

Northwestern College, Iowa

NWCommons

Oral Histories

Orange City Fire Department

2019

Henry Jonker

Ann Lundberg

aelundberg1@outlook.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://nwcommons.nwciowa.edu/ocfdoralhistories>

Recommended Citation

Lundberg, Ann, "Henry Jonker" (2019). *Oral Histories*. 3.

<https://nwcommons.nwciowa.edu/ocfdoralhistories/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Orange City Fire Department at NWCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Oral Histories by an authorized administrator of NWCommons. For more information, please contact ggrond@nwciowa.edu.

Henry [Hank] Jonker

Time: 1:05:37

November 25th, 2019

Orange City Iowa

Ann Lundberg, with Don Schreur also in attendance

Orange City Fire Department Oral History Interview

Transcript:

A: This is Ann Lundberg. It's November 25th, 2019 and I'm interviewing Henry Jonker for the Orange City fire department oral history. With us today is Don Schuer who will be participating in the conversation as he finds things to add and say. So, Henry, could you please tell me what your date of birth is?

H: August 12 in '31.

A: 1931. O kay. And you born in Orange City and lived here all your life?

H: All my life.

A: Okay! When did you join the Orange City fire department? Do you know how old you were or what year it was?

H: I can't remember the exact year, but I know I was in there for 26 years.

A: You were in for 26 years, okay. So, did you start in the 60s?

H: 50's.

A: In the 50s. Okay. So in the 1950s. Do you have a sense of how old you were when you joined?

H: Well, I just got out of the service.

A: Okay, and which branch of the service were you in?

H: I was in Korea.

A: Okay. And in the army?

H: Yes.

A: Okay. So, you were just out of the service and come home.

H: I come home, and I joined the fire department.

A: Why?

H: Why? Because I felt that I had something to help them with.

A: Okay. Did you have any particular skills that you had in mind as you were joining up?

H: Not really. Just wanted to be a part.

A: Okay. Did you have a friend on the fire department at that point in time?

H: I had many friends on the fire department.

A: Can you name some of them? This guy over there.

H: Well, that guy over there. [Schreur laughs.] Well, you were on before I was?

D: Well, I got on in 1959.

H: Okay and I got on in about '53.

A: Oh okay. Do you remember some of the people who were on at that time or who was the fire chief?

H: Calsbeek and Duven.

A: Oh, Mr. Duven.

H: And which we lost of course. It's the only one we lost on account of total foolishness.

A: Ever. Yes.

H: The people in Orange City would love to be the first ones there before the fire department and that's a big mistake.

A: Yes. Right. Did you want to talk about that event since we're on the subject? That was 1962, right?

H: Well, yeah. It was in that span of time. And what I said is the truth. Right Don?

D: That's right.

H: On a gravel road going to the fire, some of the firemen weren't even there yet, and people hit Duven. Right almost in front of me. I was running to get to the barn too. The barn was on fire.

A: Okay. So did you come in your own vehicle that day?

H: Yes, I had to because I couldn't jump on any truck because the trucks were all gone.

A: What was your work at that point in time?

H: Carpenter.

A: You were a carpenter. Okay. So, you did have a lot of skills to offer to the fire department.

H: I did.

A: It's a good one. Yeah.

H: And I felt that I could help them a lot. And later on, you're talking to me, you'll talk to Don. They put me in as president in my later years.

A: Okay. Did you use the gavel?

H: Yes. Rang the bell. And sometimes I wondered why I was there. The people on the force, I had to reprimand them, so we say, because the most important thing is that we get there to the fire and not run stop signs and this and that because we knew that that was going on in the department. We had no rights to do that.

A: Correct. And we still don't.

H: To put people down that were on the fire department, it's tough.

A: Right. So how did you do that when you had people who were running stop signs.

H: We brought it up to the fire department and if it's the truth, we would — well it's the funniest thing, Don and I went over a lot of years of books. And they fined some of us, kind of funny like.

A: So, when you were president, you would call them out at a department meeting? For speeding? Or running signs?

H: Yeah and and this is what we want. We want you there and not recklessly get there. We have to obey the laws.

A: Did they accept that from you pretty well or did they get angry?

H: They did.

A: Oh good. Okay.

H: They did because we'd reprimand them for a certain length of time or we fined them. I wasn't against that that you don't—you get their attention.

A: So, would they say you couldn't come on calls for a certain amount of time too?

H: They reprimand them for a certain length of time, yeah.

A: Okay. About how long? Do you have any recollection?

H: I can't remember. But that was the toughest part of being on the board then, shall we say.

A: Right. Right. The personnel issues. Right, do you remember anything else you did while you were president?

H: The fire department went through three stations.

A: All while you were president?

H: Yes.

A: Okay.

H: We started under the water tower and the building [on 3rd St SW]. That was it.

A: Really, right next to city hall?

D: No. Next to the old water tower.

H: The one right in the center of town.

A: Oh the one in the center of town. Okay.

H: That was where we met first. Then we moved to the back of the band shell and increased our trucks.

A: Why don't you tell me a bit about the first station underneath the water tower?

H: We got a telephone call, but that's the only thing that we knew if there was a fire. Later on we got pagers. And later on...well, the phone was set up real well though.

A: That's good.

H: Because I think they had a button that all of them would go.

D: It would be a long ring. Sometimes you were on party lines, but most of the fire fighters were on a private line. But it was a long ring, so you knew that it was a fire call coming in and they would tell you where the fire was.

A: Okay, and so how would you decide whether you went to the station or directly to the fire?

H: We would always go to the station first and if the trucks were gone, then I knew where to go from there. You can't expect some people that are right next to the station. Or Don was very close.

A: They'd be gone.

H: Of course, I was out on Iowa Avenue.

A: So, what did the fire station look like, the one at the water tower?

H: Just a two-stall garage.

D: Just a wooden garage. Wasn't there only one truck there, at that time?

H: Yes.

D: Just one truck at that time.

H: And we had a little room in the back. We'd meet.

A: Oh, so you met in the back?

H: Yep.

A: Okay, and what sort of apparatus did you have? Do you remember?

H: Well, we had that one truck.

A: And what was that? Was that the '27 Reo?

H: No, it wasn't a tanker. It was a regular fire truck.

D: It was a pumper truck that carried a little water. But then the city also had a water truck. So actually, we had two vehicles, but one was assigned to the fire department and the other one was really assigned to the city department, but it was available.

A: Double duty.

D: Yes, right. But you see, you can only have two in each truck, but at that time we hung in the back of the fire truck.

H: Jumped on!

A: Did anyone ever fall off?

D: Not to my knowledge. That only took care of just a few people and the rest were to respond in their own vehicles.

A: Do you remember what kind of fire truck that was?

D: The first one, I think, was a Reo.

A: Right. The 1927 Reo. Do you still have that in that fire station?

D: Or a cosmopolitan. I'm not sure. I think maybe Fred Dykstra could answer that better.

A: Okay! I'll be sure to ask Fred!

D: He probably would know that!

A: He's sort of astounding in his truck knowledge.

H: It's not around anymore, we sold it.

D: Yeah, it's not around anymore.

A: Do you remember who you sold it to?

H: No. We can't. You're asking questions that are *way* back there.

A: Way back there. [Laughter.] Well, just in case you remember. Just in case.

D: When we first got on, we kept all our equipment at home. So, it wasn't until we got the fire station in the downtown park. That's when we started leaving our gear there. So, then everybody would report to the fire station. Before that, a lot of them would report directly to the fire which wasn't a good situation because you had to make sure that you had a driver and somebody to be with the driver. So that was quite a change.

A: And did that change happen while you were president, Henry?

H: No, I wasn't president until we got in the band shell department [in Windmill Park]. That was the first time that I was president.

A: And if I remember rightly, Don, you had told me that was controversial to make everybody come to the fire department. Is that true to your memory too? How did you feel about it at the time?

H: Well, they had to know what to expect for one thing. And it's sensible that we don't all...

A: Skitter around?

D: You could have fire fighters at the fire, but you wouldn't have the equipment possibly! You have to make sure there was somebody there to drive the equipment. [Laughter.]

A: I know that at least once we've ended up without a vehicle that we needed!

D: That would be rather embarrassing.

A: Yes, it is!

H: It got better as age too.

A: Yes, you practiced. So, you were president after the band shell fire station. Do you remember anything about the building of that station?

H: The new station?

A: Yeah, the new station in the Windmill Park.

H: Yeah, that's when I had the gavel to yet.

A: Okay. What do you remember about that process and how you convinced the city to give you a station.

H: Well, we thought it was too large, but now we realize it was super.

A: Oh, you mean the band shell station?

H: No. The new station.

A: Oh, here? The one we just built?

D: No, the one prior to that.

A: Oh, the 1973?

D: The 1973.

A: Okay. How about the band shell station?

H: It was nothing. Not much room for meeting and the trucks and that's about it.

D: Two stalls and a meeting room and a place where we could hang our gear.

A: Right, but when you first moved in, did it seem too big in that band shell?

H: Well, it was better than what we had!

A: Yeah. I think, Don, you had said that there was some controversy over building the band shell station.

D: Actually, the fire station was built and then the band shell was added later on.

A: Okay!

D: There was a gentleman in town that, well, maybe I had better not mention his name.

A: That's fine! Gentleman is good.

D: The night before the election, he passed out pamphlets urging people not to vote for a new fire station. And it ...

H: Hurt.

D: ... angered some of the fire fighters. In fact, there were several of them that said if the city wouldn't build it, they'd build it themselves. That's how important they felt it was for the future of Orange City. But fortunately, the positive overruled the negative at that time and they built that station. And that was the major event at that time. I don't recall what the cost was.

H: No, I don't either.

A: We will go back to the notes and figure it out. Do you remember anything about that controversy or the period of decision?

H: We knew it was there. But that's it.

A: So, it was kind of lurking and then it came out.

H: When you see it now, it's almost too small already. And so, we did the right thing.

A: Did you get any positive feedback about it as president or catch any flack?

H: I think so.

A: Okay. Did you buy a new truck then, after you moved there?

D: Later on, we did.

A: Okay. Did the water tank stay at the city building or did it move with you to the fire department?

D: Then we also got a tanker truck. I think it was a converted milk truck probably.

H: Yeah. Had a big tank on it. A lot of water.

A: Did you build that one yourselves?

D: I think we had probably built by Tolman. I think they probably build that at that time for us. But then we just had the two vehicles.

A: Okay. Do you remember any particular fires especially that you went to?

H: Well, I'm sure Don will say the Vogel fire.

A: 1964, I think? Is that right? So, what do you remember about the Vogel Paint fire?

H: It's something you never forget.

A: Why?

H: I can still see those 55-gallon drums fly up in the air, explode. And we were on the roof of part of that building back there where the 55-gallon drums were, and they come out of the roof and what are we doing sitting on the roof pumping water?

A: Did you get off the roof?

H: No. We stayed with our job.

A: Okay. Okay.

H: Of course, we was over the office and not the factory.

A: Were you scared?

H: Not really.

A: Okay. Took it in stride.

H: It was your job. You volunteered for a job and you do it. That was the way my carpenter work went and that's the way the fire station went.

D: I think, Ann, we felt the same then as fire fighters feel today. That there's risk involved but there's a certain amount of chances that you have to take, but within reason. And you always think about what the person next to you, you know, never go in alone. Of course, in those days, we didn't have the equipment that you have today.

H: Nope.

A: Right.

D: We didn't have breathing apparatus. So most of the fires were fought from the outside.

A: Which is smart under those conditions. Yeah.

D: Under those conditions. And today, you know, because of new equipment, and so forth, technology has changed a little as it pertains to fire fighting.

A: Right. Yeah, and so have techniques as a result of advanced technology. So, Henry, you were on the roof of the office building. Did you eventually have to retreat? Did they end up losing the whole building that day?

H: No, I don't think we ever retreated.

A: Okay.

H: Not totally. No. No.

A: So, you saved the office area?

H: Yes.

D: The office was saved.

A: Oh good! And were you on the roof too Don? Where were you?

D: No, I was running one of the pumper trucks.

A: Okay. You were making the water.

D: There was a fire hydrant in front of, on the north side of Zwemer Hall. There was a street.

A: Okay. That was a little piece away. Where was the engine then? Where did you position the engine?

D: The truck. That's where we had the truck. Right there.

A: Okay. So, you were pumping from the front of Zwemer Hall all the way over to Vogel which was across Albany?

D: Yes.

A: Oh my goodness!

D: That's where our main truck was, and I was with the pumper truck.

H: Yep.

A: Wow! So, did you have a large diameter hose to take the water from the engine to the other hoses or were you just running like a 2 ½ inch hose all the way from the truck to the fire.

D: We went from the hydrant to the truck and from the truck to the fire.

H: We also had a y.

A: Oh, you had a gated y. Oh good!

H: We could run separate hoses.

A: Okay. So, you had two hoses on the fire at least.

H: Oh, yes!

D: Yes, so between the factory and the office, there was a fire door. And we maintained one line from the office side to the fire door, so it wouldn't get into the office. And as long as the line was on the fire door it kept it...

A: Cooled down.

D: Soon as you take the water off you could see it just get red as a beet. So it kept it from going into the office.

A: Okay. Good for their records. Yeah.

D: But we had, I think, the city of Alton was there and Sioux Center was there.

H: Yes, and what we have today is unbelievable! They had a little fire at the factory south of town and we had everybody there. And the fire was already out! I understand. [Laughter.] And

you see all those factory workers standing outside. I was interested in that when I was out there checking on my son who is building a house over there.

A: Is this the Vogel fire? Or is this a different fire we are talking about.

H: This is a different fire.

A: Oh, okay.

D: I think one of the recent fire calls.

H: The latest fire.

A: Oh! Out at the aerospace?

D: Electrical fire in the basement I think, with the electrical wire in the basement. They called in Sioux Center and Le Mars.

A: Okay.

H: All there. The street was blocked off and I seen people standing outside without a coat on. It was cold!

A: Yeah, so people are still really curious and the other departments they sure come when we call them. Because we worry about it.

H: Yes. I think that is pretty much set on. And they like our new truck.

A: Oh, our stick, our aerial ladder. You didn't have an aerial ladder in the band shell fire station.

H & D: No. No.

A: Did you get one after you moved to the 1973 station?

H & D: Yes.

A: I bet that was exciting.

D: It was, yes.

A: Do you remember if you bought that new or used?

H: Brand new.

A: Very cool!

D: It came out of a town in Nebraska. I forget the name of the town.

A: I know there is one down there, was down there, that made engines.

D: In those days, I can remember one of the trucks we bought came out of Brookings and one came out of Laverne, Minnesota.

A: Uh, huh. Yeah.

D: And of course, we knew when the truck was in the process of being built, so occasionally there would be several of us that would drive just to observe the different stages.

A: You would go visit.

D: And we did that in Nebraska too, visit the, see our truck being built. It was an exciting times to get a new fire truck.

A: I know that members have been going up every couple of weeks to Rosenbauer outside of Sioux Falls to see our new engine which is all but done. So we are excited to take delivery in a couple of weeks.

D: A couple of weeks?

A: Yeah, get that Sioux Center truck out of our station! Although we appreciate their lending it to us.

D: That was exciting times!

A: Yeah. Good road trips.

D: That's right!

A: Good road trips. So, the move to the 1973 fire station was that a pretty easy bond issue to pass?

D: Oh, the one in '73?

A: Yeah.

D: Oh, yes. I think that the fire fighters, fire department had a good relationship with the public and I think that the people realized that as Orange City was growing that we needed better facilities, better equipment so that was not controversial either just like the new one now. That passed by 80.

A: It was a beautiful thing!

D: ...86%, something like that.

A: That was beautiful, yeah. In your station in Windmill Park, did you all have room to sit down as you were talking about your fire department business or was it too small for that?

H: Very small.

D: But we had a meeting room.

H: Sure. Separate from the trucks.

D: A long table.

A: Right. Okay. And about how many people were on the department at the time?

D and H: 25.

A: That's a really good number.

H: Now they try to keep it at 32, don't they?

A: We do! Did membership go up after you moved to the fire station on Albany?

H: All we asked for, yes!

A: Okay, so you got more people.

H: If we asked for members and they would come.

A: And how did you ask for members?

D: Oh, I think it was just word of mouth. I don't recall that we ever had to advertise.

A: Okay. So, you asked your friends and neighbors who you thought would be good?

D: When I first got on, when Henry first got on, we had the black ball system, you know?

A: Hmm...mmm.

D: And if a person applied and if the current members, when they voted on it, if there were three no votes, the person would not be accepted.

A: And did that happen?

H: I think so.

D: Yeah, that would happen.

A: And why did that happen?

H: They knew the person I would say.

A: And what kind of things did they know about them?

H: And maybe his job, that he couldn't just lead.

A: Okay.

D: Or maybe he lived in the country, lived outside of the town, and we require them to live in city limits.

A: Inside of town, okay.

D: So we wouldn't change the policy, and there was a no vote. And you know, sometimes you however you know a person you think whether that person would be compatible. It was a close-knit group. It really was. I think it still is.

A: It is. Maybe not as much as before there were so many life distractions?

D: A very close-knit group. And uh, we were proud of what we had and we didn't want to ruin that relationship.

A: Mess that up.

D: Yeah. Right.

A: Did you turn people down because they had bad reputations, do you think?

H: I really don't think they had reputation over the possibility of being a fireman or being available.

A: M-kay. So, it was more of a practical...

D: Yes.

A: ...than perception of who these people were.

D & H: Yes.

A: Like they weren't good character.

H: It's pretty hard to tell if John Doe over there what you think of them.

A: Right.

H: Right.

D: Well, also, you know, that every employer didn't necessarily appreciate the employee leaving for a fire call and some of the applicants would tell us that, well, if they were on the job, they wouldn't be able to leave.

A: Right.

D: Only if they got a call on Sunday or at night. Well, it's gotta depend on people throughout the days.

H: It's not what we wanted.

D: That was also a factor.

A: Right. And did you have a probationary period for your fire fighters like they had to prove themselves over the course of a year? That's what we do now, is they are on probation. We've made that policy a little bit more flexible recently allowing people to like, join us on the first due engine, if they proved that they have enough prior experience and we feel confident with them. But, they still have a probationary period and then we vote again after that probationary period.

D: No. We didn't have that policy at that time.

A: Okay. So it was on or off. On or off. Okay. Up or down.

H: It's hard to be a judge...

A: Oh, terribly hard. Yeah.

H: ...of a person.

A: It is. It is.

H: You have to think twice, three times...

A: You should.

H: ... before you come up with the right answer.

A: And were all of the fire fighters from Orange City, like long term residents, or did you have people like me who moved to Orange City and then joined the fire department?

D: Most of them were...

H: Locals.

D: ...local people. You're talking about a community that was 2,000, 2500, 3500, rather than 6,000. So we didn't have an influx of people coming in like we have now.

A: We're in a more mobile society.

D: Which is an improvement.

A: Yeah. There benefits.

D: Right.

A: Lose a little of the community and you gain something else as a result of that.

H: That's right.

A: What was your favorite job on the fire, Henry? Like did you like to be on the hose line or were you a ladder man?

H: Most of the time I was on the hose line.

A: Okay, and Don you were an engine man a lot of the time? Just sometimes?

D: No, just depends who was available on a particular fire.

H: We all knew...

A: Everything.

H: ...how everything worked.

A: That's good. That's good. But you liked hose line best?

H: I did. Yep.

A: And why is that?

H: Well, you get right to the heart of it, but then like Vogel's you just don't want to enter that room.

A: Ah, no.

D: [Chuckles.]

H: It was unbelievable. Well if you go to a fire and you feel the door, and you know, it's hot.

A: Hot, hot, hot!

H: And you have to get inside to... and the equipment they got nowadays...

A: Is better and we breathe.

H: You just go in!

A: Right. Did you ever have rescues when you were on the fire department? Did you ever have to get anybody out of a building?

H: I can't recall anybody.

A: Kay. And you didn't respond to things like car accidents then?

D and H: Oh yes, we did.

A: Oh! You did!

D: Later on, we did.

H: And we had the jaws of life.

A: Oh yeah.

D: In fact, when Mr. Van Etten, he was the funeral director, ran the ambulance service also, and when he elected to retire, then the fire department had a small little van used as an ambulance and we worked closely with the hospital and that worked fairly well because at first, at that time, you had to take a Red Cross course and then you had to take an advanced Red Cross course and the when it got to the point beyond that, we felt that we didn't have time for the training. Our main responsibility was as fire fighter, and so that's when the hospital took it over at that time. So, we would still assist them.

A: Right.

D: We would go out on accidents, but we weren't the primary provider at that time.

A: Did you go to farm accidents too?

D: Oh yes.

A: Do any of them stand out? Car accidents or farm accidents?

D: Yes. Car accidents stand out. Fires stand out. You know, we lost some citizens in Orange City to fires.

A: You did.

D: Oh yes.

A: In their homes?

D: In their homes, yes.

A: I bet that was really hard.

D: Yeah, those are the ones you'd like to forget but you don't. Property loss is bad enough but...

H: Humans.

D: ... when lives are lost it was something that stayed with you.

H: Lifetime.

A: Yes.

H: Didn't the fire department used to run that white station wagon ambulance too?

D: Yep.

H: And I drove that for many years. And who is that gal lived on Main street? That nurse? I'd have to pick her up every time and we had that accident by Maurice on the second bridge over the Floyd River.

A: What happened?

H: What happened? A truck a semi and a car hit on the bridge.

D: On the bridge.

H: And this gal, this nurse that I'd hauled over there, and we had to wait for the coroner to come and explain that he was dead. And we all knew that it was hopeless.

A: Right. Did the passenger in the car die too?

H: When we hauled her to the mortuary, as a nurse and as a driver of that ambulance as the fire department and we both retired...

A: After that?

H: ...after that.

A: Too much!

H: It was more than we could handle.

A: Yeah.

H: Yeah. And Evon said to me, "Why do you give up?" Well, what I saw, I didn't want to see again.

A: Right.

H: But it was just us. That was our ambulance! That white station wagon.

A: I think I've seen pictures of that before. Yeah.

D: Yeah. It was an icy road and the car hit the side of the bridge and then ricocheted to the left and into the vehicle. In fact, the driver of that vehicle maybe passed away about three years ago.

A: Okay. That's a hard thing to live with too even. It wasn't their fault. Just an accident. But those are really hard.

D: And then later on we got the jaws, which was a big improvement.

H: Yep. The jaws of life. It opened a door that wouldn't open.

A: Right. Yeah. We were out practicing a few weeks ago with our spreader and cutter. Now we separated the two applications. Yeah.

H: You are talking about things we didn't have!

H & D: [Chuckles.]

A: I know! I know! The jaws of life really was an important invention to help. And so that helped you get some people out who otherwise would have suffered more. That's good. That's good. Did you have to raise money for the jaws of life?

D: No, it was donated.

A: Very good.

D: There was a man with the name of Simons, I think. He was in Missouri some place. I dunno if he worked for K Products and ah, was involved in a bad accident and later on that family donated money to the fire department for the first jaws of life.

A: That's good. Yeah. That's good.

H: It makes you feel good when people back you up, which you do. The decisions that you make.

A: Right. And about when was that when you got the jaws of life? Was that the 60s, 70s...

D: Not the 60s. Could've been the latter part of the 70s or the early 80's.

A: Did you ever watch the television show *Emergency*?

D: Yes.

A: What did you think of it? Did you ever watch Hank?

D: You just hope those things never happens in Orange City. [Laughs.]

H: We've had some touchy situations.

A: Yeah.

D: You know, some of the worst fires were really out of town fires. I can remember one cold, cold night we went to Hospers.

A: Was that a house fire?

D: No, it was Stuit, Stuit was the name of the shoe store. It was on Main Street. It burned down. And in Alton, oh, the theater, the liquor store.

A: Was that the same night, the theater and liquor store? Different fires?

D: No, different fires.

A: Kay. Do you remember what started them?

D: No, I don't.

A: Kay. Did you have a fire investigator come when there were bad property losses or deaths?

D: Not in the early days. That was later on.

A: Okay. So pretty much just the local police and coroner if necessary did that kind of work?

D: Right. Sure.

A: Do you remember any details of those fires? The Hospers shoe store fire or the...

D: [Chuckles.] I can remember boxes of shoes floating out!

A: Oh! [Laughs.]

D: We had the hose line in the back. The thing I can really remember is that Hospers called us, and we thought we were there just to assist them. But when we got there, we realized that their truck had froze up on them. So they...

A: Winter?

D: Oh yes, it was winter, severely cold weather. And so, they hadn't even started to fight the fire.

A: Had it frozen in their station or when they got there?

D: No. When they got there. It was on the street but it froze up on them.

H: You can't remember all of them.

A: Oh heaven's no! Heaven's no!

H: Some of them you just get there and it was out already.

A: Okay.

H: And you say "Amen."

A: Right.

D: It was always a kind of relief when we knew what the fire was. Like a farm fire, if they would say the barn is on fire or if you didn't know you and you were just hoping that it wasn't the house. Sometimes we would know and sometimes we wouldn't know.

A: Hmm...mmm.

D: Often times we would know. We saw a lot of barns burn up in those days. A lot of barns.

A: And why did barns catch on fire primarily?

H: Faulty wiring.

D: Faulty wiring. Yeah.

H: Not taken care of.

D: Wet hay, sometimes. Of course, the chance of saving the barn was impossible, but saved buildings next to it.

A: Right. Exposures.

D: It was a challenge.

A: Do you remember any fires with unusual causes?

D: Yes, I can remember one where afterwards inspecting the house we found in the basement, the center of the basement, there was a little fire pot was built.

A: For an open fire?

D: Well I think they used intentionally.

A: Oh, set? Oh! Arson!

D: The owner.

A: Exciting! Yeah.

H: Before you say anything about something like that, you have to be very cautious.

D: We didn't say anything, but we did seal the house off until the state inspector came.

A: Okay. So, you had a state inspector then, at that point in time.

D: Yes. And we had classes to try to identify the cause.

A: Okay!

D: He had, we'd go to state fire school.

H: The easiest one to detect would be farm equipment like a combine and if a tractor would be on fire.

A: Because?

H: Because the chaff would get close to the engine and then...

A: Poof!

H: Poof! That's the way it would go.

A: So, you'd know the cause of that. That's an accident.

H: Not a set one.

A: Right.

D: But some fires today, they still haven't determined the cause.

A: Right, too much damage like at big downtown fire, the Hawkeye building. Too much damage to really, really pin it.

D: They had insurance people and inspectors there for days and days and they really couldn't put a handle on it.

A: Yes.

H: It's hard to detect.

A: Yeah, yeah. Well, too hot, too long.

D: That's right.

A: But we've had other fires where it has been set in five places and so there you're pretty sure...

D: There you are pretty sure!

A: ...what's happened! So, who was the fire chief while you were on the fire department and what do you remember about him?

H: It probably was Fred Dykstra.

D: No, the first one was George Huizinga.

H: George Huizinga, yeah.

A: Okay.

D: And then Orville Beltman served for a while.

H: Yep. Orville Beltman.

D: And then Fred Dykstra.

H: Fred Dykstra was on most of my time.

D: Yeah.

A: And what do you remember about Fred as a fire chief?

H: He was a good fire chief.

A: What made him a good fire chief?

H: He knew what his position was. I would say!

A: Which means? What does that mean to you?

H: What does that mean to me?

A: Yeah, what does the mean to you?

H: Well, you respect him because you knew that he was a good fire chief and Don would say the same thing I'm sure. He was on there for many, many years.

D: It's a little bit like, this is being recorded, but, you know, today we talk about Denny Vander Well. The three D's: Denny, Darlene, the dog, and the fire department.

A: Halleluiah! Amen! Yes!

D: Okay, it was the same thing with Fred Dykstra. It was Fred, Betty his wife, and the fire department.

A: Really dedicated.

D: Right, I mean, that was his, well, I wouldn't say his first love, I am sure his wife was his first love, but I mean, from a practical point of view it was the fire department and he lived it.

A: Hmm...mmm.

D: And that's what it takes for a fire chief.

A: Yes.

D: And, ah, Fred wasn't always popular, because you know, he had to come down occasionally.

A: Right.

D: And so any time you do that, you know, you kind of divide forces. You have some that go this way and some that go that way, but Fred was very, very dedicated to the fire department.

A: What positive changes did you see him making? Do you remember any of the things that he did, the initiatives?

D: Well, he emphasized training. When I first got on there really wasn't any training. The only training was just being at the fire.

A: On the job.

D: On the job, you know. But Fred, ah, supported going to fire school, having classes, getting the trucks out from time to time, hooking up hydrants, things like that. So, he was very interested in training because we didn't have that many fires.

A: Right.

D: Like we have today, per capita, so most of the training then was on the job except for classes that—

H: Were set up.

A: Did you ever have training burns? Where you had a structure of some sort that somebody asked you to burn for them?

D: Oh yes, yeah.

A: Good. Good practice.

D: We had a couple houses we would burn, would light them, and put them out, and relight them, and put them out again, and finally we would let them go.

H: This was good practice too.

A: Oh yeah.

H: You'd go in there and say "now this is what we'd do if we had to."

A: Do you remember anything that Fred did especially as fire chief?

H: He was very good in my book. And if someone is very good, you don't have anything to talk about because he was good. Let's face it.

D & A: [Chuckles.]

A: He was a carpenter!

H: Pardon?

A: He was a carpenter, also a plus in your book!

H: Sure! [Chuckles.]

A: Yeah, yeah.

D: To be a good fire chief you had to be tough.

A: Right.

D: And I think the same thing holds true today.

A: Oh yeah, absolutely. So, Henry, question for you. This is a personal question. How did your wife feel about you being on the fire department?

H: She was a nurse, so she was concerned about health wise and otherwise. No, nothing. She went through some danger situations as a nurse!

A: I bet she did!

H: Just as we went through dangerous circumstances as fire department. So, I would say that's about the same.

A: Okay. So, not a problem for you? Did she wait up for you when you were gone?

H: Not really. She didn't go chasing after me, she knew that we was doing our job. But some of her jobs that she had in a hospital were similar to what we had.

A: Right, yeah.

H: And she always talked about a person that got out of the hospital and when he got out the back door and into the alley, the alarm went off, see. Same thing as when we have a fire. And they had to go run this man down and there's snow on the ground and they had to track him with blood. So she has funny stories and we have funny stories and there's nothing wrong with that. She sees this man frequently after that happened and they just laugh, and they never forget it!

A: Was he an escapee from the hospital?

H: Oh, he was just wanting to go home.

A: So he ran?

H: So, he ran, and the hoses were dragging and how he got out? He went out the back door!

D: Good thing there was an alarm on the door. [Chuckles.]

A: Oh, so you came because the door was alarmed?

H: Yeah.

A: Oh, okay. Wow. Do you remember any...

H: That's the same situation as a firemen or nurse and anybody has the same.

A: Do you remember anything funny things that happened on the fire department?

H: No, I don't really recall any real funny things. It was pretty serious business!

A: Did you ever tease each other?

D: Oh yeah!

H: Oh yeah!

D: We did.

A: What did you tease each other about?

D: Well some things that were comical was if there was fire, especially it as a night fire, and afterwards we'd go to the bowling alley because Frank or Ray would open it up and have coffee for us, you know.

A: Nice!

D: And then you'd see how some people were dressed. [Chuckles.]

A: Any examples?

D: Well, you know, putting your clothes on over your pajamas, you know. And just the way you were dressed and sometimes...

A: Pajamas! Showing up in pajamas.

D: Yeah.

H: Underneath.

D: And sometimes, you know, shoes on without any socks, or something like that.

H: That was good to talk about.

D: We would laugh about it. Joke about it.

A: I know we've had a least one fire fighter show up in his wife's shirt. Obviously, his wife's shirt he pulled on.

D: [Laughs.]

A: So how long did you stay at the bowling alley drinking coffee after a fire and debriefing?

D: Oh, I don't know.

H: Just a cup of coffee.

D: Sit around just a half hour or something like that depending upon what time of the night it was. Sometimes it was about time to get ready to go to work, sometimes you'd probably go home and hopefully fall asleep and get a couple hours before you had to get up and go to work.

A: That's not an easy task.

D: No, it isn't.

A: To sleep after all that.

D: You're pretty hyper. It takes a while to get over it.

A: Adrenalin. Yeah. Did people ever bring you food on the fire ground?

D & H: Oh yes!

A: Did you ever have a long fire? So, who did that?

H: Ladies...

D: Farm fires, the neighbors would come with all kinds of food. Sandwiches, cookies...

H: Drink, cookies.

D: ...coffee, Kool-aid. Oh yes.

H: We didn't get fat on it!

A: You were working too hard. [Laughter.]

D: No, they always treated us very well.

H: Well, I had somebody that pulled me and told me that I should be joining the fire department. Bernie Vander Hart. He was on the board.

D: He was on.

A: Okay.

H: He was president at one time.

D: And you worked for him.

H: And I worked for him!

A: And so he told you, you should think about it?

H: He gave me a good push, a shove, you see.

A: Yeah.

H: I worked with him until he died.

A: Okay.

H: To this day, I know what he died of. He died of a ruptured appendix. And weeks before, he would say "pain" and I'd say "Bernie, you got to go to the doctor with that." But, he didn't listen to me at that time and of course he was older than I was and to this day I think, "If he could listen to me that week before he died, he might've been alive a bit longer."

A: Yeah.

D: That's right.

H: But he was very stubborn. If you wasn't ready 10 'til 1 or 10 'til 7 in the morning, he'd just drive off. That's being late. He was a very particular man, but he had an influence on me and the fire department. I know that.

A: He kind of took you under his wing?

H: Yeah.

A: Yeah. Yeah. Was he on the fire department when he died?

H: Yes, he might've been. I don't know. If you go through some papers... No, I don't think—

A: So he had quite before that.

D: He'd retired.

H: But, that's life.

A: It is. Yeah. It is. Did you ever get teased about anything yourselves?

D: Oh yeah. [Laughs.]

A: Do you remember what you got teased about?

D: Oh, I can remember the first station on Albany Avenue. Everybody would be in a hurry and there wasn't a lot of room between the trucks and were we had our clothes and I was in there and putting my clothes on and Fred Dykstra came running in and he was holding something and he caught me right here on the head and, you know, anytime you get a cut on the head...

A: It bleeds.

D: So there I was, blood was dripping down and so they got on the radio, and they told the ambulance to stop at the fire station before they went to the fire! [Laughs!] And they bandaged me up! [Laughs.]

H: Accidents will happen no matter what!

D: And then at the next annual supper, they had a little trophy and it was a half-ass trophy, or something like that, they presented to Fred. [Laughs.] But fortunately, it wasn't anything serious. I did go to the clinic and they put a couple stitches in it. So, we laughed about that a lot and nobody got mad and it was just one of those things that happens.

A: Did you get a nickname out of that?

D: No, really not. But you know, I think it all taught us a lesson to, hey, just slow down a little bit, you know!

H: Most important thing, like I said earlier, is that we get there.

D: Yeah, that we get there!

A: Henry, anything funny ever happen to you that you got teased about?

H: No, maybe did but I don't remember. You can't remember everything in your life.

A: Heavens no! No!

D: Fortunately!

A: Especially when there gets to be more and more of it! Pushes some of that stuff out!

H: When I think of my life, I could name you five times that I should've been dead.

D: [Chuckles.]

A: Any of those on the fire department?

H: No. None of them would be there.

A: Huh!

H: But it's accidents and in Korea and those things. When you got five of them you can name, it was the truth, but I'm here.

A: Here you are!

D: Here we are.

A: Probably four more lives yet to go!

D: Enjoying the good times!

A: Enjoying the good times.

H: Even if I was on the fire department. With all the dangers involved. We all live dangerously.

A: Yeah, risky business. Is there anything you remember from the day Stan Duven died? I know we talked about that earlier. You remember running through the vehicles.

H: I was running in between cars and Stan was ahead of me and I remember him getting hit [clap] by a car.

D: Trying to jump on the truck, slipped, and then...

A: So, what else do you remember about that day? What did you do then? You were coming up behind him?

H: We was on call, the fire department. The barn was on fire. We continued. But then there was somebody there to help.

A: Yeah. So, you went ahead and manned the hose line.

H: I was on...somebody else took over. But I was right with it. In between those cars and he jumped on that truck and he missed.

A: Yeah, yeah.

H: But to me it was people's fault because the people that were already there had no business being there. It was the fire department that had the business, nothing else. So that always did bother me.

A: Yeah. Yeah. Did you know how bad he was hurt right away or did you find out later?

H: I can't remember that, but I remember him getting hit.

A: Falling. Yeah. That's a terrible memory to have. Yeah. And when did you retire from the fire department Henry?

H: Why did I?

A: Yep. When and why? Why did you decide to hang up your hat?

H: Well had done 26 years in and I asked if I could get out and they said I had to have one more year!

D: [Chuckles.]

A: They did? Oh my goodness! Why did they tell you one more year?

H: I don't know!

A: They just did. They loved you that much.

H: I think they...

A: Henry, we can't let you go. You're too valuable.

H: They thought I was bossy once in a while, because I was. I was the one with the gavel!

A & D: [Laughs.]

H: But I wasn't. I was down to business.

A: Were you president when you retired?

H: How many years, I don't know, but I was president.

A: For a long time.

H: Yep. A number of years.

A: But you had given up that job before you retired.

D: I think it was after you were president that you retired but I don't recall exact...

H: At the time I asked and I gave my resignation and I turned it in and they said they wouldn't let me out. One more year, they said.

D: One more years. Get's you to 25 years then.

H: I had 26 then.

A: 27. Wow. Did they give you a party or did they just say sayonara?

H: No, no party. It was business.

A: Business! I hear you played cards sometimes though.

H: Yes, we did, after the meeting.

D & A: After the meeting.

H: Yeah.

A: Good.

H: And now we work with Fred, going through the old books and Fred would open the door and put him in his pick-up and put him in a wheelchair.

A: Yeah, his walker.

H: In the back. And that's respect to Fred.

A: It is. Is there anything that stands out from that process of going through the records? This last, I guess it was about a year ago that you did that. Anything that you...

D: I think we felt were...

H: Well, they asked us! We did that for four weeks in a row!

A: I know!

D: We appreciated being asked to help, you know.

A: Yeah.

H: They wanted to know how many years these people were on and so we go through the thing and we'd stop and we'd show it that this person joined or left the fire department and he wanted more accuracy. And that's what we did. We spent four weeks didn't we?

D: Well...

H: He arranged the same night of the week and he called us.

A: Yeah, Yeah. That was a good.

H: And I would be reading Bernie Vander Hart when he was president and so and so was secretary. And yeah, it was kind of interesting. That we was allowed through those books.

D: I think both Henry and I still feel that if there was some little job that we could do to benefit the fire department, we'd still be available. There's a lot of things we couldn't be able to do and shouldn't be able to do but if there are menial tasks, we'd still be happy to help out.

H: That's when we run into the funny ones with fines.

A & D: [Laughs.]

H: Yeah! I didn't realize it until I read all those fines.

D: All those fines.

A: Added up. Added up. Yeah. Anything else that you're dying to tell me?

H: I think we've told you enough of our life and that was only with the fire department.

D: Sign your name.

H: Sign on the dotted line.

D: Sign on the dotted line.

A: Okay, Henry, do you have an email account?

H: What?

A: Do you have email? Email? On the computer?

H: No, I don't.

D: He doesn't have it.

A: Okay.

H: I tell you, my wife quit nursing because she had to learn that. The new method and what do you think she did? She went to the home healthcare and worked there nine more years on the road, bringing pills to different people and helping people.

A: Good for her!

D: Say what is it, the 25th?

A: Yeah, the 25th.

H: 11?

D: 11, 25.