

Interview With Brenda Burkman

J. This is Jane LaTour in August 7, 1996, interviewing Brenda Burkman.

So, Brenda, since last we spoke you've been acting lieutenant. You've been promoted. And do you want to speak a bit about the changes in your job description and your life as a fire fighter?

B. Okay. I'm not acting. I'm actually promoted.

J. Right. you are. No, I meant ... I meant, but you've been serving .

B. I'm a ... serving as a lieutenant.

J. Before, you had been promoted but you hadn't started ...

B. Oh, I hadn't actually ... Oh, probably I was just in school or something.

J. So what's it like?

B. Well, you know, they ... they send us to school for a month and ... and we spend almost no time talking about management, which is what we spend ninety percent of our day doing. And then we spend about ten percent actually engaged in emergency operations. And it's ... it's been very interesting. A little unnerving at first because, in typical Fire Department fashion, I was sent to an area of the City to supervise in that I had never worked in as a fire fighter, so I didn't know the buildings or anything. And so, of course, my first day as a lieutenant, I am with an Engine 1, and my first phone alarm as an officer was to the Empire State Building where ...

J. Um-hum.

B. So, you know, you look up and it was like, Oh God, why ...--you know. But it turned out it was nothing. It was just a ... a defective alarm system. But still, it's a very different area of the City. We have everything. This is sort of midtown/Chelsea/West Village.

J. Um-hum.

B. And I work in Ladder 12, which is in with Engine 3 and Battalion 7. So it was a whole new set of guys who had never worked with a woman in their fire house before. You know, there might have been a few women detailed in there from time to time, but no woman had ever been assigned there. And they first got used to me by having me bounce through there, which meant I was working there about one third of my time, half of that time in the truck and half of the time in the engine. And I worked in two other fire houses as well. And so I did that for a year, so they sort of got to know me a little bit. Still, the Captain was not particularly

happy to have me come there. He had a different person in mind,--a guy,--but I ended up with the assignment. And subsequently, since we've become mutual partners, you know, he has to deal with me on a regular basis, and I would say that, you know, he's gotten over most of his initial trepidation about having me there.

J. Um-hum.

B. And I think, for the most part, they guys have also. You know, it's still a big deal that they have--you know--one of the only two women lieutenants, and they have Burkman--you know--

J. Um-hum.

B. who is chief shitster. And then,--you know,--there just aren't that many women around.

J. Um-hum.

B. So the idea that they have any women,--any woman,--is sort of like Oh Aeeze ...

J. Yeah.

B. But they ... I would say that ... that in general, we struggled through,--you know.

J. Um-hum.

B. It's ... And I enjoy it. I ... I like having a lot more control over my day. Of course, I'm still subject to people above me making demands on my time and stuff,.

J. Um-hum.

B. But basically, you know, I schedule my own work, of which there is quite a lot. The pay is certainly not commensurate ... commensurate with the responsibility and extra work that you have to do. There's no really sort of down time, I find; certainly not on the day tours.

J. Um-hum.

B. We're constantly going in and out and very busy. And,--you know--I'm ... I'm ... I have to be a jack of all trades. Not only do I have to know what I should be telling the guys under me to do, but also I have to ... I'm responsible for their well-being, so everybody has to get back to the fire house safely. You know,--if anything goes wrong, I'm being held ultimately responsible. You know, it can be a scary feeling sometimes ...

J. Um-hum.

B. sometimes.

J. What's a typical day like?

B. You know, I'll typically be there an hour before the tour starts, and I check to see who's working that tour, and if I'm working twenty-four hours, who's working the next tour, and make sure that I've got somebody to drive the rig,--you know,--a chauffeur actually coming in.

J. Um-hum.

B. See if there's any details in or out of the house;--you know--people having to leave to work in other fire houses that day or being detailed in to work in my fire house to fill an empty spot. I look through the Department orders. I look through the pa--what we call our pass along book. That's sort of like a hand written history of what's gone on since the last tour that I worked--you know--that all the officers add to when something happens to the rig or--you know--one of the members, or some kind of difficulty or ... or issue in the house that ... that should be noted. I look at the in coming papers. I see if there's any reports that have to be done that day. I have to fill out the ... the staffing,--the man power,--you know--for the proper tour. I have to do the time reporting to make sure that people get credit for working or not working, where they're on vacation or whatever, that we have ...--you know. They don't get their check if they don't have a TPR form that was sent in. And that ... that typically occurs--you know--within the first hour.

J. Um-hum.

B. And then, the change of tours,--you know,--there's a tone that comes over. Everybody assembles on ... In my fire house, everybody assembles on the apparatus floor. I talk to the members that are working. I give them their assignments for the day, in terms of emergency operations,--you know,--what positions they have: chauffeur or irons or can or ...--you know. There's five positions in ... in the truck. I make sure that they inspect the tools that they're supposed to inspect; that everything on the rig is working. If it's not, I have to call the shops. And that's just--you know--within the first hour and a half or so. Then ... Then we may have ... After that, we may have a drill. We may have a ... We may have to go out on a building inspection. We may have complaints that we have to investigate. We have to take care of ... They guys'll be doing the Committee work, which means--you know--cleaning up the fire house and stuff while I'll be doing a lot the paper work.

J. Um-hum.

B. And we ha-- ... And they'll have to go out and get ...--you know,--go out together and get the meal, if we're responsible for that. And we make phone call ... I make phone calls take care of whatever needs to be done during the tour, and hopefully not leave anything over for the next guy to have to worry about that's

coming in after me, because he had a reputation as being sort of a slack ... a slug,--you know. If you ...

J. What ... What do you like about it? What's improved?

B. Well, it's ... it's very challenging.

J. Um-hum.

B. because of the ... the constant demands. I ... I don't have to ... I don't worry just about myself and my own little job responsibilities anymore. I have to think about how we're all performing as a team. And one of the things I like about it is the training aspect. I ... I like teaching and I'm very conscientious about drilling.

J. Um-hum.

B. And fortunately for me,--you know--my company seems,--and the fire house in general--seems to be interesting in drilling, for the most part. So,--you know--I don't have to ask twice to get people involved, and ... and they're fairly enthusiastic and ... about contributing and stuff. So that's a good thing. I like being able to drill on what I want to drill on.

J. Um-hum.

B. I ... I try and figure out--you know--what it is about the people that are working that day, what we can ... what what areas they may be interested in or may need work on to bring their skills ...--you know,--improve their skills. And ... 'cause we have very young guys under me. For instance, last night I had,--of the five guys that I had working for me,--three of them had a combined total of ... of less than six years on the job. So ... So that's a little unnerving when you start thinking about--you know,--do these people ... If something happens, are these people really going to be able to know enough to keep themselves out of trouble,

J. Um-hum.

B. and keep ... keep me out of danger and--you know--and do what we have to do for the civilians that we've helping out. So ...

J. Um-hum. Now, in terms of your working relationship with the Captain, what's ... how how has that proceeded? I mean, what ... what do you bring to that that ... to improve the relationship with his acceptance of you?

B. Well, I think a lot of it just had to do with reputation versus reality.

J. Um-hum. Um-hum.

B. You know,--the saying in the Fire Department being: telephone, telegraph, tell a fire fighter. And,--you know,--there's this very speedy and often inaccurate network of rumors that get spread about people. Not just about me, but--you know--definitely about me. And ... And there's just a certain reluctance on the part of a lot of guys to ... to work with women, because they ... they entered their ... this job feeling that--you know--this is going to be a man's world.

J. Um-hum.

B. And why should I have to work otherwise.

J. Um-hum.

B. And I think that the ... the main thing that has improved our relationship is just a general getting to know one another. And he realized that--you know--a lot of the rumors about me were not accurate, and that I am a hard worker, and that I'm conscientious and I'm trying to do the best that I can, and that I'm not looking to--you know--cause problems in the fire house or ... and I don't have a thin skin,--you know.

J. Um-hum.

B. And I have a good sense of humor. So,--you know--these things sort of like, I think, allayed a lot of the initial concerns he had about me coming there.

J. Um-hum. Now,, what about ... You switched Unions when you took this position.

B. Yeah. You know,--that has been like, such a ... a disappointment in a lot of ways, because, on the one hand, I had heard,--and I think it's accurate,--that ... that the Officers' Union ... the meetings are a lot more under control. There's a lot less cursing and--you know--general mayhem that goes on and stuff. And that's true. But the down side of the Officers' Union is that our benefits, I think, are shit.

J. Yeah.

B. Our dental plan as compared with the ... You know,--things actually got worse for me, in terms of benefits. And,--you know,--so that in terms of the kind of salary increase that I've gotten over the beginning of my promotion ... We get our biggest salary increase after we've been promoted for three years, and I've only been promoted for two in October. You know,--the salary increase has not made up for the loss of overtime.

J. Um-hum.

B. And also, the increase in medical and dental expenses that I've had,--considering the amount of extra work and responsibility

that you have ??

J. Why is their contract so far behind the fire fighters?

B. I think just 'cause they're smaller,--you know,--

J. Uh-huh.

B. and the City can get away with ... with giving them the shaft easier than they can with the Fire Fighters. I mean, generally, the officers piggyback on the Fire Fighters contract. But that doesn't mean that we get everything that they get. And I'm not really sure, but I suspect that our benefits are also somewhat tied to the Superior Officer benefits and the PD. And it wouldn't surprise ... And they have, like, so many little cabals over in the PD

J. Um-hum.

B. of various ...--you know,--the Lieutenants' Association and the Sear-- Every-- ... Everybody ... Every rank has, like, a separate Association.

J. Um-hum.

B. The other thing that I think that happens a lot with the UFOA is that the ... Even though the Lieutenants and Captains are the greatest proportion of the membership, they don't have the greatest benefits. And the ... It's sort of like the U.S. Senate.

J. Um-hum.

B. You know,--the small states wield power way out of proportion to their numbers.

J. Yeah. Um-hum.

B. And that's definitely the case in our Union that the Chiefs--you know--hold a ...

J. Take the ...

B. a lot ... take a lot more of the bigger slice of the cake than they ...

J. Um-hum. Yeah.

B. they would otherwise be entitled to.

J. Any ... Have you seen any difference in terms of the way they ... this Union responds to women than the Fire Fighters?

B. Not really. No. Brower had been--who is the President of the Union,--had ... had been very nasty to me on occasions where

women had come up against his membership, namely the officers. And most notably for me in the medical office deal, because the doctors are part of the UFOA. And had gotten personally very ugly on ...--you know,--in the media about the situation and stuff. And it's like that never happened, as far as he's concerned.

J. Um-hum.

B. And so, I was a little disappoint----you know. And that's .. that's been okay. You know,--I'm willing to let bygones be bygones. I was a little disappointed that when I got the White House fellowship, that the ... the Union did nothing to congratulate me. I mean,--after all, there's ... It was ... The Department put it on the Department order, which was a first.

J. Um-hum.

B. I've been getting kinds ... Total strangers have been calling me up and congratulating me about it,--you know? But my own Union hasn't said boo, even though this is the first time in the history of the ... the thirty-two year history of the program that any Fire Fighter has ever gotten it. You'd think they've have like a little

J. Um-hum.

B. pride in the fact that one of their members got it. But it doesn't seem to be the case.

J. Yeah.

B. So that,--you know--that was like a little ... I thought a little shocking, actually.

J. Um-hum.

B. And I wonder if the same thing would have happened if a guy had gotten it. So ...

J. probably not.

B. Well,--you know ... I don't know. You know, it's hard to say, because sometimes the Unions are just so incredibly out of it that they ... You know,--they're more interested in what the next Fire Fighter Calendar is going to look like or something,--you know.

J. Right. What ... What do you have to say about VanNessen taking a new position with Management. Is that ...

B. It was ... It was a little shocking, in the sense that,--you know,--here ... here the head of the Union now just walks ... crosses the line, and now he's Management,--you know. I don't think it's bad for the Fire Fighters. I mean, ... The first thing

that happened was that Juliani is incredibly pro-FD.

J. Um-hum.

B. And so that works in our favor, unless we do something to piss him off like we did with Coch. I don't see that changing. And I just wonder if Tommy is willing to stand up to him. He ... He says he is, and--you know--he doesn't ... he can walk if ... if there comes a crisis in the situation. Tommy was one of the more progressive of the ... of the Union leaders of the UFA, as long as I've known him.

J. Um-hum. We're talking about Thomas VanNessin.

B. And ... Tom ... Tom VanNessen. And ... And so,--you know,--that I have hopes there. I ... I was waiting to see what he was going to do. I expected him to have a learning period where he really wouldn't take any, like, drastic steps to do anything until he sort of felt like he was a little more secure in his actions. And now that he should be at that point, I'm leaving to go to Washington, so I (laughs) I don't know what he's going to come up with. But,--you know--I'm ... I'm shocked in the fire house about how much negativity there was towards his ...

J. Um-hum.

B. his ... There's a lot of suspicion about his motives, and ... and--you know,--why is this Union guy all of a sudden Management? And,--you know--what did ... did he ... what did he have to sell out to get there,--you know. There's a whole thing with the merger with the MS a deal done so that he could become Commissioner, or something like that? So there's that suspicion,--you know. There's not really a lot of joy about seeing one of their own become the most powerful person in the Dire Department. It's very, I think, tunnel vision on the part of a lot of the UFA members, but,--you know. And we're see who turns out to be right on that.

J. Now, how did this ... How did you decide to apply for the White House fellowship, and how did that ... What were your thoughts? Were you feeling in need of ...

B. Well, I'd never heard of this before.

J. Um-hum.

B. But when Schaefer was Commissioner, it seemed like, all of a sudden, there started to be a lot more advertisement of ... of promotional and--you know--career enhancement opportunities:

J. Um-hum.

B. scholarships and various programs that were available through the City and elsewhere,--you know. And ... And these

things started appearing on the Department orders. So I'm reading through the Department Order, and it says something about a White House fellowship. And it just said very simply something like: Fellows spend a year working in Washington. If you're interested, contact the Fire Department, Department Of Personnel. So I did that, and I asked them to send me the material. And they sent me this huge xeroxed packet. And I looked at it, and it said: Deadline ... and it was like one week. And I'm talking about ... This was a very involved thing. They wanted to know what was your class rank in high school. It's been a long time since I graduated high school. You had to have a res-- ...--you know,--list all your employment since you were three years old. You had to get references and job recommendations and all this stuff.

J. Um-hum.

B. And for some ... I just sort of like decided, well, let me give this a shot. And I put aside everything for a week, and I got it organized. And when it came ... And fortunately, I had some very good friends who agreed to write these things on very short notice for me. And ... And there was a lot of writing on my part, lots and lots of writing you had to do: a proposal to the President and a whole bunch of stuff, and--you know,--it involved thought. So I get ready to get the Fire Department recommendation. I called over to the Department Of Personnel over there, and .. and nobody knows anything about it. The only person who knew about it was the Director who was on vacation. So I said: When is she getting back? She's getting back like a day before it's due. I said: Well, forget it. So I call up and I just arrange to get my own recommendation. So she calls me back like the day before it's due and says--you know--I'm calling you back about it. Well, I said, I took care of it,--you know,--whatever. I'm going to mail it in. She says, Oh no. It has to go through the Department Of Personnel,--the City Department Of Personnel. And I said why? And she said because they were the one who made the opportunity available. I said: This ... This application process, I found out later, was on the Internet,--you know. Anyone can apply. You don't have to have ...

J. Yeah.

B. I said: You know, they don't particularly care for me over at the Department Of Personnel because I'm constantly suing them. And I have, like, one day. I said: I can't bring that thing over ... Well, you know, you do what you want to do, she says to me. So I did. I sent it in. And the next thing I know, I get called for the regional interviews, which was very intimidating, except that I knew one of the panelists already who was Ray Kelly, the former Police Commissioner.

J. Um.

B. So that was kind of nice. "Oh, hi! How are you?" And--you know--that type of deal. And I got through that. And then I

get called for the nationals. And we had to go down to Annapolis and get interviewed down there. And the next thing I know, they'd ... they'd picked us. So it was quite ...

J. So there was only eighteen?

B. There was eighteen of us. Yeah.

J. ??

B. And ... And,--you know,--it's a big honor. People who have gotten it have been like Colin Powell and Henry Cisneros, the HUD Secretary, and Doris Kerns Goodwin, the Pulitzer Prize winning author. I guess she did the Johnson biography.

J. Biography. And Eleanor Franklin and on and on.

B. Yeah. And on and on and on. I mean, when I looked at the directory of former fellows the other day, they're typically all, like, CEOs; head of whatever they're doing,

J. Um-hum.

B. and so it's a little intimidating from that ... Or they're in jail. No.

J. So ... So you're going to be working in the Department Of Labor.

B. Correct.

J. And what kinds of thing ... Do you have any idea what you'll be doing there or ...

B. Well, I went over for my--you know--one hour interview. And it was ... it was one of these combination I asked them questions, they asked me questions. And ... And I told them that ... what I was interested in doing was working on interagency projects. In other words, if there are things that cut across the different agencies, that's the kind of stuff I'd be wanting to do. And ... And who would I be working under? And they told me that I'd be working under the direct supervision of the Assistant Secretary, who is Cynthia Metzler, the number two person in the Labor Department. And then, subsequently, Reich found out I was coming, and ... and apparently, the Labor Department is ... is pretty interested now. They ... They had really read my resume quite carefully. And apart from the ubiquitous question which I got on all my interviews, like, You were a lawyer. What made you decide to become a fire fighter? That was like the thing ... That was the common thread throughout all the interviews,--a natural question. And so ... And that was a question I got,--you know--through all my interviews for the fellowship, just ... They were just fascinated by this idea

J. Um-hum.

B. of a white collar, highly paid worker--you know,--taking a humongo pay cut to do this very dangerous blue collar,

J. Difficult ...

B. physically demanding, anti-woman type of job.

J. Yeah.

B. So ... But they ... they not only asked that question, but they asked, like, lots of very specific questions about my resume and about my policy proposal, and my con--previous contacts with the Department Of Labor, which were rather limited to the Women's Bureau and that was about it. But I had been a speaker at their anniversary conference for the Women's Bureau and ... and things along those lines. So,--you know--it was a good interview, and I think ... I think they're interested 'cause it seems like a good fit for them. They weren't interested in any of the other fellows 'cause I ... I just don't think any of the other fellows had a driving desire to go there either. So ...

J. Um-hum. Yeah.

B. But for me, it's, ... it's, I think, a really good opportunity, see the big picture.

J. Um-hum. So you have a leave of absence from the Fire Department? Is that ...

B. Right.

J. Uh-huh. And ...

B. We don't know what those conditions are yet,

J. You don't know what that means ...

B. because they haven't informed me,--you know.

J. Now, what about ... in terms of the organizing with women fire fighters. Any new developments in terms of the national or local organizations?

B. Well, basically, I'm just--you know--not doing it.

J. Um-hum.

B. I had been ... I am the Secretary of the local organization. I've been doing the newsletter very sporadically.

J. Um-hum.

B. But,--you know,--that ... that's going to have to be picked up by somebody else. It's a little depressing what's going on with the local organization. There's a real lack of interest in ... in it from everyone, in terms of showing up for meetings or getting involved at all or ... You know,--if somebody has problem,--if they have an issue,--well, then they want the organization to instantly respond. But if the organization's just going to consist of the President--you know--

J. Um-hum.

B. calling up whoever to say--you know,--we need to have this done or whatever, well, eventually even that person's going to get tired of ...

J. Yeah.

B. of the thing.

J. Who's the President now?

B. It's Rocky Jones, the other lieutenant. Yeah.

J. How is she doing on her job now, in terms of being a lieutenant and ... You ever ??

B. I think she has a more difficult fire house to deal with than I do. But ... But that was her choice. I mean,--she picked that place. And I don't know if I would've, but--you know--everybody's got different ideas about what kind of house they ... You know, every house has a different personality.

J. Um-hum.

B. And people have different things that they want to do. She she'd worked there. She knew what was going on there, and she picked it. And she seems to be coping with it, so ... I think both of us have ended up--you know--being satisfactory from different perspectives,--you know. They haven'[t ... There haven't been like any huge blow ups or huge problems, or anything along those lines. We're just sort of going along, just doing out little lieutenants thing, and hopefully, just acting the same way,--you know--having the same issues as the junior lieutenants who happen to be men. So ...

J. Um-hum. What about the nation organization?

B. the national organization, I don't hear exactly what's going on with the Board.

J. Are you still a trustee?

B. No. I'm not a trustee anymore.

J. Um-hum.

B. And I just finished doing some work for them. I did the update on the legal sections of the handbook which we had published I don't know how many years ago, probably four or five years ago now. And we just finished doing ... I just finished doing my part of the ... the legal stuff for it,--you know,--which was good from the sense that I had to ... to update my own

J. Review changes, yeah.

B. Yeah, my own knowledge of what's going on in the law in that area, but bad from the sense,--you know--it pays about fifty cents an hour when you really break it down,--you know.

J. Yeah.

B. So ... So,--you know--it's getting your name hopefully on the masthead. That doesn't really... But it's ... it's a good thing to do. And ... And the national organization has some interesting projects going on. They're doing some stuff with value enhanced recruit training where they're doing a little pilot project to try and encourage departments to revise the way they hire and train their newest fire fighters. So,--you know--that's interesting. But I'm not at all involved in that.

J. Um-hum.

B. And ... And there's a few other things going on that are pretty good. We have another national conference coming up in ... in June,--no, sorry, April of '97, and I basically had to bow out of any organizing responsibility for that because of the fellowship.

J. But you'll attend.

B. I'm hoping I'll be able to. Yeah.

J. Where ... Where will it be?

B. It's going to be in Austin, Texas. So yih hah!

J. A pretty town. (both laugh) Barbecue and ...

B. Yeah. And we're hoping to get Ann Richards as the keynote speaker. At least I am. I don't know ... You know,--I don't know what's actually been done to accomplish that or not, but ...

J. So in terms of ... We had spoken before about the Captain's exam, and any... any ideas about it.

B. I'm totally screwed on that, I think, 'cause they've actually set a date for something like November of '97.

J. Um.

B. And I won't even get back to the Department until September, so it's going to be really hard to study and ...

J. Um-hum.

B. I'm not totally writing it off. I'll take it, of course. But I just think I'm going to be way behind the eight ball. And all I can hope for is that they'll postpone the damn thing six months or so,--you know?

J. Yeah.

B. It's ... It's a little depressing. One of the other lieutenants in my fire house has very kindly offered to send me some study materials while I'm down there.

Side Two

J. So in terms of aspirations, now where are you at, in terms of your career?

B. Well, in terms of New York City, I don't know ... You know, I would like to get promoted to captain. I don't know how realistic that is. Let's say that I have four or five more years before I hit twenty. I'm starting to think about--you know--ways of enhancing my resume that ... and broadening my horizons that would be good, in terms of trying to get a position of real authority, either here or somewhere else, rather than--you know--just fire house authority.

J. Um-hum.

B. I mean, I ... I enjoy the fire scene. I enjoy the emergency work. I certainly enjoy working with the different personalities on on a--you know--intimate basis,

J. Um-hum.

B. although sometimes they drive you crazy. But ... But in terms of--you know--I'm starting to thi-- ... People have sort of said to me, Well, you know, you should be Fire Commissioner someday. And then, the idea that Tommy VanEscen was a fire fighter ... (laughs) You know, I ... I just ... I'm hoping to use the fellowship year to ... to sort of explore those possibilities..... I already started by going Masters of Fire Protection Management program at John Jay, and I've got a semester of that out of the way. And now that ... I have to suspend that, too, while I'm gone.

J. Um-hum.

B. But that's only a two year program. So I come back, I

finish that up in a year and a half. I was thinking about rejoining some committees or doing some stuff nationally, and--you know--doing things that aren't so strictly tied to women in the fire service,

J. Um-hum.

B. but show a greater depth and aren't too one dimensional in terms of issues. So ...

J. So it sounds like you're moving toward your second career.

B. Yeah. I think I ... You know,--I think that there's,--you know ... Assuming I want one, because there's ... I have a lot of years of working life left.

J. Um-hum.

B. And I'm ... I'm hoping I'm sort of like the Bob Reich role model,--you know. Here I am changing careers every certain number of years. The ... The Fire Department is the longest time that I've held like a regular job during my adult life.

J. Um-hum.

B. So ... And,--you know,--I don't think I have to sort of aim low.

J. Um-hum.

B. I could ... I think I could easily get a job like teaching in a degree program or something like that. I don't think I have to settle for something that's at low level.

J. Um-hum.

B. So we'll see.

J. Good enough.

B. We'll see if other people agree with me on that. (laughs)

J. Okay. So I just was ... I told you about the three hundred pound woman question. But ...

B. Is that your question or is that somebody else?

J. No. That's ... That's the question everybody wants to ask fire fighters,

B. How ...

J. if they ever have to carry ... But what's the hardest thing you ...

B. You don't carry anybody

J. Yeah.

B. out of a fire because ... You know, this is the whole thing with the famous quote from Mayor Coch about I don't care what gender the fire fighter is as long as he or she can carry a--well, I forget what Coch's weight was at the time,--but it was something like a two hundred and thirty pound mayor out of a burning building.

J. Yeah.

B. Nobody carries anybody. Everybody drags.

J. Yeah.

B. And frankly, there have been instances where the strongest guy on the Department literally was not able to single handedly get a person out.

J. Um-hum.

B. And a lot of times,--you know,--you're going to have to call for help, and maybe make a start,--you know,--get 'em part way down the hall, or whatever.

J. Um-hum.

B. But you may not be able to get him entirely out by yourself. You're dragging people. And there's various ways of doing that. We find that, because women tend to have more strength in their lower body, they're using their legs and ... and--you know--lower body to generate the power to drag somebody, rather than--you know--pull them along with their arms as much, but manage to get them out. My advice would be, don't weigh three hundred pounds.

J. (laughs) Okay. Well, what was the biggest shortcoming of the training that you had to become a lieutenant?

B. Well, the ... We ... The overall shortcoming, I think, effected everybody was that there was very little time spent on real life management issues, and even real life fire fighting scenarios..... And the great majority of ... of time was spent adhering to federal and state training mandates, and things like hazardous materials and--you know--some other stuff that we really don't do that much of.

J. Um-hum.

B. But because of these mandates,--you know,--we have to have fifteen hours, or whatever,--you know--before we're certified to be bla bla. And actually, every fire fighter's supposed to get

fifteen hours of haz mat training every year. So those kinds of things eat away at your four weeks and also at you just sort of interest. So the one thing they tried to do was to give us a little ... We spent like a week or some-- ... something like that, on something called,--what did they call it? It has to do with instructional methodology. Oh, it's called edmet,--educational methodology. And it's to try and teach you how to drill.

J. Um-hum.

B. I don't thin it .. a lot of it really sinks in. And depending on where you go, some people just never make an effort,--

J. Um-hum.

B. you know,--to drill. But we spent some time doing that, and everybody enjoys that. But then it's a question ... There's no follow up.

J. Um-hum.

B. you know,--there's no kind of, Well, how are you guys doing? after ... after a year out there. And,--you know,--it would be great if you could bring people back for like, three days and say to 'em, What do you ... What did we not teach you that you needed to know?

J. Um-hum. Um-hum.

B. And,--you know,--how can we help you out now. And what have you had problems with, and what have you not had problems with,--and things along those lines. But they don't do any of that. The ... For me, personally, the training really fell down on anything relating to diversity.

J. Um-hum.

B. I'm in there with ... There were thir--around thirty of us, twenty-nine white men,

J. Um-hum.

B. generally from very similar backgrounds, very similar attitudes towards their job,--you know,--we're here to fight fires,--you know;--fairly similar experiences in terms of--you know--not having been in fire prevention or not hav-- ... You know,--there were a couple of guys who had been marshals, but ... or had been in rescue;--had a little bit more

J. Um-hum.

B. unusual career paths. But the great majority of us were all this little monolyth. And in terms of,--you know,--trying to

encourage people to work with other people whose backgrounds were different than their own, there wasn't a lot of that. They had some goofy thing on women in the Fire Service, which used these horrible examples like of a ... of a woman failing to do X. I can't remember what it was,--failing to, like, save a co-worker or something like that. And as if it were a real life thing that had happened.

J. Um-hum.

B. It wasn't just like a fictional incident, but like it was a real incident? And I objected to this being used as a discussion point. And I was told, Well, you know,,,,,,,,--if you object to this, well, you should write something down and ... You know,--and then immediately,--you know--the guys are looking at you like, what are you raising a stink about here. They did-- ... They didn't see the point,--

J. Right.

B. you know. So it turned out Rocky, who had been ahead of me, had had a couple of things along those lines, where she felt like women were really being singled out as being deficient and ...

J. Um-hum.

B. and problematic,,,,,,,, and problem causers, and--you know--this kind of thing. There was never any kind of ... of attitude on the part of the instructors that perhaps peoples' employment outcomes should be tied to how well they are able to work with people who are not exactly like themselves;

J. Um-hum.

B. That in some way,--you know,--people who commit sexual harassment or racial discrimination or something, should have their careers affected by it. And they don't ... There's nothing along those lines. The Department has never really put its money where its mouth is, in terms of ... of its commitment to EEO. And certainly you saw that in .. in officer training. Now keep in mind, this is the only officer training that people get, except for ... when you're promoted to Captain, they give you one day on how to be an acting Battalion Chief. And that's it, in terms of Management training. So,--you know--

J. On the job training.

B. there ... there will be conferences. The deputies will go to deputy conferences. There will be ... The Captains are ... Actually, the newly promoted Captains ... They have this very interesting program now called the Captains' Development Program, where they takes the guys out of the fire house for a full year and they assign them to desk jobs,--which everybody hates,--and they give them jobs that are, like, in all different areas of

the Fire Department: finance and--you know--staffing and operations and--you know--and special projects,

J. Um-hum.

B. and things where they have to go and they have to research and they have to write, and they have to deal with .. with civilians,--the civilian side of the Fire Department, and--you know--all kinds of things to broaden their horizons. These guys are bitching and moaning about this like crazy. And I thi-- ... And then, they have speakers come in. So it's like a little fellowship program for them, really.

J. Yeah.

B. And I thought this was great,--you know!--and to really bring people out of that lock step mentality. And they're like (snarls) And now I really question what the Department's commitment is to it. Initially, they had a guy that was organizing it sort of de facto. He sort of got it dumped into his lap, and he was ... he was very gung-ho about it, and he believed in it. And now it seems like it's sort of faltering, like maybe after Schaefer left, there wasn't ... there's not as much commitment to it at the top. Or maybe they think it's more of a waste of time than they initially thought it was going to be.

J. Um-hum.

B. Or maybe they can't find the money for it. I don't know what the deal is, but

J. Yeah.

B. it seems to be ... So I was hoping that, by the time I get promoted, that there would be something like that still. And I don't know that it's ... that that's going to be there.

J. Any word on Susan Blake?

B. Susan's up doing her little thing at fifty-eight Engine,-- whatever she does up there. I don't know. Yeah. She's doing her ... doing her job, as far as I know.

J. Um-hum. Um-hum.

B. And we just got a brand new woman fire fighter who's in the Academy right now,--

J. Oh?

B. Anna Schermerhorn,--

J. Is she black?

B. a nice New York name. No, she is not.

J. Um-hum.

B. And Anna's pretty tuned in to--you know--the real deal.

J. Um-hum.

B. She's not, like some little naive babe in the woods like we were when we came in. She knows what the Fire Department's about. And she's the only woman in the class, nat--.

J. Um-hum.

B. I have no idea where she's going to be assigned. I talked to her a little bit about that this week, and--you know--I was asking her about, Well,--you know--what are you looking for in a fire--? But they've ... She doesn't even know if she'll ... She may be bouncing around. That's another thing they're doing. They're taking fire fighters,--the brand new ones,--and sending them, supposedly, sending them to a different house every year, now that ... for three years. Now, they may can that, too. So ...

J. Um-hum.

B. In any event, Anna worked very hard to get on the job and--you know--had ridden with fire companies;--had buffed ... She knows what's ...

J. Um-hum.

B. what's going on. So ... She just wants to get through Training Academy and not--you know,--not make any waves,--just blend in and not be high profile,--which is not a dumb thing on her part.

J. Um-hum.

B. You know,--you don't want to be high profile when you're in training. Just want to get the hell out of there. (laughs)

J. Alive!

B. Yeah, in one piece. Hopefully,--you know,--not too many scars and ...

J. Um-hum. Okay. Well, any other comments before you go out to Washington?

B. (pause) I wish I had started doing this earlier. I wish I had started doing this, like, at the very beginning of my career, cause--you know,--a lot of things happened. I even wish I ... I had the time to, like, do things now, because things happened in the course of the tour that are just unbelievable.

J. Keeping a journal or ...

B. Yeah. And I don't have time for any of that.

J. Um-hum. Right.

B. I mean,--and they're hysterical, too. There,--I mean,--are these stories that are just unbelievably funny. And now, when I try and think back on what are they, and--you know--what the hell! I don't know. We did have ... Right before ... I think one of the things that ... that made things for me to be a little easier on me, when I first went to 12 Truck, was, right before we got formally assigned there, we ... we made a grab. We saved a guy. And it was one of these sort of fluke things,--as they all are,--where we weren't supposed to be the first due truck, but we ended up first due. And we went to the fire floor. And the first due engine was there, and they said, "We think there's somebody in there. We thought we heard somebody behind the door,..... but--you know,--we can't get in there." So we popped the door, and--you know,--we got ... there was a guy. And we got him out,--threw him out in the hallway. And he had ... The next engine,--the engine that I'm actually with,--took the guy and did some work on him and brought him back. He was out. And they brought him back..... And he went and spent about a month in the Burn Center 'cause he has respiratory burns and facial burns and stuff. And we went in,--you know,--and did the rest of our deal. I was certain that there were other people in there, but it turned out there weren't. And it worked out very well,--you know? We made a grab,, and it was a ... it was a very good feeling. The guy completely, like, disappeared. We never heard from the guy. The ... And the Chief wouldn't put us in for any kind of citation or anything,--which was sort of weird. But we did get the Council member, who is a personal friend of mine, to have a little ceremony and give us all a big proclamation that ... that thanked us for saving this guy's life in his district, and bla, bla, bla.

J. Um-hum.

B. So that was,.....,--you know,--that was nice..... I tried to ... I set that up because I was trying to give the guys some recognition when the Chief had clearly given us the shaft.

J.. Um.

B. And ... And I think they appreciated it..... So that sort of like smoothed the way for me to come in,--you know. Here! Look! We got We made a grab while she was the officer and,--you know ... (laughs)

J. Yeah. Yeah.

B. You know,--she didn't stand in the hallway,--you know? ?? Oh God! You know how girls are? The girls are very ...

J. Yeah. (laughs)

B. You know,--get scared. So ... So that was kind of cool.

J. Um-hum.

B. And I don't know. I mean,--there's just been ... There have been just a million funny stories of--you know--water fights and things that seem incredibly juvenile.

J. Um-hum.

B. You go and you see things all the time that are just beyond the pale,--you know,--that you never see as a civilian.

J. Um-hum.

B. You're in peoples' apartments in the middle of the night, and you come on dead bodies. And there's ... It's ... It's never a dull moment.

J. Well, that'll be for the book,--your book.

B. Oh, yeah. Well... Well ...

J. So ...

B. We'll have to do a fictional account. (laughs)

J. Thanks for participating, and good luck.....

B. Yeah. thanks.