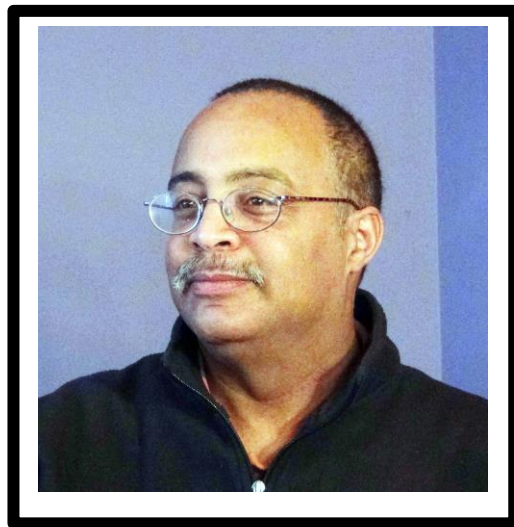


Transcript of oral history interview with

Joseph Waters

Gladstone/ Maplewood Fire Department, 1980-2007



by Kate Cavett of HAND in HAND Productions
and Bob Jensen, President, Maplewood Area Historical Society

for the
Maplewood Area Historical Society

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ORAL HISTORY

Oral History is the spoken word in print.

Oral histories are personal memories shared from the perspective of the narrator. By means of recorded interviews oral history documents collect spoken memories and personal commentaries of historical significance. These interviews are transcribed verbatim and minimally edited for accessibility. Greatest appreciation is gained when one can listen to an oral history aloud.

Oral histories do not follow the standard language usage of the written word. Transcribed interviews are not edited to meet traditional writing standards; they are edited only for clarity and understanding. The hope of oral history is to capture the flavor of the narrator's speech and convey the narrator's feelings through the timbre and tempo of speech patterns.

An oral history is more than a family tree with names of ancestors and their birth and death dates. Oral history is recorded personal memory, and that is its value. What it offers complements other forms of historical text, and does not always require historical corroboration. Oral history recognizes that memories often become polished as they sift through time, taking on new meanings and potentially reshaping the events they relate.

Memories shared in an oral histories create a picture of the narrator's life – the culture, food, eccentricities, opinions, thoughts, idiosyncrasies, joys, sorrows, passions - the rich substance that gives color and texture to this individual life.

Kate Cavett Oral Historian

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KC: Kate Cavett

BJ: Bob Jenson

JW: Joseph Waters

JW: My name is Joseph Waters, retired firefighter with the Maplewood Fire Department. I was there for almost twenty-seven years, from September 1980 to January 2007.

My interest in the fire service – I call myself a kid of the *Emergency*¹ – the TV show about Johnny and Roy. And I’ve always had an interest in the fire service, firefighting, so when I turned eighteen, I had already known a number of firefighters – at that time, it was Gladstone Fire² – and decided “Well, let’s just give it a shot and see what happens,” and applied, and had a number of people that said, “Yeah, we know him. We’ve known him as a kid for about five years. Let’s give him a shot and see what happens.” And so it kind of went from there.

KC: So you were eighteen. And you were just a kid.

JW: Correct. [laughs]

KC: And you’re Black.

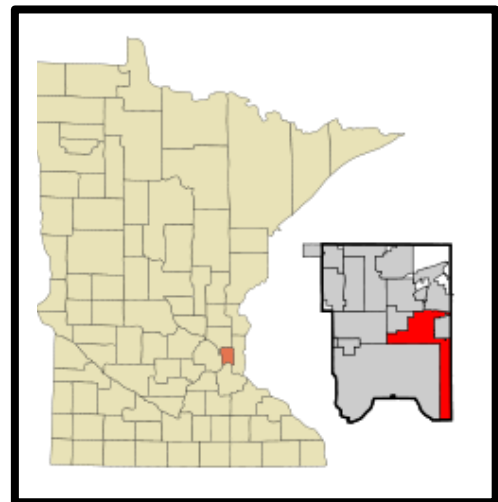
JW: Yes.

¹ *Emergency!* is an American television series that combines the medical drama and action-adventure genres. It debuted as a midseason replacement on January 15, 1972, on NBC, and ran until May 28, 1977, with six additional two-hour television films during the following two years. *Emergency!* was created and produced by Jack Webb and Robert A. Cinader. The show focused on paramedics John Gage and Roy DeSoto (played by Randolph Mantooth and Kevin Tighe respectively) of the Los Angeles County Fire Department’s squad 51 based out of station 51 in Carson (actually LACoFD Station 127). The paramedics worked with Rampart General Hospital emergency room personnel. Engine Company 51 often responded to various emergencies along with the paramedic squad.

² **Gladstone Fire Department**, see chronology in Appendix A

KC: And they never had anybody with a tan [African American] on the fire department before.

JW: That's correct. It was different. You know, so it's like three strikes against you when you're walking in the door. But, you know, there were some that said, "We don't want him." But then, they're that way with everyone. It just made it that much easier to say it to me. But then there's others that are saying, "You know what? This is our potential future of the fire department. Let's give him a shot. You know, all us old guys, us middle-aged old guys, aren't going to be here forever, and if we start rejecting people because we don't like them because of skin tone" – despite the fact that Maplewood³ had a significant Black population at that time – "we start rejecting people, no telling what could happen." But I had also talked to an older chief who had retired before I had come on the fire department.



KC: Who was that?

JW: I think his name was George Ormsby⁴. And he had said, "Yeah, we tried going in the Black neighborhoods off of County Road B between Hazelwood and White

³ **City of Maplewood** was incorporated in 1957 from New Canada Township in Ramsey County, Minnesota. New Canada Township was organized in 1858 and named by the earliest settlers who emigrated from Canada. It was largely dairy and truck farming until post WWII veterans built homes and sought the comforts of suburbia. Maplewood was named for the maple tree which was a favorite of the township supervisors and for the nearby Maple Wood School and Maple Street. Gladstone, the earliest commercial neighborhood was platted in 1886 and established a volunteer fire department in 1943. Parkside was a neighborhood that established a volunteer fire department in 1958. The city has a total area of 17.99 square miles.

⁴ **George Ormsby** was a Gladstone firefighter July 10, 1951 to July 15, 1978; with 27 years of service.

Bear Avenue and see if those folks would be interested in becoming firefighters, and they said no. None of them were interested.” Different demographics or just a different way of thinking at that time that they had experienced a life a little bit different, so they really weren’t interested in being members of the fire department, because they just considered it just an old boys club. I didn’t look at it that way. I just looked at it as an opportunity and I’m going to pursue it. [And my mother taught me not to let the stuff of racial discrimination get in the way.]

KC: Because it was an old boys club.

JW: It was. It was. [Kate laughs] And, you know, in some instances, it is, too. Even today, it still has its cliques. That’s just the nature of the business. I mean, you’re never going to get away from that. But at least, you know, you do have an opportunity to come in the door and see if you have the skills, the guts, to do this job. You are serving your community for very little money, and I mean, very little money. [laughs] But nonetheless, you get a chance to prove yourself, and you get a chance to prove yourself to the older guys.

KC: So you had just graduated from high school.

JW: Correct.

KC: What were you doing in the rest of your life at this point in time?

JW: Well, I had also just started college. I have a Bachelor’s Degree from Hamline University⁵ in Economics. At that time, it was called Economics. It’s more Business Administration. But I kind of have a little minor in Political Science. And I was just graduated. I was going to Hamline University full-time, and I was doing this fire gig at the same time. For me, it worked out perfectly, because

⁵ **Hamline University** was founded in 1854 by Methodist pioneers as the first institution of higher education in the state. It is located at 1536 Hewitt Ave in Saint Paul.

obviously the first thing you do is they don't just give you the gear and put you on a rig⁶. You can ride a fire truck, but you've got to go through Firefighter I⁷ basic training.

KC: Where did you do that?

JW: That was through Century College. The department paid for it, but it was through Century – what is now Century College. It was 916 Vo-Tech⁸ at the time. And that basically teaches you about the different hose lays, the ladder lays, how to use ropes, how to attack fires, and so forth. That was about – it was six months, because it was four hours a night, one night a week, for six months. And then after that, I went into what is known as EMT, Emergency Medical Technician training⁹, the basic level. And that was another four or five months, four hours a night, one night a week. But that was actually taught by the Maplewood Police Department, because at that time, they had the – the police

⁶ **Rig** slang name for a fire truck .

⁷ **Firefighting I and II** classes were taught at several technical colleges in the metro area. Starting in 1972, ISD 287 Vo-Tech (since 1995 called Hennepin Technical College) sent instructors to local fire departments (including Maplewood's volunteer departments) for training in basic firefighting procedures that had been established by the National Fire Protection Association. In the early 1980's, 916 Vo-Tech (in 1996 became Century College) began teaching these procedures which eventually became Firefighting I. Firefighting II was later established for more advanced firefighting skills.

⁸ **916 Vo-Tech** was an Area Vocational Technical Institute at 3300 Century Avenue North in White Bear Lake began in 1969 and in 1996 was merged with Lakewood Community College to create Century College to provide post-secondary education in technical and occupational areas, including adult extension programs to prepare for or upgrade employment skills, such as firefighting.

⁹ **Emergency Medical Technician (EMT)** can serve in the patient compartment of an ambulance. EMTs use medical equipment such as automatic defibrillators, deliver trauma care and are educated in a simple way over all injuries and diseases. EMTs form the backbone of EMS delivery in the United States. Most work in a team with more advanced providers. EMTs usually complete a course that is about 150 hours in length for 9 college credits, are required to hold a Basic Life Support certification from the American Heart Association, and are required to attend a minimum of 12 hours a year of continuing medical education.

paramedic program was up and running, and they were training other people to be EMTs. Now, that training is done, again, through Century College, just from a cost standpoint. But when I came on, we did the training in-house. So by going to college, you already had those study habits or study patterns in place, so it just made it easier to study the material versus, you know, someone that's working all day and hasn't been in school for a while suddenly studying the stuff at night. They may have a little bit tougher time.

I had a tough time, too. I won't say it was easy, because it was all new stuff, but I had the study patterns in place to make it easier to pass.

KC: And you're a bright man and you knew you were bright, so probably had the confidence to do it...

JW: Correct.

KC: —where maybe there were some of your older peers who had [not] been in school for a long time and didn't feel as confident.

JW: They didn't feel as confident, yeah. A lot of them were tradespeople, you know, so there used to working with their hands and learning on the job. Well, in this particular case, you still learned on the job, but you needed to understand the basics to do the job, and like I said, for me the study was much easier.

I was a little nervous, because there was one – like I was taking my practical exam for my EMT, and there was one area where I failed because the guy says, "You don't seem confident enough in using the airway, so I'm going to fail you and have you come back again." And you kind of feel about this tall, but I'm like, "Well, okay." Went back and did it and passed it with ease.

KC: How long did you have to wait until you went back and did it?

JW: I think it was a couple weeks, which was fine, because it gave me time to study and it gave me time to talk with others who were doing it. And after that, it was kind of like yeah, I walked right in. It was like, "Excuse me. [laughs] I know what I'm doing."

KC: So you did Firefighter I. You did EMT. Did you do Firefighter II ?

JW: I did Firefighter II about nine years later. Today, it's actually done all at the same time. And that took about six to eight weeks, because Firefighter II is just getting into more techniques. You already know the basics. Now it's just getting into the techniques. I took the certification for that and passed and so forth. There was also a thing called Firefighter III, but like I said, today that's all kind of merged together into Firefighter I and Firefighter II.

KC: Is there any other training, formal training, that you did to be a firefighter?

JW: No. After that, I've taken some classes on leadership, on tactics and so forth. These two and three day seminars, but there was no other formal training that I had taken. They had looked at taking hazardous materials training, but we kind of did what was known as Hazardous Materials Operations, a forty-hour course, versus the 180-hour course. But that was done much later and that was also done in-house. That was part of our regular training that we did on Tuesday nights for two hours.

KC: What was it like for you, the Tuesday night trainings and the Saturday morning trainings?

JW: Oh, we didn't do too much Saturday morning trainings, because the Saturday morning trainings were really just a repeat of the Tuesday evening trainings. The Saturday morning trainings were set up for those that worked afternoons and couldn't make the evening drills. But it was just nice getting together, listening to

the other guys, learning with them, just being around the other guys, hoping that some sort of – at that time, hoping a fire call would come in, because you want to be a firefighter, so you want to break windows and use the hoses and so forth, you know. [Kate laughs] But it was just nice getting together with them and just basically learning from –

KC: And drinking beer with them?

JW: I didn't drink beer. Even though there was beer at the station at that time, I did not drink beer. After about three years on the job, when you have a \$10,000 beer bill in the month, it's kind of like, "Okay, it's time to cut this off. You want beer, you can pay for it." But then there was also a slow push just to get beer out of the station altogether, because when you come to the station and drink a free beer, I mean you're going to drink as many as you want and then go home drunk. And if a call comes in and you go on a call drunk, it doesn't look good to the public.

KC: Did that happen?

JW: Yeah, I had one or two people that had a little too much to drink that shouldn't have been on the call – that I did not feel comfortable working with because they weren't 100%. They felt that they were. I didn't.

KC: What year was beer gone from the station?

JW: 1983

KC: So this is when you were eighteen, nineteen, twenty –

JW: Correct, correct.

KC: How did you handle that?

JW: I just kind of kept my mouth shut and just did what I was supposed to do. I go to a supervisor and say, "You know, maybe you need to deal with this issue." Kind

of push it off on them. It is like today where you walk up and say, "Hey, you've had too much drink. Get out of here." In those days, you just want your supervisor and let them deal with it.

KC: Did they deal with it?

JW: Some did, some didn't, [laughs] to be perfectly honest with you. Because some of your supervisors, that was their drinking buddy. And maybe it was their drinking buddy at somewhere else, and of course, they didn't want to offend their drinking buddy, so yeah, in some cases they dealt with it, and in some cases they didn't. One particular case, the gentleman had his wife there, and she knew he had too much to drink, and she physically blocked him from going out onto the apparatus bay to get his gear. But I think he somehow managed to show up on the second truck on a house fire, but they kind of kept him aside.

KC: You reference getting the beer out of the station. My illusion is this might have been a big deal.

JW: Initially it was. But you started having more and more people understanding that it was becoming a problem. Maybe in the 70s, you just kind of ignored it, but this was like early-to-mid 80s where there's much more awareness and drunk driving and people being inebriated and your image in the public. And they see that you're inebriated and you potentially fall down on the fire scene, and that doesn't look good, because they called their city council member and were saying, "Hey, I had a fire at my house and one of your firefighters showed up drunk." Granted, the city couldn't do anything about it, but it would be mentioned in a way that, "You need to deal with this issue."

KC: So some of this stuff was beginning to happen.

JW: Right. Correct.

KC: So this was 1981?

JW: I'd say by '83, right around there. I say by '84, the beer was gone from the station.

KC: Anybody quit being a firefighter because the beer was gone?

JW: No, no. Like I said, there were other places that they could go: private clubs, the bars, whatnot. So it didn't stop the drinking, but what it did do is that those that had too much to drink didn't show up on calls.

KC: Talk about some of the early fires and one of the first fires you went on and what that felt like.

JW: One of the first fires I went was a huge house over on Keller Lake¹⁰. It belonged to a scientist at 3M. It was a big house. And I was somewhere and I heard the call come in, so I had to go back home to take the car home, because I was using my dad's car. But I could see from the fire station at Hazelwood and County Road C, I could see to the southwest a big orange glow. And so I knew this is significant house fire. So I went home. I said, "Here, you got to take me back to the fire station. We got a house fire to go to." So as I went back to the station, got on the ambulance, pulled up. By the time I got there, this house had pretty much burned down. There were still walls standing, but there wasn't much left of the place. So was just kind of an adrenaline rush, like "Oh, this is my first fire to go on." A huge fire. Big house. And at that time, I didn't think about, "This is someone's personal property," and whatnot. It's just like "Yeah, I get a chance to be on this big hose so I can squirt about 150 gallons a minute worth of water." So it was kind of thrilling. I just finished my Firefighter I training, and so I was able

¹⁰ **Keller Lake** is located southwest of the intersection of highways 61 and 36. Part of a chain of lakes feeding into Lake Phalen and adjacent to the Phalen-Keller Regional Park and the Keller Golf Course.

to go on a call and participate on a call, but you still had to – you are still the junior person, so you would be behind a more senior person. So yeah, it was kind of one of those rushes that you had.

KC: An adrenaline rush.

JW: An adrenaline rush, correct, correct, so.

KC: This is the first time you're out there playing with the big boys. Anybody push you aside? Anybody not want you to be on the hose with them?

JW: Not really. In this particular fire, there was so much to do that every free hand was needed. And like I said, since this was a huge – this was a big, two-story house. And I want to say it was equivalent to, like, 4000 square feet. You needed every available hand that you had, and when you're running the big hoses, the two-and-a-half style hoses, you need at least three people to control it. And I think we had six people on that line at that time.

KC: Wow.

JW: Yeah, I know. So yeah, particularly when you get an engineer¹¹ that fires up the throttle and puts more pressure on the line, suddenly the line is telling you where it's going to go rather than you directing the line, so. But yeah, we had six people on this particular hose, so there was plenty of work to do, plenty of work.

KC: You reference not realizing this was someone's home, livelihood, all their possessions.

JW: Correct.

¹¹ The **engineer** drives the fire truck and operates the pump to ensure there is adequate water in the hose to the firefighters.

KC: What happened when you moved out of being “This is a place for me to get an adrenaline rush” to “Oh, my gosh, somebody’s lost everything”?

JW: It took about twenty years for me to realize that, to be perfectly honest with you. [Kate laughs] They’d always say – we have a fire marshal, because even the fire marshal at that time had said, like, “Oh, gee, this is fun. This is great to be on the line.” And he would come back saying, “Yeah, it’s someone’s house. Just keep that in mind.” You know, because you’re being a firefighter, the thing you want to do is fight fires, move the hose around, like I said, break windows and do stuff like that, but over time, you start to realize, “Yeah, this is someone’s personal possessions.”

We had a small bedroom fire back in the 1990s, the early 90s. And the fire was really contained in this one bedroom and it wasn’t that much fire, but we come walking in with the hose. One of the chief says, “Don’t turn that water on until you get to the bedroom, because that’s where the fire is.” Because now we were much more conscious. We’re already tracking in someone’s house with our boots and our gear. And this is in the wintertime, so you’re bringing in snow and everything. After a while, you start to realize, “Yeah, let’s try not to do as much damage, to do as very little damage as possible.” There’s going to be some damage. You’re going to have a window broken or something. Maybe a window broken. Maybe you can just open up a window. If you open up the hose, maybe you will only open up a little bit and put the fire out that way. So we just consciously as a department became more aware of people’s personal possessions.

KC: Was that talked about in trainings?

JW: Yes, yes. You know, “Be careful. Don’t just walk in and swing around and hit the wall and so forth. Take your time. Watch what you’re doing. You know, instead

of taking an ax and breaking the door, check the knob. It might be unlocked.”

[Kate laughs]

You know, a funny story. There was a movie called *Once Bitten* with Jim Carrey in there, and it was with Lauren Bacall, and she was the witch, and in order for her to stay young, she had to bite a young virgin male. Well, she had all these other virgin males that were getting older, and they are kicking down doors and breaking things. She finally stops them and says, “Hey, slow down! Check the knob! I got to pay for that.” And the guy kind of laughs, like, “Oh, yeah, you’re right.” Turns the knob. He’s like, “Oh, yeah, it’s open.” And that’s kind of the mentality we were going at, you know. Granted, you’re in a rush and you’re thinking about getting to the fire, but slow down along the way. Do a simple thing like checking the knob, because that saves the homeowner some money. That’s a knob that he doesn’t have to replace and so forth.

KC: Now, you’re a young guy taking this in, but you’re working with a lot of veterans. Were they willing to take that on and change those attitudes, too, or were they just going to do it the way they’ve always done it?

JW: Well, you had some of the veterans that were starting to retire, but you had some of the other ones that were kind of what I’ll call the middle-aged veterans. They started to realize, “Yeah, this could be my own personal property, too. Yeah, let’s slow down. Let’s not make a big mess if we don’t have to make a big mess.” So you did have some of the more what I’ll call middle-aged veterans that were starting to take this in and teaching the younger guys, “Hey, slow down.” I mean just “slow down” in general is their philosophy. You know, “We don’t need to kill ourselves over this.” So yeah, you had – the ones that I hung around more with were taking this in and saying “Yeah, let’s slow down.”

KC: At what point were you not just the kid, but maybe there were some others younger than you on the department?

JW: Well, I won't say younger in age, because there's very few people that were younger in age. They were just younger in experience, because you had some that were, like, in their early thirties that had come on. Ask that question again. I lost my –

KC: So you were always one of the youngest on the department.

JW: Correct. Right. Correct.

KC: But other people came on that were older than you.

JW: They were older, but they identified with me, not because of my age, because same level of experience. And we had no problems working together there, because we were learning at the same time.

KC: Tell me a story where there was a problem, where somebody just couldn't get over your color.

JW: Gee, that one I'm going to have to think about. [both laugh] Because I was trying to think of some of those situations and it wasn't overt, it was more covert. You know, it's just like they would ignore you when you walk into a room or like, "Why is he here?" or something like that. Or they would get up and leave. But that was, again, some of your older senior people who had twenty-five years on there and were ready to leave. But there was no covert (sic) reaction like that that I knew of.

KC: And this was the 1980s, so – we are in Minnesota, and we knew to be –

JW: *Minnesota nice.*

KC: Yes, and a little bit more politically correct.

JW: Correct, correct.

KC: How much of the overt did you experience?

JW: None. I mean, I can honestly say none. Yeah, there was none that I can honestly recall.

KC: How much of the covert?

JW: Quite a bit. It was quite a bit. You know, I'd say about 40% of it. There was some older guys at some of the other stations that knew me, but in my particular station--Hazelwood¹², I didn't really have that problem, because most of the guys in the station that I ran out of had been on less than ten years when I started. Because that particular station opened up in 1974, so you had what they referred to as charter members of that station. But there wasn't -- there was some covert. There was a couple of people that didn't -- he didn't like me, but towards the end as he started to retire, he started to respect me, simply because longevity or just the fact that I've been there so long worked in my favor, that I wasn't going to go as easily as they thought. And maybe that was his version of hazing. I don't know.

KC: Did you have to be better than the other rookies?

JW: No. I had to be just as good as the other rookies. I never experienced that I needed to be better. I just needed not to be so jumpy, so antsy, so mouthy as a person -- you know, nineteen and twenty-year-olds that think they know everything. But I didn't have to be better than anyone else. I didn't have to prove myself that way. I just had to prove myself that I could do the job.

¹² **Hazelwood Fire Station** at 1530 East County Road C, Maplewood, was part of the Gladstone Fire Department.

KC: At what point did you realize that you were such a teenager?

JW: To be perfectly honest with you, I hired someone right around the same age. This was about fifteen years ago. He was around the same age [as I was] when I started. And like I said, he was starting to do things that I had did and I just had this flashback, thinking, "Hmm, that was me [both laugh] eighteen years ago." And I started to realize, like, "Oh, my God. I was that bad, too." But then he started doing things. I'd tell them to do one thing and he would do something else. Then I'd pull him aside, like, "Weren't you told to do this and not that? Why did you do it?" But then I kept thinking to myself, "Hmm, I did the same thing. I did the same thing, too."

KC: Maturity is such a gift.

JW: It is. It really is.

KC: Tell me a story about another fire that you remember.

JW: There was one up on County Road D. It's a doctor's house. The house is still there, but the whole area is completely—or is completely been developed. But it was a house kind of stuck in the back. It was a Black doctor's house. They had left the house and a fire started in the kitchen and ends—and one of the police officers driving by saw smoke, checked it out, come to find out it was a fire in the kitchen. It was a hot August day. It was the first week of the State Fair. This is back in 1983. I was just pulling in the Target and I heard the siren go off, so I drove back to the station, and I'm like, "Oh, what do we got?" "We got a house fire." And I looked up, again, to the northwest and saw a big column of smoke. Pulled up to the house and it was just the whole back end of the house had been going, as we say, "going," meaning there were flames. So I pulled up on the ambulance, grabbed a tank, and then went in and helped the crew.

Unbeknownst to me, I had heat exhaustion, because one of the medics looked at me. He says, "Take your gear off and have a seat." And they gave me some water and ice and put me in front of a fan. But when I walked into the house, it was this huge statue in their front entryway. I'm like, "Who lives here?" But we got a job to do. So we had fire in the kitchen, fire in the bedroom. It was mostly on the upper level of the house, but it was just one of those fires where I experienced just heat exhaustion and didn't even realize it, because if you're a young kid, you just keep going. And then one of the medics looked at me and said, "Sit down. You're not doing any more work, because you're about ready to drop." And I kind of realized from that point on, you know, on real hot days, you need to pace yourself, because you got sixty pounds worth of gear, it's ninety degrees out with 90% humidity. You're not going to last that long. You're not going to last as long as you think you're going to last, simply because the body can only take so much, and as I got older, I started to realize that.

KC: And you were better at pacing yourself.

JW: Better at pacing myself, correct.

KC: And that day, were you willing to stop and sit it out because you were told to?

JW: I only sat it out because I was told to. I wanted to get back into the action. [both chuckle] But no, but I was told to sit it out, so I just followed orders at that point.

KC: How'd you learn to follow orders?

JW: Kind of the way I was growing up. I had a strong mother, strong Black mother, you know. You didn't want to cross her. [chuckles] Let's just put it that way. So you just learned to listen to what, as I say, the elders tell you.

KC: You started working your way up the ranks.

JW: Correct.



KC: At what point did you get a rank promotion?

JW: First one kind of came in 1993. It was lieutenant safety officer, and that was a new position. It didn't really have a job description, if you will, but it was kind of like, you need to make sure people are doing safe practices and so forth. I'm like, "Oh, first chance at it. I think I'll do a good job at it." But it was kind of one of those things, it was like do as you go. It was like on-the-job training. There was no—there was a formal—not necessarily a formal job description that we had, but there was kind of a formal way of doing things, and I had to learn that as well. But I also ran into resistance with that position as well, because it was like,

“Here’s the blue helmet,” because that’s what the safety officer wore. “Here’s a radio, just to kind of keep you quiet, and now just go sit in the corner. Don’t do anything to ruffle feathers.”

KC: That was the expectation, but you’re a wise enough human being to know that what they were—what you needed to do was important.

JW: Correct. That’s correct.

KC: So how’d you get through the “Go sit in the corner”?

JW: It wasn’t easy. It wasn’t easy, because again, we had a house fire, and they had a captain at that time that was doing his own thing, and there was unsafe practices. I said, “Stop, don’t do it. If you’re not going to do it the right way, don’t do it at all.” Got into an argument on the fire ground. Well, he got even six months later by taking the position away from me, and I kind of felt angry, but I’m kind of like, you know—and then I felt that I didn’t get any backing from our chiefs at that time. Instead of saying, “Yeah, he was 100% right in what he did. You, Mr. Captain, were wrong in taking the position away because you were wrong on the fire scene.” Instead, they just kind of said, “Oh, well, you know, I think you got a case, but I think you should go argue with Captain So-and-So.” And I’m like, “You know what? It’s not worth it. Because if you’re not willing to back me, I’m not going to start an argument that I feel I’m right on, but I could actually lose. So I’ll just sit it out and wait and see what happens.” So I sat it out for a year and had fun, but I knew I was right and I had people come up to me saying, “You were absolutely right in what you did. Captain So-and-So was absolutely wrong in what he did.” I’m thinking, like, “You know, you guys should speak up about this, because if they start to hear this, it makes it easier for me to make my case. But if you don’t say anything to them, you’re kind of standing out there by yourself.” But that’s a position that’s always been kind of controversial, because

the nature of it is that person has the power to stop you from doing something, because they feel you're going to hurt yourself, and there are other folks that feel that you're just a lowly lieutenant, you're a lowly safety officer; you don't go around telling a senior officer to stop doing something.

KC: What was the unsafe practice that Captain So-and-So was doing?

JW: If I remember correctly, they were going up on the roof and the roof was weak. They didn't have a breathing apparatus on, and I told them, "If you're going to go up there and do some work, make sure you have your breathing apparatus on." And they did not have the breathing apparatus on, so it was kind of a conflict between a captain giving one order and me as a safety officer saying, "No, you're going to do safe practices."

KC: And the captain was sending other people without their breathing apparatus.

JW: Right. That is correct.

KC: Did you ever get to go back and be safety officer?

JW: Not safety officer. Then we created this position called lieutenant. Again, it was out there, kind of a training position. Didn't have a job description. So by 1995, I was made lieutenant. And it was kind of like a training officer, a training position to move into the captain's position, which I moved into in '96, but we had a change of chiefs at the station at that time.

KC: So the new chief was willing to have—

JW: The new chief was there at the time of the fire. He knew what was going on, and he called me and says, "Would you be willing to take a captain's position." And I said yes. He had been there when the original incident happened, correct. Because at that time, our officers always took over after the first of the year. So this was January 1996. He knew what happened, he knew the conflict between

myself and this other captain, and he says, “You were right and that captain was wrong. But I think you would make a good captain.”

KC: Who was the new chief that made you captain?

JW: He’s now our Assistant Chief—Fire Marshal, Butch Gervais¹³. He’s kind of a straight shooter. He’ll tell it like it is. Whether you like it or not, he tells it like it is. And, you know, you can accept it or reject it from that point. I’ve always respected his opinion. I may not have always agreed with him, but I did respect his opinion. He took the job to heart. I mean, granted, he had a full-time job elsewhere, but he took his position seriously, both as district chief and of course takes his position seriously as fire marshal as well.

KC: What’s a district chief?

JW: District chief. We had five stations, and a district chief is in charge of that particular station and they have a particular area. For instance, when we had the five stations, my area was north of 36th, east of 61, up to County Road C, and then I had everything north of County Road C following the border with Maplewood and Little Canada and Vadnais Heights and White Bear Lake, down 694, down White Bear Avenue, back to County Road C. So each station had a chief in charge of the station, and then they had up to four captains underneath the district chief, and then you probably had about fifteen firefighters from there. But a district chief is in charge of that particular station. The title just happens to correspond with, “That’s your district.”

¹³ **Clarence “Butch” Gervais** was a Gladstone, then Maplewood firefighter November 1977 to the present; Fire Marshal 1999 to present, Assistant Chief/Fire Marshall 2009 to present; with over 37 years of service and counting.

KC: What station were you out of?

JW: I was at the station at Hazelwood and [1530] County Road C. At that time, it was Station 7. It's now Station 3, because they've shut down two stations. But I always ran out of the station at Hazelwood and County Road C.

KC: Did you go up farther than being captain?

JW: Yeah, in 1999, by this time we had become a city department. The goal was to merge all three departments together, because at that time, the city manager only wanted to deal with one entity rather than three. In 1999, because we hired our first full-time chief, Joel Hewitt¹⁴, who came from Roseville Fire. He became the full-time chief, and then from '96 to '97, they were negotiating bringing the three departments together and that was his job. In July of '99, I became acting district chief – meaning you're just kind of filling in – and then three months later, I became district chief at that time. That's the highest rank that I had obtained within the department.

KC: Now this is a volunteer position.

JW: Correct. Or it's a paid position. There's a stipend that goes along with the responsibility, you know, so you get the stipend plus your call pay.

KC: How much was the stipend?

JW: [laughs] I honestly don't remember. I should remember, because it was paid quarterly, and I'm thinking it was, like, \$2000 a year.

KC: Okay, so a stipend equal to cents on the hour that you worked.

¹⁴ **Joel Hewitt** was a Roseville firefighter 1976 to 2004 (including 7 years as chief); Maplewood Fire Chief Department 1996 to 2000; St. Anthony Fire Chief 2000 to 2004; Moorhead Fire Chief 2004 through 2010. He was first fire chief of Maplewood Fire Department; and initially had no personnel or stations until the 3 Fire Departments agreed to consolidate that became effective January 1, 1997.

JW: Right, correct. Because by that time, we were up to anywhere from \$10-\$12 per call – per call, not per hour. They pay per hour today, but at that time, it was per call, so if the call lasted twelve minutes or twelve hours, you got exactly the same. But again, if you enjoy – it’s kind of like that psychic income. If you enjoy what you’re doing, the money really doesn’t make any difference. It’s nice to have the money – don’t get me wrong about that – but if you enjoy what you’re doing and you enjoy the work and the nature of the work, the money is kind of secondary.

KC: Do you have to buy some of your own equipment?

JW: No, all of that was provided for us. Even from day one, all of that was provided by the department: the uniforms, the badges, the turnout gear¹⁵, the helmets, the boots. All that was department issued.



Turnout Gear

KC: You referenced the departments coming together.

JW: Mm-hmm.

KC: So what’s the difference between Parkside¹⁶, East County Line¹⁷, and Gladstone?

JW: Well, basically there’s nothing. The goal is to serve the public, you know, respond to calls, medical emergencies, fires, accidents, and so forth.

KC: But they all have their own personalities.

¹⁵ **Turnout gear** --- The outer protective gear worn by firefighters and so-named because they are kept beside a firefighters bunk at the fire station to be readily available when they turnout for a fire.

¹⁶ **Parkside Fire Department** – Chronology Appendix B

¹⁷ **East County Line Fire Department**—Chronology Appendix C

JW: They all have – yeah, it’s like three kids. Each have their own personalities. I kind of look at it this way: Gladstone fire, which I was part of, was great on the finance end. We always had money. Parkside was very good on structural firefighting, and what we say “opening up the building” or they now say “softening the building,” getting the windows opened up, getting the ventilation done. And East County Line was good at governance. I mean granted, you may elect your chiefs and so forth, but they had a board of directors like a corporation that oversaw – that the chiefs reported to, so there was always a level of accountability there. So in my opinion, the each brought their own uniqueness to the table.

KC: Did that make it more difficult to come together as one department?

JW: Yes and no, because you’ve got some leaders over here, maybe at Parkside, that are kind of militant. They want certain things done. They want things to last ten years. You got maybe the East County Line group over here saying, “Oh, the heck with it. Let’s just do it. And then we’ll get whatever the other departments get.” And then you got Gladstone is kind of like a good mediator in the middle saying, “You know folks, hey, let’s stick together. Let’s not break off. Let’s go into this with unity, because in the long run, we’re going to have to learn to work together.”

So it’s like any merger at the beginning. It’s kind of like everybody does their own thing. It’s like, “Okay, you’re good at this, we’ll continue that, you’re good at that, we’ll continue that, and we’re good over here. So we need to kind of learn how each other does things.” But again, they had been working on fire scenes together for forty-some-odd years, so they kind of knew everybody’s quirks when it came to a fire scene. It’s just that behind the scenes, administrative management stuff that we kind of got to work out.

KC: Talk about a fire that you are at when you were a district chief, where you were in charge, you weren't on the line.

JW: We had a house fire back in 2001. It was actually a month before September 11th, and it was an arson fire, because a bunch of burglars had broken into a house and vandalized the house and then set the house on fire. I was at home. There was actually a medical just before that. I didn't hear it, and then someone at one of the fire stations had paged me. That's what woke me up. I had fell asleep on the couch in the afternoon, actually because we had a trailer fire earlier that morning. I was about to call them back and then this call had come in saying that we had a house fire. And I kind of drew a mental block exactly where it was, so I said, "Could you repeat the address?" And I ended up following one the police officers in.

When I pulled up on the scene, you could see visible flames in the house. I was the first one there. It's like, "Okay, they're all going to react based on your voice." So my goal was always to be as calm as I could be, but I didn't want to be so calm that I sounded like I was on Valium. But got on the scene, gave a description of the house, and just about when I was getting out of the car, the first fire engine pulled in behind me, and I said, "Okay, it's in the living room. You're going to have to break your way –" I don't think I told them they had to break their way in, but "It's in the living room. Go get it." And all of a sudden, I hear all this pounding. I'm like, "Okay, what are they doing?" I'm like, "Oh, they're breaking down the door, because the door was locked." Obviously, they checked the door, so they just decided they had to break their way in. But as I've got other units coming in, I'm like, "Okay, I can't focus in on just what they're doing. I've got to look at the whole – I'm managing the whole scene." So my goal is the second rig in is to bring what we know as water supply. They got to hit the

hydrant, lay a four-inch supply line¹⁸ into the primary engine so that crew never runs out of water. So my next goal is, there was one – there were two rigs coming. One I did not hear check-in, as we say, and the other one did. So I gave – the one that checked-in, I said, “Okay, you’re going to be laying into the hydrant into the first rig.” The other rig, the second rig out of our station, had chimed in and said, “We’re at hydrant – we’re at so-and-so location. We can hit the hydrant lane to Engine 7.” I said, “Great, do it.” And I told the other crew, “Your assignment is being changed from water supply. Now you’re doing ventilation and search and rescue.” So it was really just kind of managing the whole incident, and that’s kind of how I saw myself as a district chief, as a manager. If I need more resources¹⁹, I call for more resources. If I need you to standby²⁰, I need you to standby. And my job is also to track resources; where is everybody in case something goes wrong. And I felt pretty good about that, you know

One of the things I wanted to do, because it was a two-station response initially, we had implemented what we call an “all-call tone” so you can notify all stations at one time. That was my biggest goal was to get on the radio and say, “District 7 dispatch, let’s do an all-call.” [Kate laughs] But Butch Gervais also checked-in on the fire, too, and when he had heard that there was flames showing, he got on the air and said, “Do an all-call.” I’m going, “Damn, I wanted to do that.” [Kate laughs]

KC: So then all the stations send rigs for that fire?

¹⁸ **Supply line** is a large diameter hose that connects the fire engine to the water supply or fire hydrant.

¹⁹ **Resources** are firefighters, equipment, types of trucks, water, chemicals.

²⁰ **Standby** is to be held in reserve or to wait until called into action.

JW: Yes, right. And what they do is the station that has a fire sends everything out of their station, and then as the backup stations come in, they send in a designated rig. And then once – you know, like Station 1 would always bring the ladder²¹ and the air truck²². Station 2 would send a pumper²³. Station 7 at that time would bring an engine. Station 3 would bring an engine, and maybe Station 4 would either come with the ambulance or just standby, depending on the nature of the call.

KC: So Butch Gervais is the chief?

JW: He was fire marshal²⁴ at that time. He became our full-time fire marshal in 1998, so obviously, he could respond at his own pleasure.

KC: So he's higher rank than you. Does he come over and take over managing the fire or does he let the district chief continue?

JW: He pretty much lets the district chief handle the fire, because then he can concentrate on investigating the fire. Because a lot of times while the fire is burning, he wants to see what's going on. So if he thinks things are running well – he could – if things were going haywire, he could technically come in and take control of the situation, or he might just come over and say, "Hey, calm down a little bit. This is what you've got." But if things – he's obviously listening to the radio and what's going on. If he thinks things are going in line, fine, he's going to

²¹ This **ladder truck** was a 95' aerial device with a bucket

²² **Air truck** was a truck that carried a mobile compression unit to refill oxygen bottles at a fire scene.

²³ **Pumper trucks** are designed to connect directly to fire hydrants for their water supply and will have a pump to increase the water pressure to hoses used for fighting fires.

²⁴ **Fire marshal's** duties vary but usually include fire code enforcement and/or investigating fires for origin and cause. Fire marshals may be sworn law-enforcement officers and are often experienced firefighters.

then concentrate on the investigation, because his job as fire marshal – he was just strictly known as fire marshal at that time – was fire prevention, investigation, and so forth. He may even help out. If the fire is big enough, he may even help out with suppressing the fire, but his primary responsibility at that time was investigations.

KC: What do you mean by “suppressing the fire”?

JW: Fire suppression is getting on the hose line, ventilating the building, setting up fans, backing up a crew that’s going in the door. That’s your fire suppression activities.

KC: Being a line officer just if more manpower was needed.

JW: Right, if more manpower was needed because the incident is big enough, yeah, he would help out that way.

KC: Explain ventilating the building.

JW: Essentially, you’re opening it up. So you got a fire in the kitchen here, you know, and it’s getting into the walls and it’s getting into the ceiling. You want to get up to the roof, to the highest point of the roof, and cut a hole – you’re literally cutting a hole in the roof. That’s one option. Maybe it’s just breaking a window. Maybe it’s opening up a back door to let the smoke out and so forth. That’s ventilating. Maybe even setting up a fan at the front door, a positive pressure fan that actually pushes the fire back through what they call “the burn side.” If the fire is here and you got your fan set up over here, it’s pushing fire back through the burn side. You want to keep it out of what they call “the unburned side.”

So that’s essentially what ventilation is. It’s just opening up the building, making it more tenable for the crews to go attack the fire, because right now as

the building is closed, you're containing all that heat. You want to get that heat and fire and smoke out of the building.

KC: But it would be my illusion that there is a real science to that, so that the additional air doesn't spread the fire.

JW: True. It takes some coordination; it takes practice. It's not something you can just, like, learn in one minute and apply the next. You learn from experience. Again, if we're in this room here and the room was well evolved and there's flames shooting out the window, you may not turn the fan on. You may open up the doors, open up the windows so that the fire continues to draw out that particular direction. And then a crew will come in from the other side and put it out.

KC: And it's the chief's job to –

JW: The chief's job as I see it, as I've always seen it, is to manage that incident. If you've got a crew inside with the captain or a line officer and says, "I need another crew to get up on the second floor because we got the fire in the wall," my job is to make sure that whoever is standing by, "Okay, bring your crew to the front door. Report to Captain So-and-So or Chief So-and-So because they need help on the second floor. They've got fire in the wall in the second floor." Or they may need help on the roof ventilating and so forth. My job as a manager, you tell me what you need and I'll get you the resources. At the same time, if I'm starting to run out of resources, it's my job to get more resources to the scene. The idea is to get the resources before you need it. My job is basically not only to manage the incident, plot out where everyone is, but anticipate what they may need, so when they need it, it's there. You're not calling for it.

KC: This takes a mind that can work in certain ways. You can't have it being a popularity contest about who gets elected chief.

JW: You can't, but sometimes that's the way it happens, because it's perception. "Oh yeah, this person is a good firefighter, so he'd make a good leader." It's the perception of the person. This person may have a lousy personality but could be a good leader, but they may not like him because of his personality. Now when we became a city-owned department, or a city department, the Maplewood Fire Department, we got away from the popularity contests. If you are interested and you met the qualifications, you could apply for the position. There was still a level of political popularitiness that went into it, because it's kind of like there's that subjective portion to it. It's like any other job. I mean, you may meet all of the qualifications, you're ninety percent great for the job, but that ten percent could be the tipping point. And that's how we were when we became a city department, and we actually started doing that we were Gladstone Fire. We still elected our chiefs, so it was still that popularity contest. If that chief did something you didn't like, you probably wouldn't vote for him the next time, but on the other hand, yeah, you want to pull someone based on their qualifications.

KC: Was there ever a time that someone was elected chief or assistant chief and they couldn't handle it and you had to suffer with it for a whole year?

JW: Not that I saw in our department. You know, you may have had captains that you questioned, because the captains were always appointed, and you're kind of like, "Why was that person made captain?" And they really weren't qualified for the job, because they would go to a fire and they couldn't make a decision, and people were saying, "Well, this guy has been on nineteen years and he's the captain. He can't make a decision?" I kind of looked back to him and said, "Well, you're the one that made the appointment." [both laugh] I wouldn't say it to him, but I kind of look at him like, "You made the appointment. You figure that out." And, you know, and yeah, sometimes – because when I was first appointed

captain, I just thought, “That’s awesome responsibility. That’s pretty scary. I think I’ll just go sit over here in the corner, go ask for my yellow hat back.” And when I say “yellow hat,” firefighters wore yellow hats, line officers wore red, and then chiefs wore white.



So it was an awesome responsibility, but you kind of think, “Well, you know what?” You step up to the plate and do the best you can. But yeah, there were times when you had—not necessarily chiefs, because he pretty much had the confidence then, but there were situations where you dealt with captains that you kind of questioned. Like, “Do I really want to be under this person’s command? Do they really know what they’re doing?”

KC: And there can be wonderful people and they can be intelligent, but their mind does not work in managing that many details.

JW: No, they’re used to doing one thing. Maybe they come out of manufacturing, and at that time they did one thing and one thing only, and they can handle that. It may be couldn’t handle four or five different tasks simultaneously.

KC: Did you apply to be a captain?

JW: No, I was offered the job. Because I had been the lieutenant safety officer and a lieutenant before, so it was just a natural progression. Today, if you wanted to be a captain, yes, you would have to apply for it after you met certain qualifications, but at that time, it was kind of like, you know, “You did your time. We think you’re ready to be an officer. Do you want it? Yes or no.”

KC: Did you recognize that you had done your time, but you were also the first Black man to not only be on the department but making rank?

JW: It crossed my mind, but I just didn't think about it that much. To be very honest with you, I just felt I was one of the guys, and I really didn't give it that much thought. Once I got it, I'm kind of like, "Yeah, it's a pretty significant achievement." But up to that point, I didn't think about it. I didn't think about it that way.

KC: Now in doing interviews with other firefighters from Maplewood, it was very clear that the Auxiliary was a critical part of the department, and some of the people I have interviewed have indicated that you had to have a wife because that was part of the whole process.

JW: Oh, really?

KC: Yes. [laughs]

JW: No one told me that. [Kate laughs] One guy did make a comment. He says, "You gotta get married because we'd like to have a Black woman in the Auxiliary." And I'm like, "I'll do that when I'm ready. I'll get married when I'm ready to get married, not on your timeline."

But when you mentioned that, I happened to think of that comment, but it really didn't bother me that much, because I mean, the Auxiliary own had its own kind of "strife," you know, political and intrigue and so forth, and that's just from listening to the guys hearing it from their wives. [Kate laughs] So for me, it's kind of like, "I'll get married when I'm ready to get married, and I'm not going to be forced into this thing, and I'm not going to marry the wrong person." Never got married, but – [laughs]

So that probably was the case ten, fifteen years before I even came on, but it wasn't the case when I came on, because it was not uncommon to have single guys come on the department.

KC: The Auxiliary wasn't as big then, by 1980.

JW: No, it was still pretty – it was still significant, it was pretty significant, because again, going back to this August '83 fire that we had. At that time, we didn't have what's known as a rehab²⁵ unit, where basically a person could sit down, relax, take a breather, get some drinks, or something like that. "Drinks," I mean like Gatorade, water, not the ninety-proof type stuff. Because the Auxiliary would be the one that would bring that to the fire scene. Nowadays, we have an air unit that carries all the cold drinks and cold packs and so forth that a person can use to sit down, lawn chairs that they can sit down and relax.

KC: So in 1983, "the wives," the Auxiliary would show up at the fires to help with that stuff.

JW: Right, they would be called. The dispatcher – we had our own dispatch center at that time – knew who to call based on where the fire was. And they would bring stuff to the scene.

KC: You were part of Gladstone, but you were out of the Hazelwood station.

JW: Correct.

KC: What was that relationship like between Gladstone and Hazelwood and –

JW: At the time, it was competitive. Some of the Gladstone guys resented the Hazelwood guys, because maybe they got the new truck, or Gladstone got the new truck and then Hazelwood would get the hand-me-down. And there was a situation where [The department got a new truck that was at Gladstone station. A very tall firefighter was standing up while the truck was being driven out of

²⁵ **Rehab** – rehabilitation, restorative, recuperation, recovery – providing a place to rest, drinks, cold packs.

the station and almost got his head cut off. He shouldn't have been standing up, but that situation caused that truck to be moved to the Hazelwood station because our doors were taller. The Gladstone station maybe only had a ten-foot door where Hazelwood had a fourteen-foot door, And some people were not happy that the new truck was now at Hazelwood.] So it was competitive in nature, because you had a lot more senior people at the Gladstone station, twenty-plus years, where the Hazelwood station, they had less than ten years' experience.

Gladstone Fire Department Patches



c. 1956



c. 1978 - 1997



Helmet Sticker

KC: What was the history of the Hazelwood station?

JW: Is that particular area, it grew, and then of course with the Maplewood Mall coming in, they realized they needed fire protection in that area. It's kind of the second oldest area in the city. There weren't as many retirement homes as we have today, but the biggest thing was that the Maplewood Mall had opened up, so they wanted a fire station that was close to the Maplewood Mall to serve the Maplewood Mall. But there had been talk even years before that, because Gladstone would have to always cross Highway 36 to get up there. But it was just as the area – as the city grew and the area grew, it just became a need to put a fire station in that area.

KC: And Gladstone – was that part of Gladstone or they just reached out to that area?

JW: No, from my understanding, that was all part of Gladstone, that area.

KC: Did you ever feel like the stepchild up at Hazelwood?

JW: No, because I didn't experience – I wasn't there from day one, so I didn't experience kind of like this brand-new fire station [opened September 1974] with all these brand-new guys, because it had been operating for six, seven years already, so I never had that stepchild feeling.

KC: But the Hazelwood men would come down and train at Gladstone.

JW: Correct. And then vice-a-versa. The idea was so that Hazelwood wasn't always coming down, or Gladstone going up there.

KC: And so Gladstone officers knew how to work out of the Hazelwood –

JW: Correct. They knew – in training the idea is to get to know your peer next to you, because in those days, you could be working with Person A on this call,

but on another call you're working with person *B*. The idea is to get to know who you were working with and know their quirks and being able to work together for a common cause. You may not like the person, but at least you have the commonality was the call, particularly the fire call at that time.

KC: And if you could trust them?

JW: Exactly. Precisely.

KC: Okay, if they could have your back?

JW: They had your back, you had their back, you know, and so forth.

KC: Ever a time where you couldn't trust who was supposed to have your back?

JW: Not really. You know, I kind of just trusted the people that I was working with. We had no significant incidents where I felt, "Hmm, can I really trust this person?" You know, I was just kind of a trusting person at that time. I would just – I felt I could work with anyone.

KC: Were you ever hurt on duty?

JW: No, fortunately.

KC: Was anyone ever hurt when you were on a fire with them?

JW: Not seriously, thank God. I mean nothing that was clearly life-threatening or anything to that effect. There was one situation I will say. We're going to an accident with injuries on English and 36th. English and 36th is now a bridge, but at that time, you still had – you didn't even have the stoplights at that time. I got out of the ambulance, and there was a car coming by me at about fifty miles an hour, and I almost got hit. And one of the guys says, "Watch it!" You know, because again, I was so focused on the incident, I wasn't focused on my own personal safety. He goes, "Watch out! You almost got hit!" You know, so there,

this was an older gentleman that had my back as well. [At that time we did not have reflective safety-wear. We just wore our clothes. Then we went to a simple vest with reflective tape, then to a jacket with reflective tape. Now they wear bright-lime-green jackets with reflective tape on it, both day and night.]

But no, fortunately we didn't have any serious injuries that I'm aware of. I do know the situation about fifteen years ago. The gentleman, he is one of our



full-time captains now, he was operating the Hurst tool, which is the jaws of life²⁶, and he was trying to open up the door and it kicked back on him and hit him in the chest, or not chest, but it hit him in the ribs. So he had significant – I think he had one or two broken ribs out of that incident.

But that's the most serious thing that I can think of.

We had a fire at Hill-Murray High School²⁷ in 1982. It turned out to be a PCB fire, it was an electrical pole or an electrical generator was on fire and it had PCBs in it. I was standing out in the rig. So anybody who was on that scene, had to have blood tests and follow-ups and so forth, but fortunately, nothing has come out of that.

KC: Did you start going to a lot of accidents, ambulance runs?

JW: Yes, more and more. "Cut fingers. Oh, I've been in pain for two weeks," They call me at two in the morning on a Wednesday when I've got to get up and go to work. "Can you take me to the hospital?" You smile. "Sure, I'll take you to the

²⁶ Popularly referred to as the **Jaws of Life**, or Hurst Tool, a trademark of Hurst Performance, Inc. Hydraulic rescue tools are used by emergency rescue personnel to assist vehicle extrication of crash victims, as well as other rescues from small spaces. These tools include cutters, spreaders, door busters and rams. The Jaws of Life were first used in 1963 as a tool to free race car drivers from their vehicles after accidents.

²⁷ **Hill-Murray School** is located at 2625 Larpenteur Ave E, Maplewood, MN 55109

hospital. That's what we're here for." Even though in the back of your mind, you're thinking, like, "Well, you waited this long. Why couldn't you have just waited a couple of more hours and called a cab?" But you just don't say things like that to people. [Kate chuckles] But the simple fact is you are there to serve them.

Yeah, the medicals have spiked up. When you talk about medicals, we had a situation in the mid-80s where I was called to a shooting. We actually went into the Gladstone area, because they were on another call. And we went into the house. The person who was shot was obviously dead. His girlfriend was crying over him. The police were there. Come to find out the shooter was in the basement, and all of a sudden, one of the cops brings this guy out handcuffed, and we're kind of like, "Really? Did anybody bother to check the house before –" Nowadays, we would say, "Is the house clear?" – known as Code 4²⁸ – before we would go in, but with the active shooter scenario now, you're just going in surrounded by cops, get your victims, and get out. But at that time, yeah, we just all kind of ran in to serve the victim. "Scene security? Oh, we're not worried about that." [Kate laughs]

But those are the kind of life lessons that you learned, that yeah, you'd better make sure that the scene is safe before you go in, or you'd better have protection with you to go get the victim and get out.

KC: How many people go on a medic call?

JW: Usually four.

²⁸ **CODE 4:** All clear or I am okay. Also used to tell another unit they can disregard.

KC: So this is two in the ambulance and a fire truck goes –

JW: No, all four in the ambulance.

KC: All four in the ambulance.

JW: Yeah. Now say you had an accident with injuries. You get the first three or four on the ambulance, and then the next four would come in and take the truck. They would take the fire engines for a couple of reasons. First of all, if you needed any equipment off there for extrication, getting people out of the cars, we had rigs set up to do that. The other thing is the rig can actually block the lane. You can't rely on the police. Not to say that they're bad, but there might not be enough cops there to block traffic. At least you bring this big, in our case, yellow



Gladstone Fire Trucks

rig in there and you park it, you can block a lane with that. So if you've got someone who's not paying attention, they're going to hit the rig before they hit us. Or, you'd have gas leaks and so forth. You can wash them down.

So you could put eight people on a car accident. If it's a much bigger incident, you call for more help, or if you don't need them, you can simply say, "We don't need you." You can always turn them back.

KC: So when a call went out, it went out to everybody, and you don't know how many are going to show up there.

JW: Well, they notified (“toned²⁹) the station, but you don’t know how many are going to show up. If they come back with additional information, you could simply say, “Well, start Station 2,” or “Start Station 1,” or “Start another ambulance.”

I’ll give you another example. In 2006, we got a report of an accident with injuries around Keller Lake, and it was actually on the Maplewood-Little Canada border. And a couple of kids—there’s about three kids in this car—and they slammed into an electrical pole, so they knocked out power in the area and tipped the pole over. I believe the driver was killed, but there was another victim that was injured, and we were told about that, so when I pulled up, I said, “Okay, fine.” I believe we started with two ambulances on that one, and I said, “Send the second ambulance non-emergency, because we do have a fatality.”

I did a walk around – it’s known as a 360 – just to see what was going on, and I found a third victim that was out of the car, laying on the ground, that the cops were standing over. And I looked at that and I said, “Start that second ambulance up here Code 3³⁰. We got a second victim up here.” And as the

²⁹ “**Toned**” paged with a specific tone for firefighters for a specific area.

³⁰ **CODE 3:** Life-threat response. Emergency traffic, or simultaneous use of lights and siren required in order to achieve a rapid response. This does allow the responding unit to ignore jurisdictional traffic laws, but does not allow the responding unit to operate without due regard to safety.

paramedics³¹ had come in, I told them, I said, "Take care of this victim." One of the captains says, "No, do this." And they said, "No, Joe said do this. Go to this victim." And then when I found the second victim, they all got real nervous. "We didn't even know that second or third victim was there." I said, "Neither did I." Had I not done that 360 walk around, I wouldn't have caught that third victim. You got all these cops there with all these guns and not a soul came up to me and said, "Hey, we got three victims in this car, because we already had one fatality in the car." When you have a fatality in the car, everyone gets transported to the hospital, because you don't know the extent of their injuries.

KC: So you were trumping a fire captain?

JW: No, I was district chief at that time.

But a captain had said, "Yeah, go over this way." And the crew, the medic crew, had said, "No, Joe had told us to go to this victim over here." That's when we discovered the third victim. That's why the captain had said, "Go to this victim over here."

KC: So at what point did they start bringing paramedics on?

JW: Actually, it was before I came on, because you had the police paramedic program in the mid-1970s, around '73. They started out by putting ambulances in the

³¹ **Paramedics** are advanced providers of emergency medical services and are highly educated in topics such as anatomy and physiology, cardiology, medications, and medical procedures. Their skills include administering medications, starting intravenous lines, providing advanced airway management for patients, and learning to resuscitate and support patients with significant problems such as heart attacks and traumas. A paramedic complete a two year degree programs (between 1,200 to 1,800 hours), and are required to hold additional certifications such as Basic Life Support, Advanced Cardiac Life Support, Pediatric Advanced Life Support from the American Heart Association, and are required to attend a minimum of 24 hours of continuing medical education annually for their state certification and 36 hours of continuing medical education annually for their national certification. . Paramedic education is accredited by the Commission on Allied Health Education Accreditation. Paramedics work primarily in urban and suburban communities. About 95% of Paramedics are fully compensated employees.

stations in 1978 and eventually training everyone to be EMTs. Between 1978-1984 all firefighters had to be trained as EMTs. By the time I came on in 1980, all new firefighters were trained as EMTs. The older people had the opportunity of doing the EMT training or kind of the first responder³² training. We had up to about twenty people. I would say about half of them were EMTs of some type.

KC: So you get a call and you're a EMT and everybody else isn't EMTs possibly, that show up?

JW: Possibly, right. But you had the police paramedics going in at the same time, so you had medically trained personnel responding, even though some weren't EMT, you knew how to set up an IV bag, you knew what equipment needed to be brought in. If a person full arrest, full heart stoppage, not breathing, you knew how to do CPR. You knew how to do – at that time, they did mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. You knew how to do the basics the medics took care of the drugs and talked to the hospital. There was a predetermined protocol that the medics would follow. If the person's heart had stopped and they're not breathing, obviously you defibrillate them. The medics would do that. They administered a couple of drugs, and defibrillate again if they needed to, and by that time, they would contact the hospital. So we were kind of there is a manual labor, if you will, and the medics, they were kind of the docs.

³² **First Responder**, which is a generic term referring to the first medically trained responder to arrive on scene. They have more skill than someone who is trained in basic first aid but they are not a substitute for advanced medical care rendered by emergency medical staff. First responder courses cover cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), automated external defibrillator usage, spinal and bone fracture immobilization, oxygen and, in some cases, emergency childbirth as well as advanced first aid and are often one or two weeks.

KC: Did they have that many medics that would be showing up? My illusion is there might have been times where you are in charge as an EMT because they didn't have enough medics.

JW: That has happened and you know, by that time, we were much more confident in our EMT skills, and we knew how to do a basic size up. We knew what to do. Obviously, if a person is not breathing, you've got to assist them in their breathing. And if their heart is stopped, you've got to do CPR. But we also knew how to give a report over the radio: "We are on the scene. Patient has a heart history, they're diaphoretic," meaning they're sweating and so forth. "They're having trouble breathing. We've got them sitting up. We've administered O2," you know. So we knew how to do the basics, to at least start some treatment. We did not administer drugs, but we knew how to do some basic treatments to get them going.

KC: Did you carry the drugs on the ambulance?

JW: No, the drugs were – I take that back. No, the drugs weren't carried on the ambulance. They were carried by the paramedics, because they had to be secure. The things we carried were IV bags, needles for starting IVs, the tape, stuff like that. But we really didn't carry very much in meds. The meds were carried by the medics.

KC: What year did the paramedics move into the fire stations?

JW: That really didn't happen until 2002, when the fire department started to take over the paramedic program. And even at that time, we didn't have any firefighter paramedics. It was still police paramedics, but it was a transition. But it was 2002 with that transition that they started to put paramedics in the fire department.

KC: Any other stories that you remember on a medical run?

JW: No, the medicals, to be perfectly honest with you, all kind of blended in. I'd say about the only about the only medical I have, and it was actually – I was at the south end of the city at my brother's house. It was like an eight-year-old who was hit by a car, and I just happened to drive up, and I looked over and all these people were looking at someone on the ground. So I got out of the car, and I go, "What happened to him?" He got hit by a car and he was obviously unconscious, and then his mother come running and she's crying and she's like, "I love you" and so forth. And he started to do this with his hands, [the person begins making a fist and the waist pulls inward toward the body all at the same time] and when you do that, that's a brain injury. And that really scared me. I'm going, "Did anyone dial 911?" And they said, "Oh, yeah, they're on their way." And then I started to hear the sirens in the background. But when he did this, it really kind of scared me, because I knew that was a brain injury, and I thought, "We got to get this kid to the hospital right now." So the minute the ambulance pulled up, I think I got on the air. I grabbed one of the cops' radios, and I said, "I need your radio." And I said, "Medic 1, step it up. This is not good." And they pulled up pretty quick. I said, "We've got to load and go." Because he was doing this. I do believe he did survive, but when you do something like that, that's a significant brain injury, and it could get to the point where it's irreversible, and that kind of scared me. So we got him into the ambulance and got him to Regions Hospital³³ within about – at that time, still Ramsey Hospital. Got him there within five

³³ The City and County Hospital opened in 1872. In 1923, it was renamed Ancker Hospital in honor of its late superintendent Arthur B. Ancker. Over the years it encompassed twelve buildings over several acres with a mailing address at 495 Jefferson. In 1965 it moved to 640 Jackson Street and was renamed Saint Paul Ramsey Hospital, renamed again in 1977 Saint Paul-Ramsey Medical Center. In 1986, the hospital becomes a private, nonprofit facility and was no longer county-operated; in 1993 it merges with HealthPartners; and in 1997, renamed **Regions Hospital**.

minutes and they got them into the ER and he did survive that situation. Never did meet the kid, but I was happy – the guys at Station 1 did tell me that yeah, he did survive, which is what I was glad to hear.

KC: You go in and say “I’m an EMT. I’m with the fire department.” Or are you just a citizen driving by who starts giving directions?

JW: I kind of assess the situation. I’ll quietly walk in and assess the situation, won’t just barge in, simply because it’s just my cautious nature. Because once you there and you start something, you pretty much have to stick with it or turn it over to a more senior paramedic, so I just kind of watch is going on. I kind of assess the situation is the way I look at. Maybe it’s not too serious. Nowadays, I just kind of back off because I don’t have the protection that I had at that time, but the law always says just do up to your training, but a lot of times in this day and age, I would just kind of back off because you don’t know what the person’s history is. But at that time, I would just kind of assess the situation, and if it was serious, I just kind of say – you know, if they’re bleeding, “Do this, do this.” You know.

KC: In this situation, were you the first medically trained person to arrive?

JW: Yes, because apparently it had just happened or the call to 911 had just happened, and like I said, I just happened to be driving up and I turned my head and the situation just didn’t look right.

KC: Any major fires that you went to?

JW: I’d say the biggest one was that fire that I went to in the 1980s.

In September 1982, what used to be Flower City at Snelling and Larpenteur, they needed our ladder truck. We went to that. It started in a garbage can outside the building and spread inside the building. We were told by our crew to go up to the second floor, because the fire had been getting into –

it had pretty much destroyed Flower City, and it was attached to a two-story building, so we had to go up to the second floor and kind of stop the fire from there.

KC: So you send the ladder up.

JW: I need to explain. We have a tower ladder. It has a bucket on the end of it. My philosophy has always been once that tower



ladder goes up and you start shooting water, you've kissed the building goodbye, because that's known as a defensive fire, because it's probably gone through the roof and the roof has collapsed. But in this particular case, it hadn't— Flower City was attached to another building, which had a second floor, and we had to go up to the second floor and keep the fire from getting into the second floor. We had to actually keep it from getting into the first floor in that particular building as well.

KC: You go inside the building to go up to the second floor?

JW: Yeah, this was a separate building from Flower City. Flower City was gone. There was nothing left. When we pulled up to Flower City, the roof had already collapsed in, there was nothing but fire coming out of every window, but they were concerned that there was a building that was attached to it, that the fire was getting into that building. And they originally went up to the second floor and they found fire in the second floor, so our job was to go into that second floor and push the fire back towards Flower City.

KC: So you go in through the first floor inside the building upstairs?

JW: This is up to – well, we didn't go inside this particular building. We went up a set of stairs that led to the second floor, then the stairs were at street level, so was like two separate residences walking into this building.

KC: So didn't need your ladder truck.

JW: Well, they did use our ladder truck. But one crew was handling that particular fire in Flower City, and I was pulled with another gentleman to go up to the second floor to put the small fire, which we contained to that one area.

KC: Is it dangerous going inside to go to the second floor when you don't know what you're going into?

JW: It's always dangerous. I mean, you can have a simple fire that can easily get out of hand. That's why we have so many eyes and ears on the fire, because they're kind of watch – you know, you got the crews that are doing the work and you got other people that are watching what's going on, so something does happen, they can go in and intervene. But it's always a tricky situation. If you got flames coming out of the roof, the natural reaction is well, put the flames out on the roof first and then go in and get them, but maybe sometimes the easiest way to get the fire is to go inside and then go up and hit it in the attic and then that puts the fire out. You got to play it by ear. There is no one-size-fits-all. But anything can be dangerous, because I've had simple fires that have turned deadly– in the history of the fire department, simple fires that have turned deadly, simply because maybe they didn't open up fast enough or maybe they went in and punched a hole in the wall and that gave it air, which caused the fire spread.

KC: Were you ever in a deadly situation?

JW: Fortunately not. Been some situations I've been nervous about, like going into basements because there's only one way in and one way out, but fortunately, I've

never been in a deadly situation. I've been in a situation where maybe the garage is on fire and the cars are on fire that are sitting in front of the garage and you hear a loud explosion, and usually the explosions are from tires blowing, but not from the car blowing itself. But nothing deadly per se.

KC: Water stimulates gasoline to burn more.

JW: Well, it's because this is your gasoline, this is your water. So the gasoline is sitting on top of the water. That's why it's burning.

KC: And you're gesturing with your hands that the water is on the bottom.

JW: Right. Well, water on the bottom, right, because the gasoline is kind of lighter than water so it's floating on the water. There is a way you can put out a gasoline fire by using water, but they tend use foam, because you want to smother it.

KC: So how do you – you know, how close do you get the cars if the fire could get to the gas tanks?

JW: Well, you kind of know where the gas tanks are. The gas tank is pretty much in the rear. If the fire is burning out of the engine well, you're pretty safe. The biggest thing you have to worry about is if you have a magnesium block, but if you have your protective gear on and it blows, you've got some protection there. So if your engine is on fire, maybe the interior of the car is on fire, it hasn't gotten to the gasoline tank yet. You just started the back and push the fire forward. It's just a matter of, you know, you do a quick size up when you get there. "Size up" meaning, "What you have and what do I need to do? Well, okay. We got a car that is on fire." If the car is what they call "fully involved" with flames coming out everywhere, you just start at the back and work your way forward.

KC: Do you ever drive by the fire to get to the fire station to get your gear to come back to the fire?

JW: I don't think I've ever done that. I don't ever recall doing that.

KC: Gladstone had a policy that you had to go to the fire station.

JW: Correct, correct.

KC: Because some of the other departments didn't have that same policy.

JW: Right, yeah, but ours generally – I think there was only one time I went directly to the fire before I was district chief, because it was like a block from my house, where I thought maybe I could intervene. But when I was district chief, obviously I would go directly to the scene, because I had my gear with me in my car.

KC: They give you a car if you were district chief?

JW: Yes. When it became a city department, at that time, they gave us cars, because we'd go to the scene, do a size up, kind of lay things out how we wanted to attack a fire, so I would have a set of gear at the station, but I'd also have a set of gear in my car.

KC: What happened the time you went directly to the fire?

JW: It turned out to be an aerosol can that had exploded, but it seemed to do some damage to the car. So when the other rig pulled up, they had their gear on. They're like, "Okay, you just stand outside and manage the fire. We'll go put the fire out or take care of any problems inside." Which was fine, because you really don't want to be showing up on the fire scene with no gear and no protection, and you go in to do something to make matters worse, because if you get hurt, you can't help solve the problem.

KC: How long does it take to put on gear?

JW: Well, if you're good, you can do it in thirty seconds. It doesn't take that long.

KC: How many layers?

JW: Well, you got the boots, the bunker pants, and the coat, and then you've got a Nomex hood that you put over – it actually goes over your head, covers your neck. For me, the first thing I do is take my shoes off, put my feet in my boots, pull the pants up, it's like snow pants, snap them together, grab my Nomex hood, put that on and then put my coat on, grab my helmet, and go to the rig. And like I said, with practice you can get it done in less than thirty seconds.



KC: Did you ever go to the station when nobody was around and practice in the early days?

JW: When I did that the first time, just practice putting it on, because at that time, we had hip boots that we wore, so I'd practice putting it on, seeing how long it would you take me to put it on. Because it was a competitive nature, too, because wanted to get your gear – you wanted to have your gear on before you get the truck. Well, a lot of people would grab their gear and run onto the rig, and then put their gear on in the rig. And it's like you kind of look at the person like, "You're getting in the way." [chuckles]

KC: Were they still riding on the back of the truck when you came on?

JW: No, they had stopped that. They pretty much had stopped that. They felt it was unsafe.

KC: [laughs] It was.

JW: We had the crew cab, so it's kind of like, "We have the crew cab. Use it."

KC: You obviously love firefighting. It just shows in your eyes.

JW: Right.

KC: Why did you leave?

JW: Had enough. Just felt that I got into a situation where I didn't get backing from the chief, didn't trust him, didn't trust the guys anymore, that it just, to me, wasn't worth it. It was just much easier after – I mean, it wasn't a rash decision. Some people thought it was a rash decision. No, it took some thought, some real thought, and when I finally said, "You know, I've had enough. I'm not going to deal with this anymore." The chief goes, "Well, why don't you come back and become a captain?" I'm like, "No, because I do see a situation where they would say something and you would believe it without even investigating it, and I could see something coming out of that." It just wasn't worth it anymore. I enjoyed what I did, but after a while, it's just kind of like, "Nah, I don't need this anymore."

Kind of opened up my eyes, too. You know, because I always considered myself a team player, because at the end of the day as a leader when your bosses say something, you argue it out, but once a decision is made, we're going to carry it out. Unless it's life-threatening or degrading to the person, we're going to carry out their orders, whether you like it or not. That's just the way things are. That's my private sector experience, that's my public sector experience. Private

sector, yeah, we'll argue behind closed doors, but once we make a decision, this is the way we're going to go. We can make modifications along the way, but this is the direction we're going to go. If it's a total flop, hopefully you've learned something from it. But I just honestly felt that it got to the point where I did not have the backing of the chief that I should have had, and it wasn't worth my time anymore.

KC: They have gone to fewer volunteers. So was it going in that direction that—

JW: No, it wasn't at that time. I would have liked to have seen it kind of go that direction while I was still on, because I felt it would have provided a much more consistent level of service, rather than just waiting for people to show up, because you had people that said, "Oh, it's just another medical. I'm not going to show up," or they take their time. They would get their five dollars. You know, they get their call credit and their five dollars for just showing up at station, while those that make an effort to come to the station are on the call, spending an hour, an hour-and-a-half, on the call if it was medical. You know, these people that didn't show up on medical suddenly showed up on fires. They all of a sudden – then they wanted to be part of the action when there was a fire, but when it was a medical, which is eighty percent of our calls, they took their time or they didn't show up at all. But I would like to have seen us go to some kind of duty crew, part-time status, while I was still there, because I did believe in it, and I do believe in the way they're doing it today, because it does provide a much more consistent level of service.

KC: So you had fellow members of the department that wanted to be firefighters, not medics?

JW: Correct. Correct. They started as firefighters. They don't want to play doctor per se. And they weren't interested in the medical part of business, but that's what

kept us going. That's honestly what kept us going. Otherwise, we probably would have done fifteen calls a month if we were doing strictly fire-related calls, with injuries and so forth.

KC: When it became part of Maplewood Fire Department, were there still the Tuesday night trainings?

JW: Yes, we still did that. We still got together by moving around different stations. We also did it in what they called districts. There were times when everybody would come together, but they would still do kind of like East County Line, the southern end of the city, would still get together. Gladstone would get together, or Gladstone would get together with the old Parkside guys, and there was time that we would mingle things around. East County Line would come up to us, we would go down to them, and vice a versa, just to kind of mingle things up. So it wasn't just always coming together for the Tuesday evening monthly meeting.

KC: Were there any women that came on the department while you were –

JW: We had one. She didn't last very long. [laughs] Maybe she didn't have an interest in it, or I'm not sure. I was just a firefighter at that time, so I kind of stayed out of those little human resource issues. You know, she had a tough time with the guys down there. She, Helen Jane Zane, ran out of the Gladstone station. We had one at our station, but she ended up leaving after a couple of years.

KC: Do you know why?

JW: No, I don't.

KC: You were embraced as an eighteen-year-old coming on. Did that same thing happen with the women?

JW: As far as I know, she was embraced. I don't recall that she had any problems. I remember one time I called her up to say, "Are you still going to be able to

attend” an event that we were doing up at the Maplewood Mall, and she said yeah, and somehow it kind of got one into another situation, solely a sexual harassment situation, and all I was doing was calling to make sure she was still available. I was doing that with everybody on the crew to make sure they were still available, so I kind of backed off dealing with her. I was still a captain at that time. Kind of backed off dealing with her, because how this one situation got interpreted into something else. I don’t know. To this day, I still don’t know, and I’ve never even asked.

KC: [laughs] Male—female interactions have their complexities.

JW: Yeah.

KC: So what other stories do you remember, Joe?

JW: [pause] I’m trying to think.

KC: What was most fun you had?

JW: I went to my first chief’s convention in Rochester in 2000. Had never been to one before. It was rather interesting, learn – to talk to other firefighters, learn about other activities that had taken place. There was a significant activity taking place in 2000. I can’t remember what it was, and they kind of reviewed that situation, and I always ask myself how would I have handled that particular situation. Again, I can’t remember what it was. I do remember the first day I was down there, there was a double murder up in Circle Pines and a big apartment building fire down in Eagan, and I always ask myself how would I have handled the Eagan apartment fire, because the murder situation was pretty much a law enforcement situation, so you’re pretty much in a support role. But there was something else that happened earlier that spring and I can’t remember. It was

just nice going there and talking to other firefighters and how they dealt with situations that had arisen.

KC: Is there a lot of discussion, throwing out options, and just exercising the brain in looking at different options?

JW: Not necessarily different options. They would ask questions: did you consider this or did you consider that are what were your priorities at the beginning of this incident and so forth. You know, if you had to do it again, what would you do different than you did it this way. You know, hindsight is always 20/20, but you learn from it.

KC: How did you learn to be a chief, how did you learn to be a captain? I mean, is it just watching on the job, or was there ever any specific training?

JW: There was no specific training like you have today, but it was just observing how other people handle situations. How would I handle a particular situation? That was the best way I could do it is kind of on-the-job learning what others did, or learning from what others didn't do, I should say.

KC: I've learned that in law enforcement – there's a lot of leadership training for law enforcement command staff.

JW: Right, the fire service is not very good at leadership training. It's pretty much like, "I got mine, you get yours." And that's a bad thing. One of the things I do look at is when fire departments hire a consultant to come in and evaluate the fire department, one of the things they talk about this lack of leadership training, lack of succession training.

And there should be some sort of succession plan in place, because the person who's fire chief now is not going to be fire chief forever. And you've got assistant chief/fire marshal. There's a point in time when he's going to retire, so

you have another assistant chief/EMS. He's young, he's aggressive, and he's been in that job, I don't know, maybe four years. Would he be able to take over the department if he had to? I don't know. Would you have to go outside to hire a fire chief? The question is what kind of succession planning do you have in place now? Because it takes time to build leaders, that by the time you're ready to leave, you should be able to say, "I think these five or six or seven people would do a good job of leading the department."

KC: When you left in 2007, how did you stay connected to firefighting?

JW: Well, one thing, I got involved with the – I had already been involved with the Firefighters Hall & Museum³⁴, but I'd also been talking to a number of people within the fire department after I left, and they were kind of telling me the things that were going, so I kind of connected to those back channels, those little back networks.

KC: Please share about The Firefighters Hall & Museum.

JW: The Firefighters Hall & Museum was actually founded – we've got to kind of back up for the history. There's a thing called the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Museum which went defunct in, like, the mid-1990s, that had a lot of fire trucks, birthday parties, and so forth. It was in Minneapolis. Then you had the Bill and Bonnie Daniels Firefighters Hall & Museum, which is also – it's now in Minneapolis, but Bill and Bonnie, Bill was a Minneapolis fire captain who had

³⁴ Bill and Bonnie Daniels **Firefighters Hall and Museum** showcases and preserves a part of firefighting history. It is located in Minneapolis at 664 22nd Ave NE, midway between University and Central Avenues. The Firefighters Hall and Museum was made possible by a generous gift from retired Minneapolis Fire Captain Bill Daniels and his wife Bonnie, many donations, and thousands of hours of volunteer time. Volunteers continue to donate their time to ensure these critical historical artifacts are not lost. The Museum contains a variety of vehicles, equipment, literature, and photographs related to firefighting and firefighters. There is an extensive library available for research purposes. The library contains information on former Minneapolis and St. Paul firefighters and other historical items dating back as far as the 1860's, as well as an extensive collection of firefighting literature.

a trust that had garnered up to one million dollars to set up a hall for retired firefighters to go. And they ended up merging the Bill and Bonnie Daniels trust with the National Fallen Firefighters Museum. Much of the equipment that's in the museum was also in the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Museum. And what this was set up to do was to have a place for retired firefighters to go, and also place to do education and kind of community outreach to the neighborhood, which it's done through the birthday parties, the hall rentals, and the museum itself.

And the actual concept of the fire museum in Minnesota was conceived by retired Minneapolis fire chief Clarence Nimmerfroh³⁵, [in the 1970s] who was interesting character [laughs] within his own right. But he wanted a Valley Fair style museum with amusement rides and so forth that people would come to. So that was kind of the development of the museum, and then by taking the artifacts from these different museums, they were able to create this hall where retired firefighters can go. Active firefighters can come, too. But at the same time, we do fire prevention and community outreach.

KC: And are you preserving the history of firefighting in Minnesota?

JW: Yes, we are. In other words, we get information and we try to preserve it. For instance, we don't have anything on the Hinckley fire of the 1890s, we have a lot on the fires that happened in Minneapolis and in the Twin Cities area, so we have a lot of history on Minneapolis. And we've got old map books of what the city looked like maybe around 1890, 1900s, you know, where Minneapolis actually stopped at 54th Avenue South, where goes to 60th now. But at that time, it went to 54th. We got the picture – we got a map of where our museum is

³⁵ Clarence Nimmerfroh was a Minneapolis firefighter 1943, to 1983; chief 1971 to 1983, with 40 years of service.

located at 22nd Avenue in Minneapolis, where Madison Avenue ran right behind it. It's now Edison ball field. So we have stuff like that. We have like for instance, the Northwestern National Bank building fire in 1982. We got a lot of information that the investigators no longer needed, so we have information about that, how the fire burned, the damage that was done in the building. And we got pictures of fires going back to like 1894 hanging on the wall, where you can actually see the horses and steamers at the fire, all the way up to modern motorized apparatus.

KC: Do you have information on the West Saint Paul fire or the G.E.M. Store fires?

JW: No, we don't. I wish we did. We do not. We have a little bit of information on the West Saint Paul fire, the West Saint Paul explosion, but we don't have any information on the G.E.M. store fire. I wish we – yeah, it would be nice if we did, because I think that – with the G.E.M. store fire in Maplewood, I think that's when we got tough on our fire codes, because they decided, "Let's build the fire protection in the building rather than wait until afterwards."

KC: Speak more of that.

JW: The fire prevention?

KC: Yes, and the G.E.M. store fire and how that inspired the fire codes.

JW: Again, in the history of the fire service, usually the codes come about after some sort of disaster. If you ever leave the building, you notice how the door pushes out? That's because of the Coconut Grove fire in Boston in 1942. It was a nightclub that killed like 400 people, almost 500 people, and what happened is the fire had started – I believe it started in the basement, and of course everybody was going out the way they came in, just out of natural habit, but the doors when he went into the building pushed in, so when you came out, you had to open the

door. Well, as everybody is trying to get out, more and more people behind you and they're pushing you forward, suddenly you can't open the door. So by changing the fire codes, by saying the door – when you leave the building, the door should swing out so that you can get out naturally, rather than having the door swing into the front.

In the case of the G.E.M. store fire, I don't believe it had any sprinklers. I believe it started up in an attic and then spread in the attic and finally collapsed into the store itself, but there was no sprinkler system to stop the fire. So to make a long story short, the complete building was destroyed. So I'm sure the city looked at that saying, you know – at that time, outside of 3M, that was their biggest piece of commercial property. "We need to build the protection into the building so when a fire does start, you can stop it before it gets too big, because that's a fire that took equivalent to thirty departments to put out. When you really look at it, kind of the east half of the metro area was there putting out that fire. But by building the fire protection in there, but putting the sprinkler systems in there, putting the fire stops in there, and so forth, you can actually contain the fire to a certain area

KC: What's a fire stop?

JW: For instance, I learned it, if you have these houses that were built in 1900 and they're two-story, and you have a plank, a piece of wood that's about this long. There's nothing from the basement level to the roof, so if a fire starts here, it's going to run right up the wall and right up to the attic. By putting the fire stop in here, essentially you are putting a blocker in there, so the fire does start in the basement, it's going to stop at this point rather than run all the way up the wall.

KC: So fire stop would be something nonflammable between the wood –

JW: It's not necessarily nonflammable, but it's a way of keeping the fire contained in a certain area.

KC: So houses nowadays are built with fire stops.

JW: They're built with fire stops, yeah. That's why you have your inspectors coming in before you frame up the walls, to make sure everything's in place. Now, it can be compromised through drilling a hole to put the pipe in there or drilling a hole to put an electrical cord in there, and so forth, or a conduit, but the idea behind it is by putting a – it's essentially a blocker. By putting a blocker in there, you're stopping the fire from advancing upward, or you may advance across or something, but at least it won't continue to go up.*

KC: Are you familiar with the 3M³⁶ sixth floor fire³⁷?

JW: Yes. I was in high school when it happened.

KC: What is your knowledge of that fire?

JW: I heard it was an arson fire. I don't know who did it, but I think they caught the person who did it. It was an arson fire because someone sprayed flammable liquid on the wall, and then threw matches at. At that time, 3M did not have the sprinkler system in that building, so once the fire

³⁶ The **3M Company**, formerly known as the Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company, is an American multinational conglomerate corporation with headquarters in Maplewood, Minnesota. The company was started in 1902 in Two Harbors before moving to the east side of Saint Paul around 1910. In 1952, they bought land in New Canada Township (later Maplewood) between McKnight Road and Century Avenue to allow expansion for their research laboratories and headquarters. In 2014 the 3M Center of 475 acres has over 50 buildings and the company employs over 88,000 worldwide, produces more than 55,000 products. In 2013, Maplewood and 3M announced a joint decision to locate a Maplewood fire station in the northwest corner of the 3M Center.

³⁷ **3M Fire** on July 25, 1979 at 3M Company, 6th floor of building 220 in 3M Center, I-94 and McKnight Road, noted as the only 3M building that had no sprinklers and that a snorkel truck could approach building from only one end.



The fire in 3M's main administration building, Building 220, occurred in the early morning hours of July 25. Fire fighters from Maplewood, St. Paul and surrounding suburbs responded quickly to the call. Above, fire fighters work in an office in the badly-charred sixth floor after extinguishing the fire. Below, broken windows in the building give no clue to the kind of damage to the inside offices (lower right) that occurred.

3M building's sixth floor gutted in July 25th fire

A fire in Building 220, the main administration building at 3M Center, in the early morning hours of July 25 caused extensive damage to the building's sixth floor and less serious damage to the fifth and seventh floors. An early estimate of the damage was \$1.5 million.

No one was injured in the fire, which was discovered by a security guard about 2:30 a.m. About 25 fire fighting and support units from Maplewood, St. Paul and surrounding suburbs were called to the scene and brought the fire under control about an hour later.

The building was closed for the day and employees who work in the building were informed over local radio stations not to report to work.

Many other 3M employees worked hard during the day and on into the

evening to prepare the building, with the exception of the heavily-damaged sixth floor, for safe occupancy by employees the following day. Supervisors and managers from Building 220 called their employees to tell them when and where to report to work.

Sixth floor employees were at work the next day also, but were relocated into temporary working quarters.

Investigators were called in to determine the cause of the fire, but that information was not available at publication time.

Clair R. Larson, vice president of Engineering, said it was estimated that the sixth floor of the building would not be ready for occupancy by employees for three or four months.



Photo by Bob Randall



Photo by Bob Winch

got going, and you have these large open floors, once it got going, it basically just spread across the floor. From my understanding, the lighter fluid that they threw on the wall, I guess they had ATF³⁸ or the Fed boys in there and they were able to actually identify “It was this particular brand of lighter fluid that started the fire.” That’s how exact it was. But from my understanding, it started in one area, and then it just basically spread across the entire floor.

KC: Were there fire stops between the floors so it didn’t –

JW: I believe there were, because they kept it to the sixth floor. There was actually fire doors, because we actually walked the sixth floor, and I was there with one of the fire chiefs that was there, saying – you could still see the smoke damage from where the fire had come through the door, or was trying to come through the fire door. And he basically says, “Yeah, you can see where the smoke damage had come in. You can see where we breached the doors to get into the sixth floor.”

KC: How did you happen to be walking the sixth floor with him?

JW: 3M after that fire decided to open up to the fire service, so they could see what’s in their properties, so if they did get a call, they knew what they were dealing with. Now we didn’t get into the secret labs where they’re doing secret experiments, but there were others that they would allow us to walk into to say, “Okay, this is how our office floor is laid out.”

KC: So you were with Gladstone then?

JW: Yeah, I wasn’t on the fire department when the fire happened, because like I said, I was in high school when that happened, but it was two years later.

³⁸ ATF—The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives is a federal law enforcement organization within the United States Department of Justice.

Because it was kind of like a community outreach that 3M was doing to the fire department, so they could see what they were getting into, because they knew we were responding, so they just wanted to say, "Hey, if you get another call, another situation like that, this is what you could be faced with."

BJ: The one would be you were at Hazelwood station, which was a substation to Gladstone, and yet Hazelwood had a chief, a district chief, and they also had their own territory, their own district? Why did they remain as a substation versus becoming a full-fledged station like Gladstone or Parkside?

JW: Well, we never considered ourselves a substation. We were a full-fledged station. We were part of the Gladstone Fire Departments, but because that was the Hazelwood neighborhood, that's kind of where it gets its name from.

BJ: Did you have your own finances in your own governance?

JW: No, it was all part of – we were all under Gladstone's.

BJ: Okay.

JW: We were all part of Gladstone Fire. It would be like you have a Tom Thumb store, you own a Tom Thumb store here and you own a Tom Thumb store over here. I mean granted, Tom Thumb may be a franchise, but whoever owns the two Tom Thumb stores, yeah, they had common books, common finances. It's just that they serve different areas.

BJ: Okay. Other than that, never any talk about Hazelwood splitting off and become independent, much the same as Gladstone is independent.

JW: No. None, no. [laughs]

BJ: Oh, okay. When you were just a firefighter and you went to a fire, did you have any assigned duties or were you assigned a duty at the fire?

JW: When we got to the scene and we knew we had a fire, they're kind of like, "Okay, you're on the nozzle, you're backup, you're going to bring the ax to open up the door." So we kind of made the assignments as we were en route to the fire.

BJ: See you learned all of these different activities, tasks, duties, so you could go pretty much anywhere, is that right?

JW: Correct. That's correct.

KC: So whoever was the most senior officer or the most senior firefighter kind of would give out the assignments?

JW: Either that or the captain. Usually came from the captain in the front seat.

KC: So whoever sat in the front seat was the captain?

JW: Right.

KC: Did you ever sit in the front seat?

JW: Oh, yeah. I've done it a couple of times.

KC: Before you were captain?

JW: Right. Long before I was captain. Scary experience. Again, I had an experience where I really didn't know what I was doing and I was sending confusion to the guys. They were getting upset, because I didn't know what I was doing and they were confused, because they were following my lead. So that was the first time that I did it, because there was no person – no one wanted to sit – and at that particular call, and it happened to be a fire alarm, so fortunately it wasn't a serious call, but no one wanted to sit in the front seat. I'm going, "Oh, I'll do it." And like I said, when I got to the scene, I was confused, so they were confused, and they got upset.

KC: How did you clean that up, to regain trust for a future time?

JW: I just kind of listened to them and just waited until the right opportunity came along and did it again, rather than just jumping right into it just to kind of fill a spot, just kind of back – listen to what they have to say, because they're basically coming from experience. They were upset, obviously. But just listen to what they had to say, watch future captains, and then step into it again. So it's kind of like, "Yeah, I got bucked by the force this time. You know what? Maybe I'll just wait a little bit and then I'll try riding the horse again." And it worked out much better that time.

BJ: When you were in training, you mentioned the Firefighter I training, was that strictly classroom or did you get any equipment training?

JW: No, it was both classroom and equipment training, because when we do Firefighter I training, we kind of do it in a generic nature. "This is an inch-and-a-half hose. This is a two-and-a-half hose. This is a four-inch hose. This is how you lay it. However, you follow your department's policies and how you lay hose, because some people may do a standard lay just like this. Some may do a cross lay like this, you know. Some may do it where they have some fancy way of laying hose, because it's worked for them for the last hundred years." So the firefighter training was the basic, but when it came – we did evolutions in training and so forth, but if the end of the day, you always followed your own department's procedures.

KC: Did Gladstone/Hazelwood have any special procedures, any special ways of doing it that was unique for them?

JW: No, not really. I mean, basically we did what were known as "cross lays." So we had the inch-and-a-half at both ends of the pumper, and as we got towards the

middle of the pumper, you'd have the two-and-a-half and four-inch there. And then a lot of times, you would have the cross lays back here, so when you got that out of the back of the rig, you could grab the hose and head to the fire.

KC: With the inch-and-a-half.

JW: With the inch-and-a-half, correct.

KC: And laying the hose is how it's laid on the truck?

JW: How it's laid on the truck, correct. [laughs]

BJ: You're learning.

KC: Yes. [laughs]

BJ: You talked about rehab, which is short for what, rehabilitation –

JW: Rehabilitation, yes.

BJ: Kind of to recover –

JW: To recover, to relax, yeah.

BJ: Okay, and you mentioned that the Auxiliaries usually came in with the beverages and maybe something to eat. Were they ever compensated for their time, much like the firefighters were compensated for their time?

JW: They weren't compensated for their time, but they were given, like, a stipend. Maybe they were given like \$400 for the year to buy all the different drinks and so forth.

BJ: You mentioned that the ladies that were closest to the fire were usually the ones that were called to be the rehab service. So who did that? Was that out of the station or –

JW: Well, usually, the one time I can recall when it was done, our chief called the dispatcher and said, "Can you call our ladies auxiliary?" So our dispatchers, which we – at that time, we had Maplewood dispatch. The dispatch was done out of the Police Department. They had a phone book that said, "Okay, if the fire is in Gladstone, these are the people you call for ladies auxiliary."

BJ: And was it pretty much for every fire or only if it became major or more than a certain time?

JW: Usually it was just on major fires, big ones, or in this particular case, it was a hot August day, so you definitely needed it on a day like that. But that was for a house fire.

BJ: Okay, I know for another one, White Bear Lake, they used to have the local pizza shop – that if it was more than an hour, the pizza company would run in with free pizzas, so when they got the fire out, they could kind of rehabilitate. Did you ever have any of that, that a restaurant or a pizza place would come in?

JW: Not that I can recall. I mean, they would go to McDonald's and just say, "We need X number." They probably had a good relationship with one of the McDonald's – the McDonald's on Cope at that time and said, "We need fifteen hamburgers and fifteen cheeseburgers." So they probably would do that and just quick call them up, and then within ten, fifteen minutes, go and get that stuff. Or at that time, we didn't have the Rainbow's and the Cub's, so they maybe would go to the local Maplewood foods and get a bunch of doughnuts and bring them back to the station with coffee.

BJ: Do you know, were they usually donated or did you have to buy them?

JW: I believe we had to purchase those.

KC: [laughs] What haven't we asked you that you thought we would ask you?

JW: I just play it by ear. It's like, "Would everyone ask me, go ahead and ask." If I don't want to answer it, I won't answer it. You asked me – one question you had, why did I leave, I kind of answered as honestly as I could. You know, like I said, fed up, it's time to go. And like I said, I was glad I did.

It was a rewarding experience. I never regretted a day. Never looked back after I left. I can honestly say that. I've been asked a few times to come back and thought about it for all of five seconds and then moved on [laughs], because I just felt it was time to move on. There's other things out there to do. Like I said, it kind of opened up my eyes, because I was so focused. "This fire gig is the only thing I want to do." And it's kind of like once I got out of it, you're kind of like, "Oh, my God, there is a world outside of this place." And I started doing other things and basically, the skills that I learned in the fire service, with the fire department, and my private-sector skills, I applied to what I do over at the fire museum, so.

KC: What is your legacy with the Gladstone/Maplewood Fire Department?

JW: I just consider myself – I would never want a station named after me or anything like that. Just that: "You know what? He was one of the guys. He did what he thought was best, and it didn't always work out, but you know what? At least he stepped up to the plate and did something, which a lot of people don't do. And then when he felt like it was time to go, he wasn't afraid to leave and he stuck by his decision. It wasn't the game that some people thought he was playing. When he left, he left." And my comment was: "If you think you could do a better job, step up to the plate." So I think my legacy should be "at least he stepped up to the plate and did something and didn't complain, wasn't a complainer."

KC: In a city that you have maintained roots in.

JW: That is correct. Correct.

KC: Joe, thank you so very much.

JW: You're welcome. It was fun. It was enjoyable.

KC: Good.

BJ: Thank you, Joe.

JW: Thanks.

APPENDIX A

Chronology of Gladstone Fire Department

Gladstone Station: 1900 Clarence Street

and

Hazelwood Station: 1530 East County Road C

- December 11, 1942 First meeting to discuss starting a volunteer fire department held at the Gladstone school. 16 men attended.
Source: History, MAHS 2006.1424.0001
- November 23, 1943 An organizational meeting was held. Six officers were appointed so training could begin by the North Saint Paul Fire Department.
Source: History, MAHS 2006.1424.0001
- February 8 & 12, 1944 The department was incorporated with 27 volunteers and Leonard Foeller elected as the first chief.
Source: Document, MAHS 2013.0004.0035
- May 7, 1944 Open house held in Gladstone for their first fire engine - a 1923 Pirsch fire engine that was purchased for \$1,000 from the Excelsior Fire Department.
Source: History, MAHS 2006.1424.0001
- August 12, 1944 First fire run to a grass fire at 1794 Flandrau Street. Three men extinguished the fire in 30 minutes.
Source: History, MAHS 2006.1424.0001
- September 16, 1944 Construction was started on a station with donations from local citizens.
Source: History, MAHS 2006.1424.0001

- 1957 New Canada Township residents voted to incorporate as the Village of Maplewood. Village Council Meetings were held in the Gladstone Fire Station until a new city hall was constructed in 1965.
Source: History, MAHS 2006.0006.0017
- 1958 Gladstone Fire Station had 40 men and 4 pieces of equipment.
Source: Newspaper, MAHS 2006.1430.0001
- 1970 Station was enlarged with a 4th stall to accommodate the new snorkel truck and a meeting room, small kitchen and restrooms.
Source: History, MAHS 2006.1424.0001
- July 25, 1972 An organizational meeting was held at Holy Redeemer Parish Center to consider improving fire service to the rapidly growing north end of Maplewood and the Maplewood Mall. This led to creating Hazelwood Fire Station as a substation to Gladstone.
Source: History, MAHS 2006.1424.0001
- October 3, 1972 Bill Mikiska was elected as the first district chief of Hazelwood Fire Station.
Source: History, MAHS 2006.1424.0001
- September 15, 1974 Hazelwood Fire Station's 2-stall building was completed for \$192,000. Fire truck #124 was transferred to Hazelwood from the Gladstone Fire Station and a second truck was rented from Parkside Fire Department.
Source: History, MAHS 2006.1424.0001 and 2006.0006.0017
- 1974 Firefighters were asked to drive ambulances to assist policemen who were trained as paramedics.
Source: Oral interview of Dick Juker and Joe Waters

January 1, 1997 Gladstone, Parkside and East County Line Volunteer Fire Departments merged to create the Maplewood Fire Department and all firefighters were required to become EMT's.

Source: Oral interview with Steve Lukin

2001 A new fire station constructed at 1955 Clarence Street and the department is relocated.

Source: Report, MAHS 2012.0009.0391

July, 2005 The Gladstone Volunteer Fire station is demolished.

Source: Maple Leaves, MAHS 2011.0010.0021

Gladstone Fire Chiefs:

1944 – 1947 -4 years Leonard Foeller

1948 – 1951 -4 years John Cottrell

1952 – 1964 -13 years Alwin (Al) Schilla

1965 – 1968 -4 years Al Schadt, became City Fire Marshal 1968 to 1985.

1969 – 1975 -7 years Robert Finberg

1976 – 1979 -3 years Tom Kansier

1979 – 1980 -2 years Jerry Kasmirski

1982 -1 year William Mikiska

1983 – 1984 -4 years Dennis Cusick

1985 – 1991 -7 years Jim Franzen

1992 – 1993 -2 years Howard (Howie) Weber

1994 – 1995 -2 years Richard "Dick" Peterson

1996 – 1997 -1 year Steve Lukin

January 1, 1997 Gladstone joined the Maplewood Fire Department with Joel Hewitt as their first Chief

APPENDIX B

Chronology of Parkside Fire Department 2001 McMenemy Street

- June 1958 First meeting with 14 men. Bob Westbrook elected first chief and their first engine was a 1947 pumper purchased from Gladstone Fire Department.
Source: History, MAHS 2013.0001.0117
- January, 1959 They went under contract with Village of Maplewood for fire service.
Source: History, MAHS 2013.0001.0117
- May, 1959 Completed construction of 3-stall building on a 9 ½ acre site.
Source: Newspaper, MAHS 2013.0001.0117
- 1962 There were 40 members.
Source: Newspaper, MAHS 2013.0001.0117
- 1988 There were 42 firefighters and 3 multi-purpose fire response vehicles.
Source: History, MAHS 2013.0001.0116
- 1995 Negotiations to consolidate all three volunteer fire departments into Maplewood Department.
Source: Letter, MAHS 2013.0003.0093

APPENDIX C

Chronology of East County Line Volunteer Fire Department

East County Line Station - 1177 Century Avenue

Londin Lane substation - 2501 Londin Lane

Noted for their annual Halloween parties for children and families of the community.

October, 1942

First meeting at the home of Frank Kass to discuss creating a volunteer fire department.

Source: Newsletter, MAHS 2012.0009.0564

November, 1942

At a second meeting, Ruggles Sanders was elected fire chief with 14 charter members. The first homemade equipment was a 1929 Dodge truck chassis with a soda acid water tank purchased for \$250 from Lindstrom, MN. Later, a portable fire pump was added.

Source: Newsletter, MAHS 2012.0009.0564
and History, MAHS 2013.0001.0115
and Newspaper of June 30, 1982

1946

Chief Sanders went to Merchants State Bank to get the department's first loan of \$3,500 to purchase the first pumper truck.

Source: Newspaper of June 30, 1982

1946

They purchased a 1946 Ford pumper with a 500 gallon tank built by Flour City Fire Equipment Company.

Source, MAHS 2013.0001.0115

April 12, 1947

The department was incorporated.

Source: Newsletter, MAHS 2012.0009.0564

December, 1947

A 2-bay station was constructed on land purchased from John Geisinger.

Source: Newsletter, MAHS 2012.0009.0564

- c. 1952 Building enlarged to 4-bays.
Source, MAHS 2013.0001.0115
- Early to mid- 1950's They began contracting with townships for fire protection, including today's southern Maplewood, Oakdale and Woodbury. These areas included the 3M Center and Landfall Village.
Source, MAHS 2013.0001.0115
- 1954 Fire station was expanded with another 40' x 60' addition.
Source: Newspaper of June 30, 1982
- 1957 The fire district included Landfall, Woodbury, Oakdale and the southern leg of Maplewood that was south of North Saint Paul and east of McKnight Road. Oakdale and Woodbury eventually started their own departments. He's not certain what happened to Landfall.
Source: Verbal from Bob Bade, former fire chief of East County Line.
- Late-1960's – Building enlarged to add offices and meeting spaces, a hose
Early-1970's drying tower and additional bays with higher doors.
Source, MAHS 2013.0001.0115
- 1975 Maplewood police officers were trained as paramedics by Saint Paul-Ramsey Medical Center (later known as Regions Hospital) with Dennis Cusick (both a Maplewood police officer and a Gladstone firefighter) as champion. Later, training was done through 916 Vo-Tech.
Source: History, MAHS 2006.0006.0017 and verbal from Chief Steve Lukin
- October, 1977 Firefighters were asked to drive ambulances (station wagons converted to hold a stretcher) to assist the police paramedics.
Source: Strategic Plan for Maplewood Fire Department

- October 1977 A substation of East County Line was planned and built on Londin Lane and Lower Afton Road. 5 ½ acres were purchased by Maplewood to provide faster response in southern Maplewood and keep insurance premiums low. It's estimated that \$260,000 is needed to construct a building.
Source: Letter, MAHS 2011.0010.0172
- 1978 Four new Advanced Life Support vans were purchased by Maplewood and housed at Parkside, Gladstone, Hazelwood and East County Line fire stations. They were driven by firefighters to assist the police paramedics. All new firefighters were required to become EMT's but a few old-timers were allowed to remain with their First Responder training.
Source: History, MAHS 2006.0006.0017 and verbal from Chief Steve Lukin, Dick Peterson, Bob Bade and Dick Juker.
- November 6, 1979 Maplewood voters pass a bond issue to construct a new station on Londin Lane.
Source: Newspaper, MAHS 2014.0001.0311
- ca. 1981 – 1982 Firefighting classes were started at 916 Vo-Tech. Previously, ISD 287 Vo-Tech instructors from Hennepin County conducted some classes at local fire stations as early as 1976. Also, John Rukavina of Roseville fire was instrumental in starting classes at local stations by local firefighters. These all evolved into Firefighting I class at 916. Firefighting II was added later.
Source: Oral interview with Chief Steve Lukin, Dave Klocek and Bob Bade.
- June 30, 1982 The equipment used by the department includes: three pumpers, one rescue squad, a city owned Snorkel truck, a tank truck, a grass fire unit, a utility van with cascade air and salvage equipment, one basic life support ambulance and two advanced life support ambulances.
Source: Newspaper of June 30, 1982

- 1986-1988 Additional remodeling of the station.
Source, MAHS 2013.0001.0115
- 1995 Most firefighters were required to be EMTS-- Emergency Medical Technician.
Source: Oral interview with Steve Lukin
- June 1996 Tentative agreement to consolidate with Gladstone and Parkside volunteer fire Departments Into Maplewood Fire Department.
Source: Letter, MAHS 2013.0001.0109
- January 1, 1997 Gladstone, Parkside and East County Line Volunteer Fire Departments merged to create the Maplewood Fire Department and all firefighters were required to become EMT's.
Source: Oral interview with Steve Lukin

CHIEFS

- 1942 - 1964 Ruggles Sanders
- 1964 - 1965 Harvey Brockman
- 1965 - 1972 Herb Johnson
- 1972 - 1972 Don Hove
- 1972 - 1976 Bob Bade
- 1976 - 1978 Bob Murray
- 1978 - 1979 Bob Bade (2nd time for 7 years total)
- 1980 - 1985 Duane Williams
- 1986 Dave Selbitschka
- 1987 Bob Miller
- 1988 Dave Selbitschka
- 1989 - 1996 Larry Bush

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