

Robert and Jan Banasik_8_9_24

00:00:04**Amy Mauro**

It's Friday, August 9th, 2024. My name is Amy Mauro. And it is about 1:00. And I'm here with Kate Fogle and Robert Banasik. And I'll ask you both to introduce yourselves and spell your last name as well.

00:00:24**Kate Fogle**

Hi, I'm Kate Fogle. I am the Foundation's project archivist working with photo and video.

00:00:35**Robert Banasik**

Robert Banasik, retired DC Fire department.

00:00:40**Amy Mauro**

And we are talking today as part of the oral history component of our project, which is the history of the DC fire and EMS Department in photos and videos and oral histories. And it is funded by grants from the Humanities, DC and DC Commission on Arts and Humanities. So this is just going to be a regular conversation. I should have explained again before the recording went on, but, the way it works is we will talk today. And there will be a transcript and I'm going to go over the transcript, edit it for clarity, and then send it to you to review. And if there's anything that you're not comfortable with, we can always redact it. And then it will be added to the Washingtoniana collection of the Martin Luther King Library in Washington, DC. And it will also be included as part of the website for the project that we are working on. Okay. So with that, why don't we just start from the beginning? Tell us where you were born and raised.

00:01:50**Robert Banasik**

Beginning is a good place to start. I was born and raised in Youngstown, Ohio in northeastern Ohio in 1939, which seems like an eon ago. I had no idea in the world that I wanted to be a firefighter at the time. At the time, Youngstown was kind of right in the heart of what they now call the Rust Belt. Back then, it was the steel belt. There were a lot of steel mills. And I was working as a machinist apprentice, or not working as the case may be, because there were layoffs and so forth. And one day, Jan's father happened to notice a very tiny ad in the local newspaper that there was an exam being given for the DC fire department, which at the time was under federal civil service. This was prior to Home Rule. And he suggested to Jan that it might be a good idea, and I eventually went ahead and did that, applied and took the examination because, well, it was a salary position. But I didn't hold much hope because, you know, I was from a smaller city, I guess you could say, and I just had no idea that I would be hired in Washington, DC for their fire department when I came here from northeastern Ohio. But I took the exam anyhow, received the grade, which was evidently acceptable because that was in February. I took the exam, and I received a letter in mid-summer to come and take a physical and go for an interview, and still didn't really have any idea that this was really a job that was being offered to me. But the two of us came to Washington, which, by the way, we had been to the previous year on our honeymoon.

00:04:08**Amy Mauro**

Jan is your wife?

00:04:09**Robert Banasik**

Yes.

00:04:09**Amy Mauro**

Okay. So you were married at the time when you decided to make this leap?

00:04:13**Robert Banasik**

Yes. Anyhow, after the interview, at which the personnel officer said, well, you'll probably be hired in a month or two. We were nowhere prepared to do this, but Jan happened to be with me because she wanted to come back

and see the city after we had been here the previous year. And we just kind of reacted. And that was in mid-August, and I was appointed 1st October. So it was just a kind of a whirlwind.

00:04:46 **Amy Mauro**

1961, is that right?

00:04:48 **Robert Banasik**

1961 yes. And it turned out that I loved the job. It just happened. Number one, it was a job. But then it very quickly, I realized after spending some time with these guys the first couple of days, I realized what a great job it was.

00:05:10 **Amy Mauro**

Before we get into the job, can I ask a little more about your background? Did you know anyone who was a firefighter? Did you know anything about the job?

00:05:19 **Robert Banasik**

No, not in our community.

00:05:20 **Amy Mauro**

Anyone in your family?

00:05:22 **Robert Banasik**

No. There was no ... there was no indication that, as I said, that this was a job that I would like or anything else. But no, there was no background at all.

00:05:35 **Amy Mauro**

Okay. And so tell us about your first days. Where were you assigned?

00:05:41 **Robert Banasik**

I was assigned to Engine 16, which at the time. Well, it's still at 1018 13th Street Northwest, but at the time it was across from the news building. The Washington Daily News, which is no longer in existence. I was appointed there and directly to the company because back then there was a backlog at the training academy, and so we were appointed, as I said, directly to the company, I had absolutely no idea what I was doing, but there was enough manpower to where I was allowed to be kind of a third, literally a third man on the engine. So normally there's two men on the back step, which is no longer something they do.

00:06:37 **Amy Mauro**

Four total on the engine. Is that right, four total people on the engine?

00:06:42 **Robert Banasik**

Five at the time. Oh five at the time - we had two piece engine companies. And there were naturally two drivers, an officer and two men on the back step. And I happened to ... I was the third man, so I just kind of hung on and did what they told me to do. I eventually went to the Academy in February of '62, so I spent four months before I ever went into the Academy. I caught on pretty quickly.

00:07:18 **Amy Mauro**

You say you "hung on." Were you still riding the outside of the engines at that point?

00:07:23 **Robert Banasik**

Hung on. Literally, yes.

00:07:25 **Amy Mauro**

Wow.

00:07:25 **Robert Banasik**

Yeah. We were still, you know, they just they said, okay, here's what you do. You get up here and you put your arm over this bar and you hang on. And that's what we did. And that's what everyone did. Every fire department -- there were the ladder companies and the truck companies and you just rode the side of the truck. And there was a bar to hang on to. It was amazing that most everyone seemed to hang on pretty well. We had very, very few accidents ... where people fell from the apparatus. So that really is how it all started. I had no idea, as I said earlier, that I wanted to be a firefighter. But that's how it all started. Now, I was assigned, as I said, to Engine 16. That was a pretty active company. And the personnel officer at the time, I can remember there were probably about 10 or 12 of us appointed at the time. And he realized I had no experience. A lot of the guys that I was appointed with were volunteers in the nearby, usually suburban Maryland, and he knew I had absolutely no experience. So he said, well, I'm going to assign you to Engine 16. He said, you'll get plenty of experience there. Which I did. And I stayed there until I got my first promotion in 1969.

00:09:06 **Amy Mauro**

What was Engine 16 like? Did you have any company officers or peers who stood out while you were there?

00:09:15 **Robert Banasik**

Yes. Several. I had probably what I considered my best company officer, a lieutenant by the name of George Mercado. He was just the right kind of guy for the job. He was calm, cool, and collected. He never issued an order. Well, he did, but I meant he would suggest things, for instance, around the firehouse and so forth. He he would never say, do this, do that. He would say, you know what? That really needs to be done. And on the fire ground he had, I would consider a sixth sense of what was going on. We several times had close calls, and he always seemed to make the right decision. ... I had 4 or 5 years on the job, but he was just someone that I learned a lot from. I also remember a deputy chief, William Sweeney, whom at the time they referred to as Big Red. I was fortunate to fill in as an aide to the deputy chief from time to time. So I drove him and I was his aide on the fire ground. And he also was a guy that never seemed to get excited, always made good decisions. That was the first time I heard the saying, "We didn't start this fire. We're just here to put it out. So just calm down." Those are two officers that I remember. There were a good many. I don't mean to say that they were only two. I learned a lot from my peers, other privates in the department that were drivers. That were technicians. They were senior to me, a few of whom were probably almost as old as my father ... And there were just too many to mention that I really got a lot from.

00:11:55 **Amy Mauro**

And was the headquarters still at Engine 16? When you were there, the fire chief?

00:12:02 **Robert Banasik**

The deputy chiefs. The deputy office was there. So it was really a good place to be because that was the battalion chief's quarters. It was the only four door firehouse in the city. So you had the battalion chief, the deputy chief, Engine 16 and Truck Company 3. It was referred to as the Big House. And on the third floor of that building was the Police and Fire Clinic.

00:12:29 **Amy Mauro**

Right. I remember that now.

00:12:31 **Robert Banasik**

So that's where it all took place.

00:12:34**Amy Mauro**

Have you been since it was renovated?

00:12:36**Robert Banasik**

Yes. I have been, in fact. I went when they had the dedication after the renovation, and they really did a neat job at that house.

00:12:52**Amy Mauro**

It's beautiful.

00:12:53**Robert Banasik**

One nice thing was they widened the doors because apparatus kept getting bigger and the doors weren't right.

00:13:02**Amy Mauro**

Okay, so you became a sergeant next, is that right?

00:13:05**Robert Banasik**

Yes. It was my first promotion. I was assigned to Engine 1. And sergeants were kind of roving fill-in officers whenever regular company officers were out. The sergeant filled in. But I was fortunate to be assigned to a company where the regular lieutenant was on extended sick leave prior to his retirement. So I was pretty much in that front seat every day. So instead of getting detailed around, I got detailed around enough to know the city a little bit, but I spent a lot of time at Engine 1 and my next promotion was to Lieutenant, at which time I stayed in that house and just went across the floor to Truck 2. I stayed in that company for a year or two and was transferred back to my old company in Engine 16. So I was lieutenant in the same house to which I was appointed. I don't know whether you want me to go through the rest of my promotions and so forth.

00:14:20**Amy Mauro**

Yeah, we can always go back in time after. Summarize your career.

00:14:25**Robert Banasik**

I spent some time in northeast. Rhode Island Avenue, Brentwood area, Brentwood village, it's called. And I spent a year or so there.

00:14:38**Amy Mauro**

Was it still Engine 26?

00:14:40**Robert Banasik**

26? Yeah. Truck 15. I was the Lieutenant. The truck company. And at the time, I was on the captain's list - the promotion list for captains. So I spent a little over a year there and then went all the way across the city. When I knew I was coming up for promotion, I asked to be put somewhere closer to home because we lived in the Falls Church, Virginia area, and that was a trek every day all the way to northeast. So anyhow, I got closer to home. I got real close to home to Engine 29 on MacArthur Boulevard, which was the slowest company in town. So I went from one of the fastest to one of the slowest, but it was kind of neat. It was an entirely different experience. That was really the place where you found where people paid more attention to you and what you were doing. I mean, we used to have neighbors come by the firehouse and visit with us, and you really got the feeling that you were appreciated, even though, thankfully for them, they didn't have to call you out very often. One thing was sure, though, if you went on a box alarm, you knew you had a fire in that area because there were no false

alarms there, and it was not very busy. But it was very interesting. And I spent three years there.

00:16:13 **Amy Mauro**

And so I want to make sure I'm keeping track. So you were a captain at Engine 29 and what year did you go to 29 then?

00:16:21 **Robert Banasik**

Approximately 1976.

00:16:24 **Amy Mauro**

Okay.

00:16:25 **Robert Banasik**

And I was there until 79, early 79. I still have the copy of my personnel list with dates of promotion and all that. But that's on another level. In 1979, I went back to Engine 1 as a captain and spent a little over a year as the captain of the engine company. And in 1980 there was a big exodus from the Department. It had to do with retirement, cost of living increases. And for the guys that had a lot of time on the job, it was very advantageous for them. As far as their COLA that they would receive upon retirement for them to go. So there were a lot of upper level officers that went and all of a sudden, I went from being the captain of Engine 1 to being a second battalion chief. That was in October of 1980, staying at that house again. So I spent a lot of time on 23rd. Very fortunate. I spent probably another three years there and got transferred. Not something I asked for, but you go where they send you. I was transferred to the 8th Battalion all the way across the city in far northeast. Spent approximately three years there, perhaps 3 to 4 years there. My last transfer was to the fourth Battalion, The fourth Battalion Chief's office is at 14th and Newton in the quarters of Engine 11 and Truck 6. And from there is where I retired in 1990. February 28th, 1990.

00:18:29 **Amy Mauro**

As a battalion chief. I am not familiar with the 8th Battalion. We've got seven battalions now, and we call the training Academy the 8th Battalion. So I've learned something.

00:18:41 **Robert Banasik**

They eliminated a battalion that at the time was Engine 27, 30 and 19, Truck 17. It was a small battalion. I only had four companies. So that was one of the reasons they kind of eliminated one and kind of incorporated it in ... I think those houses are in what is now called the 6th Battalion.

00:19:04 **Amy Mauro**

The 3rd.

00:19:05 **Robert Banasik**

I haven't really kept up with it that much, but okay.

00:19:10 **Amy Mauro**

So you spent a lot of time in downtown Washington, D.C..

00:19:14 **Robert Banasik**

Most of my time downtown.

00:19:15 **Amy Mauro**

Yes, and saw a lot of changes, I imagine, in the city. Can you tell us how the job changed, how the environment did.

00:19:24**Robert Banasik**

But it was a good place to be and you got to do some kind of exciting things. You know, we were first due at the White House and never had to respond to a fire at the White House. But in the quarters of Engine 16 we kept what we called a crash truck, a foam vehicle that was kept there to stand by whenever there was a helicopter landing on the South Lawn. So we would jump on that thing and go to the White House and go in the southwest gate and stand by for helicopter landings, either there or on the monument grounds later on. They used to use the monument grounds. So you got to do that. I was occasionally allowed to go on security details for some of the inauguration balls. We would have firemen standing by in the wings, I mean in the just out of the way. And just in case, you know. I remember President Kennedy used to do his press conferences in the State Department auditorium. And I can remember going there and standing right in the wings while the president was on stage. And it was kind of a thrill to be involved in things like that. So it was more than just fighting fires. That was a lot of excitement.

00:21:09**Amy Mauro**

Did you ever meet the presidents when you were at the landings?

00:21:14**Robert Banasik**

No. Never. Not that I can remember now. my biggest thrill with those security details was one time being assigned to the opening day ball game of the Senators, where the president throws out the first pitch. And my station part of that time, part of that day, was in the dugout, and I got to sit in a major league dugout. And I was just a kid back then. And that was pretty thrilling. I was a big baseball fan. I got to sit in a major league dugout.

00:21:58**Amy Mauro**

Nice.

00:22:08**Robert Banasik**

Okay, I've got a note here that says highlights. I guess I've outlined a few of those highlights.

00:22:14**Amy Mauro**

Tell us what stands out in your memory from your career? The more positive things. Highlights is fine as well.

00:22:27**Robert Banasik**

You mean incidents?

00:22:31**Amy Mauro**

Any fires or large incidents that you remember? I know we're going to talk about the riots, but, kind of outside of that, anything that stands in your memory.

00:22:40**Robert Banasik**

I recall one fire that was the only one similar to that, like that, that I had ever responded to. And it was a lumber yard in northwest, I think it was around 9th and V at the time, and I was assigned as lieutenant of Engine 16, and it was the middle of winter. I recall this specifically, it was 17 degrees outside, and the wind was blowing about 30 miles an hour in the middle of the night. I was in my room, in bed, and I just kind of overheard the speaker from downstairs, put a box out for that lumber yard. And I realized, you know, the wind, it, the cold and everything, that this was just not going to be ordinary. And I'll never forget, I just swung out over the edge of my bed, and I put a sweatshirt on that I had on the table next to the bed. I put a sweatshirt on and zipped it up because I knew we were going. And sure enough, the first company on the scene, Engine 4, asked for a second alarm, and it was with the wind blowing and everything else, and there were open air lumber racks. And it was

just almost fully involved. I still have a picture hanging downstairs of me after the whole thing was out. And then I got icicles hanging off of my helmet and everything.

00:24:16 **Amy Mauro**

I feel like I think we have photos of that fire. That sounds familiar. We'd be happy to share them with you.

00:24:22 **Kate Fogle**

I think we have some photos from that.

00:24:26 **Robert Banasik**

I think it was W.T. Gallagher was the company. That's a lumber company.

00:24:30 **Amy Mauro**

That sounds right. Yeah. There was definitely a lumber yard fire. And also, I remember, you know, lots of icicles, too, but that's probably a lot of fires.

00:24:42 **Robert Banasik**

Well the reason being it was strictly what we refer to as a heavy duty device, ladder pipes, wagon pipes, that sort of thing. Very, very few handlines in service. And with the wind blowing and the water all flying around ... And I remember when it was time to go back to quarters, we couldn't even roll the hose because it was frozen stiff. And they had to send a truck from the apparatus division, and we folded the hose in half and put it in the back of that truck to take down to the apparatus division to thaw out until we get our hose back. So that stood out as there were a few more. There were a couple of close calls. I went part way through a roof one time at a bottling company, a bottling plant, which was at the time located right near Fire Department headquarters, at the time was Vermont Avenue Northwest. Walking foolishly across a roof where the fire was underneath me and and got to a soft spot and went partway through. But fortunately I had a hose line with me, a charge line. And when I did, I was able to catch it under my arms and crawl out of the hole and do a crab walk back. Back to safety. So that was a couple that stood out.

00:26:24 **Amy Mauro**

And so tell us where you were on April 4th, 1968.

00:26:31 **Robert Banasik**

April the 4th. I was attending a retirement party for a battalion chief. I believe it was Wayne Somerville. But the retirement party was at Bethesda-Chevy Chase in a big hall there, and the retirement party was there. Henry Gallota was the fire chief, and he attended that party. And part way through the evening, he stood up and cautioned us that things were starting to heat up, literally in the District, and that we should be prepared to get back, to be called up to work in the morning whether or not we were assigned a day off or not. And what he was referring to was Plan F, which the fire Department instituted to ... I guess the F stood for full mobilization because, instead of a day platoon, a night platoon, and a platoon off, the off-duty platoon was split and half of that platoon, depending upon which group you're assigned, half of that platoon went to day work, half of them went to night work. And the two-piece engine companies I mentioned earlier were split into individual units. So you had Engine 16 wagon, Engine 16 pumper. So you had almost double the manpower. And instead of 32 engine companies, you could have as many as 64 because they split the companies. So sure enough, when I got back home late that night, Janet said the firehouse called, and you're supposed to report for duty in the morning. So I did, and that was Friday morning. I was a driver, but there were three pieces of apparatus available, one of which was a reserve pumper that was put into service as Engine 16, are for reserve. But some of the other drivers got in there before I did. So there wasn't a piece for me to drive, so they assigned me to the crash truck. The Mx5 Navy crash truck for the day, and another fellow and I were assigned to that. And things were quiet on Friday morning. But then the schools let out early. And when the schools let out in the middle of the day, all of a sudden, things started happening and the house emptied. There were only the two of us in there. And I remember vividly there was a men's clothing store at the corner of 14th and I on the other side of Franklin Park. And they looted that store and set it on fire, and there was nothing we could do. And I believe Arlington County

came in and took care of that fire. We had a lot of mutual aid from both sides of the District.

00:29:45 **Amy Mauro**

Why do you say there was nothing you could do? Was it just too big? It was too far gone. And there was just two of you, or.

00:29:50 **Robert Banasik**

There was just the two of us. And we didn't have any apparatus. We had a Navy crash truck, but there wasn't anything we could do with that.

00:29:58 **Amy Mauro**

Okay. I guess I wasn't following the type of truck.

00:30:02 **Robert Banasik**

So that was the rest of the day. And at the time, we had a couple of guys come in in the afternoon and relieved us, and we left. We got the heck out of Dodge. It turned out that we just barely beat the all hands on deck thing, where nobody was supposed to be relieved for Friday night, but he and I got out of there early and went home, but reported to work the next morning. And the piece of apparatus that I was assigned to was made available because one of the officers had gone on sick leave and one of the drivers became an acting sergeant. And so I was a driver again. And that was all day Saturday daytime and all day Sunday. Mostly 14th Street, 7th Street, those two corridors. 14th Street on Saturday. Seventh Street on Sunday. Uh, things started quieting down on Monday, and I don't recall exactly when plan F was taken out of effect, but it was a few days later where we went back to being normal again.

00:31:22 **Amy Mauro**

And on Saturday and Sunday. Were you in a more traditional apparatus? Were you actually engaged in fire suppression?

00:31:29 **Robert Banasik**

Oh, yes. 14th and 7th Street. Oh, yes.

00:31:31 **Amy Mauro**

What was that like?

00:31:34 **Robert Banasik**

Well, there was some freelancing going on because you may have been originally dispatched on an alarm to a specific location, but there were times when you went back in service and they just sent you on another one, or you happened upon something on your way back to quarters, and there was no one there. But in our case, we were going back to 16 from a fire in the, I think it was the 1400 block of Harvard Street, an apartment building. And we were on our way back to quarters and came across a drugstore around 14th and Belmont, and fire was rolling out onto the sidewalk. And we were just there, just the four of us. And we were able to connect to a hydrant and at least knock the fire down. We didn't do any overhaul, but we knocked the fire down before we went back to quarters. So there was a lot of that going on. Same way on Sunday. You just, your company officer was in charge of the fire. That was it. He might have been the only one. There might have been another company with you. And in one case, we were able to commandeer a pumper with just a driver, and they were able to put him on a plug so he could supply enough water so we could supply heavy duty devices. But it was ... it wasn't chaotic, but there was a lot of scrambling going on Saturday and Sunday, both. And by Sunday they had called in the National Guard and things had started to quiet down a little bit, but they were still, we were on 7th Street on Sunday, and I remember there was still tear gas floating around. And in fact, I got a whiff of it before I was able to put my mask on out in the middle of the street. And like I said, after that, it kind of quieted down. But there were a few days there where it was pretty hectic.

00:33:42 **Amy Mauro**

And what's going through your mind as you're walking these streets?

00:33:50 **Robert Banasik**

Uh, the only time I can remember something really going through my mind was - this is entirely apart from the riots. I was still at 16, and we ran a fire on 15th Street northwest downtown. And the fire was in the basement. And we were assigned to cover an exposure in the lower part of the basement. But it was a pretty large fire. It was in the Sheraton building. And so we went downstairs and you couldn't see your hand in front of your face, and it wasn't really hot, but it you could feel it. And so we were just supposed to stand by and cover that exposure. I had a 30-minute mask on. My lineman had a 15-minute mask, which didn't last very long. They never lasted 15 minutes or 30 minutes. Anyhow, his alarm went off and I sent him out to get another mask because I was down there by myself and the hose line was your way out. If anything ever happened, you had that hose line to follow to get back out. And I was turning around or something like that. I dropped the line and I started feeling around on the floor for it. And what? This is exactly what? Through my head. What am I doing here? Well, I quickly located that line on the floor and pretty soon my line man came back in and everything was okay after that. But I did have that one time. It was like, what in the world am I doing here?

00:35:38 **Amy Mauro**

Fair question. Jan, do you mind if I ask you? I mean, there is all this chaos happening in Washington, DC, and your husband is is down there. What was that like?

00:35:51 **Jan Banasik**

Well, at the time, we had two small children. Let's see, Beth would have been four and Bob was two, and they always had a telephone booth in the firehouse so you could call in the evening or whatever and say good night, that sort of thing. The children could talk to the father or whatever. But you could ring that thing 24 hours and no one ever answered it because they were all out on the street. So you just never knew when they were coming back. It was pretty frightening. And the more you watched the news, the worse it got because they were showing all kinds of things. And of course there was a lot of smoke. We lived in Arlington at the time, so I remember taking the children and going down to Saint Agnes Church, where we went to church and looking across because you could see all the way into the city. At that time, it was not all built up and, looking at the smoke and just thinking, what in the world? You know what is happening? How is this going to end? When are they coming home? Are they okay? Are they getting food? You know, I mean, mothers always think of those things. You have to eat and go to sleep, you know?

00:37:24 **Amy Mauro**

And firefighters don't think of food and sleep.

00:37:27 **Robert Banasik**

No, no.

00:37:29 **Jan Banasik**

I learned that pretty quickly between Bob and our son, Bob. Between the two of them, you know. Yeah. Many nights, never getting back into the bed or getting in it at all. It's made. And it's still made in the morning because they never got to bed.

00:37:50 **Robert Banasik**

That happened to me one time. Once. Well, more than once. But one time I remember, I was acting deputy fire chief and at the quarters of Engine 2 at the time, and there was a train derailment coming into town off of New Hampshire Avenue Northeast, and the 4th Battalion chief was assigned to that box, and he held all units. So I went up there, and it was early at night, still in the evening. And it turned out the derailment involved some cars toward the tail end of the train. The engineer didn't realize that it had happened until they got to almost to near the metro station of ... Don't recall where. Anyhow, it turned out that part of that train had drums that contained

nitrocellulose, highly explosive. We were in the process of evacuating the neighborhood when we found out that the drums that contained the nitrocellulose were empty, but they had not yet been purged. So the waybills still had to say nitrocellulose. But it was it was kind of touch and go there for a while, trying to avoid an explosion, get all the people out of the neighborhood because it was in a residential neighborhood up in far ... northwest. But I remember getting back to quarters in the morning, and my bed was still nicely made and I never got in it. Spent all night on the fire ground.

00:40:01 **Amy Mauro**

So what was the conversation in the firehouse during and after the riots? I imagine it's, you know, it's a kind of a period of transition for the city. And, the department had never experienced something like that. Do you remember what the mood was and what people talked about?

00:40:20 **Robert Banasik**

Well, I remember saying ... guys around me saying that we never realized how much fire that one company could put out until you had to because there was so much. As I said, there was freelancing going on. When plan F was discontinued, we went back to normal. And, I mean, we talked about it for a while, told fire ground stories, but, most everyone was involved, with the exception, perhaps, of some of the way outlying companies, but even then, some of them were called in. Transferring in, that sort of thing. Now, you asked for highlights. That's some of the highlights, the riots. And like I said, that one big lumber yard fire.

00:41:28 **Robert Banasik**

I also have to say there were times in the department, unfortunately, that were not so good. It had to do with, after Home Rule, the Department's budget was slashed a few times. Supplies were in short supply - cleaning materials, that sort of thing. I mean, something as simple as that. The companies would spend their own money to buy cleaning supplies to keep the firehouse clean. Apparatus was in poor repair. It was just wearing out, and there was no apparatus to replace it. They weren't spending any money. This was, I would say, early 80s. It didn't have anything to do so much with the hierarchy of the department. It had to do with the city and cutting the department's budget. The department went as far as to put companies out of service for lack of manpower. They weren't hiring anyone. And sometimes, just because of lack of manpower, they would put companies out of service for a whole shift and detail those people to other companies. And that went on for a while until and I'm not sure exactly when this happened, but there was a fatal fire and the company that normally would have been first due there was out of service. Now, whether or not that fatality would have happened in regular circumstances, we'll never know. But that kind of got everyone's attention and they stopped doing that. But that was a period of time when things were just not that great in the department. Everyone was doing their job. But I'd be lying if I said there was no grumbling going on because there was. Yeah, it was kind of hard to put up with when the guys were putting themselves on the line and to have the city just kind of. Oh, well ... So that was, I would say. Just kind of a not a good situation.

00:44:12 **Amy Mauro**

Did you guys ever worry about your own safety when there were those supply shortages, or was it more about the threats to the public safety?

00:44:21 **Robert Banasik**

No. It was nothing to worry about. I mean, we, you know, apparatus was workable, but it was just not in good condition. We never considered that being a hazard to us. Other than the fact that I remember one particular instance when the engine company was assigned a reserve piece that had a hole in the back step. It had rusted through and it was that bad of condition. And we had actually had a hose wagon with a hole in the back step. The guys had to watch where they put their feet. So that was one of the few times that was just kind of a low light, I guess you could call it.

00:45:13 **Amy Mauro**

And the others?

00:45:16 **Robert Banasik**

Not that I can think of right off hand.

00:45:19 **Amy Mauro**

You and I talked about Tommy Turner's death. Can you tell us a little more about that day? If you don't mind?

00:45:27 **Robert Banasik**

That was a lowlight. I was assigned as a lieutenant to Truck 2 and I had been promoted to that house not too long before, so I knew Tommy. He was on the other shift, but I knew him. And it might have been a weekend afternoon. I know it was afternoon and Engine 16 was dispatched to that box at L between 4th and 5th, which used to come in false from time to time from the street box. And there wasn't much around there, but there was this big old building, I guess. I don't know, it might have been four stories, an old warehouse that was abandoned. And they struck a second alarm on the box, and Truck 2 was second due on the second, which put us kind of in the rear position. We took a position on the east side of the building. There was a big vacant lot there, and we were going to put the ladder pipe in service. The second floor, I mean, the top floor was pretty well involved and 16 had gone in and taken a hand line in there. Well, they were ordered out, but it took a while to come out of the building. And I can remember I told the truck driver when we put the ladder pipe in, I was going around to the front of the building so I could get an angle to see how well we were doing with that stream. And as I walked around to the front of the building so I could look up, Engine 16 was coming out and Tommy, I believe, was the last one out. And about that time there was a parapet that gave way, bricks and that sort of thing. And it just it hit him. He was the only one and of course, taken to the hospital, but he died a short time later. That was the one fatality I recall. There were a couple of others on fires which I was not dispatched. I can remember a couple of other line of duty deaths, but that was one where I was present and having known him and all. It was kind of ... Kind of hard to take.

00:48:05 **Amy Mauro**

Yeah. Of course. Well, thanks for sharing that with us.

00:48:22 **Robert Banasik**

The department. This is just a note. The evolution of the department.

00:48:27 **Amy Mauro**

Yes.

00:48:29 **Robert Banasik**

I don't know a whole lot about what's going on now because I'm not there any longer. Although those luncheons to which you came that one time, there are some guys that are either newly retired or are still active, will occasionally show up. So you kind of get some idea about what's going on. One of the big things that happened in the department was after I retired, they went from two-piece engine companies to single piece engine companies, which is the standard.

00:49:07 **Amy Mauro**

That happened as late as 1990?

00:49:10 **Robert Banasik**

It happened in the 90s. It was after I retired. But at the time, we were just so used to having these two pieces of apparatus. It gave you tremendous flexibility instead of - there were times instead of laying out from a plug on your way in, you would go to the front of the building and the pumper would go to a plug by himself to the rear positions, which gave you a lot of flexibility in rear positions. But it was really an expenditure because you had twice as many pieces of apparatus to purchase and maintain, and equipment was improving. One of the big pieces of equipment, it wasn't very big. It was something that attached to the hydrant, which allowed other companies to use that hydrant after you were attached. Now, when we had pumpers, the pumper used a sleeve.

Big sleeve to attach to the hydrant. If other units came in and wanted to lay out lines from that height, they could lay out to that pumper with no longer having that second piece. There was a valve that they developed that would allow that company to use the plug, and then another company to use off of that valve. I won't go into great detail about it, but anyhow, it allowed for a little flexibility there. And if you look around every department in the country now, they're single piece companies.

00:50:56 **Amy Mauro**

So that was a big change.

00:50:58 **Robert Banasik**

It was, it took some getting used to. But on the other hand, it freed up a lot of money for apparatus. And there was a period of time when, as I said earlier, money was in very short supply.

00:51:19 **Amy Mauro**

I'm sorry. I don't want to interrupt your train of thought. The fatal fire that you referenced when the department's resources were low. Do you remember around what year that was or where it was?

00:51:34 **Robert Banasik**

That was while I was still at 2 Truck. So that was probably around 71, 71 or 72, in that area. I forget the exact date of that fire. But that was about 71 or 72.

00:51:55 **Amy Mauro**

Okay. Sorry I interrupted. So you were going to say - we were talking about the apparatus. It was a big change, but it freed up money, I think is where you were going.

00:52:05 **Robert Banasik**

Yeah. There was a period of time when the department went from purchasing what we referred to as custom fire apparatus. They were companies Pierce and Seagrave, and that's what they made was fire trucks. Well, they started instead of buying custom apparatus, they would buy commercial chassis, usually Ford, and put pumps on them. And they were just not really made to handle the everyday in and out of pumping jobs where you might be there pumping for hours, even to the extent where sometimes you had to refuel. So commercial chassis just did not stand up very well. And now they're back to buying, right?

00:53:02 **Amy Mauro**

They're back to customization.

00:53:04 **Robert Banasik**

And I don't know exactly who - they're probably Pierce and Seagrave. Seagrave made one of the best aerial ladders ever.

00:53:17 **Amy Mauro**

I guess the question on evolution was more when you think back to your first day in 1961, and then when you retired in 1990. That's a long period of time where the department must have seen many changes. What do you remember was sort of the most striking change during your time there? One of them may have been taking over EMS and doing more EMS work.

00:53:48 **Robert Banasik**

Completely forgot about that. When I was first appointed, there was no such thing as an EMT, right? No medical technicians. They were ambulance guys. If you rode the ambulance, if you were a technician assigned to the ambulance, you got technician two pay. So you got a little more money to do that. And some guys

actually like riding the ambulance, which is what we refer to it as: riding the ambulance. And medical responses then involved mostly transport. You know, as I said, there were no EMTs, certainly no paramedics. And when I was first appointed, there were seven ambulances and there was one, casualty hospital, which I think now is Doctors Hospital on Capitol Hill. Casualty hospital had their own ambulance but that was it. There were seven ambulances for the entire city. And I remember the first time, my first and only time I ever rode the ambulance, I was at Engine 16 as a private and came into work and they detailed me to Engine 2. Engine 2 at the time was down on 12th Street, and I left my car and walked down there with my gear, and I walked in the front door and the captain of the squad said, are you from Engine 16? Yes, sir. You're assigned to the ambulance. And I said, there must be some mistake. They told me I was going to Engine 2. He said, you're assigned to the ambulance. And I said, but I've never ridden the ambulance. He said, do you have an advanced first aid card? I said yes, sir. He said, you're on the ambulance. We had 13 runs that night and I had absolutely no experience. But that was what emergency medical was back then. It was just like, load them up. And I don't mean to say there wasn't some care giving, but, you know, there was no I.V. lines. There wasn't any heart monitors or anything like that. It was just the nearest hospital.

00:56:08 **Robert Banasik**

The next thing that happened was EMTs. Well, first off, anyone being hired had to go through EMT training, and almost all the guys on the back step went through EMT training. I had just been promoted to sergeant. They weren't sending officers. They were just sending the back step guys. So I never received any EMT Training. I was on a lot of calls when they started sending engine companies along with the ambulances, and you kind of get a little OJT there. So they started hiring civilians for the ambulance service, and they had their own hierarchy. They had supervisors and so forth. That worked, but it wasn't always the best situation. I always thought there was a us and them type situation with the civilians. And I think has changed now and for the better. With paramedic engine companies which, by the way, our son was used to the whole time in Fairfax County. It was paramedic engine companies. Every company had a paramedic. Emergency medical response started to get a lot better back then and it is to this day. To my knowledge again, I have been gone from the job for all that period of time. I don't know exactly how well it's working, but I do know I think every house in the city now has at least a basic life support unit assigned to it, if not ALS. Yes. So they went from seven ambulances to ...

00:58:18 **Amy Mauro**

It's in the 40s now. I never get that number exactly right. But including the 17 medic units and the rest are ambulances and 21 paramedic engine companies.

00:58:32 **Robert Banasik**

Yeah, I think some of the surrounding counties are staffed all the way. Every engine company has a paramedic assigned and it's gone from being, like I said, an earlier us and them type thing now to where everyone is on the same page, both salary wise, because there was a real discrepancy there in who was getting paid what and what their duties were and all that sort of thing. So it's got to be a lot better now.

00:59:07 **Amy Mauro**

I think it is. I was part of that policy decision to unify the workforce.

00:59:13 **Robert Banasik**

Oh, is that right?

00:59:13 **Amy Mauro**

I agree with you that it's definitely an improvement. It was very distracting when it was not that way.

00:59:23 **Robert Banasik**

Well and then you had a uniformed officer that oversaw the whole thing. Right. But then under him were civilians. And then they had to answer to company officers in the firehouse. And like I said, in some cases it

didn't work very well. Not all cases, but there were some where you had a lot of this.

00:59:53 **Amy Mauro**

Yeah. Do you want to look at your notes and I'll look at mine. Let's see.

00:59:59 **Jan Banasik**

What about integration and the addition of women?

01:00:06 **Robert Banasik**

Oh yeah. That's a good one. Talk about evolution. When I was first appointed, there were three companies still that were black companies. Engine 4, Engine 7, and Engine 27. And, you know, Washington was basically a southern city. And that's the way it was when I was appointed. They eventually integrated and everyone just got along. But there was, you know, there was some, uh, feelings there that well, there, you know, that's them. And this is us. And it turned out that the companies that were still segregated companies were very active. Engine 4 was one of the most active in the city. And 27 also. 7, I think might have been integrated right about the time I was appointed. I don't recall prior to that, I think it might have been Engine 13. At any rate, uh, by probably my third or fourth year on the job, I think all the companies were integrated. So we all learned to get along. And as far as women on the job. I always - believe me, I am not, uh, what's the word I'm searching for here?

01:02:00 **Jan Banasik**

I don't know. [Laughter]

01:02:04 **Robert Banasik**

I am not against women in the fire service as such. Never was. But I disagreed with something being given to them that, for instance, they didn't have to lift as much. They didn't have to do this. They didn't have to do that. If they could do that, fine. But there was a period of time when the department was hiring people who physically could not handle the job. And I don't know how much more I can say about being physically able to do it. They kind of early on, the ones who couldn't handle the job just kind of weeded themselves out and went to other divisions and that sort of thing. Went to personnel, went to administrative. I knew a few women who were quite able to handle the job both physically and mentally and everything else. And I was on their side. But there was a period of time when there was a lot of slack being cut as far as being able to physically handle the job. So I think it's to the point now to where, at least according to our son, who's been through that as an officer in the Fairfax County Fire Department, you know, they go through the same training, they do the same thing, and they're able to handle the job. So more power to them.

01:03:46 **Amy Mauro**

Same standards now in DC for women and men.

01:03:50 **Robert Banasik**

So I hope you understand where I'm coming from with that.

01:03:53 **Amy Mauro**

I do. Yeah. Tell us about your son's decision to become a firefighter. Were you happy with that development?

01:04:05 **Robert Banasik**

Oh, yeah. I was the one who suggested it. He was in his early 20s at the time and had a good job, but it was physically, very physically demanding. And even for him, that was something because he to this day is in excellent physical condition. But it was a pretty physically demanding job, and he was making good money. But I guess he was living at home at the time. He had moved out and sold that house. And one day he came in from work and I said, you know, you ought to think about the fire department. I said I don't have this big thing about you following in my footsteps. But I said, you know, I know you, and I know I think you'd like it. Well, he had a

friend who was a volunteer in the Vienna Fire Department. So he eventually decided to apply and become a volunteer, went through training and everything else he had to do to pass EMT. That was first. If you didn't pass EMT training, you were out. So he went through training at the fire academy and one of the first nights he spent on duty with the paid men at Vienna. He came home in the morning, and I'm pretty sure he said something like, Dad, I see what those guys do and I like it. So that was kind of like me. I mean, after I saw what was going on and saw everyone working together. So anyhow, he went and took the exam. It took him two exams to get on ... that was an experience for him... Yeah, had he not done that.

01:09:26 **Amy Mauro**

So tell us. I just I have a few more questions. Kate, please feel free to chime in. Tell us what you loved about being a firefighter.

01:09:35 **Robert Banasik**

I'll tell you what I've said to so many people over the years. It was the most exciting thing I ever did in my whole life. And then I kind of tempered that by saying, except when I married my wife.

01:09:49 **Jan Banasik**

That's an obligation.

01:09:54 **Robert Banasik**

And of course, you always had the feeling like you helped people out and saved people's lives and you saved property damage and that sort of thing. But it was exciting. And when I was appointed, I was appointed effective Sunday. All appointments were effective on the first day of the week on Sunday. I didn't actually report to fire department headquarters until Monday, because I had to have some dental work done before I was appointed, and I went to the physical and they said, you've got to have this dental work done. So I had to report back on Saturday to be reexamined and make sure all that had been done. So I did, and I checked in ... I drove into the District. I had no idea where I was going to stay. I didn't have much money because at the time I was collecting unemployment. I'd been laid off from my job as a machinist, and I drove into the District, stopped and got a phone book out. Back then, they had phone booths. I looked up the YMCA. Well, first off, I bought a newspaper and looked for rooms to rent, and I didn't know my way around the District at all. So now what do I do? So I looked up the YMCA and it was at the time - it was the 1800th block of G Street. I think they're still there. I don't know. And I went there and got a room for the night and showed up Saturday. That was Friday evening. Showed up Saturday morning at the clinic and went through my exam. Bingo. It was all done, and there was a uniformed firefighter who had been assigned light duty at the clinic who kind of I had met when I first took my physical, and he was there again. And he kind of took a shine to me, I guess. And he said, where are you staying? And I said, the YMCA. He said, oh, we can do better than that. So as we mentioned earlier, the clinic being on the third floor at the time, he takes me downstairs to the deputy chief's office and introduces me to Chief Boss. That's kind of neat. The Deputy chief's name was boss.

01:12:11 **Robert Banasik**

That's right. He introduced me to Chief Boss and he said, this young man is going to be appointed on Monday, but he needs a place to stay over the weekend. And so chief picked up the phone and called a friend of his, who was a captain of Truck 2 and again sent me there. That was a new house. That had just been built the previous year. And he said, go down there, they'll put you up for the weekend. So I marched myself into the firehouse and was warmly greeted by everyone there. It was a long Saturday, which ... backing up a little bit. Back then the workweek was 60 hours and there were only two shifts. And you worked five days on day, worked ten-hour days, five nights on night, work your days off, advanced every week so that you never had the same two days off. And anyhow, long Saturday was where you made the shift from day work to night work. So you work day work. And then you came in on Saturday morning and worked 24 hours, and then you were on night work for a week. So I happened to show up there at 1 Engine on a long Saturday, and on long Saturdays they cooked breakfast, lunch and dinner. So I showed up there around lunchtime and they said, oh, come on in and have lunch and fix lunch. And I wanted to pay for it, whatever it was. Now I know, don't you know it's on us? So came dinner time to cook. Fix a nice dinner. They invited me in to have dinner on the guys again, and I thought, wow, this is really something. So I got along. They were really nice guys. And I got along with them. And I'll

never forget, on Sunday, I showed up and there was a different crew working, and I said something about dinner and they said, or dinner or lunch, whatever it was. Well, we only cook on long Saturdays and holy mackerel, what do I eat now? But anyhow, I stayed there for the weekend and then was appointed to the company on Monday morning. I still had no place to stay because Jan was still at home, taking care of all of our business up there, getting ready to move and all that sort of thing. So I stayed in the firehouse for a week or two until one day the chief's aide on the other shift came to me and said, looking for a place to stay. I said, yeah. He said, my mother has rented rooms on Rittenhouse, near the corner of 12th and Michigan Avenue up right near Catholic University. Anyhow, she was a widow lady and had this big old house about three doors from the corner and rented rooms for a dollar a day. So I went there and stayed with her for a month and a half, I guess. You know, October. And until Jan finally came down in November and we moved. But I just was so taken by how these guys were. And as I said, the excitement of it all was really something. So I knew right away that I had made the right decision because like I said, her dad, I've still got the, the a copy of the announcement. That's it.

01:16:12 **Kate Fogle**

Can we have this?

01:16:15 **Amy Mauro**

Is this an extra? I'll take a picture of it.

01:16:18 **Jan Banasik**

It wasn't a want ad. It was just in the newspaper. Just in the news.

01:16:24 **Robert Banasik**

Just the general news.

01:16:26 **Amy Mauro**

\$5,160 per year. Oh, and they've got the height requirement.

01:16:32 **Robert Banasik**

Oh, yeah. Then I got another whole list of requirements here, and it was pretty stringent. Teeth, extremities. Lungs. Heart and blood vessels. Genital. Urinary nervous system. There were a lot of surprises.

01:16:58 **Amy Mauro**

So how does your service with the fire department continue to impact you today?

01:17:04 **Robert Banasik**

Well. You see it here. The retirement is beyond belief. I had back then. I had absolutely no idea that retirement would be this good to me financially ... So it has affected me, impacted us quite, quite well.

01:18:11 **Amy Mauro**

I forgot to ask about the leadership of the Department. Any fire chiefs that stand out during your tenure who you admired?

01:18:23 **Robert Banasik**

I mentioned Chief Galotta a little earlier. Maybe it's because I knew him a little bit, because when I was appointed, he was a deputy chief on the other shift. But I knew him, and he was 100% for the guys on the street. In a few years to come, I drove him occasionally as a fill-in aide when he was a fire chief. He lived off of Oregon Avenue Northwest. And he was just the kind of guy that I considered was number one. He was a firefighter. He was promoted up through the system, and he had the interest of the men on first and foremost. I'll never forget there was one time that ... At the time, I was a fill-in aide for the assistant fire chief this particular

day. And not that I got to do that all that much, but I did do that occasionally and that was day work, naturally. And I was at fire department headquarters, which at the time was on McMillan drive. And a firefighter the previous day or two had been taken to the hospital with smoke inhalation. And I was there in his office, outside of his office, when he got the news that this firefighter had been taken to the hospital with smoke inhalation and he went off the rails. He said, I spent all this money to make sure that everybody has breathing apparatus. And it was not so much the firefighter but the firefighter's officer that he was [concerned with]. This guy did not have breathing apparatus on. So that said to me that he was a firefighter's fire chief. The rest of them I didn't know too well. Chief Johnson, oh that picture is downstairs -- my promotion picture. Burton Johnson handed me my certificate when I made captain ... I knew Chief Coleman because Chief Coleman was a Second Battalion chief when I was a captain at 29. So he was my battalion chief. And I did know Coleman, and he came up through the ranks.

01:21:34**Robert Banasik**

There were a couple that I didn't particularly agree with. For one thing, when the department started going outside the department to find a fire chief, I didn't really feel that that was necessary. Because it's one thing if you're a small town, it's another thing if you're a major city and you have a department of... I forget how many back then. 13 or 1500 uniformed personnel. You should be able to find somebody that has come up through the ranks one way or another. I mean, other divisions. I remember Raymond Roberts when Chief Millard Sutton was the fire chief when I was appointed. He was an old salt tough guy. I remember standing in line when we lined up there and the fire chief's office the day we were appointed, and he marched back and forth in front of us and said, boys, I'll have one thing to say to you. Don't ever be late. And I took that the last thing in the world I needed was to lose that job. So being late was just not on anyhow. Raymond Roberts replaced him and he came through the Fire Prevention Division, but also had come up through the ranks. So as I said, a department the size of the district, if they can't find somebody within the department. Now, lately I think that's been happening with some of them ... I know Tom Tippet. Tom became fire chief after I retired, but I understand Tom did a real good job. And as a matter of fact, I was appointed with his brother Mike. Mike and I went through the Academy together, and so. And. I think they're doing the right thing now, at least the last couple of times. Promoting from within the department.

01:23:48**Amy Mauro**

Last question. Unless you have more and you have more to add. So for someone, a member of the public who comes across our website once it's published and is reading through the history. If there's one thing you would want that person to know about the department and your time there, what would it be?

01:24:09**Robert Banasik**

I'd have to think about that. I'd like them to think that it now is one of the best departments. And it was at one time one of the best departments in the country. And that was not just my estimation. There was at one time, the National Board of Fire Underwriters used to rate departments by a number of things. I mean, the underwriters would come for like two weeks and spend time with training and fire prevention and fire suppression, and they would [look at] water supply, that sort of thing, and they would rate a department. And at the time I was appointed, DC was rated 1, which what that meant was that was the lowest fire insurance premium. Anybody you know. And it just went up from there.

01:25:06**Amy Mauro**

It's called. ISO now.

01:25:07**Robert Banasik**

Right. Whatever. Yeah. It's different now. Yeah. But at that time DC was rated 1 and there were only a couple of other departments in the country that were rated 1. That rating slipped, but I think it's I don't know whether they go through the same process now, but I just like people to know that personnel wise, I worked with some of the greatest people in the world. And they have to know that they've got one of the best, still one of the best departments the world.

01:25:44**Amy Mauro**

Well, I agree with you.

01:25:46 Robert Banasik

And I'm going to look with interest when your beta version comes out in October. I was just at the dentist yesterday and she's been my dentist. In fact, her father was my dentist and I've known her for years and years, and she was talking about the department, and I know what it was her father had written, who was my dentist originally, had written a biography. And I said, you know what I said? I told her about today. And she said, what is that? And I said, DC Fire and EMS Foundation. Where can I find that? So I told her when you come out with it, I will let her know because she seems to be very interested in that.

01:26:43 Robert Banasik

What you're doing is a great thing. I as a former member and all for the guys up there and out there on the street right now. I think it's a great thing that you're doing.

01:26:53 Amy Mauro

Thank you. Anything we forgot to ask that you want to add?

01:27:00 Robert Banasik

I don't know. I think we went through most everything that I could think of and what I have written here in my notes. If there's anything I've missed or something that you feel like we didn't talk about, please get in touch. I'd be more than happy to.

01:27:23 Amy Mauro

I will, and likewise.

01:27:25 Robert Banasik

Come to another luncheon.

01:27:26 Amy Mauro

We will.

01:27:28 Kate Fogle

Those are fun. We definitely should do that. It was really fun. And my questions were actually presented. Yeah, I was going to ask about women and the integration aspect, and that was wonderfully covered. But thank you so much for your time. This has been just really illuminating.

01:27:47 Robert Banasik

I have plenty of time these days. That's all I have.

01:27:55 Jan Banasik

I would like to add that when we finally got here and I began to know the other firemen because it was all men at that time, and we knew no one in this area. All of our family and friends were in Ohio. So we were pretty much on our own, trying to build relationships with other people and find the people of interest. As it turned out, firefighters loved to have parties and most of them were in Maryland. And at that time we lived in Fairfax and there was no Beltway and there was no 66. So you were just driving down 50 until, you would...

01:28:48 Robert Banasik

Cross Memorial bridge down Constitution.

01:28:50 **Jan Banasik**

Year drive for an hour before you even got someplace. But firefighters became our friends, and they still are. We still have many people that are very best friends we've ever had.

01:29:11 **Robert Banasik**

We lived next door to one of them for a while.

01:29:18 **Jan Banasik**

Yeah, we're losing too many of them. But they're loyal, they're strong, they're proud, and they work hard. And they all shared that bond with each other on the fire grounds. But then the families all sort of grew off of that. And our children and their children, they are as much our family as they are the other. Some of them, because we were we were so bound together by their work schedule, for one thing. But also by everything they did.

01:30:05 **Robert Banasik**

And we share the despite different departments, we share the same bond because the last I didn't go to the last luncheon before last, we had the guys from the District and then our son and then Bob Bingham's son, who was on Arlington County, was there. He's now retired. So even though these guys retired from other departments, it's just like they sit down and we can just start talking because you you do the same thing. You might have, you know, a different department. You're doing the same thing.

01:30:45 **Amy Mauro**

Thank you. Thanks for that contribution. It is important. It's a very special community. As I told Kate when she came on board.

01:30:54 **Robert Banasik**

It's hard to explain to to folks who, from the outside, so to speak, what it's like. You're finding out. But, you know, ordinary person on the street. What do you like about being a fireman? Well, like I said, the most exciting thing I ever did in my life. But there were there were other things. I mean, Janet just covered the thing about friends. I mean, we drove. We had one very good friend who lived in Camp Springs, and at the time we lived in Fairfax, city of Fairfax. We drove from there to Camp Springs, and they would drive to our house. All that distance, because we had another couple that we knew that lived over in. I forget where, Brentwood or somewhere in there? Yeah. Back then, most DC firemen lived on. This is just I don't know whether you're still recording, whether this is on the record, but a lot of DC firemen lived in Maryland. I don't know why, but I do remember quite a few comments about, oh, you have to cross a bridge to get there.

01:32:20 **Amy Mauro**

That's right.

01:32:21 **Robert Banasik**

When I was fortunate to spend that first weekend that I mentioned at 1 Engine, some of those guys lived in Virginia and they talked, you know, we had a mobile home at the time when we were first married, we bought a brand new mobile home, and that's what we had brought here. And we lived in for a couple of years to build our first house. So I said to the guys, I'm looking for a mobile home park. Oh, you can go here in Virginia. You can go here in Virginia. Well, talk to the guys from Maryland. It's like you got to go across a bridge to get there. Like it was another country. And I'll never forget the one couple that we knew that lived in suburban Maryland. They were coming to visit us, and I'm giving them directions. And I said, and then, you know, here, here, here. And you go across Key Bridge. And he said, which one is Key Bridge? And he was born and raised in the area. But those bridges were like, huh? But we were fortunate that we ended up in Virginia. I think the state of Virginia is great.

01:33:24 **Amy Mauro**

Well, something that is definitely resonating with this project is how much the fire department lifts individuals. And I think that's something the public doesn't necessarily know or appreciate. So they'll certainly learn it from these interviews. You know, people focus on the mission and the firefighting aspect, but there's so much more to it.

01:33:46**Robert Banasik**

That's something you just mentioned there. Just how it lifts individuals. Yeah, it does. Certainly in my case.

01:33:58**Jan Banasik**

I would say it's very much like military. They live together, they work together, you know, they have the same bond, the same mission. They understand each other. They understand the work schedules and all that sort of thing.

01:34:15**Robert Banasik**

And as a matter of fact, when I was first appointed, it was quasi military. You saluted every time you walked into the... And I remember in my probation book, you know, it said, salute members of higher rank. Not required to repeat the salute where that member remains in your quarters or presence.

01:34:35**Amy Mauro**

How about that, huh?

01:34:37**Robert Banasik**

She used to help me memorize my probation book.

01:34:41**Jan Banasik**

The box alarm on three by five cards.

01:34:46**Amy Mauro**

Oh, yeah.

01:34:47**Robert Banasik**

You had to know a certain number of boxes back then. You know, street boxes were the thing, and you had to know the box number where it was like box one four, I think, was 14th Pennsylvania Avenue. How about that? Wow. You had to know the route, the box, the route to that box and the four closest hydrants. That was all part of your probation. Now, once you learn that it became really a good something to use in the job, because once you're a driver, you have to know. There was no GPS back then. You had to know where you were going when you went out the door. And once you got on the street, then. You'd think - Okay, now it's 16. We would do a lot in the rear. 2 engine. Engine 2. Engine 16. Engine 4. Engine 16. Engine 9. Engine 6. We were second due to a lot of companies downtown, and because we had 2, 6, 4, 9 and 1 and 23 all around us. Well, you had to know the route to that box, but if you were second due, you also had to know where the hydrant was, where the alley was and where the hydrant for that alley was. And sometimes you kind of play it by ear, but you had to know that. Nowadays they've got GPS and print outs and the cabs and all sorts of things, which is good. It makes it a whole lot better.

01:36:26**Kate Fogle**

Well, thank you so much.

01:36:27**Amy Mauro**

Thank you again.

01:36:27 **Robert Banasik**

Well, gee whiz. I should be thanking you. And I am thanking you so much for what you're doing. I just think that's fantastic.