

## Garry Wiggins Oral History 8\_22\_24

00:00:00**Kate Fogle**

Okay. Again, I just want to thank you for your participation. I am talking today with retired DCFD Lieutenant—correct?

00:00:10**Garry Wiggins**

That's correct.

00:00:11**Kate Fogle**

—Mr. Garry Wiggins. My thanks for participating in this oral history interview. It's not only going to benefit the DC Fire and EMS Foundation and the history project that we're doing, but it will go on to be beneficial to the public and researchers here at the DC Public Library. Once completed, you are going to receive a transcript of today's audio, as well as the audio itself. This will be for your review. If you'd like to omit anything, you can let me know. That option is completely available to you before it becomes part of our history project, and then part of the final collections here at DCPL. Just to begin, today is Thursday, August 22nd, 2024. As stated previously, I'm here with retired DCFD Lieutenant Garry Wiggins at the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial branch of the DC Public Library. Garry, can you please spell out your first and last name for me?

00:01:16**Garry Wiggins**

That's Garry, G a r r y. Wiggins, W i g g i n s.

00:01:23**Kate Fogle**

Wonderful. And my name is Kate Fogle. That's K a t e F o g l e. And I am the Photo and Film Archivist for the DC Fire and EMS Foundation. I believe I had sent you a few kind of basic structure questions to start.

00:01:43**Garry Wiggins**

Yes.

00:01:43**Kate Fogle**

But really, let's go back to the beginning, why you joined the Fire Department. Did you have aspirations of being a firefighter or were there other reasons for you wanting to join?

00:01:55**Garry Wiggins**

The Fire Department was far off my radar. I was a struggling student at Catholic University. I was studying engineering. Reagan was in office. Money's dried up very quickly. I found myself at a party one night, and a friend of mine was like, I'm going to take a test in the morning, what are you doing? I said, what's the test for? He said, Fire Department. I said, well, okay. And the rest was history. I went up to Roosevelt High School. Stood in the line for like eight hours. I was number 1401 to go in and take the test.

00:02:46**Kate Fogle**

Wow.

00:02:47**Garry Wiggins**

From that point on, I started kind of gearing myself to, I think I'm going to be a firefighter. Now, I took the test in '84 and it took two years for me to come on the job, even though I ranked very high on the test. It's just a long process to to get you in the door. Still, I was used to working in the community. I was a Water Safety Instructor, Lifeguard. I worked at most of the rec centers in the city during the summer times, and this kind of was up my alley. I still will be working with people, and I get to use my first aid skills. When I got the call in '86, I came on board. Again, like I said, firefighting was far from anything I thought I would be doing. I had dreams of being

an astronaut. My dad worked for NASA.

00:04:01 **Kate Fogle**

Wow.

00:04:02 **Garry Wiggins**

Some things I didn't learn about him until long after he passed. But if you've seen the movie Hidden Figures, he was one of those mathematicians at NASA, up here at Goddard that, because he didn't have a college degree, he always got pushed aside. He had to train several of his bosses. They come to him, he'll train them. Then they become his boss. That was very frustrating. All of his ideas for improving the office he worked in were scuttlebutt until after he retired. Then whoever was still there took all his ideas and got paid for them.

00:05:02 **Kate Fogle**

Wow.

00:05:04 **Garry Wiggins**

Anyway, with firefighting, I had negative images from the 60s and early 70s of firefighting, especially during the civil rights movement. Like I said, it wasn't on my radar. But, once I got in, I said I could do this.

00:05:28 **Kate Fogle**

Can you expound on that a little bit in terms of you had negative perceptions. Can you explain what you were seeing at that time that made you kind of go I'm turned off to that.

00:05:41 **Garry Wiggins**

I vividly remember seeing on TV firefighters, particularly down South, joined with policemen in spraying water hoses onto other minorities down there. It just didn't sit well with me. My dad was kind of pushing me in another direction also. When I did get the opportunity and I don't take light on that because, I think that opportunity to come on the Department only came about because of the likes of Marion Barry and his home rule and trying to get both police and fire. DC jobs. He's trying to give them to DC residents and that just kind of opened up a window that said, okay, I can get in here. There I am, taking the test. My training class was about 50/50. Even though everybody was supposed to live in the city when I came on, all but one of my Caucasian counterparts lived in the city. Most of them had their name on an apartment. All the same one bedroom apartment. All of them had their name on that lease to prove that they had DC residency, but that was never truly followed up on or, yes, all of them would have never made it through the hiring process. That just showed me that there were people looking out for them, going around the system. Most of the Caucasians coming on the job, they all either worked at another fire department or were volunteers in another fire service, so they were accustomed to firefighting. They all seemed to know the history about the fire stations throughout the city, and had preferences on where they wanted to go once they're coming out of the Training Academy. With me, and most of the brothers and sisters that came on at that time, we knew nothing about the Fire Department, station numbers, or anything like that and just, put me wherever. It so happens that I ended up down at Engine 7. I didn't even know the history of Engine 7 at that time, which was one of the first Black fire companies. It wasn't that way when I got there though. It was two Blacks on my shift. Because I was a rookie, I didn't get detailed out. The other one, he was always getting detailed until I finished a certain point in my probation. Then we just didn't work a whole lot together because either one was in and one was out, so.

00:09:24 **Kate Fogle**

Sure. I was just going to ask you, especially in terms of once you kind of got going, you have your foot in the door, what was surprising about being in this new kind of fire group of folks? Was there just things that were mostly surprising and also what was disappointing. I mean, I'm sure there were things that—

00:09:48 **Garry Wiggins**

There were a lot of good and bad things that impacted my career. My first day, I remember I had a Sergeant named, Mike Smith or something. I used to call him Iron Mike. He kind of pulled me in the office and just kind of broke down the rules of how we work at the Department. He implied that, if I ever caught you stealing anything, you will be out of this job. I was like, why would that even come up? The Department was just switching over to a 24-hour shift, because it was a split shift before that. When I started, that was the first class to go straight to the 24-hour shift. That was eye opening. There were a lot of things that they expected me to know about the customs of firefighting and traditions of firefighting. All I knew was what I was taught down at training school. After I got my gear on, this piece and everything, and met everybody, the first command I was given was to make the coffee. Mind you, I'm not a coffee drinker. I'm still not. I made the coffee that one morning. They never asked me to make it again. I think it was so strong. And it was expensive. I think it was a gourmet coffee and I'm like, oh, you wasted our money. I was like, oh, don't you know? I was like, nope, I don't know how to make coffee. I don't drink it. I was never asked that again. I generally get along with anybody and everybody. As long as it was job related, I'm a team player. I did notice there were a lot of horsing around that goes on at the firehouse. At the time, I was in my probation. I'm strictly about the books and learning. I didn't participate in the little horseplay that went on. I was all about the business, about learning my new job.

00:12:46 **Kate Fogle**

Yeah.

00:12:47 **Garry Wiggins**

They were always trying to get into my personal life. I just kept that separate. In the 80s, we didn't have computers and cell phones, and all the calls came in—you had the main line, which was official, and we had a payphone, which we get personal calls on all the time. One thing kind of ticked me off. My girlfriend called me. Somebody stayed on the phone trying to talk to her for a long time before they told me I had a telephone. We had words about that, and I don't think that ever happened again.

00:13:44 **Kate Fogle**

Oh my gosh. Did you feel, once you arrived, was there anyone that you gravitated toward or that gravitated toward you, like in terms of feeling like you had a mentor or at least someone that was trying to give you guidance to kind of get you through that probation time, but also just to impact your future of your career?

00:14:08 **Garry Wiggins**

When I came through the Training Academy, a lot of the Progressive Firefighter members were on staff down there. They introduced us. They told us about the organization along with the introduction to every organization that was down there. The Union came down to talk to us, or Christian Firefighters came down to—the Credit Union. Every entity in the Department that there was came down and talked to us. I think because the Progressive Firefighter members were already down there, they extended their hand to any of us who might have been struggling with our training. Either after training or the day was over, you could stay back and get some extra tutelage if you need it. They even did Saturday gatherings. Come together on a true off day and review anything you had trouble with. I personally, I don't think I had to take advantage of that much because I was a college student. A lot of the terminologies were new to me relating to the Fire Department, the fire apparatus and tools, but it was just a matter of learning what is what. Like the difference between a cross lay and a layout. That just required me to think about it. Whereas those who were volunteers, that was second nature to them. It's like some seem to excel. It's just like they just had a head start on the learning process. It's like being in a driving class and you've been driving for five years already. You're in the class to get your certification, but you're not really learning nothing from the instructor. That's kind of how it was for me. Everything was just being new and I had to absorb it.

00:16:38 **Kate Fogle**

Sure. Absolutely. Would you say it was just kind of a normal feeling surrounding that when you start something new? Do you know what I mean? There's going to be some disappointments, but probably some exciting or just new interesting things about it. Did it feel pretty balanced in that way? Or were you ever like, man, I don't know about this. I don't know.

00:16:59 **Garry Wiggins**

It was one when when they did, down back at the Training School now. When we had an introduction to smoke and heat, being my name Wiggins, they had us in alphabetical order. I'm in the back of the line. This is the first time we were to go into the burn building to get an introduction to heat and smoke. That exercise was canceled midway through. I heard people screaming and bailing out, and these were guys who had been volunteers since they were 16 and I'm thinking, I don't know if I want to do this. Then they had to reschedule the whole exercise. Actually, when I got to actually do it and I was like, okay, follow the instructions that I was given, I said, okay, I can do this. But it's madness when you kind of were looking up to those who had experience, and they were the ones screaming and yelling and bailing out. I was like, oh, but it was interesting.

00:18:19 **Kate Fogle**

Did you feel folks like that, these folks that have had all these previous years to really grow their understanding of fires and some things like that, was there an understanding of yourself? Do you know what I mean? Coming from maybe a non-fire background, like were people willing to be like, yeah, we're we're happy that you're here without your pre-existing knowledge. Do you see? I don't know—

00:18:45 **Garry Wiggins**

Okay.

00:18:46 **Kate Fogle**

Yeah.

00:18:47 **Garry Wiggins**

Okay. Like I said, a lot of members of the Progressives were around the training school.

00:18:53 **Kate Fogle**

Sure.

00:18:53 **Garry Wiggins**

They were also on the front lines of advocating, we need DC residents.

00:18:59 **Kate Fogle**

Right.

00:19:00 **Garry Wiggins**

They were happy to see us here. Mind you, most of the Blacks that came on with me had college experience or degrees already. This just was a opportunity at a better paying job. I didn't know I was just like okay.

00:19:22 **Kate Fogle**

Absolutely. I'm sorry. I feel like I should have maybe framed this a little differently. I was going to kind of segue into what it felt like just from maybe like the racial standpoint, right? But this is more like, did you feel like folks that might have had more experience were does that make sense? They were open to the idea of eventually working with folks that didn't have that experience previously, or did it feel just kind of like everybody was learning together kind of?

00:19:47 **Garry Wiggins**

We were going through things together.

00:19:50 **Kate Fogle**

Yeah.

00:19:50 **Garry Wiggins**

After class, I'm going home and I'm studying.

00:19:54 **Kate Fogle**

Right.

00:19:54 **Garry Wiggins**

They were going home. They were leaving out and going to the bars and they would talk about the night before. I was like, I don't know what y'all doing.

00:20:06 **Kate Fogle**

I See, I see, okay.

00:20:07 **Garry Wiggins**

We're running in different circles. But I remember when we got our first paycheck and everybody said, let's get together and go to Bennigan's. I said, all right, cool. I don't know if you were familiar with Bennigan's, but it was kind of an Irish pub. I was like, yeah, we all go together. I'm thinking, hey, this is a bonding moment between our Blacks and the Whites on the job coming on together. I was 23 years old. I got carded each time I tried to order a drink by the same waitress. I know there was one person in the class who was 20. He didn't never get carded. And I was like, hmm. I said, all right, that's an experience. All right. The next time we got paid, they're like, well, let's go to a Black establishment. One White guy showed up. Everybody else, they just went the other way. I was like, oh, okay. We were good enough to invite us and we'll come. But it doesn't work the other way around. All right, I see. Mind you, some of these were volunteer chiefs and captains and they kind of touted their rank and everything. But, as far as I'm concerned, we're all probationers down here now, so.

00:21:41 **Kate Fogle**

Wow.

00:21:42 **Garry Wiggins**

Yeah.

00:21:43 **Kate Fogle**

I think this is just a great segue though. Am I correct with the date there that the full integration—in that phraseology—happened in 1962?

00:21:55 **Garry Wiggins**

That's about right. That's the year I was born.

00:21:59 **Kate Fogle**

Right. I guess what I'm saying though is like—and you joined in '86, is that correct?

00:22:03 **Garry Wiggins**

I joined in '86.

00:22:04 **Kate Fogle**

Obviously that's a fair number of years to have passed.

00:22:08 **Garry Wiggins**

Right.

00:22:09 **Kate Fogle**

But what was that like for you? I mean because you're already telling me, you're trying to kind of have that comradeship with these folks, and then maybe that wasn't quite reciprocated. Do you feel like there were still kind of structures in place that it felt that you were still not—

00:22:30 **Garry Wiggins**

Okay. Here we go.

00:22:31 **Kate Fogle**

Yeah.

00:22:32 **Garry Wiggins**

Out from the Training Academy. Again, when it came to getting our Company assignments, they put a big board up and said, where do you want to go? I knew nothing about it. I had one friend who got in the class ahead of me. He went to Engine 7. I said, just put on 7. They wanted the first, second and third choices. I knew where some stations were. I didn't even know the numbers that corresponded with them. It didn't make a difference to me. I ended up getting assigned to Engine 7 with a friend of mine who was like, I say, he got on class before me. We went to high school together and took the test together and so we ended up assigned together. He was on a different shift, so it was kind of good to be able to talk to him when I was doing change of shift and whatnot. We lived in the same neighborhood and everything else. On our shared day off, we would get together and play ball or something like that. Then as time went on, it came to studying and preparing for the promotional exam. The first promotional exam was given in 1990 because there was a big lawsuit that stopped all promotions for like a decade.

00:24:10 **Kate Fogle**

Right.

00:24:11 **Garry Wiggins**

Since I came on in January '86, I wasn't eligible. My friend came on in the fall of '85 and he was able to take the test. I was like, okay. This test was ordered by the courts. It was due to what was called the Hammond case. It's a big case in DC, which was about the hiring, discrimination and promotional discrimination in the DC Fire Department. The change in the hiring protocol was part of that suit, which brought in DC residents. But, the test was to promote 100 new officers. At the time, the Fire Department was predominantly Black. I would say we were about 70% Black at that time. Two tests was mandated by the courts—the '90 and the '91 exam. It was part of a lawsuit. Those Blacks that were part of the lawsuit, they weren't to get their pay money until after the tests were done. 70% of the job now, 100 new spots opened up. 83 of those spots went to White members. It was all kind of cheating went on. That sparked another lawsuit. But that lawsuit went so long that they did not roll anybody back from it. They found there was mass cheating going on. There were code words that was written on the test and on answer sheets that, if you were Black, you didn't know about them. You had to have been a volunteer. Once that discrepancy was pointed out, that suit went up to '96. They could not go back. Then, what do you want us to do about it? That kept the power structure in the Union's hands, I would say, because most of those beneficiaries were all in the Union. The Union changed their rules on who can vote. I wasn't a member of the Union for a long time anyway. But those who were members, you would think that Blacks had the majority would be the majority in the Union. But they gave past retired members the same voting privilege as active members. Since we weren't members in the past, they always had a large conglomerate of members come up to vote. No matter what you might have achieved about active members as far as casting ballots, you could never beat the overwhelming number of retirees putting their vote in. I got to know the difference between the politics of the job at that time, DC, the Black chiefs and captains, that they based their strength in politics locally with

the city council, the mayor's office, school board. The White members, they went through the IAFF, International Association of Firefighters, whose power was up on Capitol Hill. That's why they were able to drag a lawsuit out forever. Excuse me. Let me just turn that off.

00:29:05 **Kate Fogle**

Wow. Oh, no. No. You're fine. But, and not to interrupt you, I wanted to say, I know you had said you were not a member of the Union for a long time. Was that sort of part of that feeling that maybe this wasn't a place that was going to advocate for my best interests?

00:29:27 **Garry Wiggins**

Yeah, I got that very early on.

00:29:29 **Kate Fogle**

Wow.

00:29:30 **Garry Wiggins**

I felt that in the Training Academy and the Progressive Firefighters Association, just there to act. We fought to get you on the job. This is where you can turn to if you have problems on the job. The Union— on the big lawsuit I mentioned—the Union's lawyers were fighting on behalf of the city against the Progressive Firefighters. No, I wasn't joining them. That was just a cold slap in the face to pay your money, to fight against somebody, to fight against you.

00:30:13 **Kate Fogle**

Wow.

00:30:13 **Garry Wiggins**

I stayed away from the Union for a long time. Systemic racism definitely was evident. DC Fire Department was officially—name changed in '91 to DC Fire and EMS. Yet you still see DCFD on the back of coats or equipment. Why? Because my grandfather was a DC firefighter. It was a big thing to get it changed from fireman to firefighter. That was one. And then DCFD. Those were long-lasting traditions [and they] were hanging on to things that their grandfather had. DCFD, they were actually on the coats, they had DC Fire and EMS on it. Some people actually scraped the EMS off. No, we're DC Fire.

00:31:19 **Kate Fogle**

Wow.

00:31:21 **Garry Wiggins**

The Progressive Firefighters Association, they embraced EMS. That was the wave of the future with the advances in fire prevention. Tragic fires were going down because of smoke alarms, smoke detectors, fire suppression systems, extinguishers, and just community awareness of knowledge that was going out that the more tragic fires were going out, the more need came with getting EMS service out to the city. When I came on, it wasn't required for me. I just took it upon myself to let me take up EMS. I want to be able to provide that dual service to my community because I could be running my family, friends I know who grew up with neighbors or what have you. I embraced it. Like I said, that was something that the Progressive Firefighters embraced and try to live up to that. Others were like, I came on here to be a fireman, like my daddy.

00:32:50 **Kate Fogle**

I just want to clarify, too, was there a large percentage of Black membership or Black service within the EMS portion of DCFD? I'm just trying to understand. Is there also kind of a racial component with that to not only—

00:33:09 **Garry Wiggins**

The Ambulance Bureau back then was separate. It was all under the Fire Department, but it was like a separate agency inside an agency. That was all civilian run. There was a few guys who elected to just go on outside and stay on the EMS and run on the ambulance, but mostly that was all civilians, and civilians came from the city. That was basically all Black force there inside the Department. The Department very strongly tried to keep the two separate. Those who were here already, an officer on the EMS side was given very little respect by firefighters. I was like, he's still an officer. Because, like I said, when I got certified as an EMT, I stopped getting overtime as a firefighter. Whenever I put in for overtime, it was like, oh, he's got a EMT. Put him on the ambulance, put him on the ambulance. Those without EMTs got to work their overtime on the fire truck. Two different worlds, two different, structures of work. At that time, you might not catch a run all day on the fire truck overtime, 1 or 2 at the most. Ambulance, you're going to get a fairly decent amount of runs, one per hour or so. It kept you busy, so. My overtime, like I said, I worked harder for my overtime, I would say, but I, it didn't, it didn't bother me.

00:35:07 **Kate Fogle**

Yeah. And not to really necessarily keep on this point. I do know that in a different interview, Amy Mauro and I were speaking with someone who mentioned the KKK house. I guess that was a question too, though. Did it seem like maybe especially, you know, you came in without this understanding of which houses were the ones people were jockeying for—

00:35:30 **Garry Wiggins**

Right.

00:35:31 **Kate Fogle**

—but over time, did some of those houses—

00:35:33 **Garry Wiggins**

Oh, it became very evident.

00:35:35 **Kate Fogle**

—perpetuating some of those really—

00:35:36 **Garry Wiggins**

The houses that were considered the busier houses, the ones that were fighting more fire. This is the ones, those who were volunteers were gravitating to or pushing to get at. If they didn't get it initially or initial assignment, as soon as their probation was over, they were putting in transfers to get at these different houses. I mean, the Department was integrated, but it was still segregated in some meaningful ways. Also, one of the busier houses was Engine 10. They touted the record as having the most runs in the nation.

00:36:24 **Kate Fogle**

Is that the House of Pain?

00:36:26 **Garry Wiggins**

House of Pain.

00:36:27 **Kate Fogle**

House of Pain.

00:36:28 **Garry Wiggins**



Yes.

00:36:29 **Kate Fogle**

Wow.

00:36:35 **Garry Wiggins**

As a young sergeant, I got detailed there. When I walked in the door and put my stuff in the officer's seat, the Captain didn't know me. He was like, you can't be in charge here. Made a couple of phone calls, and I was detailed right back out. They put the technician in charge of that unit for the day. I'm like, okay, I go where I'm told. I went to an all Black house. I was like, it is what it is. I just roll with the punches and keep going. One thing I definitely didn't know about is medals and awards for outstanding service. Out in the field or what have you. Not that I didn't do things that were worthy of it. I think all of us did. But on the backside, if you were White, they were writing you up to get a bronze medal. Silver medal. Gold medal. I didn't know nothing about it. I'm doing my job. Doing my job. I made a couple rescues by myself. I'm just doing my job. Boom, boom. It wasn't until I was a lieutenant that I heard about the award ceremony. It wasn't really highly promoted to go to the award ceremony. But when I finally did, and I seen everybody in their dress uniforms, and they're getting all these medals. I was like, no rank, just all these medals up on it. It's like, oh, what was that about? I still never got one my whole career, I like okay. A letter of acknowledgement of some things I might have done, but no, I never got a medal. That was true to most of the Black firefighters. All of us had stories of heroic events that we've done on the job, and we just go back and throw another hot dog on the grill. As a firefighter, you rarely even wore a dress uniform. I think the first time I actually wore my dress uniform was for—outside of graduating from the Academy—was for a line of duty death. And that's when I started noticing the differences. And I said, can you get all this? Oh, I'm on the squad. I was like—

00:39:57 **Kate Fogle**

Wow.

00:39:57 **Garry Wiggins**

—I don't know.

00:40:02 **Kate Fogle**

I would say that for some people that might feel just so overwhelming and upsetting, but it seems to me you kind of, I don't remember the phrase you used, but you rolled with it, right? You just kind of had to get up every day and do what you got to do and—

00:40:20 **Garry Wiggins**

My first five years on the job, I was still looking for something better to come along. I was like, I don't know if this is for me, but after I took the promotional exam, I got promoted to technician first. It was the first level of promotions available to you. As a technician, I'm driving the apparatus, and I had a young sergeant, White sergeant, and we were responding on a call, and he's just lost. I'm grabbing the mic, and I started communicating with command and telling them what we're doing. I need to be in that seat. That's how I just applied myself, and I eventually did get promoted and got promoted again. My promotion got stifled by the first White Chief that took command of the Department since I've been on the job. That was Chief Rubin. At that time, I was President of the Progressive Firefighters, and I was meeting with him and bringing issues to put on his table. I was like, look, we need to get information out to the public about this and that, about fire safety for the kids. In our organization, they got a grant to do a stop fire campaign. Got the video and everything, and I brought that to the Fire Chief and showed him our program and our literature and everything that go with it. He gave me the thumbs up. But we were going around presenting this in the community centers anyway as a fraternal organization. He went on and made their own version of it with all his people he wanted in there. I said, okay, all right. As long as the message gets out, that's how I took it. That's what it's about. He wanted to make sure we weren't getting credit or belittle our efforts on our end, you know? It wasn't the same, I think, as our presentation. We still use it today. That one they made came and went with the with his departure. Also, when Rubin was Chief, Obama got elected, and I tried to get on that inaugural committee, and I was denied. It's like, we got more people qualified. Define qualified? I have a fire science degree. I have completed the Executive

Development Institute over a five year period at this time, completed that now in 2003. Okay, well, what is more qualified? Mind you, my history with this organization. I was part of the Million Man Marches, three of them. We were in control of the logistics for the Million Man March. We ran the command center. We controlled all the first aid stations on the Mall for the Million Man March. The Progressive Firefighters, along with our international brothers and sisters came into town. The first year, I was more of a participant at the Million Man March. The second time it came around, I was working in the control center with the communications for the Million Man March. And the last one they had, I completely ran it, the control center. Had a mobile command set up on the Mall, and I sent out all the assignments to all of my brothers and sisters who were volunteering. I've been doing this. By far, Obama's inauguration was the largest event ever in DC, by far. Since the Million Man March, just put it that way. My experience meant nothing to this Chief. He was like, he didn't want my input. The day of the inauguration, I get a call and ask me, did I want to work overtime? I didn't want to go overtime. Under Bush's inauguration, I was working one of the balls as an officer. They want to put me on an ambulance. I was like, okay, I just...

00:46:05 **Kate Fogle**

Wow.

00:46:13 **Garry Wiggins**

I understood the history of Rubin before he came to DC. He started out as a DC firefighter and left, and everywhere he moved to, he got rank. He never took a test. He just goes to another place and applies. You experienced in DC as a technician? Okay, we're going to make you lieutenant. Okay. You leave Portsmouth and goes to Richmond. Okay. We're going to make you a captain. He ended up as a city administrator down in Alabama. During his confirmation hearing, I didn't testify against him. I just testified of what we would like to see happen during the reign, which was make sure the cadet program stays intact and keep the hiring local instead. Because they had opened it up by then. Rubin gets in and he really opens the floodgates. He had six classes going on at one time, and most of them, you had to look to find the Blacks that were in the classes at that time. It was a couple here, a couple there, and through 2000 to 2010, they really changed the complexion of the Department. I was like, wow. If you look at the Department today, 80% of the officers are White again. That's mainly due to the hiring change that Rubin put in. If this is what you're hiring during doing this time, by the time we got things corrected, these little guys were the seniority, and now they're running everything again. I was like, wow. I always felt the Department should be a reflection of the community that it serves. Firefighting in general was, at its origins, it's community-based. So why all of the majority of our firefighters coming from two states away? It's not about the community anymore. It's all about taking control again.

00:49:34 **Kate Fogle**

I think this is a great segue just into, and I believe you retired in 2017. Is that correct?

00:49:40 **Garry Wiggins**

That's correct.

00:49:42 **Kate Fogle**

And who was your Chief at that time? It wasn't Rubin at that time.

00:49:45 **Garry Wiggins**

No, no. Chief Dean.

00:49:49 **Kate Fogle**

Okay. Oh, yeah. Okay.

00:49:50 **Garry Wiggins**

Chief Gregory Dean was chief.

00:49:51 **Kate Fogle**

Yeah.

00:49:52 **Garry Wiggins**

Came out of Seattle. I met him in Seattle. We had a convention in Seattle in 2012. I had no idea he would be ever coming to DC as a fire chief. But, my my views were mixed with him. When he came here, we would meet on a regular basis. We'll talk about the issues, but he would never act on them. When I would call back to my friends in Seattle, I was like, what is going on with this chief? We didn't know exactly what he was doing until until he left, too. I was like, oh. He let the Union really run amok when he was chief, and he didn't want to fight the Union. I told him, I think the worst thing that we have going on with the Department is the 24-hour shift. You run more than we ever have, but the 24-hour shift with three days off allows so many people to come from Pennsylvania, Delaware, Jersey and the Eastern Shore. Southern Maryland. They had one person commuting from North Carolina. Yes. And this was a chief. Who would fly in, do his [unintelligible], fly back. I had a rookie from Pennsylvania. I didn't hold it against him. He was a good rookie. After he finished his probation, he invited everybody up to his house. Took me 2.5 hours to get there. When I got there, I said, wow, this rookie, he's got all this land up here. All rural Pennsylvania, house twice the size of mine. I was like, okay, I see why you do it, but this money that you're making wasn't meant for you. But, they'll make that sacrifice for that 20-25 year career. Because like I said, this urban salary goes a long way out there. Where most of us here are still struggling to be able to afford a home and what not. I think the city would be better if most of us lived here. Then we could have bought the homes that were available instead of going out of the city. This agency and the Police Department, you got a lot of your emergency responders who come in from outside of this area to serve this city. I always question, what is your commitment to the city? Taking it away from DC, when I look at Ferguson, what happened there. Their police force, 80% of them are from outside of that area. Outside of that community. It makes a difference when you respond to a community that you know the people there or they recognize you or they, maybe not recognize you, but they see somebody that looks like them. That makes a difference how responses that you get. I know the customs and traditions, the idiosyncrasies of our community. I know what I'm walking into, when I see a whole lot of youth running around. It doesn't fear me, you know? In fact, I almost can command the respect. They see me, they figure, oh, he's from the community. Like I said, my time as President with the Progressive Firefighters—

00:54:22 **Kate Fogle**

Yeah.

00:54:23 **Garry Wiggins**

—the longest reigning president, was never my intention to be president this long.

00:54:32 **Kate Fogle**

Just to have a little of my own question, too. I'm so interested in this. Did you join up, but did you ever envision that this is where you would go? Did you feel like you wanted to be part of that leadership contingent?

00:54:46 **Garry Wiggins**

I saw myself on the board. I saw myself being on committees and helping out. I didn't have the aspiration to be the president. Until the President asked me. I've got to step down. Because he was at that time retired. He said, we need a young face, and you're the only one who's been consistent over the years. I was like, okay. I went in with like a four year plan. Boom, boom boom, this, this, this, and I'm out. My first couple of years, I thought it was working just fine. I had already kind of hand-picked who was going to replace me, my vice president at the time. Then it just dawned on me how targeted we were, because when I was out of town, they targeted my vice president. He might have did something wrong. Internet went wild. I don't know what he was looking at, but he got caught looking at something on the internet that they said he shouldn't have been. I said, well, it was on the house computer or something? But it forced him to retire while I was out of town at a conference. They hit him. Then from that point on, I was like, okay, gotta start all over. It just didn't come to be. Everybody we were tapping, trained to do different aspects of the board members. They were, I wouldn't say tapping out, but they just didn't make it, you know? Then I got to the point where I had a hard time communicating with the youth today. I still do today. I had trouble with my kids. They're all about texting. Okay, I can do the texting, but I'm

not a TikTok, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook. I'm just not on social media like that. You might find my Facebook account, but my wife is the one who updates that and puts pictures on there. She always asked me who these people are. Are they friends? I was like, yeah, those are friend's friends. She's like, okay, I got you. But I just didn't stick with technology. I had IT. It moved kind of fast. By the time I got into Yahoo, they were on something else, Do you remember Blackberries? I didn't, I had a pager. That moved into the cell phone and the smartphone and tablets. I was like, okay.

00:58:13 **Kate Fogle**

Are you finding that—I can just tell you're a very passionate person. I know that you obviously are bringing a lot of that passion to the Progressives. Are you finding that, a little bit part of the struggle though, of like meeting these younger folks to kind of get them engaged, bring them into the Progressives, is it a different sell now? You know what I mean?

00:58:37 **Garry Wiggins**

It is a different sell.

00:58:38 **Kate Fogle**

It's the same policies. It's the same ideas. But you got to meet them in a different place, right?

00:58:44 **Garry Wiggins**

Definitely got to meet them. They don't volunteer. We do toy drives or blanket and coat giveaways to the homeless, socks giveaway, food drives in the community, packing meals for the homeless. The Martin Luther King Parade. They don't even come out to march in the parade to show off. That's like, wow. Reverend Barber would come to town, and I'll get a call. It's like, okay, we're doing the Poor People's March. Can you support us with first aid? I said, sure. I get it for a couple first aid stations. I look around and it's all the older guys are doing it. The younger guys are not coming out to help out with that. I was like, wow. What do we do here? I do have some active members who do participate. Look, you guys got to talk to the rookie classes. I can't talk to 'em. If they come to a meeting there, I introduce myself to them and show 'em what we're doing on this level. But I can't continue to be the face of the organization. Because they're not going to see me out there on the street with them. They might see me on the news. The year I retired. Was it? I think it was that year, I was on the news for a fire rescue in my neighborhood.

01:00:44 **Kate Fogle**

I was actually going to bring this up. I found this story about you and two other folks. I believe you—

01:00:50 **Garry Wiggins**

My Vice President, Bobby Pearson, which we live on the same street. And another neighbor. A house was on fire. My daughter yelled out, I came out, saw the fire. Somebody get Bobby! And we went, and we just took command. We forced entry. We and another neighbor, got in, got the neighbor out and all along, and while on the phone with communication, tell them what we have. I did the initial first aid on our neighbor because he had a pulse, but he wasn't breathing. I was like, okay, let's get him going. Keep the respirations going until the fire trucks got there. Then, of course, they going straight to the fire station. This man is priority. Adrenaline rush, they're looking at the fire. By the time the second unit got on the scene, they were the ones who were able to assist with the fact that we had injuries here that needed to be tended to right away. By the time they got there, the house was fully engulfed. He would have never survived without me being there.

01:02:33 **Kate Fogle**

Right?

01:02:35 **Garry Wiggins**

We being there. Another fire in the community was my cousin's home, a few blocks away from me. He was on vacation, 4th of July. I remember it very vividly. He called me and said, Garry, my house is on fire. Can you go

see what's going on? And sure enough, the fireworks had landed on the awning. He had one of those canvas awnings and it ignited and burned into the roof and into the house. When I get there, I'm off. I was recently retired, but that was my whole crew that was there, and as the fires go, some firefighters can be very destructive. Some of them are about the business of attacking the root of the fire. While I was on the scene, I think everybody knew do it by the book like they were told. Or just to see themselves, my crew still doing it the right way. I was like, oh, great. The police were trying to get me away from the scene until everybody said, no, that's the Lieutenant.

01:04:04 **Kate Fogle**

Oh my gosh.

01:04:06 **Garry Wiggins**

I was like, no. Of course I'm not going in there, but I could see everything and I can tell who was supposed to be there. Everybody was gone. Then by the time my aunt got there, I was like, okay. The fire was knocked down, and I was allowed to go in and show her. To kind of inspect the initial damage. I never was in Fire Prevention, but I took all the classes. I was able to see the root cause of the fire itself. I was like, okay, initiated right here. Oh, what is that? That's one of the fireworks that shoot off in the air. Now of course, that was preliminary. I never really did follow up with the Fire Marshal's Office to see what the investigators had deemed it, but I was like, that was pretty obvious to me—

01:05:09 **Kate Fogle**

Wow.

01:05:09 **Garry Wiggins**

—that this needs to go get these illegal fireworks off the street. It ain't happening—

01:05:16 **Kate Fogle**

No. [laughs].

01:05:17 **Garry Wiggins**

—in DC.

01:05:18 **Kate Fogle**

Oh my gosh.

01:05:19 **Garry Wiggins**

Like right now we're poised to give away smoke detectors throughout the city and neighborhoods that need it.

01:05:35 **Kate Fogle**

I'm sorry, is this through the Progressives or is this through the Fire Department, like, kind of a joint—

01:05:40 **Garry Wiggins**

Progressive.

01:05:40 **Kate Fogle**

Yeah.

01:05:40 **Garry Wiggins**

We have in our storage unit right now, we got about a thousand smoke detectors.

01:05:45 **Kate Fogle**

Wow.

01:05:46 **Garry Wiggins**

We're gearing up for a Fire Prevention Month, which is October. This was through a grant through Kidde Smoke Detector. Kidde fire alarm. We're going to work with the Fire Department, as far as trying to get them out there. This is another call where I need my younger people to volunteer to come and help. Now, we don't just give them away. We install them when the person requests them. We make sure they get up and put in the right place. These detectors have a ten years lifespan. That should suffice for a good while.

01:06:40 **Kate Fogle**

This is incredible, both of these stories you just shared, I think, really speak to the fact that this is beyond just a day job for you. You cared about the work you did and you're still continuing that really amazing concept of public service, especially for your own community. Right? That's incredible. In terms of your retirement, I have to ask you, what have been the wonderful things like, are you looking backwards and saying, yeah, there were some bumpy spots, but overall this was a great thing? Or, how has this shaped you going into your retirement?

01:07:21 **Garry Wiggins**

Retirement. Okay.

01:07:22 **Kate Fogle**

Well, yeah. From the Department because you were a busy, busy person.

01:07:28 **Garry Wiggins**

Going to retirement. I still find myself out here recruiting for the Department. Unofficially, but I do the rec centers. When I go swimming, I talk to the lifeguards, because that's how I started out as a lifeguard. I might have mentioned the Water Safety Instructor. I trained lifeguards, so.

01:07:54 **Kate Fogle**

Wow.

01:07:57 **Garry Wiggins**

I talk to them about a possible career in the Fire Department. Several have joined the Fire Department, but also, still see the racism that is evident in the hiring. I have one guy I talked to, he failed a physical. They said he was colorblind. Okay. He's working in Alexandria Fire Department now. Another guy, they said he was overweight. I said okay, 5' 10", 5' 11", 250 pounds. Said he was a fullback in college. I was like, okay, he wasn't fat. They used that BMI against him, and told him he needed to lose 10 pounds. He lost the 10 pounds. Oh, we made a mistake. He needed to lose another 10 pounds. He's a firefighter in Howard County now. My daughter took the test for the Fire Department. Physically, she passed the CPAT. The psychological exam she failed. How she fail that, she was a college graduate? Oh, we don't know. They said we can't give that information out. She's still trying to be a firefighter and she's going to another department right now outside the city. If she makes it there, there might be another lawsuit coming against the city. The females in my organization, they have a lawsuit right now.

01:10:03 **Kate Fogle**

Really?

01:10:04 **Garry Wiggins**

The attorney that's representing them already won \$100 million lawsuit up in New York with our chapter out there. It's just lawsuits, they take time. They can take a toll on you.

01:10:22 **Kate Fogle**

Yeah.

01:10:23 **Garry Wiggins**

I don't know how long it's going to take for them.

01:10:25 **Kate Fogle**

Can you give me a little context of the specifics of the lawsuit for the women?

01:10:32 **Garry Wiggins**

It's a discrimination lawsuit. Several of them were paramedics and paramedic firefighters, and they sought to move out of firefighting and go to Fire Prevention. They stopped getting their paramedic pay, but they still have their paramedic certificates up to date. Other people, males did the same thing, but they got to keep their pay. You got a good lawsuit. Hopefully they'll be successful. I hate taking money from the DC's coffers like that, but I was like, if you will invest in it the proper way, we wouldn't have this problem. As lawsuits go, when police get sued and then the agency gets sued, people look at it, it's not money out of their pocket. You're actually suing the city, not the individual or the agency and its name. Lawyers are going for the bigger piece of the pie. We try to represent our members when they get caught up. If we feel that they are getting a bad rap on a case. First time lawsuit, on one of my members—I mean, the first time in trouble. Got a couple of years on the job. He forgot to get a signature from a patient on the tablet. Ended up getting 700 and like 50 hours suspension. They were more so after his partner, which they actually fired her, but they gave him this hefty long suspension. To me, that's a written reprimand. 12 hours, 24 hours at the most. This man had to find another job to survive. But he's still on the job. 740 hours, would force most people to retire, especially with only a couple of years on the job. We represented him on his appeal. He won the appeal. Appeal said that 720 hours of the 740, he's supposed to get back. The Department appealed the appeal. The guy is still working. But he's a little frustrated, but he's still got his job. He's still taking care of his family. But, 700 hours, that's a lot of money. We've calculated, between the money and then the annual leave and sick leave that he lost somewhere in that time. It all came to a hefty sum. He just wanted what we thought he was due back. This is how the Department does it. I think every DC agency is kind of doing the same thing. Somebody wins an appeal. Contested. Still, just keep keep it in court. Most people don't have the money to fight. The waiting game. I hate to see that going on, but I see it more happening against, again, my people. Not just necessarily my members, but my people. The hiring discrimination and discriminating with how discipline is rolled out and promotions, still exists. It still exists.

01:15:18 **Kate Fogle**

Because I know you said at one time, at least the representation within the DCFD reflected more of the city—

01:15:27 **Garry Wiggins**

It did.

01:15:28 **Kate Fogle**

—but are you kind of, knowing that when you left, did it feel like things were kind of still going backwards a bit or like—

01:15:39 **Garry Wiggins**

We definitely have gone backwards.

01:15:41 **Kate Fogle**

Wow.

01:15:42 **Garry Wiggins**

What is it? It's almost like the Department looks like it did before I came on. And that's another thing. Young people don't know the history. Right now they're repeating it. They have, for instance, some of my members have problems with facial hair. This has been proven through the military that some of us can't be clean shaven.

01:16:25 **Kate Fogle**

Right.

01:16:26 **Garry Wiggins**

It's called pseudofolliculitis. The military made a waiver for that, those who have been diagnosed with this disease are allowed to keep—

01:16:39 **Kate Fogle**

Yeah. You get like a chit card or something. I don't remember what it's called, but exactly.

01:16:43 **Garry Wiggins**

—like no more than a quarter inch. But you didn't have to shave. You didn't have to be clean shaven. That same applied in the Fire Department. We will use the military's analysis on that and our remedy, and we fought and won it. In the 70s and 80s and the 90s. And then it just keeps popping up. Even today they still got guys off because of their beard. But just this weekend, there was a fire at an apartment building. They showed these puppies that got rescued, dogs. And the spokesperson for the Fire Department was a white guy with a full beard. I'm like, how in the world are you still putting Black guys off apparatus? Because they got up here and you got a spokesman here with a full beard who I know doesn't have pseudofolliculitis. But I'm getting tired of going to meet with the Chief. I don't do this regularly as I used to. Like I said, that's for the younger people. Like this your all's fight. I'm just trying to show you where all the skeletons are hidden. I'm the keeper of the history, right? But nobody knows the history of this Department better than Romeo Spaulding. And Willie Drummond. They're both very good. I will leave you their information.

01:18:38 **Kate Fogle**

We actually did get to talk with Willie, which was great.

01:18:41 **Garry Wiggins**

Okay.

01:18:42 **Kate Fogle**

It was awesome.

01:18:42 **Kate Fogle**

That was the innovator of fire prevention.

01:18:45 **Kate Fogle**

Exactly.

01:18:46 **Garry Wiggins**

Yes.

01:18:47 **Kate Fogle**



That's the guy.

01:18:48 **Garry Wiggins**

The book. The fact that he didn't get the accolades he deserves, well. Romeo Spaulding, he's done more for firefighting than any chief anywhere. And, he retired here as a captain. He would definitely. I was speaking to him on my way over here. I'm gonna leave you here with his email and phone number.

01:19:18 **Kate Fogle**

I would love that.

01:19:19 **Garry Wiggins**

He said he's already doing an oral history with the Smithsonian—

01:19:25 **Kate Fogle**

Oh. That's wonderful. Okay.

01:19:26 **Garry Wiggins**

—about the Department. I don't know if—are you working together with the Smithsonian?

01:19:32 **Kate Fogle**

We aren't—I mean, that would be amazing. No, we're not.

01:19:35 **Garry Wiggins**

Okay.

01:19:35 **Kate Fogle**

But it sounds like if he's maybe willing to speak with them, maybe we could talk to him as well. Because this is such important stuff to talk about.

01:19:45 **Garry Wiggins**

He is definitely local and—

01:19:47 **Kate Fogle**

Great.

01:19:48 **Garry Wiggins**

—he was down at the Academy with us, I think. Was he down? Willie was down there for the interview. We actually did our own interview with him. I got hours of him on tape.

01:20:02 **Kate Fogle**

Oh. That's wonderful. Can I just ask you, when did you actually join the PFAA [sic]? What—

01:20:10 **Garry Wiggins**

Training Academy, '86.

01:20:11 **Kate Fogle**

So you did? You joined right up?

01:20:14 **Garry Wiggins**

That was a no brainer for me.

01:20:15 **Kate Fogle**

Amazing.

01:20:17 **Garry Wiggins**

President of Black Student Union at Catholic University, while I was there. That kind of just fell in my lap, too. It wasn't something I aspired to do, but leadership in high school, captain of the swim team. I was in the honor society.

01:20:47 **Kate Fogle**

You touched on this lightly, and I'm so sorry, I don't know what you're timing—

01:20:52 **Garry Wiggins**

Oh, I'm good for another 20 minutes.

01:20:54 **Kate Fogle**

Oh, okay. Brilliant. I just wanted to say, you did mention that currently, you have Progressive members that are female that are dealing with their situation. I know that women were allowed to join previous to when you came into the Department.

01:21:10 **Garry Wiggins**

Women started coming on the job in '78.

01:21:12 **Kate Fogle**

Exactly. Yeah.

01:21:17 **Garry Wiggins**

Most of them were members of the Progressives. One of the first females, her name was Bea Rudder.

01:21:27 **Kate Fogle**

Bea Rudder, yeah.

01:21:28 **Garry Wiggins**

She was the first to become a chief, a Battalion Chief. Deputy Chief. She was actually thought in some circles to be the next fire chief, and she kind of got railroaded out of there after she left the scene of an accident. I kind of got to research that one. That's kind of funny. She didn't abandon the scene. There was a big fire going on, and she had the Fire Department representative take over the scene and went to the fire. Then those other powers started using that against her. Forget about the fire. You didn't abandon, you transfer control to actually somebody more capable. Because she wasn't the EMT at the time. They used that to hang her. At that time, I think she could afford it, but she had her timing already ready. I've been in this fight way too long.

01:22:58 **Kate Fogle**

I'm sure there's definitely some, not even some, just elements of exhaustion, though. It's just a different—your career is different because there's other things going on, right, that you're kind of always aware of.

01:23:12 **Garry Wiggins**

There's some houses, like I said, if they didn't want you there, they got you out of there. Like I said, at one point there were so many of us, they couldn't deny us anywhere. But, actually, there are things that are reverting back to the way they were. I had suggested a long time ago to the fire chief. He should have a community board in front of every firehouse, so if things are going on in the area, people can look to the firehouse to know what's happening. Schools are out early this day or... We didn't have an electronic one at my firehouse on Rhode Island Avenue. We had one was put up by the community, and we would put things like, it's little Johnny's birthday today, and they would come by the firehouse and make a big deal out of it. More tragic, 9/11. Half staff, we lost such and such people during this time. 9/11 was a big change in my life, too. I was called down. I was off duty when that happened that day. I just got off work. My sister, she worked at the Pentagon. My sister-in-law, called me, and she didn't know what was going on. I didn't know what was going on because, I come home, I don't turn the TV on. I go to bed. Turn on the TV, and I saw the Twin Towers and then the Pentagon. Then I was like, oh, this is what being a homebody does. I got up, got dressed, went to my school, got my mom to take the kids home. You got them? Then I went to the firehouse. I called communication, told them I'm back here, and they said, we don't know what's going on. I started initially calling the members of my firehouse who were off duty, not just my shift, but the other shifts. Start calling them in to the firehouse. I could only call members who lived locally. Ask me why?

01:25:48 **Kate Fogle**

Why?

01:25:49 **Garry Wiggins**

To call long distance, you had to have an operator outside of this immediate area. Cell phones, towers crash. Do you remember the Nextel Direct Connect? I caught up with most of my shift with Nextel. Come on back in. Come on back in. Those who lived outside, I could not call. I couldn't get them to come back. Well, we are here. The guys got back, we were there and we had no apparatus. We were just all in the firehouse. We're just going to sit tight. I documented everybody in the book when they got there. Of course, eventually they're like, okay, we're going to get a bus. We're going to send you down to relieve the crews down there and get your gear, get your everything together, blah, blah, blah. I got there in the middle of the night. This should not have had any play on the day at all. The morning, the fires were knocked down. It was very symbolic. A big old flag was being hung off the roof. But the guys that was on the roof had, when they decided they were going to do that, they called all of them down and put a full, fresh crew up there. But where are we? I see who just came down. Why did you take them down? It's like, oh, I said, politics again. On 9-1-1.

01:27:44 **Kate Fogle**

Wow.

01:27:46 **Garry Wiggins**

Mad it happened. But it did.

01:27:52 **Kate Fogle**

I don't know. Are you close to time or.

01:27:54 **Garry Wiggins**

Oh, I got three. I got 3:20pm. I was just grabbing Romeo's information while we talk.

01:28:02 **Kate Fogle**

Oh, that would be great. Thank you for sharing that story. Very, very interesting. I was going to ask, there's got to be some milestones, though, important events from your career that you still kind of look back on or that have

shaped you into the person you are now. Can you speak to anything like that just as a conclusion?

01:28:24 **Garry Wiggins**

9/11 was one.

01:28:24 **Kate Fogle**

9/11.

01:28:25 **Garry Wiggins**

Was just one. Assisting in delivering babies.

01:28:33 **Kate Fogle**

Wow.

01:28:34 **Garry Wiggins**

I was like. I'm just doing my job, ma'am. Don't name them after me. That's my job. Like my life flashed before my eyes. There they are. I was in the fire truck that flipped over on. Military Road going through Rock Creek Park. My driver lost control of the apparatus as we were going downhill on curves. He did evasive action to avoid a car that was supposed to pull over to the right. One pulled over to the left, and that caused him to swerve quickly. And we're going down here on curves. He could never regain control. Last thing I remember, we hit the median strip, and I was knocked out. The guys told me when they got me out, my right eye was hanging out of the socket, and I counsel that event. Even after I retired, people tell me, man, I don't know how you got flew over a car when you hit the median strip. I was like, I couldn't tell you. I. The fact that all of us survived. I was hurt the worst. I was off a year on that.

01:30:35 **Kate Fogle**

Wow. And where were you, on the apparatus? Like where?

01:30:38 **Garry Wiggins**

I'm in the officer seat.

01:30:40 **Kate Fogle**

Wow. Okay.

01:30:42 **Garry Wiggins**

I had no brakes on my side. My driver, like I said, lost control. And boom. I woke up in the hospital. They tried—have you heard of the Rosenbaum case?

01:31:05 **Kate Fogle**

I think, maybe.

01:31:06 **Garry Wiggins**

A New York Times reporter who had, in the winter time, Thanksgiving, was found outside. They called an ambulance for him. My same company that flipped over, they ended up on that scene. And transporting him to the hospital. They took him to Howard Hospital, but because they didn't disclose he had a head injury, they tried to blame the Fire Department for not doing their job. I said this was wintertime. How well can you examine a person out on the street in the wintertime? Cold. You don't really realize what's going on, but the mighty New York Times was just like, oh, the Fire Department. It ended up not. The family ended up suing, but they didn't sue for money. They sued for change in how we operated. The Department again was trying to fire the guys who

it had previously tried to fire for the flipping of the fire truck. But I was there to defend them, even though I wasn't back to work at that time. I was like, look, you can't ask somebody to do more than what they did on the job, out on the field, out on the street at night, than what they did. You're after them because of something else. Even as time went on, it's like the firefighters did nothing wrong, but they still imposed a whole lot of changes on the Fire Department. Even though I was still recovering at the time, I was still able to try to help them keep their jobs. They actually fired them the next day and rehired them. Because once we set the lawyer on them, they're like, oh, okay, no, they're back on. But they didn't allow them to work. They just put them in a non-contact position with the public for about another six months or so before everything cleared up. That was about that main thing. The cadet program they're still kind of our pride and joy. We fought for that, and it's still going on. Class 26 just graduated, but the fact that it started in '86, and you're only up to 26 classes. Why is that? It had been stopped under Rubin. It took us a long time to get it back. I said, they should be in there in class 34 or something like that right. 38 actually.

01:34:46 **Kate Fogle**

Yeah.

01:34:46 **Garry Wiggins**

That's what it should be. It's still here. I still meet with them. Most of the classes that just graduated. all of them committed to joining the organization. I just gotta keep following up with them. I still gotta spoon feed them. I featured them in the Martin Luther King Parade. Got them in the march in the parade with me. I tried to get them out to do a little community service, not trying to push too much because I don't want to push too hard. I usually get the contract with the circus to provide first aid for them, and that's one of the fun events that you go get to see the circus for free. Just sitting there with a first aid bag. It's a matter of just being there when needed and enjoy it when you don't. That's how that goes.

01:35:51 **Kate Fogle**

Oh, that's wonderful.

01:35:53 **Garry Wiggins**

Yeah.

01:35:53 **Kate Fogle**

And then my last question to end, like to truly end on, is what are your hopes for DC Fire and EMS for the future. Just improving some of these areas?

01:36:08 **Garry Wiggins**

I just hope that these young generations—because it's a whole other generation behind me that didn't really get involved with us. I'm just hoping these young ones will be the new leaders coming up. That we're trying to arm them with our knowledge in the history of where we come from that can help them as they move forward on their careers. Hopefully, my daughter might end up being one of those new leaders.

01:36:47 **Kate Fogle**

Aw.

01:36:47 **Garry Wiggins**

We'll see. We'll see.

01:36:49 **Kate Fogle**

Oh, well that's wonderful. Well, is there anything else that you'd want to talk about or do you feel—

01:36:55 **Garry Wiggins**

I think I've covered it that I can think of right now.

01:36:58 **Garry Wiggins**

Yeah. Well, I just want to say again, thank you so much for your time. Just you coming down here, spending a few hours out of your afternoon. It means a lot. Thank you so much.

01:37:09 **Garry Wiggins**

Again, like I said, I'm right here in the community, so I'm like, I'm always willing to help.

01:37:14 **Kate Fogle**

Well, that's fantastic.