted on. Yeah, yeah.

Q: But they could be qualified, but if somebody doesn't like them, then what?

JAP: Well, in other words, if somebody runs against them and opposes them, then you have two people to vote for.

Q: You mean people don't generally oppose someone who is trying to be Chief?

JAP: Well, sometimes. But, usually, the Chief's more actively involved, because they've been there and they had all—and they got the different stuff they went in for the six years.

Q: And there's also a feeling about running twice because other people are waiting in line?

JAP: Well, all right, but we had the one, I was telling you, one of the Chiefs there went twice, and he was well qualified and he had the time. He was available. And I didn't see there any kind of hard feelings, because he was qualified. You know, all the experience he had, you know.

Q: Can you think of what was a call that you were called out on that was unusual?

JAP: (Laughs). Oh yeah, I'll tell you one. We had a call about, oh, it's got to be forty years ago. There was a Pan American airplane on the end of my block, somehow they—they must have hit or something, and ...

Q: A Pan American plane?

JAP: Yeah, a plane. It was a plane. Somehow—and I don't think it was anything serious, but ...

Q: Hit where?

JAP: Hit at the end of Delaware Avenue and Port Washington Boulevard, in that area, okay?

Q: You mean they were ... [???] ...

JAP: Two planes touched each other, and part of it came down. Part of it, not all. I guess I don't remember the results, and the plane got back safely. But we were called in and we had to pick up this piece of—I forget what it was, a wing or something. I'm not sure. And that's going back about forty years ago.

Q: And—but you have no idea how it was resolved with the flight itself?

JAP: No, no.

Q: You had a part there.

JAP: Yeah, but the plane did land safely somewhere. We heard that.

Q: So, there was no loss of life.

JAP: No, no, no.

Q: But you had to go pick up the part?

JAP: Well, we had to—of course, we had to—we got the call, and we had to rope it off and keep the people away from there and the traffic at the time.

Q: And what did you do with the parts? Did that have to go back?

JAP: I guess the FAA guy, the government had to take it, I'm sure. Yeah.

Q: So, that was quite an unusual ...

JAP: Oh, it was. Yeah, yeah. And, of course, we had people call us sometimes, there'd be a cat in a tree or something like that, and you'd (laughs) ...

Q: That's the silly call.

JAP: Yeah, yeah.

Q: You had nothing sillier than a cat (laughs).

JAP: No, not that I—not that I recall. ... [END OF SIDE A; BEGIN SIDE B] ...

Q: Do you ever remember wondering if you were going to die in any fire that you went to?

JAP: Well, it's a funny thing. You always have that fear hanging over your head.

Q: How do you cope with that fear?

JAP: Well, first of all, you know, you get there and you focus on what's there, the job you have to do. And you get in there to save somebody or, in other words, your training comes into effect. That's why you go for training in various ...

Q: But do they give you classes in psychological stress?

JAP: Yeah, we had a couple of them, because we had lost one of the firefighters many years ago, and we had to ...

Q: That was what? Bobby Dayton?

JAP: Bobby Dayton, that's right. And we had to—it was kind of—you're also a family, and so he was a member of the family. And unfortunately, that happened, and we all had to go through psychological ...

Q: You had to go through psychological counseling?

JAP: ... yes, counseling, right.

Q: But what makes you do this hazardous job? What's inside of you that makes you ...

JAP: Well, whatever makes it motivation. I can't honestly answer that, truthfully. But you got there, and you say, you're concentrating, you're focusing. Everything is behind you so everything you're focused on is ahead of you. And you go in there and you say, okay, I got to do this; I got to do that. Or help this one, help that one. And for some reason, you just push it aside and you focus on that one particular duty.

Q: Have you ever received any recognition for anything or ...

JAP: No, not really. But the Chief always tells us you fellows did a good job at so-and-so fire or so-and-so fire.

Q: And what was the most moving rescue you ever made? Can you tell me?

JAP: Well, let me see. We had a cave-in one time. I forget where it was. The guy was there digging a trench. We were all there helping him. He was up to here in dirt.

Q: He was up to his chest?

JAP: To his chest, because he was digging a trench by hand. A plumbing contractor. I forget where it was. I think it was up on—someplace up at the Park. And it was good to be there and we were talking to him. I was holding his hand and saying, "Everything'll be fine. Just be careful." The guys were digging and digging out. And it's the same thing

happened down where, you know, I think it was John Shields called Shields Hardware right on the corner past the library?

Q: Yes.

JAP: When they were building that place, a guy went underneath there and was in a cave-in there.

Q: You had a cave-in at Shields?

JAP: Shields, yes. We had one of our guys, there was just enough opening in there, he was thin, skinny, to get in and to grip him by the legs and pull him out. And he was able to fit there. That was very close.

Q: Now, what had happened, though?

JAP: What happened was that somehow they were building the foundation. He got in there, and the thing goes, it just got him in here and kind of it covered him over. But there was enough space in there where this guy could crawl in and pull him by the legs.

Q: Who was the one who crawled in?

JAP: Oh, I don't remember now, to be honest with you. This is what? twenty-five years ago.

Yeah. I forget who it was. I don't remember, honestly. He was big enough just enough to get, one of us could get in because of our size, but it was enough to get in there just pull him out. And they were lucky, believe me. Matter of fact, we had the, we called the Syosset Fire Department. They have a special group who goes in and goes to these various cave-ins and stuff like that. A guy one time fell in a water tank someplace out ...

Q: He fell in the water tank?

JAP: Not here. Not here. This was in Syosset, in that area. And the Syosset firemen went over there and they brought a guy in with—it was empty. All right? And he was doing a little cleaning or painting, and the guy went down there with a—he went down in there with a what do you call it? harness. And he was able to pull him up. He was able to pull up to the top. These guys were good. You meet everybody there. Oh, my God, there must have been forty, fifty different firefighters and people there.

Q: Have you ever been involved on a police investigation for arson?

JAP: Okay. When St. Francis many years ago had two fires within six months time.

Suspicious.

Q: St. Francis Hospital?

JAP: Hospital, yes. This was way back when they had the first employees living in the—the help used to live there in apartments.

Q: The help used to live there.

JAP: Yeah. These were the civilian help I guess, not the doctors. And the first one—well, I worked with the Fire Marshal, Nassau County, we went around picking stuff up and check this, they could tell where the fire started, or how it started. And this one girl, one of the females there, she was the one that knocked on all those doors. She said—she was the heroine, I guess they call it, and she got everybody out.

Q: She did what?

JAP: She got everybody out. Knocked on their doors and got them out. The second fire, she did the same thing. That's when they got wise.

Q: So they were suspicious.

JAP: Oh, yeah. But they were—the second time it happened, and she did the same thing. She wanted to be known as the heroine.

Q: Heroin, yeah.

JAP: But not the drug.

Q: (Laughs) Not the heroin.

JAP: But they got her. She was a little psycho, I understand.

Q: And what happened?

JAP: So they arrested her. Oh, yeah. But it was—I forget—one fire, I forget where it was. In the room or the closet. I don't remember exactly offhand. But it was in the middle of winter. I remember that. Yeah.

Q: And ...

JAP: Aside from that, there's been—well, we'll call the Fire Marshall in if there's any suspicion. It's up to the Chief. He'll say, "Okay, investigation." The Fire Marshall, he's got to come from Mineola, and you've got to wait for him. Especially if there's any—if they have any suspicion or smell any kind of inflammatory fluid.

Q: Now, you were in the Fire Department during the '50s and '60s when there was great—

you know, great social change. You used to, if you had firemen with long hair or if they were dressed like hippies, how did the Fire Department deal with that?

JAP: All right. The reason why, for that, they'd tell them that, especially with beards and stuff and the long hair ...

Q: Beards, yes.

JAP: ... yeah, and long hair, you put a fire mask on now. You got a beard. You know, how're you going to have total closure. Right? Because you can't. That's why you had to be—shave all this off, the long hair, to put your equipment on. Because hair can burn. And they used to—it's like if you have a beard or something, how're you going to put the fire mask on this way.

Q: So how did these men take that?

JAP: Well, they didn't like it, but they had to. You either be a firefighter or you're out, you know. We're looking out for your safety. Don't forget that. Remember that.

Q: So, did you have any resentments at that time?

JAP: No, I never had a beard (laughs).

Q: No, I mean, these other ...

JAP: I don't know. I just—they accepted it. They maybe didn't like it, but they accepted it. They had to. Because it could be a life-saver, you know. So ...

Q: What other social changes have you noticed in your Department over the years.

JAP: Well, I find ...

Q: Back then versus now?

JAP: Yeah, well I find now, of course, in those days—you're going to get a younger group today. Of course, they want to have a good time, you know. I mean, you know, we—when they get to the fire station, it's just a hang out like a second home from home, away from home. But they got to behave. You know what I mean? You know, you're there for a reason. And anything about our firefighters, if a guy, if he has been drinking, let's say, if he's had half a bottle of beer, you don't go to the fire scene. Because, I mean, I'm not saying it's going to affect him ... [but I can put half a dozen bottles above him] ...

Q: In other words, if you've had a beer, you're not to go to a fire.

JAP: Usually, a lot of guys would do it and get away with it. I mean, I haven't seen it. But the Chiefs are there; your officers are there. And they can see what's going on.

Q: And if you're not fit ...

JAP: Right, and then get the driver's seat and you sit there and ...

Q: So, they don't put you to duty. They put you ...

JAP: To work, yeah.

Q: They put you in the truck.

JAP: Yeah, right, right.

Q: Have you had men that have had drinking problems?

JAP: No. Not to—I haven't seen it in the fire scene. But what they do on their private time is their own. But they don't dare come to a fire if they've been drinking. Because you could tell when somebody's drinking. I'm not a drinker. I haven't drank in many years. But you could see somebody, once they have a couple of drinks, their whole attitude changes. I'm sure you know that (laughs). But overall, there's a change in the culture then and

now, I feel that the younger group are trying to gradually getting in more and more ...

Q: Camaraderie?

JAP: ... yeah, trying to get into that area.

Q: You mean they're not as—they don't feel as brotherly as perhaps the older people?

JAP: Right. But they're coming around.

Q: They're coming around.

JAP: Yeah, yeah.

Q: And how do you instill that in someone?

JAP: Well, see what it is, we have—if we have like—we had a cook-out some days. That's how we—cost you ten dollars a piece. The guys come there and have something to eat barbecue and stuff like that. And you get more—try to get more of a relationship there if you can. And there're a couple of guys they, you know, they have an attitude. But, you know, you push them aside. I'm not saying that, you know. Your company officers, they know what's going on, the Chiefs. And they call the shots.

Q: Now, the rituals in a fire station of, you know, cooking food and that sort of thing, it doesn't apply to you because you don't stay in the station.

JAP: Right, okay.

Q: But you do ...

JAP: We have a—what they call a kitchen committee. They do a good job.

Q: And how are they elected?

JAP: Well, they're mostly volunteers. They're firefighters now. And they volunteer their cooking duties or whatever, and they do a real good job. And most of the time, like I say, at the fire meeting, we'll have a little snack. Or after a big fire, our Auxiliary comes in and they'll bring sandwiches in and Gator Aid, stuff like that to us at our fire scene. But, most of the fellows, when you take an office there, you take an oath.

Q: Do you know the oath?

JAP: No. It's something like "I hereby—I, Julius Picardi, hereby report for my duty as—I'll say—captain." And bing-bing-bing-bing-bing-bing. And that's it. And you fulfill that

duty. And you respect this captain. He's there. If they got something against you, they'll pull you in a corner somewhere. "Hey ..." try to realize that—do this, do that. But try to be careful. They don't—you don't chew anybody out in front of the public. That's bad news.

Q: So, on this committee—this kitchen committee—do they take a vote as to what people want to eat?

JAP: No, usually, they'll come up with something. A barbecue or hot dogs, hamburgers, or pasta or something, you know. And sometimes it'll be ...

Q: What's your favorite recipe?

JAP: Italian. Pasta's mine, yeah.

Q: Pasta?

JAP: Yeah.

Q: What kind of pasta?

JAP: Well, you know, the spaghetti. And of course, there's the ...

Q: With vegetables or ...

JAP: ... vegetables. Yeah, vegetables. And lasagna. And I mean I came up the ranks as an Italian family trying to cook so...

Q: And Italians usually cook sausages and peppers ...

JAP: And then there's chicken and there's always something. And that's a real, you know ...

Q: Do you have homemade pizza?

JAP: No ...

Q: Or do you know any Italians that make homemade pizza?

JAP: Not that—when we I was home, I used to more.

Q: Your mom used to cook it?

JAP: Oh, yes. Yes. Yeah.

Q: Now, how do you feel that our Long Island Fire Department compares to other departments on Long Island?

JAP: Well, I'll tell you, our department's supposed to be one of the—not the best, but one of the finest. But all departments got—they're all top shelf, and they're all good. They all have the same situation we're in. Training is very important. And when we have battalion meetings, they come up with ideas. Or we have mutual aid or something like that, they'll say okay—or if something comes up, they'll say, well, we'll have a—we found this out this month. Do you want to try this out? Or something like that. See, in other words, there's always ideas coming. And then, in other words, Manhasset won't say "We're better than you," or Great Neck say "We're better than you." We work together.

Q: Were you in the Great Neck parade last ... [?] ...

JAP: No, I was away for the weekend, yeah. The hundredth anniversary, but Flower Hill, in three years—that's that company there, in 2007, is going to have their hundredth. We had our hundredth back in '85, my company.

Q: '86?

JAP: '86, yeah, I believe so.

Q: '86.

JAP: And Protection had theirs what? two years ago? That one wasn't too long ago. Yeah, I forget.

Q: I think they're going to have that next year.

JAP: Are they? I'm sorry. Yeah.

Q: 2005.

JAP: Flower Hill's going to have it—2007, Flower Hill.

Q: Yes, 2005 is Protection. Now, didn't the Fire Department used to do some good works at Christmastime like going to—or, what did they used to do? Or what do they still do?

JAP: Yeah, we got a group of guys, of course, they put the lights up on Main Street on top of there.

Q: They put the lights where?

JAP: They decorate that thing on the railroad station. What do you call that?

Q: The railroad station?

JAP: But that Jewish thing. What do you call that thing? They have the ...

Q: The Menorah?

JAP: The Menorah, yeah.

Q: Where is the Menorah?

JAP: Well, it's there. But our fellows light it up with the trucks. And also they visit, Christmas time. At Christmas time, our fellows, you know, will be Santa Claus. There'll be two, three guys that are little elves. They'll go to the hospitals to visit the kids. And the nursing home down here at St. Francis. And they bring little gifts to the kids.

Q: Do you also go to the Helen Keller Center?

JAP: I'm not sure, to be honest with you. Maybe they do. I'm not sure. I'm not sure, really. Anybody is in the hospital. Remember, they are right there, on top of them where you need them and stuff like that. The chaplains are always there, too, to help you out, if you need anything.

Q: So do they do this Christmas morning or ...

JAP: Christmas, I think it's just before Christmas. Like a weekend before or something like that, yeah.

Q: And you pay for this all out of your own pocket?

JAP: Oh, it's all volunteer. Yes, out of our own pockets. Yeah, it's out of our own pockets, yeah.

Q: And have you ever worked with hazardous material incidents?

JAP: Yeah, there was one down here. I forget. We had one in Sands Point about three years ago. I don't remember what it was. Some kind of something in a house there that spilled. The painters were doing something, but whatever this was the stench was awful. So we were called down there. We were there about three hours, and we had to block off that whole area. And the Haz-Mat people came in from the county. They check it out. "Okay, it's fine to go. You can go now." It's the same thing where the same fire we had across from the Methodist Church. The house across the street about two years ago. There was a man that passed away in there. The whole house was gutted. And I don't know what happened. But we were there about three hours, and they had to block off the

whole area.

Q: What did you have to do during the anthrax scare just recently?

JAP: Well, nothing really. It was—they didn't tell us anything. All they said, if anything comes up, they would give us information over our pagers. But actually, you know, they didn't—we were aware it was going on. But, if there was any kind of a call, we would go on it. But, to be honest with you, they just told us, wait till you hear from—if anything comes in, wait till you hear from us, in other words.

Q: Have you fought in any wars?

JAP: No, I haven't. I had back problems at that time, and they wouldn't accept me.

Q: Do you feel that you get proper cooperation from your family, your close relatives ...

JAP: Yes, yes. One thing my family never opposed me trying to be a firefighter. My wife—God bless her—same thing. And they respect you for what you're doing. They don't tell you every day, but, I mean, you can see it, you know.

Q: And the women, what do the Women Auxiliaries do?

JAP: Women Auxiliaries, they're wonderful, let me tell you. They had their own little group. They're all wives of firefighters. You have to be a family member of a firefighter. And they'll come—the children's Christmas party we have for the kids, they'll come there and run that. Their grandchildren and children. And at the fire scene, they'll come up and they'll have sandwiches for it, if it's any length of time. Drinks, soft drinks. And so many functions. I mean, they're really, really, really good.

Q: So they're as involved as you are, you could say?

JAP: I would say yes. Not fighting fires, but they're there to help.

Q: But they come to the fire scene ...

JAP: Oh, sure.

Q: ... in order to feed you.

JAP: Oh, sure. They'll go the fire station, make up sandwiches or wherever they're picking this up from, and they'll come there and distribute to us.

Q: You used to have St. Patrick's Day parades in Port Washington long time ago, I believe.

JAP: Gee, I don't remember. It's possible. I don't recall it, to be honest with you.

Q: What's the most important thing for you to remember in your career as a firefighter?

JAP: Well, when I was appointed Lieutenant of the Fire Police, that was an honor. I was never an officer before.

Q: And what is your duty as a Lieutenant?

JAP: Well, in other words, if my Captain's not there, my job as Lieutenant is to—if we have a large fire or something, a lot of the local firefighters, if they're available, they'll assist us, when we need them for traffic and what-not. But something, you set up the groundwork. And we'll say, "You take care of Beacon Hill Road, Port Washington Boulevard, or ..." put a fire lane line up here. Something like that, you know.

Q: Is there anything you'd really like to talk about that we haven't talked about?

JAP: Not really, to be honest with you (laughs), that I can remember.

Q: Do you think, you know, since AIDS has come on the scene, have you had any, you know, HIV/AIDS—have you had any problems in the Department?

JAP: No, no, no. But the Fire Medics, anybody who handles them, comes out there right at the scene, don't touch anybody unless they put their gloves on. You know, they use Latex, whatever you call it, you know. And actually, no. I wouldn't—if there'd be a car accident, anybody bleeding, for instance, you'd want to try to keep away from the blood. But you got the gloves on, it's fine.

Q: If you had to do it over again, would you be a firefighter?

JAP: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Q: What is rewarding to you about that?

JAP: Well, just be able to give something back to the community, to help them. I feel like—you know, and you get the respect from the people. My neighbors, you know, and stuff like that.

Q: How does the public perceive you? How do they look to firefighters? Have you ...

JAP: Oh, I feel—I feel they—I feel that they accept us, and, of course, it's a situation where, you know, we're doing something for you; we're here to help you. We get all kinds of calls, and we go. And if it's a false alarm or something, we don't say, "Hey, what the hell did you call us for?" you know. We don't do that. When we get a call, we attend.

Q: And how serious are the false alarms? Do you have quite a number?

JAP: Well, sometimes, a false alarm, you're cooking and your alarm would go off. You're taking a shower, and the steam wire make it go off. Many, particularly, we'd go out to three, four times a month to one location. So we'd finally tell them, "Get your alarm fixed," or whatever it is. See I have one right in my room, I change my batteries twice a year. Daylight savings, you know, three or four—what are batteries? Three dollars?

Q: So, basically, you have a lot of false alarms?

JAP: Well, I would say we have, you know, we have—yeah, we have a share, our share, yeah. But we don't know they're false till you get there. Well, you can't say "To heck with it." No, you can't. You got to go to them and respond, and okay, you try to talk to the people.

Q: And how do firefighters feel when they go and it's a false alarm?

JAP: Oh, they accept it. They accept it. Oh, sure. Sure. Because you don't know what you're going to find, see.

Q: And what does this cost the company—these false alarms?

JAP: Well, I don't know. Well, you got—well, you got—well, of course, the personnel is not paid. But whatever you see, your equipment. Your vehicles are back and forth. That's about it, really, you know.

Q: Can you tell me what was your worst day as a firefighter?

JAP: Well, my worst day was when we lost Bobby Dayton. That was—that was kind of hard to accept. Because he was a good firefighter. He was a company officer. He was a New York City firefighter also. And that's just pretty hard. And ...

Q: And what is your—the best day of your firefighting ...

JAP: When they appointed me Lieutenant in the Fire Police. That was an honor. Oh, yeah.

Q: Well, can you tell me what the ceremony was when you took your fiftieth ...

JAP: The fifty year—when you become a fifty year member, they give you—they honor you at their annual installation dinner dance, which is in January. And you have—the members of your family have a table of ten, and all your family members're there. And they honor you with a plaque. And we also, every five years, we get a star, which goes on our uniform.

Q: A star.

JAP: A star.

Q: For every year?

JAP: Five year.

Q: Every five?

JAP: Five years, yes. And—but at the ceremony, I'd say they show you real honor. It makes you feel like a—it really makes you feel good. And they also gave us a Fire Department jacket, saying "Fifty year member" on the back.

Q: Do you wear those to fires?

JAP: No, I wear them—I can wear it during the week or outside to go to a store. Something like that. But that's ...

Q: So you get a plaque ...

JAP: A plaque ...

JAP: A plaque.

Q: ... and you get a jacket.

JAP: Jacket. Yes, yeah.

Q: They give you dinner.

JAP: Dinner, yeah. It's a—and you have your family members. All your full table is family members.

Q: And where is it usually held?

JAP: Usually at the fire station, as a rule. And this year it was held at the New York Knickerbocker Yacht Club.

Q: At the Knickerbocker Yacht Club?

JAP: Port Washington. I'm sorry, yeah, yeah.

Q: The Port Washington Yacht Club.

JAP: Yeah. We went to that, yeah.

Q: Why was that?

JAP: Well, they figured they had the—they're good to us. I'll tell you why. Once a year at Port Washington Yacht Club, they invite our members down there and the police as a thank you.

Q: Port Washington Yacht Club does that?

JAP: Yes. As a thank you of appreciation. And the night is yours. They invite you and really it's wonderful.

Q: It's an open bar and ...

JAP: Yeah, open bar. And your food. And the Police Department, the Chiefs come there and your Lieutenants.

Q: So, both the police and the fire go?

JAP: Yes. In other words, it's a sign of thank you to us. Yeah.

Q: Well, that's very ... [nice] ...

JAP: It's very interesting. Yeah, very, very nice. And they give you top shelf. They just can't do enough for you really, you know (laughs).

Q: Well, this has been a delight.

JAP: All right, then.