

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

Transcript Of Oral History Interview With

Brian Waterson
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

Interview with Brian Waterson
pk

by Margaret Dildilian
October 6, 2004

Q: Today is October the 6th, 2004. This is an interview with Brian Waterson. My name is Margaret Dildilian, and I am interviewing Brian Waterson at the Port Washington Public Library. What is your full name?

Brian Waterson: Brian Waterson.

Q: And do you have a nickname?

BW: No.

Q: Which fire company are you affiliated with?

BW: Atlantic Hook and Ladder Company Number One.

Q: When did your family move to Port? Do you know that background?

BW: As long as I can remember, they've been here. I was born here.

Q: You were born and raised here?

BW: Yeah.

Q: How old were you when you joined Atlantic Hook and Ladder?

BW: Seventeen.

Q: And how long have you been a member?

BW: Eight years. Almost nine.

Q: And who in your family was a firefighter?

BW: My uncle [Charlie Kozicowski] was a firefighter from Port Washington before he moved, and then when he moved, he joined Roslyn. I have an uncle [Richard McCabe] that was a member here--another uncle. A cousin [Richard McCabe Jr.], my father [Andrew Waterson] who's a twenty-five year member from the same company that I'm in. So that's what kind of got me to join.

Q: What are your earliest memories of firefighting?

BW: Oh, geez (laughs). Ever since I was young, I wanted to do it. My father would bring me to the firehouse, and I'd go to calls with him. And it was just something that I knew I wanted to do. So, as soon as I turned seventeen, which was the minimum age, I signed up.

Q: How old were you when you first went to the firehouse with your dad? Can you remember?

BW: That I can remember being there, at least like four years old, five years old.

Q: And did you ever wear any of your dad's things in the Fire Department?

BW: I wore helmets, jackets, (laughs) uniforms. Memorial Day, I'd always wear my father's uniform as soon as the parade was over. He took plenty of pictures. I don't know if (laughs) ...

Q: So, what did your uncle do that influenced you and your father do that influenced you the most?

BW: You know, it's just something that, you know, I saw my father doing it, and I followed in his footsteps. It was something that I knew I'd enjoy doing--helping people. And it was just something that I felt I had to do. Or, not had to do, but that I really--would've enjoyed doing.

Q: When you were going through the Port schools, did you ever think of going to college?

BW: Yeah. At one point, I was going to go to college. I had taken all my placement exams, and I just was so busy I didn't go back and make my schedule, and that's my fault for not going back.

Q: Do you ever think that you would go back?

BW: Oh, definitely.

Q: So, after eight years, do you have any second thoughts about being in firefighting? ...

BW: Not at all. I enjoy it so much, that I wouldn't expect not having it there.

Q: So, do you think this will be your life's career?

BW: As far as a volunteer, yes. And possibly in the future, maybe a paid career firefighter some way.

Q: Can you remember any stories that your father told you about firefighting?

BW: He told me, after I had joined, of a couple of bad calls that he had gone to, whether it was a working fire where somebody was badly injured or caused death, or an auto

accident or a bad car wreck that had killed someone or something. You know, just comparing stories.

Q: What do you look up to your dad for the most?

BW: Oh, he's a hard worker and would never tell anybody no if somebody needed something done. He was always there to help them do whatever they had to do. He was just a polite man that could never say no to anybody and was always there for whatever you needed.

Q: So when you became a rookie, did your relationship and your bonding change at all with your dad or ...

BW: Oh, yeah, we'd go to calls together. I'd have to wake him up in the middle of the night and say, "Okay, horn's blowing. We've got to go."

Q: So the two of you would go to the fires together?

BW: Occasionally. Like I said, he's got over twenty-five years in, and between work and stuff going on at home, he doesn't have the time that I have to put forward to the Fire Department. But he did all the--he used to be an officer, and he did his time, and now he's just kind of like relaxing now and, "You go. I'm going to stay home for this one" (laughs).

Q: How much time do you spend at the firehouse these days?

BW: At least four hours a day.

Q: After putting in a full day's work?

BW: Yeah. Between doing paperwork or going to calls, there's always something that has to be done, as far as paperwork. Or making sure that a piece of equipment is put back into service after it was used. A lot of checking equipment.

Q: What do you mean by paperwork? What kind of paperwork do you do?

BW: You're required to make X amount of fire calls in a year, and it's the Lieutenant's job of the company to do all the training points of how many hours each member has in training for the year. How many fire calls they've gone to so far in a year. Truck reports of when trucks went out. What was used on them. Letters to other fire departments asking various different things about stand-bys, or just there's a lot of things that like--it's not always the same paperwork. Checking the fax machine and getting back to somebody's question or something.

Q: Tell me how you made First Lieutenant, being so young. How did you climb the ladder?

BW: After my first year in the Fire Department, I ran for office, which was First Assistant Engineer, which is the lowest officer in the company.

Q: And what does that person do?

BW: That person's in charge of all the equipment that's on the trucks. Making sure that they're clean and that everything is maintained. So always have fuel on them, the trucks have fuel on them. That everything that was supposed to be there was in operating order and was able to be used. I did Assistant Engineer for three years, and then I moved to being Engineer--the head Engineer of the company. And I did that job for two years. Then, after that, I ran for Lieutenant--Second Lieutenant. And I did two years as Second Lieutenant. And when--I'm in my first year as First Lieutenant, and next is Captain.

Q: So, are you going to be a Captain next year?

BW: The way things look now, yeah. The Captain now is going to be stepping out to run for Chief. And everybody has the opportunity to move up on the ladder.

Q: Who is the Captain now?

BW: Thomas McDonough.

Q: And when you become a Captain, what are your goals going to be, do you think?

BW: To encourage people to go to calls. There's a lot of guys in the firehouse that have done their time and they don't have to make calls anymore.

Q: Why is that, do you think?

BW: Well, fifty year members and twenty-five year members. Once you hit twenty-five years in a fire company, you don't have to go to fires anymore. You're considered a life member, and you're exempt from the point system and everything else. There's still a lot of twenty-five year members and even fifty year members that go to calls. I'd like to encourage guys to--to get back into it and help the morale.

Q: How do you propose to do that?

BW: I don't know, yet (laughs). Hopefully, I won't have to put too much thought into it. Hopefully, it's not that hard. I'm a well liked guy at the firehouse, and I just feel that if I respect everybody that's down there, they're going to respect me, and if I ask, maybe they'll change their minds and come out more often.

Q: Now, when you become Captain, is there an initiation program when you become Captain?

BW: There's an installation dinner that they have every year. It's an installation and awards dinner. And they swear in all the officers and hand out various different awards for the year.

Q: Where do you think that will be held?

BW: The Chateaubriand in Carle Place.

Q: What happens at those, aside from the formality. Is there a lot of joking around at those, or are there serious things?

BW: It's a serious function, but there's always joking around. I mean, even at the firehouse, guys will joke around. But they don't mean to hurt anybody. I mean, some people take it the wrong way sometimes, but ...

Q: What kinds of jokes or pranks do they usually play?

BW: If you leave your car in the firehouse parking lot when you go away on vacation, you come back and you find it covered with toilet paper. Or, you know, they switch your boots around in your turn-out gear, so you go to get into your boots, you get your feet in the wrong boots. But otherwise, they don't do anything to hurt anyone or that would

cause somebody to not come around anymore. They only joke around with the guys they know that can take it.

Q: Are there some that can't take it?

BW: No, not too--not that I can think of. Everybody's pretty much a good sport.

Q: Who are the real cut-ups in your company--real cut-up characters, in terms of being jokesters, pranksters?

BW: My Captain now, which is Tom McDonough, nicknamed "Mad Dog."

Q: "Mad Dog"?

BW: "Mad Dog."

Q: Why did he get that nickname?

BW: Oh, geez (laughs). It was before I got in the Fire Department. He was a member of Great Neck Fire Department, and then he moved to Port Washington and became a fireman here. Just because of his personality. He loves to yell and everything, and then the next minute he's your best friend. But, no, he jokes around with the guys, and he's--

because he's an officer and he's going to be running for Chief, everything's calmed down a little and he hangs out with the guys.

Q: What are some of the other nicknames that people have in the Department that would be very interesting?

BW: Oh, there's so many of them.

Q: Can you think of just a few?

BW: Most of the new guys don't have nicknames anymore. It's mostly the old-timers.

Q: Is it because of the generation gap?

BW: I think so. I think--back then, everybody had a nickname. And I guess, you know, people were--I wouldn't even know how to put it--they never came up with a nickname for them or they were afraid to start calling the guy something and be afraid that the guy wasn't going to like it, or just kind of put that to the side.

Q: So it's basically the old-timers?

BW: Most of the older guys have nicknames.

Q: Are there any real catchy ones that you can think of among the old-timers?

BW: Oh, there's "Jingles." There's "Jewels." There's "Bubba." "Weasel." And there's a list. There's a list at the firehouse of names and what their nickname was, because people would always refer to the person as their nickname, and everybody'd be like, "Who's that?" Then, "You have to go on the bulletin board and ..." "Oh, okay." And then they'd find out who they were talking about.

Q: Were most of these related to fire incidents--these nicknames? Or are they just because of certain appearances or ...

BW: Some of them were appearances, and some of them are just, you know, having a good time and you say something and the name just stuck.

Q: Tell me what your training was like when you went to training. What was it like for you?

BW: It's long. It's ...

Q: What do you mean?

BW: It's fun. There's various different schools you have to take in your first two years of joining. You have Primaries of and Essentials of Firefighting, which are your two major probie classes. And, you know, you're just going to fire school every Friday night for two hours a night for ten weeks. And then Essentials was two nights a week, two hours a night, for eleven weeks. You have Mass Confidence, which is hands-on. There's hands-on classes. There's just classroom training.

Q: What was the physical part like for you of the training? What did they make you do physically?

BW: It was fun because you're just getting in, and they go through all the basics of how to carry a ladder, how to raise a ladder, how to stretch a hose line, how to do a search and rescue. The different types of fire extinguishers and what they're used for.

Q: What do you think is the most important thing you learned in training?

BW: How to keep yourself and others safe. The signs of what you have to look for when you're in a fire.

Q: And what did they tell you?

BW: You have to check--our gear now is not like anything, by far, of what they used back in the [old] days. You're so encapsulated in this turn-out gear that you don't feel the heat. So, they tell you, you know, you have to peel part of your glove back and put your hand out where you're crawling around on the floor and you could feel the heat, or you could feel the heat on your ears. When you knew it was really hot, you know, there could be a flashover. Just different signs to look for that, you know, maybe we shouldn't be going any further. Maybe we should turn around and get out.

Q: How does your training compare to your father's training?

BW: A lot more!. In my eight years, I've probably gone to more classes than my father has in twenty-six, twenty-seven years. Everything has changed. The way they fight fires. And they have a fire academy now which is state of the art, that they set buildings on fire, which I know my father didn't have it quite like we have it now. A lot of the schools are the same, but it's just so much more now.

Q: Do you feel the quality of your training is far more superior than his?

BW: I would say yes.

Q: So does, now, your father learn from you?

BW: My father doesn't really go into fires anymore. It's basically stay outside and if they need something off the truck. A go-getter, or direct traffic, or something along the lines of not being--being involved, but not being inside.

Q: When you became a rookie and your first initiation into the Department, how did that feel for you? What were your feelings about that?

BW: Oh, it was great, because, like I said, it was something that I'd wanted to do for such a long time. And the day was finally here. And, on my calendar, I had marked down when I was getting it. Well, I did, and every day, it was like a little kid with Christmas, saying, oh, "five more days," "four more days." And then the day came, and I was all happy, and my friends were all happy for me. And I got all my friends to join the firehouse. We had a ...

Q: Which friends have you gotten to join the firehouse?

BW: My high school friends.

Q: What specific skill was your--is there one thing that each person at Atlantic Hook and Ladder does well, or do you have to know the whole--the whole component of firefighting?

BW: It used to be just that if you're a member of Atlantic Hook and Ladder, you only needed to know the basics of that company.

Q: Which was what?

BW: Which is like ladders. Our job is, at a fire, if you ride the truck, which Atlantic is called a truck company. And if you ride the truck to a call, there's different operations that you perform, such as outside ventilation, the roof team, search and rescue. Well, while the other companies, which are the hose and engine companies, their major function is locating a water source, stretching hose, and then when they--you know, there's a lot of communications on a fire, but when the truck company finds the fire and talks to the engine company and tells them how to get there so they don't have to keep moving hoses. Tell them where it is and they work as a team. Where they put water on it, they vent, and as far as a skill--one particular skill--everyone's got to be pretty proficient and, even in each company's function, with the changing of time from back then. It's--you used to ride your company's truck. Now, it doesn't matter what company you're in, you get on the fire truck and go.

Q: When that horn blows, what do you do? What's your procedure?

BW: Get to the fire.

Q: Do you drop everything and go?

BW: Well, it depends--it is volunteer, and if you're doing something at home or something important's going on, you don't have to go. Most of the time, if--if you're home cutting the grass and the horn blows, it's something that's going to be there when you get back. So shut the lawn mower off and go to the call, and when you get back you can finish cutting your grass.

Q: Now, did you learn all of this knowledge--firefighting knowledge--from classes and books or from your elders?

BW: A little of both. There's, you know, with the hands-on classes at the Fire Academy, you learn a lot, but then when you come back home and you're actually doing it as a company, you know how other people work with your company. So you know they're not going to run away and not take you with them.

Q: Did you have a certain person, when you were a rookie, look after you, when you were green, so to speak?

BW: Everybody looks after you, because it's a brotherhood, and nobody wants to see anybody get hurt or anything. There were people that would always come up to me and say, "Listen, if you--if you have a question, you know, come see me; I'm always around and I'll help you."

Q: Do you feel any competition between the older generation and the younger generation in any way?

BW: No, not really. There's competition between the younger members, about how many ...

Q: Tell me about that.

BW: About how many calls one can make in a year.

Q: Like what's the competition and how many calls? How many ...

BW: Just every month they--the Lieutenant makes out a report of how many fires you went to in a month, and they put a number next to your name, you know. What number you rank in the company out of the top ten. And a lot of the young guys, they go to a lot of calls, and, you know, it's, "Oh, I can't believe I ... " or "I'm way ahead of you, by five calls." Or, if I'm at work and somebody else goes, "Oh, we had ten calls today, and I wasn't able to make the calls. Oh, I've got to make up ten calls to catch up to you." And it's a good morale thing, because it gets people going.

Q: Have you been on the top of the list all the time?

BW: In 1996, when I joined, I joined in June, and by the time January came around, I was the top point man in my age category, which was zero to two years of service. And then in '97, I won the same things there for two years in my category. '98, I won two awards that year. I got high points in my category, which was three to five years, and then I got a-- I'm sorry, no, in '97, it was overall highest points in the company and I was awarded firefighter of the year for Atlantic. And ever since then, I don't think there has been a year yet that I haven't gotten the highest point award--the overall high point award.

Q: And what do they give you for that?

BW: It's either a plaque or a little statue with a plaque on the bottom of it. It's got your name and what the award was for and how many fires you went to in a year.

Q: Have you also--have you also been an EMT driver?

BW: Currently, I'm an ambulance driver now. I've been an ambulance driver for six years. The EMS company here in Port Washington is part of the Fire Department, and just because you're a member of a--they call the fire companies a line company--you could still join the EMS company as a squad member. And I ...

Q: So you belong to both firefighters and EMS?

BW: Yes.

Q: And how do you juggle that?

BW: My responsibility is the Fire Department, my company. And if it's--if there's an ambulance call that they need help, manpower, or need a driver, then I go and drive the ambulance. I did that for a couple of years, and then I got really involved and I took a hundred and forty hour training class to become an emergency medical technician. And I did that for three years. So then my certification expired, and I just didn't have the time to go back to the classes. I was so involved doing my stuff at the firehouse, I didn't have time to do that, plus the ambulance. So I put that on hold, and I'm not an EMT any longer--not anymore, but I'm going to be going back for that. But, right now, I still like to volunteer my services with them and drive if they need a driver.

Q: How tough is the EMT training?

BW: Oh, it's--I took a six month class. It was two nights a week for three hours a night, and you weren't allowed to miss any classes. And that was--that was--that's all classroom, and then they had hands-on nights that you did a lab.

Q: What do you do in a lab?

BW: You learn how to splint somebody's arm or you do CPR on a mannequin. Remove somebody from a car accident the proper way with a collar and a backboard.

Q: Do you administer any drugs at all?

BW: No, that's an AMT, an advanced medical technician. I was just a basic.

Q: Now that you drive the truck, the EMS truck?

BW: Yes.

Q: How does that compare to driving a fire truck?

BW: (Laughs) Big difference!. The ambulance has got to be the smallest piece of apparatus within the Port Washington Fire Department. And, I'm its chauffeur on the largest piece of apparatus. An ambulance is only about twenty feet, and we have a ninety-five foot tower ladder, which is forty-seven feet. So, it's quite a difference.

Q: So how do you have to adjust before you (laughs) drive one or the other to ...

BW: Well, after I had a year of training in the company, I started doing driver training. Guys would always take me out on the weekend when I wasn't doing anything. And it was

something that..you put me in anything, I'll drive it, even at work. You put me on a machine, I'll drive it.

Q: Tell me about the--I want to go into your fire experiences in a moment, but tell me first what you do for your work, since you mentioned it.

BW: I work for the Town of North Hempstead Highway Department.

Q: And what do you do for them?

BW: Plow snow, road repairs. Sidewalks. Storms. When we're in a bad storm and trees fall, we go out and cut trees up in the storm and clear roads.

Q: Is there anything that you've learned in the firefighting department that helps you in your job at the Town of North Hempstead?

BW: Not really. It's two separate things.

Q: And how many hours do you work at your day job?

BW: Forty hours without overtime, a week.

Q: And then after you come home, you go to the firehouse?

BW: Run home, take a shower, grab something to eat, relax for a little while, and it's off to the firehouse to do firefighting work.

Q: When you're at the firehouse and there's no fire, what is the atmosphere like? What do the fellows do there to, you know, hang around?

BW: There's a recreation room with a couple of couches and a TV. You can sit and watch TV. Guys play cards. There's a fitness gym with a lot of weight training equipment. Guys go downstairs and they work out with weights, run the treadmill. Even if you sit on the bumper of a fire truck and just talk for a while, there's always somebody there doing something.

Q: Do the fellows do any drinking in the firehouse?

BW: When there's parties, like after a parade, you come back and they might have a barbecue and draw a couple of beers out for everyone. Installation dinners, they put the company out of service for twelve hours.

Q: What do you mean they put the company out of service?

BW: Like for our installation dinner or a big thing where a large amount of the company is going to a party or something, they'll call like Manhasset to come over and stay at our firehouse, while we're out at a party, so we can enjoy ourselves and nobody has to worry about, well, if I'm having a couple of beers, who's going to go to the fire. So they--they make sure that somebody's here to cover us, so that everybody can go out and have a good time.

Q: Has anybody been caught going to a fire that has had something to drink?

BW: I'm sure it has happened, but I can't recall an instance where somebody was caught, since I've been in.

Q: What do you love the most about firefighting?

BW: Well, I think it's the feeling. A lot of people don't get to experience, or don't even want the experience. A brotherhood. It's like a second family. Everybody at the firehouse is real close to one another. If somebody's relative passes away or goes to the hospital, everybody is there. They're at the hospital. They send cards and fruit baskets, balloons. They go and visit. Even if you're sick at home for a while, they send visitors up to the house and they bring you stuff. They make you feel really well.

Q: What do you dislike the most about being a firefighter?

BW: I don't think there's much. Maybe the guys that--it upsets me to see guys that are members that aren't into it as much as I am. I know everybody can't be in it as much. I mean, if you can only volunteer ten hours a week, or even ten hours a month is a lot--if you can do that, I'm happy. But I'd like to see more people more involved and going to more calls. And training's a big thing. I mean, we have a fire school and only five people show up, and it gets upsetting, because without the training, you wouldn't be doing this. And you need the training and nobody comes, and it's upsetting, and that gets to me a lot.

Q: I'd like to talk a little about--have you talk about your fire experiences. What outstanding fires have you been in in the last eight years of your service?

BW: Oh, geez. Kirkwood in Manorhaven; it was a really big fire. A lot of firemen were trapped, and ...

Q: Were you on that scene?

BW: Yes.

Q: Is that the one--was there a death?

BW: Later on, there was a death. It wasn't an immediate death. Person in the basement apartment had gotten smoke inhalation, and they pulled him out. And he, later on, passed away from injuries from that fire. From the smoke inhalation and burns.

Q: Was that Mr. Ianelli?

BW: I think so.

Q: What did you do on the scene of that fire? What was your role?

BW: I came back into town late. I was at a convention--a firefighting convention at the Nassau Coliseum, and somebody called me and asked me if I knew anything about the fire in Manorhaven. I said no, I didn't know anything. So I got in my car and came back to Port. And it was a big fire, so they were still there. They'd just started putting water on the fire by the time I got back, because of locating the fire, which way they were going to go in. And the guys on the hose line, they got "disorientated," and they had to be pulled out. And once everybody was pulled out and everybody was accounted for, everybody started going back into the building. So I made it there in time for the secondary search, but the victim had already been removed from the house.

Q: Was that--was that when the fire Chief--Geoff Cole--

BW: Geoff Cole, yes. Geoff Cole had a ...

Q: And he received a ...

BW: He went to the door and pulled the hose back to him and pushed the fire back so that the three or four guys that were on the hose line ...

Q: Was that ...

BW: ... could make it out alive.

Q: Was that Donald Alexander and ...

BW: I think it was Donald Alexander, Donald Reese might have been on there, and Gary Chudd. I think he was on there, too.

Q: What does the nozzle man do at a fire like that? What was Geoff Cole doing with--with the hose?

BW: The three firemen--three or four firemen that were on the hose line got "disorientated." The fire came--it burned through the basement door and into the room that they were in. And, which was unexpected. They thought that they were safe because the door was closed. But the fire was so intense that it just burned through the door. And I don't know if they got lost on the hose line from one another--but it started burning everything that

was in that room. And Geoff Cole was--I don't know if he was the Chief or the Assistant Chief at the time--he made his way to the front door and found the hose line and pulled the hose line back and so that he can grab the nozzle and push the fire away from the firemen that were there. And kept yelling and screaming, "Follow my voice." And they found their way to the door.

Q: What lessons did everyone learn from that Kirkwood fire, do you think?

BW: It doesn't matter how much training you have, there's--something can always happen and something can always go wrong. You always have to expect the worst. Just be safe. You never know what's going to happen next.

Q: Is there a fear factor for you when you go to these fires?

BW: Oh, there has been fear. That isn't the only working fire that I have been to in my eight years.

Q: What other fires?

BW: I've seen a lady get killed on--what was that road, off of Revere in Port Washington? Roxbury Road. Middleneck Road. Middleneck Road across from the church.

Q: What happened at the Roxbury Road fire?

BW: We had pulled up, and the police officer on the scene had said that Chief Cole was inside by himself, because they had a report that there was somebody in the house. And so, once you find out that there's somebody in there by themselves, everybody started to ... adrenaline started flowing. And, you know, you start running around, trying to work a little faster for his safety inside, because he's got nobody else with him. And you break windows, to make sure that all the heat and the smoke comes out, so that maybe if there is definitely somebody in there, if you start breaking the windows, the victim that's in there can breathe better if they're still alive. The heat leaves; the smoke dissipates. So that while you're searching, it makes it a little easier to find somebody laying in the bed. This woman happened to be in her bedroom.

Q: Did she die?

BW: Later on, yeah, she died.

Q: Were you also involved with the--with any of--the Shields Hardware Store fire or ...

BW: The fire? no. I wasn't in for the fire. I was in for the Shields wall collapse.

Q: What was that--what was that about?

BW: When they had just started building the new Shields had a basement dug out with the foundation poured, and there was a worker that was down in the basement and part of the foundation cracked and collapsed and fell on him. And then he had to be dug out, and special rescue teams from Bethpage and Syosset had to come in, and they had to brace the wall, while people had to keep digging under the wall to pull this victim out. And he was pulled out, and he made it. He's alive.

Q: And what was your role there?

BW: I was pretty new, so I was like a go-getter, up and down the ladder, "We need another saw." "Go get this." "Go get a shovel." So I was just up and down the ladder all day.

Q: Were you involved at all in the Bernard Street fire?

BW: That actually happened right before I got elected. It's right around the corner from my house. So I was there just watching. And my mom's like, "You don't have any second thoughts about joining after seeing stuff like that?" I said, "No, this is what I want to do." I mean, that was a major fire, but I had missed it by like three months.

Q: How does your--how does your mom take it when you are in this danger (laughs).

BW: She doesn't like it at all. She'll hear my radio go off in the middle of the night and wake up, and she'll hear me get in my car and go to the firehouse. And she'll listen on another radio that I have at home. She knows all the radio codes and everything, and she knows when there's a Signal 12, which is "fire is under control and everything's okay." She'll go back to bed, and then she'll wake up when I come home to find out, "Well, what happened?" Very inquisitive. And then, but she'll hear like "Signal 13" from a big fire, which means everything's done and everybody can go back to the firehouse, and she's like, it's a load off her chest. She's just happy to hear, you know--I know she's listening when I'm out on a run. So if I know, it's in the middle of the night, I'll pick up my phone and say, "All right, listen. I'm okay. Don't worry. Go back to bed." (Laughs).

Q: How does she feel when she hears "man down"?

BW: You don't hear it too often. Maybe like in a drill, like if we have a drill in town. And I'll tell her, "Listen, I'm going to a drill. So, if you hear anything, don't panic." And, of course, she panics. And, she'll hear, "Firefighter down," or something and goes, "Oh, my God! I hope it's not my son." And as long as I call her when I'm done--as a courtesy to my mother. I know she worries a lot. I make that phone call, because I know that's what she's sitting up waiting for.

Q: How does your dad take it?

BW: My dad's a little calmer, because, you know, he does it, too. So he knows it's probably just a drill, or he'll just sit and try to keep her calm (laughs).

Q: Do you take any lucky charms with you when you go to fight a fire?

BW: Not lucky charms. I mean, I have a medallion around my neck, with my company ID number on it, which I've never taken it off unless like the doctor says, "Oh, you have to remove it for an x-ray," or something. But I don't--I don't consider it lucky. Maybe it is lucky or superstitious, but that's the only thing I carry that I always have with me.

Q: You've never taken it off except when you need to.

BW: Yeah.

Q: Do you know of other men in the Department who wear a lucky charm?

BW: People have the firefighter's prayer in their helmet--taped on the inside of their helmet.

Q: And what is that?

BW: It's just a prayer card that's got a--there's something called "The Firefighter's Prayer." I don't know it, but it's just a little prayer laminated on a prayer card, and they put tape on

it and they stick it on the inside of their helmets, so as long as they have their helmet, they have the prayer card. There's little guardian angel pins that guys wear on their helmets or coats.

Q: Do you have company mascots or mottos or ...

BW: Each company's got their own--it's not like having a Dalmatian in the firehouse. But each company's got their own logo, and Atlantic's is ...

Q: What's your logo?

BW: ... a beat-up fireman. He's got like stitches on his face, and he's carrying rope and chains. He looks at this big firefighter guy carrying poles and stuff, and the company logo is "The Boys in The Hook," after the movie "The Boys in the Hood." They made it "The Boys in The Hook," because it's Atlantic *Hook* and Ladder Company. So that's on the side of our trucks.

Q: What did that "hook" mean in the old days? Is it still in place or ...

BW: It's the same thing. It's just a long pole with a point on it and a hook for pulling ceilings.

Q: Is that--is that called the Pike's pole?

BW: Yeah, pike pole.

Q: So that's the hook.

BW: That's the hook.

Q: You spend so much time at the firehouse. Have you ever done kitchen duty there?

BW: Well, there's not--we have something called the steward that cooks for all the meetings, and he's got his own little kitchen crew. But once in awhile now, you know, if it is bad weather, we have a stand-by, we'll go to the store, and we'll all chip in money for food, then come back to the firehouse and each guy's--"You make the salad. I'm going to make the steak." And, you know, everybody helps out. There's no particular--if I'm going to be at the firehouse, you have kitchen duty tonight. It's--they have guys that do that; that's their job. So they'll cook after the meetings and schools and stuff.

Q: I didn't understand, whose job is it to do that?

BW: The company elects a steward.

Q: Okay.

BW: The steward's job is to form the kitchen committee group, and he's got four or five guys that work with him and cook food for after the meetings.

Q: So is that a paid job or ...

BW: No, it's--everything's volunteer.

Q: And what if the fellows don't like what he's--the steward--has (laughs) planned?

BW: They don't eat (laughs). Go get food somewhere else.

Q: But does that happen often?

BW: Once in a while, a bunch of guys will say, "Well, can you make fish for dinner?" or a seafood dinner. And some guys go, "Oh, I don't like seafood." But the majority of them wanted the seafood, so that's what he makes. But most of the time, they're pretty good. They'll make the surf and turf.

Q: What's that?

BW: Seafood and a steak, or something. And make everybody happy, or try to make everybody happy.

Q: So you have any special recipes that you like?

BW: I'm not picky (laughs).

Q: Tell me about the tournaments. Are you--or drill teams. Are you ...

BW: Yes.

Q: ... involved in them?

BW: I joined the drill team the summer that I was elected--in June of '96. And I'm still on the drill team. There's eight events, and I run six or five out of eight.

Q: What do you mean you run it?

BW: The drill team, there's--dates way back to the days. It's changed big-time now. They have expensive race cars. That you hang on the back of a race car with a ladder. Four guys on the back of a race car, and you're doing eighty miles an hour. Then it stops for a split second and you've got to jump off and put the ladder in the ground and draw the ladder up against an arch. And one guy that's on the back of the truck has to climb the ladder. And all these other towns have their own teams, and you--every Saturday, you go

and you compete. Who can make it up the ladder the fastest. Who can put water on the--
hook up to the fire hydrant and put the nozzle on the hose and hit the target the fastest.

Q: Have you ... [END OF SIDE A; BEGIN SIDE B] ... This is side B, to continue, have you
been tops in doing in any of these exercises?

BW: We've taken trophies. We've placed in tournaments. But I've never taken a first place
overall trophy.

Q: What is your team called?

BW: The Port Washington Road Runners.

Q: And do all of the firefighters come to these, or just a few?

BW: It's a combination of the four fire companies, or the four companies in the Fire
Department. It used to be that each company had their own racing team. It was Atlantic
had the Rowdies. Each company had their own racing team. Atlantic had the Rowdies;
Protection had the Rangers; and Flower Hill had the Runts. And I forgot what year it
was, that they decided to combine the three racing teams and they formed the Road
Runners.

Q: Are these competitions and the racing teams, are they more for training or relaxation?

BW: It's more for recreation. I mean, they call it the drill team. Like I said, you're raising ladders and you're pulling hoses together. It's not training as far as firefighting; it's just a recreation, fun thing to do.

Q: How big a part does firefighting play in your social life? Do you socialize with the firefighters, as well as working with them?

BW: Yeah. You become friends with a lot of members from other departments, and, you know, you might see them at a tournament or a fire that you get called to in somebody else's district. And you hang out and you talk, and you meet a lot of people. I met my girlfriend through the Fire Department.

Q: Tell me about your girlfriend.

BW: She's a member of Roslyn Highlands, and she comes from a big firefighting family.

Q: And you met her ...

BW: Through the Fire Department, racing.

Q: At the tournament?

BW: Yes.

Q: Tell me, how do you get to date when both of you run to fires every night?

BW: I'm more into it than she is. So, she doesn't care if she misses a call. Me? I always have to, if I'm home, I've got to go to the call. She'll tape the re-set button on her radio and go back to bed, and my father will go. But she hangs out with me, you know, in Port, and she'll go to calls with us.

Q: What's her name?

BW: Dawn. And she'll come, and she's got permission from her Chief and our Chief gave her permission to--she's got the same training we do, and ...

Q: So she can go into a fire with you?

BW: Yeah, if she's here, and it's just another person to--to fill the truck.

Q: And how many fires have you been to together?

BW: Not--we've been to a couple of calls. Nothing--no major fires, or anything like that.

Q: So, what does a fireman do on his night off?

BW: We go to dinner. My girlfriend and I, we'll go to dinner; we'll go to a movie. We'll even sit at the firehouse and watch TV or something. Hang out with some other firemen.

Q: Have you seen the movie "Ladder 49?"

BW: I saw it last night (laughs).

Q: As a fire--a real firefighter, what did you think of what you saw?

BW: I thought the movie was an excellent movie. It was very realistic. It got sad towards the end, and I was told--I was told by a couple of friends, "Don't bring your wife, your girlfriend. Just go see it with the guys." And I took my girlfriend, and I said, "Aw, it can't be that bad." And, of course, I mean, she knows what it's like being a member herself. And now it's ten minute into the movie, she said, "Okay, it's time to go. I can't take it anymore." There was a big funeral and everything at the end of the movie. And it makes you think of, oh, my God! you know. That could be me. And she just didn't want to see any more.

Q: So, seeing it's so realistic, does it ever give you second thoughts about being a firefighter?

BW: No second thoughts, because I like it so much. But it makes you think "that could have been me that got trapped in that building and burned," or ran out of air and they couldn't find me in time.

Q: Is there something about youth that likes to taunt death, in a way?

BW: I don't know. Death isn't a game or I don't want to think about dying. And everybody knows it's going to happen, but I just go and do what I'm expected to do and hope for the best (laughs).

Q: You were away a couple of weekends ago, and it was part work and part party?

BW: Yes.

Q: Can you tell us about where you were and what you did?

BW: I went to Myrtle Beach for a good friend of mine's bachelor party, which is a member of the Fire Department. And on our trip, the Captain, myself, and one of the Engineers from my company had met with a truck dealer to buy--to purchase a new fire truck. So we had to go over all the specs, just to make sure that we were on the same page.

Q: Where--where did you go to buy the truck?

BW: South Carolina. And we just talked to the salesman about different things. About how many seats we can fit in it, what kind of tools we could put on it, if there's going to be enough room for the type of engine that's going to be put on it. So we just wanted to get on the same page before the truck actually gets built.

Q: Do they build the truck to your specifications?

BW: They try to, as close as they can get it to what you want, they'll do. I mean, if you tell them you want a little door in the side of the truck--two feet after the door--if they--if there's nothing on the other side of that metal, they'll put a door there for a pike pole or an ax. I mean, most of the guys that sell the fire trucks are members of different fire departments, and they know it's critical to fit as much stuff as you can onto a--onto a truck, so that when you go to a call with that truck, you have exactly what you need. And they know it's tough to fit some of this equipment on the truck, and they know that space on the truck is critical, and they try to use every free bit of space, to utilize it.

Q: So this truck that you looked at, how many firefighters will it hold?

BW: Six. Which is a driver, the officer, and four in the back.

Q: And how much would it cost?

BW: Two hundred and fifty thousand, three hundred thousand. A heavy rescue truck for firefighter, they call it FAST team, which is Firefighter Assist Search Team, which, when you go to a fire, the guys on that truck, their only job--they don't go in a fight fires--their only job is if a firefighter goes down, to go look for that firefighter and remove him. And the truck is also going to act as an automobile accident first response truck that's got the jaws of life for a bad car accident. You can free somebody from a bad wreck.

Q: Have you ever worked the jaws of life?

BW: Yeah.

Q: You have?

BW: Several times. Between real calls and training, we're big on that.

Q: So, tell me about the rescue--you've worked in rescue squads?

BW: Yes.

Q: Tell me about some of those experiences?

BW: My first one, I had just got into the Fire Department, up on Middleneck Road in Sands Point Preserves, there was a girl that fell asleep coming out of Sands Point, while driving. She hit a tree. Her car was totalled. And she was maybe two years older than I was. So, I mean, it--children think that like "I'm invincible and I can do whatever." And that really opened my eyes, to see somebody my age, dead in a car, and I've got to cut the doors off and everything to get her out. It was just something--I lost sleep that night. I couldn't go back to bed after coming home from the call, and it was just something, I said, well, I'm going to have to--these are things that you're going to have to deal with along the line in the jobs that you're doing. You're going to see more of it. Not that anybody wants to deal with it. But, unfortunately, you're going to see it, and you've got to deal with it.

Q: How did you deal with that--with the sight you saw and how do you ...

BW: I guess, as time went on, I put it out of my head. And, like I said, that was the first one I saw. So, as you start seeing more, you get a little bit better with it. It's still hard for a lot of members. They have the critical stress debriefing team that, if you go to an incident that's really tough to cope with, they call a stress team in. And you just sit with this team, and you talk about it, and they try to help you out, you know. After 9/11, they did it. And, you know, I know there were a couple of auto ambulance calls where children were killed, and people have a hard time with, especially children that they're so young, you

know. People can't deal with it, and you have to call these special teams in to help people cope with their feelings.

Q: Did you go to a stress debriefing for that? For this ...

BW: For the one that I went to? No.

Q: How many of those have you been at?

BW: Hurst tool calls? Or auto accidents?

Q: With the jaws of life.

BW: Well, I was at the one on Middleneck Road. I was on the one by Port Police. The biggest one that I can remember, though, was Thanksgiving a couple of years ago on Roslyn West Shore Road, when there was an SUV full of children that hit a tree. The truck that I was on, besides Chief Cole. Chief Cole was the first one there and called us on the radio and said, "There's definitely people pinned in the car," and that we were definitely going to be using the Hurst tool. And I was the first officer besides the Chief to pull up with the rescue truck. And I got out of the truck, and I was looking at the car. And when you have training, you know, you cut up a car. They never put a car wrapped around a tree. So, you're looking and you're like, "Oh, well, if the car was down on all

four tires, I'd know what to do." And you're looking at this car, and you're like, "Oh ..."
And at the time, the one kid that had passed away was still alive, and you're trying to do everything you can to--to help him. And he had passed away at the scene. And it's discouraging, because, you know, you said, "Oh! If I just did something a little bit quicker," maybe you could have had him out of the car quicker. And if, you know, the AMTs and EMTs could have been working on him. And--but he had bad head trauma. He had his head up against the tree and he was trapped in the car for a while. So ...

Q: How do you decide where you cut that car with the Hurst tool?

BW: Now, going through a bunch of schools for it, if you have a driver in the front seat that the dashboard is on top of him. There's a procedure to get the dashboard and the steering wheel away from the driver. If the people in the back are pinned, there's a procedure to do that. You can take the roof off if the car's on its side and you've got to get people out. You make a door out of the roof. You just take the saws or the cutters and cut a hole in the roof and make a door and remove that one. Most of the calls, whether a car is on its tires or on its side, wrapped around a tree, most of them are all basically the same. The way they teach you now, it's just a couple of things, and using those couple of techniques, if you do them right, can free up anybody in the car.

Q: Let's talk about--I think you also--you've also done ice rescue?

BW: Ice rescue and water rescue.

Q: Can you talk about those incidents?

BW: The only water or ice and cold water rescue that I've been to was Valentine's day a couple of years ago, right here in Manhasset Bay. Two guys had gone out in a canoe, and the canoe had flipped. And they recovered one guy and he told us where the canoe had flipped and what his friend had been wearing. And we were out in our cold water rescue suits and life jackets, on boats, looking to find any signs of a piece of--an article of clothing that might be floating, that might tell you where the body is. But he was--his body was recovered a couple of months later. But he was never found alive.

Q: So what kind of gear do you have to wear when you're working in cold water like that?

BW: You have these dry suits that have insulation. They could be used winter or summer. It's like plastic, rubbery. When you get in the water, it like shrink wraps to your body. All the pressure in the water just pushes the suit closer to your body, to keep you warm in the wintertime. You don't really feel the temperature of the water unless you get water down the suit. And if you get water down the suit, that's annoying, but as long as you have it on right and everything, zippered up and sealed, you're okay.

Q: Have you ever worked in confined spaces?

BW: I've taken a class that they teach at the academy. It's a ropes class. You know, Port Washington, they had--they started a confined space and high angle rescue team, which is ropes for the high angle and a confined space team. I never found myself into the--I'm not claustrophobic or stuff like that. But I'm a big guy. I can't get into a man hole and stand up, like some of these other guys can.

Q: How tall are you, by the way?

BW: Six-six. So, it'd be--confined space, for me, is not the way to go. I've taken the ropes class, though, and I enjoyed that, so I'm going to go back for more ropes classes.

Q: Out of—working out of all of these different areas in firefighting, which do you lean toward the most, or enjoy doing the most? Is it the water rescue? The ice rescue? The ambulance driving? The firefighting?

BW: It's got to be the firefighting, followed by heavy rescue or auto accident calls.

Q: Why does that grab you, out of this, so.

BW: Because it's--you only have like three or four guys working on the car at a time, so that you have room to work. And those three or four guys, they know what your next move is. Once you do one cut, they know, from the training that they've taken, what you're going to do next. And it's just, you can go in and cut. When you step out, the guy with

the spreaders comes in, and he knows to spread it, the opening. And it's just, the teamwork is, it's unbelievable when you get the right group of guys working together, how much stuff you could do without even talking.

Q: Tell me about the party end of your trip two weekends ago. What do you do? Do you have parties? Bachelor parties when your friends get married or ...

BW: Yeah, like I said, the brotherhood is really strong, and there's different cliques in the firehouse, different groups that they hang out with. And this one whole group, we went to a bachelor party down at Myrtle Beach for four days. And we flew down, and we'd go to bars and played golf, and big dinners and stuff. And we had fun.

Q: What do you feel about the parades? Do you partake in the firefighting parade?

BW: Every Memorial Day, I parade. Most of the Pride in Port parades, I've paraded in, along with the drill team. You have to—when you race, you also have to parade. It's a two-sided thing.

Q: What do you mean?

BW: You compete in the morning, during the tournament. And then, after the tournament is over, all the teams compete in parading. And there's parade prizes and everything for the

most people in line, and everybody's got to be in step, and there's judges on the side of the road that will judge you.

Q: Who are the judges?

BW: Oh, just members of other fire departments that are ...

Q: And what do they ...

BW: ... parade officials.

Q: ... judge when they're watching? What is it that they judge?

BW: They'll make sure that everybody's got the same belt buckle, the same shoes. They want to make sure that everybody's buttons are buttoned the right way. If one guy's got a tie tack, everybody's got to have the same tie tack. Everything's got to be totally uniform. They want to make sure that the spacing between the members is the same. How many spaces between the members going left to right and in front of you and behind you, that there's the same amount of space, consistent throughout the ...

Q: The marchers.

BW: ... yeah, the Department.

Q: Who trains you to do that? To walk like that?

BW: That's just--you go to a parade, and they say, "Okay, when you hear the drum, your left foot hits the ground" (laughs), and if you can't listen to the drum and figure out which way your feet go, watch the guy in front of you (laughs). Hopefully, he knows.

Q: Do you have musicians in your ...

BW: Oh, we used to have a band--a drum corps--which we had for one summer. And I guess there're only like four or five guys involved in the band, and they couldn't all make the same dates that we had parades. It kind of got split up and we went back to renting bands.

Q: Do you think that the Port community appreciates the volunteer firefighters?

BW: I think so. I mean, their applause and everything, walking down Main Street on a Memorial Day parade, and you hear everybody cheering. And even somebody coming up to you if you're wearing a Fire Department jacket and you're at the deli getting lunch or going out to dinner. There's always somebody that'll come up to you and say, "Oh, thank you." Or "I had an ambulance call at my house, and you guys made it there quick." You know, there's always something. Somebody says something or writes a letter in the

Port News to the editor thanking the Fire Department. Yeah, I think they're very well respected--respectful of the Fire Department.

Q: Do you think that most everyone knows that you're volunteer?

BW: Oh, I know that answer is no for a fact. There's a lot of residents that believe that it's paid. And between the fund drives and public relations, like an open house or a fire prevention thing, we try to make very clear that it's all volunteer and nobody's getting paid here to do what we're doing.

Q: If you were to be paid, what do you think the salaries would be?

BW: Starting salary--thirty-six thousand dollars for the first couple of years, and then maybe like forty-two after your first two years or so, as just a firefighter. And then if you decide to move up the ranks, you know, promotional exams come out. You take a promotion exam. I'm sure that there's big pay raises with promotions.

Q: Do you know what they're paid in New York City?

BW: I think a regular fireman on probation's about thirty-two.

Q: To start.

BW: Yes.

Q: What are the customs and traditions that were carried on in your dad's day that are no longer done that you may know about?

BW: I don't know. It's pretty much, you know, the same. We're approaching our hundredth anniversary--the Fire Department's hundredth anniversary. And our logo is "A hundred years of tradition." Nothing's--I mean, besides the way you fight fires and the equipment and everything. But pretty much everything is still tradition.

Q: Have you ever been injured in a particularly dangerous situation when you were fighting fires?

BW: I put my hand through a window one time when I wasn't wearing my gloves, which I was supposed to wear. And I needed stitches in my hand. You get--at a big fire when you're running around and you're on the roof and you climb the ladders and you're off the roof, and grabbing something, bringing it back up the roof. Or, your dragging a victim to the front door. It's very strenuous. I mean, but the ambulance will pull you to the side and say, "Listen, sit down, relax, hydrate yourself. We're going to put you on oxygen. I just want you to sit here and relax." And then they'll let you go. I've never been to the hospital, except for the stitches, for--on any call.

Q: Have you ever hurt your back?

BW: I've hurt my back, but I don't know if that's between work and firefighting. I have a bad back from lifting and--but when you're in a fire and you're crawling around on your hands and knees, you know, even with all the gear and your air pack, it doesn't bother me.

Q: How do you deal with your physical exhaustion and your mental stress? Do you have periodic physicals?

BW: It's every five years for younger members. They get sent to the doctor. The Department sends you to the Department surgeon, and they do a chest x-ray, physical exam, a breathing test. And then, as you get older, you get pushed into a different category, and then you have to go every four years, every three years. And some members have to go every year, if you want to continue being a fireman that goes into fires or driving apparatus. The driver has to go for a physical every year, just to make sure that, you know, their heart's strong and they're not going to be driving and all of a sudden have a heart attack and cause injuries to civilians on the street or members of the Department that are with you.

Q: What do you feel about the women firefighters?

BW: There's a lot of them that can do just as good a job, if not better, than the men. There's not really too many female firefighters in Port Washington.

Q: How many would you say there are?

BW: Three, four maybe. Most of the women tend to join the EMS company.

Q: Do you think they're physically up to doing the firefighter's job?

BW: I'm sure they can do it, but they choose not to. I don't know if it's they think it's too dangerous or that's just not their line. They like medical better than fire.

Q: Do you have minorities in the Fire Department now compared to older times?

BW: Oh, yeah. Things have changed. We never had a Black guy in our firehouse. We had one which had resigned, and we're getting another one this month. I know the other companies have a couple of them. There's Spanish, Jewish, Catholic, Italian, Polish. I mean, it's just everybody joins now. It used to be just--like Atlantics used to be only Italians went to Atlantics, and now it's just you go where you want, and everybody's welcome to come.

Q: How do the oldtimers feel about that?

BW: They know that times are changing, and you have to get away from when they joined. And they realize that times are changing and they have to get over it and get with the program, and it's 2004, and this is the way it's going to be.

Q: What are the biggest annoyances between your generation and the older generation?

BW: Fire Department, the younger guys, they want a fire *department*. And the older guys want to stay like Atlantic, Protection, Flower Hill. And the younger guys want to just go to--forget all that. Make it the Port Washington Fire Department, and everybody's one instead of four separate companies that make the Department. Make it the Department and no companies. And a lot of the oldtimers want to keep their company identities, because they feel that they're losing out on something. And the younger guys, they haven't been in the Fire Department that long to really get attached to the company identity. They just know about going to calls, so it doesn't really matter to them. The guys in the middle are like, they talk to the older guys and say, "Listen, this is the way it's got to be." And the younger guys, you could tell them anything, it's they'll look up to everybody else. They haven't really done much, haven't seen much, so they take your word for things.

Q: What are the good qualities of your generation?

BW: They're polite to the older members. Nobody's disrespectful of them. Always helping them out. I'm not too sure.

Q: And how do you--we were talking earlier about respect in the company. You know, you respect each other. How do you earn that respect when you go into the Fire Department, especially when you're new?

BW: You go to the firehouse and you see an older member and, you know, the night you get in, you might not know him. But if you come down and there's an older guy sitting on the couch, you can, you know, shake his hand and say, "Hi, I'm Brian." And "Nice to meet you." And, you know, you just start talking to the guys. The more you come around, the more you see them. You know, just sit around, talking to one another. You start gaining the respect of--but, you know, people don't think that the young guys and the old guys don't get along. There's a big--I hang out with fifty, sixty-year members, and, you know, it doesn't bother any of us. It's a brotherhood, and we're all in it together.

Q: What do you think makes a good firefighter versus a bad firefighter?

BW: One that goes to training. Training is very important. One that's always looking to learn more. There's always something to be learned. One doesn't go to a class and learn everything. They're always changing the way you do things. Go to training. Learn.

And go to calls and help others that don't have as much time as you do. Give them a hand and show them, this is the way we do things, and teach.

Q: I'm curious to know that--does your generation smoke in the firehouse?

BW: There's no smoking in the firehouse. It used to be where you could smoke and play cards, have a couple of beers and smoke, and now they stopped the smoking in the firehouse over ten years ago, before you weren't allowed to smoke in a bar or a restaurant. The firehouse did it first. It was important for a lot of guys that didn't want to go home smelling like smoke or breathing that in. So they stopped it, and if you want to have a smoke you go outside.

Q: Are there many who are smokers that go outside?

BW: Not that many.

Q: How did 9/11 impact you?

BW: It was a shock. I--I didn't expect it. I mean, I knew the towers had fallen when we went, and I just didn't--when we got there, I didn't expect it to look anything like it was. It was just ...

Q: What do you mean, when you got there?

BW: Port Washington was called for a light truck to Ground Zero. That night at like eight o'clock at night, they sent a truck from Port Washington. And I drove that truck to the City. And all they wanted you to do is park it and just--it's got these bright lights on the side of it--just to illuminate the area. And once the truck was parked, me and the three other guys that were with me, we walked around and couldn't believe the destruction. It was just--you never would have expected to see something like this.

Q: Were you concerned about breathing in that toxic air?

BW: Yeah, they had given us dust masks to wear. Nobody knew exactly what was in the air and what the effects it was going to have on somebody. So everybody took the precaution of putting on a dust mask, and then a couple months later, the Department, anybody that had been sent to Ground Zero, the Department made sure that they had another physical by the Department surgeon with extra tests, with blood gases and different blood tests and breathing tests, just to make sure that it wasn't--that it hasn't taken any effect on the members.

Q: But how could they tell that soon?

BW: It was just a basic precautionary test. If you had higher levels of asbestos or something in your blood, I'm sure later on down the line, you know, with the City firemen, once they

find out exactly everything that was in the air that day and all the stuff that was breathed in, in the future, everybody else will be going back for more tests.

Q: How long were you there?

BW: I was there for the first night until some time the next morning. And then we were released. And then I went back twice after that--once with the Fire Department and once on my own, with a bunch of friends, just going and being in that bucket brigade, just picking through the rubbish and passing the bucket.

Q: So how--if you were there through the first night, did you get any sleep?

BW: No, I was--actually, I was at work that day. When I had found out about the planes hitting the Towers, I had left work to go to the firehouse. And there were a lot of--there's a lot of firemen and policemen that work in the City that are members of the Fire Department. So, it was a big concern on calling their families and comforting their families, just to make sure that they were okay. Or even trying to locate members that were working in the City that day, to make sure they were okay, if anybody's heard from them. The adrenalin was flowing so much that nobody even thought of sleep.

Q: So, basically, you had these lights on Ground Zero.

BW: Yeah.

Q: And then, you also did a bucket brigade?

BW: Right. Just digging through the rubble and filling up a bucket and passing it to the guy next to you all night long. Just doing the same thing, looking for survivors or looking for remains of someone.

Q: Did you find any?

BW: The first night that we were there, there was an arm just laying on the sidewalk. And I thought it was fake, looking at it. And then I went, "Oh, my God! That's a real arm." And nobody thought, being that it was the first night, that they weren't going to find anybody. Nobody thought to say, "Oh, excuse me, you know, there's an arm over here," to a higher official of the City. And they would have been happy to find an arm. But everybody was so set on finding survivors that an arm was the least of anybody's concerns.

Q: You mean for identification later.

BW: Right. But then it becomes a major find. But everybody was looking for--for full bodies that survived the--that explosion, but the fall of the Towers.

Q: And did you find anybody?

BW: Not any full bodies. Just parts.

Q: What was the procedure when you found the part?

BW: You found somebody from--a Chief or an officer from the City Fire Department, or an official from the Police Department or the F.B.I. And you called them over, and you said, "Look, we have this." And then they'd bring a special bucket. They were taking personal identification things--wallets. If you found a watch or something, they tried to get the N.A. off of it. Anything that was on a person, they wanted. So you always had to tell somebody if--other groups that were there, the nights that we were there, they asked for body bags and stuff, so you know they found a body or just a large amount of remains. And it was just something that, like I said you would never have expected ever to see in your life.

Q: Did you have to go to any debriefing--a debriefing after that?

BW: They asked any member that would like to go to go, but I didn't attend any.

Q: How prepared do you think our fire department is now, in case we're attacked here in Port.

BW: Since 9/11, there's been a lot of precautions taken that you can't leave doors to the firehouse open. If you go on an ambulance call, you can't even leave the ambulance unlocked at the hospital. Everything has to be locked up. If you see anything suspicious-people taking pictures of fire trucks. Or if you had a training, somebody that looks a little suspicious with a video camera filming everything. The F.B.I. and the Port Police should be notified immediately. And otherwise, I mean, if there was a way to stop the Towers from coming down, they would have done it. But you never know when it's going to happen, and ...

Q: Has training changed at all because of 9/11, since you've been there. You haven't been back involved in training, but has training new people changed any because of 9/11?

BW: Since 9/11, we've gotten a lot of new members.

Q: Oh, really.

BW: The President had made one speech on TV, urging people to join their local fire departments, and a month later, we had like thirty people join the Fire Department, all because they said, "The President told me to join," wanting to help out. And a lot of them are still members, and some of them didn't expect it to be what it was, and they quit. They couldn't take it.

Q: So, how many do you think have quit?

BW: Maybe ten. They just weren't into it. So we got like twenty good members out of thirty, that stayed.

Q: Were they mostly young, or were they older?

BW: No, there--it was a variety. Yeah, we had people that were in their fifties and forties, all the way down to seventeen year olds. So it was a big span of ages.

Q: Do you go to the high schools to recruit?

BW: The Fire Marshal, which is in charge of public relations, he'll go. I don't know if they still do it, but they used to go to the high school, like on career day, and set up a little booth with some literature and stuff for people to take it home and read and investigate. Otherwise, after like Pride in Port parade, we set up a little booth. During the antique fair on Main Street this past weekend, we had a little information center to talk to people about joining and everything. And there's banners that we hang up all over town asking if you're interested, come to the firehouse on a Thursday night and talk to somebody about it.

Q: Did you have a fire truck there this--this past weekend?

BW: Yes.

Q: And were you showing and demonstrating there?

BW: Well, mainly just handing out literature, and if there were questions about it, we'd answer anybody's questions about how much time it takes and everything.

Q: Did you get any new recruits that way?

BW: I'm not sure. We told people, you know, if, after talking to them, if you're still interested, come to the firehouse on a Thursday night, and we'll give you the application. So we'll see if anybody comes.

Q: Are the firefighters trained to deal with any disasters on the railroad here in Port?

BW: We just took a two week class on--took a Long Island Railroad safe and awareness class, of--if God forbid, something happened--how to enter the train if the doors don't open. How to shut the power off to the trains. How to fight a fire in the train. We've had drills here in Port Washington where we actually shut the power down to the station and, you know, walk on the tracks and you enter the train from the ground and not the platform,

and how you have to force the window to kick in--kick out windows, get on the train, and disengage the controls that open and close the doors, then open the doors manually. So, it's not something that we do all the time, but we have trained in it.

Q: Does your current job allow you to leave, to go to a fire? Your construction, job at North Hempstead?

BW: Depending on what we're doing, if you're plowing snow in the middle of winter, the roads have to be open, so you can't stop and go to a call. If you're in the yard just cleaning equipment or fixing equipment, then you're able to go to a call, if your boss allows you to go, then you can go. You always have to check with your supervisor, if they feel that they don't need you for that amount of time, then they send you. If--I work down on Roslyn West Shore Road, so if there's a call on Roslyn West Shore Road and I'm at work, I just--I don't go all the way uptown to get on the fire truck. I'd get in my car and I'd just go right to the scene.

Q: Do you work part-time for the Port Washington schools?

BW: No, I used to. Before I got the job at the town of North Hempstead, I worked part-time during the summers for the school district.

Q: And they would let you go to fires?

BW: Yes.

Q: Do you keep a diary of your experiences so that future generations, or perhaps, even the Library.

BW: I have a scrapbook. I have a scrapbook that my mom started for me, of like all the newspaper articles of different fires that I went to, or pictures that I've taken of fires, that went in the scrapbook. A list of all my training and everything. My mom tries to keep everything together, so that when I have kids and grandchildren, I can pass the book down the line.

Q: If you have children, do you hope that they'll be firefighters?

BW: I say yes now, but my mom always says, "Wait till you have kids." So, you know, after I have children, I might think differently. But it'd be nice to have a son to take around to the firehouse and have the son look up to me like I look up to my father. So ...

Q: What if you have a daughter?

BW: Women can do the job too. So (laughs), I won't be disappointed.

Q: What do you think of this oral history project?

BW: I was just asked if I'd be interested in giving my opinions and the way I feel about the Fire Department for the hundredth anniversary.

Q: Do you think it's a worthy project for the future?

BW: I think it's going to be interesting once everybody's interviews get put together and you have one big history--or one big, yeah, history outlook on the whole Department, I think it's going to be worth it.

Q: Is there anything that you would like to add or talk about that we haven't talked about?

BW: Not that I can think of. There are a lot of questions asked, and that covers as much as I can think of, unless you have any other questions.

Q: Thank you very much.

BW: Thank you.