

Joe DiBernardo - Episode 797

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SPEAKERS


Joe DiBernardo, James Geering



James Geering 00:00

This episode is brought to you by Thorne, the industry leader in nutritional solutions. Now Thorne is actually trusted by eight US national teams and championship teams in the NFL, NBA and Major League, as well as recently becoming the official sports performance nutrition partner of the UFC. So when it comes to supplements, these tactical athletes space in the athletic space need two things. We need efficacy, meaning the products do what they say they're going to do on the label. And then we need to trust the fact that we are not going to fail either athletic drug tests, or work related drug tests. Now, Thorne has actually been around since the 1980s, where they were used by physicians and hospitals for nutritional supplements for the patients. They were so successful that athletic teams and even special operations teams reached out to them and they started supplying them as well. Very recently, they actually opened their doors to the general public. Now what sets Thorne apart is they manufacture their own products in a state of the art NSF certified facility in South Carolina. They use only the purest possible ingredients formulated with no steroids or arbitrary fillers in the cleanest manufacturing process. Most of you listening come from profession where it can take its toll physically and mentally and many of us are not able to bolster our nutrition purely with the food that we eat, and that's where supplementation comes in. So if you're ready to maximize your health and performance visit thorne.com or thorne.com. Take a short product quiz to be paired up with a perfect health and fitness supplements. And for you the audience if you use the code BTS one zero behind the shield 10 BTS one zero, you will get 10% off your first order. And if you want to learn even more about Thorne go to Episode 323 of behind the shield podcast and you will hear my interview with Wes Barnett and Joel to Totoro from Thorne. Welcome to the behind the shield podcast. As always, my name is James Geering. And this week it is my absolute honor to welcome on the show. Retired FDNY deputy chief and the president of the lieutenant Joseph P. DiBernardo Memorial Foundation, Chief Joe DiBernardo. Now in this conversation we discuss a host of topics from chiefs early life, his journey into the military and time in Vietnam. His path into the fire service. Numerous Fire Service stories from the war years. His son Josephs journey into FDNY. The tragic events at the 178 fire also known as the Black Sunday fire, losing his son in 2011, the creation of the foundation, the importance of bail out equipment and so much more. Now, I also want to add on to this intro some thank yous that he had forgotten to mention in the recording. So chief DNR I wanted to also thank the Suffolk County Fire Academy instructors colony Texas Fire Academy instructors, Bobby Eckert,

Kevin use Ricky Stassi, Bill RA and Jay Stark, Jeff cool Mike McGinnis, Eric Riedel, Frank Murata, Jenny McClelland, Dave Walters, Jeremy Walters, Paul DB assay Brian use Steve Sango dolci affordable drill towers, Brian Crowe, Dennis Witham, Leila Isabel Rydell, maximizers, Alexa and Jamie use, and all of the sponsors and donors that made it possible at his foundation. Now, before we get to this incredible conversation, as I say, every week, please just take a moment, go to whichever app you listen to this on, subscribe to the show, leave feedback and leave a rating. Every single five star rating truly does elevate this podcast therefore making it easier for others to find. And this is a free library of almost 800 episodes now. So all I ask in return is that you help share these incredible men and women's stories. So I can get them to every single person on planet Earth and needs to hear them. So with that being said, I introduce to you Chief Joe de Bernardo enjoy. Or Chief, I want to start by saying thank you so much for coming on the behind the shield podcast today.

 J Joe DiBernardo 04:40

I'm honored that you have thought of me and you asked me to come on this wonderful podcast. I've listened to a number of your episodes and you had some great people on there. I hope I can contribute a little to somebody else. Learning something or to the better meant of everybody's lives or I hope I just can be a plus factor.

 J James Geering 05:05

Oh, you definitely will. Absolutely. Um, I already know obviously a lot of things that we're going to talk about. Very first question were on planet earth are we finding you today?

 05:16

Right now I'm sitting in the bunker and I'm sitting in my basement on out in Long Island in Noah place New York. At my home. This is my command center where I run. I run my charity out of

 J James Geering 05:32

beautiful. Well, I want to start the very beginning of your story, obviously, we'll get to your son as we kind of progress through. But tell me where you were born. And tell me a little bit about your family dynamic, what your parents did, and how many siblings

 05:46

okay, I was. I was born a long time ago. I was born and I was born in Brooklyn, and in a section of Brooklyn called East New York, which is mostly in Italian, very, you know, poor Italian Jewish neighborhood. And that was the seventh three in the seven, five precinct today, which is the murder capital of the world, in the city. And my father, enlisted in World War Two. He joined the Navy is part of the greatest generation. I had an older sister. So my father went into the Navy. And we live with my we were born in East New York. And we live with my grandparents. So then my grandfather bought a house in Queens, New York and Richmond Hill, New York, private

dwelling and we move with my grandparents, I live with my grandparents and my aunts growing up with on the second floor of the house, my two aunts had a room. My mother and father had a we had a living room, a bedroom, and a small, another small bedroom, in a tiny kitchen with no stove, just the sink. We ate with our grandparents downstairs, and then my father was off in the Navy. And when I was like three or four, we went out to California to be with him. And my mother. Those days, there was no air travel, we took the train all the way out to California, I can imagine a woman job without two little kids. That must be tough. And then my grandma and my my Italian grandmother came, she hardly spoke any English, and she came out and visited us and save us. Up in Washington state where I'm at in Washington in the Navy Yard. I can't imagine a woman I'll be speaking English, traveling across the country. But for people, you know, the greatest generation and their parents, so my parents were first generation Americans. So after the war, my father worked for the Navy. He became an electrician in the Navy Yard. And then my my parents had we live with my grandparents. They built the house. We stayed in that house, I had a younger sister. And my father was working in the Navy Yard. And he always had two jobs, my father, always two jobs, to pay the bills. And we bought a house in Richmond Hill, Queens. The property with the building was probably 20. Buying 60 houses are only like 15 feet wide, three stories to two stories within that frame mass. And it was like the greatest thing in the world because I went from sleeping on the living room couch to having my own bedroom. My own bedroom, you could touch the walls. And it had no closet. But it was the greatest thing in the world. And one of the greatest things about it, it was on the corner was a park playground. And I grew up in that playground with all the local friends. And there was a candy store on the corner. And we go in and have a nickel coke. And it was we played sports 12 hours a day. Everybody knew everybody in the neighborhood. And it was just the greatest thing in the world to grow up in a neighborhood where you could walk through everything, where everybody knew everybody. And it was wonderful, just wonderful. My father, like I said, always worked two jobs. I went to high school. from Queens into Manhattan. Now, my parents say I had to go to a Catholic High School. You can't go to public school. I don't. I don't want to go I want To go to pro with my friends had gone to Richmond Hill High School, now he's gone. So in those days, they the cheapest Catholic high school they could find was St. Agnes on 44th Street in Manhattan and Third Avenue was only built in like a thing seven years something that was like perfect, but it's only \$15 A month tuition. And they can afford that. And I my some of my friends went to another school where it was \$25 a month tuition. They couldn't afford that. So I went to his dump. We didn't even have a gym. So I'm made a lot of friends. I ran track for them played basketball for them. And it was just great. Everything was great about it. And blah, blah, blah. I'm still friends with people from grammar school, there was 10 of us. Five of us left. And we went from we graduated from the candy store to the bar. And that bar just closed this year. And it was just a wonderful upbringing. Very happy. I was blessed. I think my generation was blessed because my parents were first generation. And they had lived through the Depression. My generation, we grew up in a neighborhood where everybody knew everybody and you could walk through everything. A lot of those neighborhoods changed so a lot of us moved to the suburbs where you couldn't walk to the candy store and you couldn't hang out in the park you had to be driven everywhere. So I my generation I think is the best of all generations we had we had it made

J

James Geering 11:46

Now you talked about where you were first born becoming murder capital of the world through your eyes because you've got a civilians eyes and obviously you gotta you know, firefighters eyes as well, very, very unique perception perceptive. I don't think a lot of people understand

like, we see things that 99% of the population doesn't. What have been the changes that have contributed towards some of the areas that used to live in now being as dangerous, as you mentioned.



12:15

That's a good question. That, that every year, it's still one of the I don't know what change, the population changed and it just began to burn down. During the fire was fountain Avenue in Eastern Europe or I grew up the entire block burnt down. It just the demographics changed. You know, the the Italians and the Jewish moved out, and they were replaced by other ethnic groups. And it's a matter of fact, where I lived in Richmond Hill. It was all Irish, Italian, German, Jewish, everybody, you could think of that neighborhood. And then like late, I'd say early. My family lived there till the 70s or 80s, that neighborhood has changed too. And that neighborhood went from those ethnic groups, German, Irish, Italian, everything in that neighborhood went to another demographic, where that neighborhood really changed and that neighborhood who never had a fire. Now, this is a busy area. But one thing though, is my father paid \$1,000 for his house now, and it was a one family house and had a small kitchen that you couldn't sit around yet it was against the wall. And we had a little kitchen in the basement. And we had three bedrooms on the second floor and an unfinished attic. I went back then many years later, and every bill and you could once each family had one call. I went back to my house many years later, I would say Well, I'd say 10 years ago and that one family became a three family. With a family on the first floor of family on the second floor, the attic was converted a family on the third floor cubicles in the basement with people living in a basement. And every house on the block had bars on the windows and you couldn't find a pipe couldn't find a parking space to go look at my house. So one family houses became three family houses with with rental cubicles. And I was talking to a guy on the street and those houses were going for \$600,000. So times change, people change and neighborhoods change they get good in bed They went from good to bad. And now they've been gentrified again. A lot of areas I worked in as a fireman or as a lieutenant. Like Williamsburg, Bushwick, the Lower East Side as a captain on the Lower East Side, that tenements were vacant, you could get them from back taxes that are selling for like \$4 million. Same thing in Harlem. You could buy, you could get them from back taxes. I think the politicians had that wrapped up because in the Bronx, we tore everything down in Manhattan, and they never tore him down. So I don't know who somebody bought them, to rehab them, and now they sell them for millions, which you could have got for back taxes. And there was some tomfoolery going on there.



James Geering 15:52

As this still is today, I like



15:55

Waynesburg and I was yuppie and Bushwick where I worked in Bushwick like was like that was which was horrible. I know. People look at apartments getting gentrified, Bushwick Alphabet City, the lower Eastside. You're familiar with Manhattan, right?



J James Geering 16:14

I am. So yes.

i 16:15

You know, Alphabet City right now. It's there's a desert boutique and every third building, and you can't rent an apartment down yet. When I was a captain down there, they were all vacant, burned down. 28 and 11. On Easter, I was I forget what street they were on now. That was it. There was a it was they call it the drunk crossing, they had the street mock drug crossing, because the chunk is used to knock on the door when they were stoned and everything. Amazing if we would have known we'd all be millionaires.

J James Geering 16:47

Well, it's interesting as well, because with the gentrification, the question is, obviously I aware where the lower income people go into, you know, this is the poverty issue that we see, you know, as, you know, yeah. As you as you, when you see the relationship between poverty and desperation, I mean, it's gonna, you know, it's gonna have a negative effect in an area and you see it in places like Detroit, you know, thriving at one point, the industry closes down. And then you know, it's the opposite end of the spectrum now.

i 17:19

I was up at the, my, my last stereo was up in the South Bronx. And everything was vacant, toned down, and lots. And when I went back there recently to for the ceremony, I wrote around when I left, there were a lots now they're all multiple dwellings. And I was talking to the guys, he said, they fully occupied and they're all they're all, you know, subsidized housing people in there, whatever that number is that they used to give them subsidized housing. So everything's occupied up here. Now, I don't know if they're putting the new immigrants in. But they're all occupied. You know, South Bronx is only a subway ride away from Manhattan. So it's quite interesting that the the area even the area I worked in, that was vacant, and lots has been built on and there are a lot of subsidized housing in there. around Charlotte. And one seven, I have a famous photograph of that is the only thing standing is the fire alarm box, and three other buildings. It looks like Berlin after the wall after the war, I should show you that I have that picture around here. But 20 years ago, they kept the government came in and put up two and three family occupied, owner occupied dwellings that transformed the whole neighborhood. If you if you wanted, you had to live in the building. So if you're going to live in the building that yo and you're going to take care of it. It was the best move, they have a maid it just gave rebirth to the area. Instead of just giving them rent checks and then moving them into a in the 70s. In the 60s, they burned them out and they would give them three and files to rove into another apartment. That whole scam back in the 60s and 70s. I'm sure you

J James Geering 19:14

know, but now I do now I wasn't aware that specifically but yeah, I mean, it must have been pretty horrific Austin in that time, then,



19:20

you know, we all know the buildings. The owners would get more insurance than they would get in rent. And so if you had a fire, the city would relocate you they would give you X amount of money to move into a new apartment. So a lot of people the building started to deteriorate. The owner didn't want to repair it. The building was worth more to him if he got burned down and he got insurance so he didn't repair it so that people a lot of people wised up and they set their own appointments on fire. Then they got a check from the guy And they went into a new apartment. So that that was a recurring theme up there. And I remember just telling in 1976 in the South Bronx 300,000 families were burned burnt out. Just think of that number. And I just recalled the figure in 1976. We had 156,000 structural fires in the South Bronx, just in the South Bronx. It was the North Bronx. There was the Lower East Side. There was Harlem, Washington Heights, there was Brownsville, East New York, Crown Heights, Bushwick. I mean, city was like, was nuts. But there was actually more than 156,000 structural fires, I tell a story when we would go out. And we, if you had a say rubbish in a vacant building, it was considered structural fire because it was in a building. In those days, we had manual typewriters, the officer, the chief always made out the fire report, the chief was always at another fire. So the ranking officer at the fire Lieutenant or captain had to go back to quarters and type up the firing. hunt and peck firefighters, typewriters, none of us could take. If it was a rubbish fire, we had a form that was a one line entry. So a lot of structural fires that we went in with one line or the boost line, knocked it down, put it out and left became outside rubbish fires instead of structural fires, because we didn't want to type out the reports. So 1956, we probably had 200,000 structural fires in the city. Just think of that number. And a lot of the big cities were going through the same thing, again, 200,000 structural fires, and just in the, in the Bronx, 300,000 families. Now the big H is that we operated in five storey H has had five apartments on a floor, that's 25 families and her apartment. They were all burnt down. It was terrible. Thank God, we'll never see that again. We'll never see that again. And the guys that live, the guys that those firefighters that went through the 60s 70s 80s and early 90s. The amount of fire duty they saw was incredible. And thankfully, we'll never see them again. And they're the most experienced firefighters in the world and you've probably interviewed a lot of them. I'm sure. They're, they're amazing. You know, the amount of fire duty they did, and they wrote the book on firefighting. Guys like Vinny done Bob Farrell, all those guys. They wrote the book on all the tactics that we are using today. They wrote the book.



James Geering 23:07

Well, I want to get to your military career before we kind of walk you through your fire service journey. So when you were in high school, were you dreaming of entering the military originally? Were you dreaming of becoming a firefighter? Or was there something else on your mind?



23:21

Well, actually, I never really knew what I wanted to do. My father worked in the Navy Yard, and that didn't look too appealing to me. I, I always was into sports. So I was always thinking about maybe I'd like to go into my brother in law as a teacher. Maybe I'd like to go into teaching but

you know, maybe I'd like to go into coaching. So I really started thinking about going into teaching and coaching. But I really wouldn't have had no direction.



24:01

No really



24:01

goal like some guys grow up pay, like you had John Norman on. He always knew and wanted to be a firefighter. And a lot of these people I wanted, I always wanted to be a cop. I always want to be a backup boy five, right? I never knew what I wanted to be a matter of fact, I still don't know what I want to be when I grow up. But my mother did tell me the best advice I ever received. She said they lived through the Depression. She said, You have to take a civil service test. The only people in the neighborhood that were working during the depression are cops and firemen. So you have to take the test. I sent him like I don't know, I don't I don't know where to find him. And I don't I don't think I want to be a cop. I spent my teenage years being chased by cops. You know. And by the way, a cop could never catch a teenager with sneakers. That's for sure. We are random every time. So I said okay, I was going to school. I had, they wanted me to go to college. I want to I didn't want to go to college. I didn't know what I wanted to take. But my parents were first generation American. I was second generation. I was the first one in my family to attend college, both sides. And they were very proud of that. So they now go on to college, have no idea what I'm doing there. But my mother says, You got to take a civil service test that was 1961, I believe, or 62. I said, Okay, I'll take the fight test. So I take the fight test. I didn't even know find it. Okay, fast forward. I was into high school sports. I was on the basketball team. I sat on the end of the bench, but I did play club ball, organized ball, Elks, Cy, oh, and all that stuff. I was pretty good at it, too. But I was sure. And I was good enough to make some All Star teams and all that. I tried out for the team in college and the gods were six feet tall. And I was five, eight. So they took the six foot guys, so I became the student manager. And I met some hall of famers in my career in there in college, still not knowing what I wanted to be. So I took a liberal arts course hoping to become a teacher. All right. I graduated, I got a job in retail. And that was interesting. Um, and I started to take courses to go to become a teacher, and then the, the army cold. So I said, okay, just go in the army and see what that's all about. While I was in the army, went out west, I had a lot of good training with 10th Cavalry. And then I went to recon school and all that, blah, blah, blah. And then I heard about this place called Vietnam. I could find Vietnam on a map and neither could anybody else. But the army was gearing up to go there. I was in the Fourth Infantry Division. And I relocated to the east coast to the system Infantry Division, because my mother was ill. So it was called compassionate reassignment. Now, they're gearing up to go to Vietnam. We don't know where we're going. But I remember when I was opera, I was going to recon platoon, which is assigned to headquarters company and I think we get these maps where they I'm looking at these maps with all these rice paddies on and, and everything. topographical maps. And it's a big secret. But the secret was they were going to Vietnam. So I looked it up on a on a globe. That's the other side of the world. Not been training to be a soldier. So they, they were going to get re fled from the fifth infantry to the First Infantry Division. And, guys, that was short time as or guys that were uncompassionate reassignment didn't have to go. So I said, you know, I've been trained to be a soldier. I think I want to find out if I can be a soldier. So I raised my hand. I says, I'm going with you. Well, they said you your own compassion and reassignment. You don't have

to guys, I want to go. So I went. And we were the secretary of the Marines got their march on 73rd airborne gray got there. June or July. I think we got there in August. We were the first division, army division country. And we went around clearing the land before other units came in. We were up at a place called coochie. So over here that not that town though. He There's a book out called tunnels of Kochi. That's where the 25th Infantry Division put their headquarters they put it over a tunnel complex. The Viet Cong had a tunnel complex under the ground. When we were out clearing that area. Every night would go into a circle. And we'd set up and every night. Somebody pop up, blow off a magazine. We could never figure out how to get inside the wire. What it was was they were in tunnels underneath us. We didn't even know that. One day we found a tunnel opening and one of the You know, let's, we threw smoke down the tunnel and all of a sudden smoke was coming out over there coming out over there and over there out of the ground was tunnels all over the place. They said, Okay, go down here and check it out. It's not, I'm not going down here. I'll throw tear gas down here but I'm not going down it. We hadn't developed the tunnel rats yet at that time. Those guys were the bravest guys I've met. So we throw tear gas down in cn CS and all of a sudden, the holes are pop out and they've come out and you know, we we capture them, the smart ones that didn't come out shooting and we take them back for interrogation stuff, though. Then we run convoys and for the resupply and different units. It was it was you know, it was pretty good. We were in some good stuff. Interesting stuff. You get if you find that what you made of when you're in combat. The guys that were real tough guys in the states weren't so tough when the bullets started flying. And the little, little quiet guys that were never said a word never said a pig. When the stuff hit the fan, they stood up and fired back and did what they did their job. They did what they had to do, a lot of the guys covered behind a berm of a shooting like this. So you're really found that what you're made of when you get shot at we had some a lot of close calls, a lot of my friends didn't come home. It was a hot, terrible. The area I was in was heavily sprayed with Agent Orange. I saw a lot of gruesome things I'm we weren't heroes, we just did our job. And like I said, You're you really find out what you're made of. When bullets are whizzing past your head. You know how close to what it sounds like a web cracking, that's when they're about this close, and heard that a lot. And I was on convoys with the vehicle in front of me went 50 feet in the air. So it's all a matter of luck. And I always remember, I went from the recon platoon to the operations section where I carried the radio for the operations officer,



32:23


which is the number one target because the enemy knows that's where the command and control is.




32:30

And not only it was a battalion radio, so I had a radio. The guy behind me has the brigade radio, the guy behind him carried the spear. So not only do we have one radio, we had three and they usually would wait till the command group came in and then they would hit us at the command group level. A couple of nice experiences. But we did our jobs and proud of the fact that I survived and Jemaine the 58,000 guys died for nothing. People going on vacation to the whole Chi Minh City was I lived in, I lived in we didn't have base camps because we were there early. We I lived in the ground. And I got there at the end of the rainy season. So I lived in a hole in the ground with a little my patch on top of me to keep me dry. Two guys in a hole. One guy always awake. 30% alert every night. When the rain came, you couldn't see 10 feet. Then I

went through the dry season. Snakes, cobras, scorpions. The bugs were horrible. A lot of guys caught malaria. I was just the heat was unbelievable. Cutting I Z's for metal that's calling in artillery fire in those days that we didn't have GPS. So we did everything by map. Reading and triangulating and when we'd stopped for the night, the first thing we did when we did get in we would call in ROI and remain overnight artillery support and we had an F out with us an artillery officer. And we always hoping that he was a good one because we went by landmarks. So he would call in the first round and the first round where we'd never knew where it was going. And a lot of them came a lot of the first rounds came in amongst us. We took a lot of friendly fire casualties. We will call in three rounds to zero the artillery so if we got hit during the night they could defend this. I remember every night we dug in it was harder when we when we fight our our offense I was standing next to the battalion surgeon once what we call the ARO n. And well actually we were on the ground. And the battalion surgeon was from Schenectady, New York. And the first round was a short round. And it came in at boxes. And he got wound battalion surgeon. And I actually found him like 40 years later. And I contacted him and he said, Hey, Joe, I got the million dollar wall. He was hit. And he was medivac went back to the states and became a doctor up in Schenectady. Today, everybody has a GPS, so you know exactly where you are. So you can call in your artillery fire. Danger Close and you're pretty safe. Nothing like 21 one nothing like being on the ground when you call airstrikes in. It's amazing. We have a fact forward air controller with us, that is Air Force officer. And his radio man who was an air quote, he was in the Navy, he was in the Air Force. And he's right down down on the ground with us with the infantry. And he said Man, I drew I joined the Air Force to get out of this crap and I'm fine on ranches liquid you guys. And there's nothing when like having we had f, f, f four phantoms come in? Maybe phantoms. Jeffrey here with Jayco ever had a navy jet? Java hero at an airshow was something

 James Geering 36:31
Yes, I have, yes.

 36:32
This the loudness of it. Now they're coming in, at doing I don't know, for under 500 miles an hour, and they're on the deck. And they drop to 250 pound bombs. And Italian man it's like holy, it's amazing. The war. You know, like, well, maybe we took a little slight before then. They know stays when they went back to the carrier. They had to drop their load before they went back to the carrier because they couldn't land on the carrier with any armament. So we would get a call from say worldly birth three, zero. This is whirlybird 300 am on my way home. You got anything for me. You know, we just got a little sniper fire from this pool fit con over there just fighting all them one out as I said, Well, she might just want to drop the load. I'll give you a book give you the coordinates. So it proceeded to drop like \$200,000 worth of ordnance on this pole. One little view of content took a plot shot is anything but it was it was a great experience. And you find out if you got it or if you don't got it. You know? Am I you know, I'm I proved to myself that I could do what was right. And I can go into a lot of other stories about the military, but I don't want to brag about anything. I just like I'm proud that I served. You know,

 James Geering 37:58
what was the recession back home? Obviously, as the war progressed, there was there was

more you know, resistance to it. You sound that you got in pretty early was that occurring even when you were out there?



38:10

Okay, when I was discharged in Oakland. And it was already starting to get bad I remember they told me don't wait uniform when you leave the post when you when you go leave town. Now I spoke to guys from my unit later on. They were called baby killers, all that other crap. And I remember when I went to the fire department, I was going to join the post the the American Legion Post or the VFW Post, the fire department post. And the first meeting I went to now when I went in the fire department, most of my officers and senior men were World War Two guys. The war ended in 45. I won I joined in 66. So there were 20 years. Most of the offices were World War Two vets, all Korean vets. Some of them were POWs. And I never forget the meaning I went through and they said you guys are losing the war over that we never lost the war. What the hell's going on with you guys? And I said, I was never an engagement that we lost and put a bad taste in my mouth. So I never joined the VFW. American Legion. It was the country was turning it really turns during the the Tet Offensive. I believe the Tet Offensive was 68 when Walter Cronkite made that famous statement on his broadcast, you know, like He already said, you know, there's some we're losing this war. There's something wrong here. You know, it's very, very poorly managed. I remember going on operations and we were told you can't you can't cross that river. That's Cambodia. You know, we chased them to the river, then you couldn't go into Cambodia, which is stupid. Well, you can fight, don't fire into that towards that town, or that village. The rules of engagement was stupid. You know, when you go into war, you should fight to win the war and use everything you got. And we didn't do that. The individual soldier. They were great. And the company offices it was up at the McNamara at that level. That screwed up the wall. He had some stupid ideas, McNamara. He thought he was going to put a wall up, you know, if you put a wall up your walk around the wall. They were you know, they were bombing the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and they were just kept coming and coming and coming. You know, the fifth award was the war was fought piecemeal. Instead of all out like World War Two, we could have won that war. You know, we didn't lose a major battle we lost. We might have got harassed, kicked in some engagements. But we went back and won the battle. It was just mismanaged. And it's a waste of 58,000 lives, and all the trauma that came after that with the PTSD and all PTSD and suicides, the disease, the cancer from aging, arms, etc. Just like Afghanistan was a waste. We lost 3000 Guys in Afghanistan, we bailed out of there, they're in Afghanistan, again. You go to a war. If you've got you don't go to war and, and fight it piecemeal, you go all out. And like Patton said, You Your job is to kill more than then they kill more of us. That's all. And



James Geering 41:53

so what was that transition like for you? You said that you know that, that you were told not to wear uniform? Not so much that day, but the the weeks after one moment, you're in Vietnam, now you're standing back on American soil that did you have any struggles with that transition? And initially,



42:09

not really. I was met at the airport with my little nieces and nephews were American flags

not really. I was met at the airport with my little nieces and nephews were American flags, which was very, very happy. And when I was in the army, I was called to the fire department.

 42:27

And I said, I was cold January 65. I said, I'm a little busy right now. I'll get out get in touch you when I get back. So

 42:39

I had corresponded with them saying I'm being discharged in March of 66. And within April, May, within less than three months, I was appointed to the fire department. So it was a very quick transition from military life to civilian life. And I went in FDNY my I had a very small probationary phi class, mostly made up of veterans that had been Vietnam vets. So, you know, we're all we weren't kids. Were all men, grown men. And we were a lot of us were combat veterans. One of my classmates ready to fail was in the battle or er, drag with the calf. And I had another guy who was with me in the First Infantry Division. So a lot of a lot of combat Vets older guys, they didn't get have that. Today. If you're in pro and probation in high school in the city, I don't know when it started years ago, they have like a drill instructor mentality, where they yell at him and they run everywhere and all that we didn't do any of that. We just we were men. They treated us like men were very small class. 50 Something guys. And I went, you know, eight weeks then I didn't know anybody I didn't even know a fireman never was in a firehouse then no firemen and I got assigned to open a 39 engine. And I go up there and read my report in and say hello to the guys introduce myself. Okay. You're coming to work this day. What do you do? What were you? I said, I just got out of the army. I didn't say I just came home from Vietnam. And I didn't I

 44:31

didn't. I didn't talk about it. They didn't know who I was. They just well, we got a probie What did he do? I think he said he just got out of the army. This is a funny story. So I didn't brag but it was not to brag about I did my duty for my country. So one of the first runs I go on. We have a man on All fire. Okay, the manhole smoldering. Did you live in Manhattan?

 James Geering 45:06

No. So I've lived in America lived on the west coast in Orange County area and then in Florida in the Orlando area,

 45:14

okay. And we have all these manholes with the electrical conduits in it. And a lot of times they, the wires cook the manholes blow. And it sounds like it's a major explosion. I mean, they, they'll break the windows five storeys high. And it's very, very dangerous. So we have a manhole fire around the corner, we usually stretch a line and we'll pull the cover and we're flooded. The

Electric Company doesn't like to do that they don't like get flooded because then they got to pump it out and all this other crap. So anyway, and when the cover goes Forget it lifts cars up. They blow 75 feet and yeah, these things weigh like 150 pounds. So we're just standing by getting ready maybe to pull the cover, we stretch the line and stand at the manhole blows. You know, it's like sounds like a major explosion. And as soon as I heard that, my mind kicked in I had a flashback. To me, it sounded like incoming. And automatically reflex I hit the deck. Now the guys are standing around like this the manhole blows they just they look around. I'm laying on the ground. They've looked and gone. Holy shit. What did they send this from? probie school. Look at this guy. He's laying on the ground. So now I'm totally embarrassed. So I I stand up and say sorry, guys. I just had a flashback. What do you have? I said, I just had a flashback. Six weeks ago, I was in Vietnam. And it sounded like, Incoming, incoming. While you were in Vietnam. Yeah. I just got back six weeks ago. We didn't know that. And I thought I was like, a piece of shit a coward. Now it's a little different because I told him Yeah, I was in Vietnam. And that's, it was automatic reflex. Okay, so now I'm a probie. They probably have doubts about Me. So I gotta be the toughest guy in the room at any fire. Those days, the guys didn't wear masks. Usually the Johnny. Johnny would be the last guy, the junior man, the Johnny would break the last cup, the hose, hooked it up to the thing and then he would grab a mask and go in with the mask and relieve the guy on the nozzle. So we had a bunch of jobs. And I'm really even the guy in the hustle. He said is this job's not that bad. I can do this job was great. I loved it. Go back to the firehouse. We'd wash up, watch a little sports, go to a fire. Have a nice meal. And I'm saying today, you get paid for this. They actually pay you to do this hang around with the guys go to fires. Everybody fire in scope by everybody runs to the fire. I'm getting paid to go to fires. Make dinner with the guys hang out.

 48:33

And a check comes every two weeks. I said this is great. I love this. So now you know we're going forward. We're going forward. This is 6660 I can

 48:45

do the job here. 1968 they have a by the way, every fire I went to and I was great. And it was exciting, exhilarating. And I never had one ounce of


 49:03


fear. 68 they have a transfer order they have a big lift.

 49:09

Because they want to take the guys from the so called busy companies and put them in the more medium companies and the guys in the medium companies up in the busy companies. I'm the junior man. So they sent me up to haul 36 engine. Now I got there. I already proved myself in 39 engine I gotta reprove myself at 36 senses go in and a bunch of jobs up there and haul them and put out the fires. No problem. Piece of cake. Those days that building construction was different. They had single pane windows. And mattresses had were made out

of straw furnaces were made out of wood. It wasn't plastic, foam rubber, double pane windows, you know if you turn the call On a fire was coming out the window was great. You could walk in down a hole put the fire out so I'm right responding with 36 cents and had great legendary firefighters I had a legendary World War Two officer Joe gas Breno and Mike could do the job is as good as anyone. And usually when you went to work if you wanted the nozzle if you got an earl you put your helmet on the nozzle and you coat so when the run came in, you had the nozzle now for senior man's work and he wanted the nozzle to take your helmet and throw it on the ground. So anyway, I remember forgot this week I put my helmet on the nozzle, we get a run and the senior man took off went home we had went to a fifth alarm that got into like three or four buildings tenement it got into the shaft and it went left and right to the to tournaments on either side. So 36 engine, I had the nozzle and we put out three floors of fire. I had the nozzle three floors of fire, piece of cake. I was in good shape and those things I'll never forget the guy said to me, he said What do you want man Fire Department. I said no, this is easy. I love this. This is great. I was in good shape in those days. And we had an inch and a half long. This is before we went the inch and three quarter and all that. And you really could maneuver an inch and a half long. So we put out three floors of fire. And I think I made my bones at that fire with 36 now I work with the legendary Lowry Fitzpatrick was a legend became a legendary fireman, Larry and I went to primary school together. And on our trophy school graduation, they put on a big demonstration for the families and Larry and I went off the five storey building and we did the single slide. And we practiced that for a week. So we must have had 50 single slides roof you know and if people outfit on on a single slide as you get up on the roof, and you slide down the side of the building five storeys it's the rescue somebody. Ironically, he fast forward a few years after Larry left 36 He went to 26 trucks and he went to rescue three he wound up dying at the Fitzpatrick frisbee fire. First, he was a probie in ladder 28 and Harlem and he was trapped in a window at a fire. Larry was on the roof and rescue three. Larry did the single slide grabbed frisbee, the rope broke, and they both were killed. So it's ironic that Laurie and I went to probie school together and we did the single slide for graduation. And that's how Larry died in the job doing the single slide the rescue of fine. So we had some legendary guys in 30 sector, which is under the Alan Hollom who was the single firehouse, real CD area of home. But it was a great firehouse and a lot of great guys and I love that there but at that time, I'm still going to college thinking I'm going to be a teacher and a coach. And I was taking graduate courses at Hunter College, which was on 68th Street Lexington Avenue, right around the corner from 39 engine and 16 truck. So I transferred back to 39 because I was taking college courses there. And then I wound up going into 16 truck. Okay. Back up a minute when I was a probie I was at the 23rd Street fire. You know the you know the 23rd Street Fighter right, but we lost a dozen guys. Yes, sir. Okay, so I I went down there early in the morning we had stood by what a watch line. So I was at one of the most famous fires in the FDNY history. The 23rd Street fire down and 16 truck. I can tell you a lot of funny stories about making rescues and grabs and all that stuff. I don't know if you want to hear that stuff.

 James Geering 54:20
Absolutely.

 54:22
Well, okay. I'm in 16 truck, we get a job when they crawl in. Couches gone. I call and I make a search. As I feel a body of pull out it's a female. Get her out in the hallway, looking female. So I slept given a mouth to mouth and the other guy starts giving her impressions. Pretty girl. I'm

just going to mount them out. So while I'm hearing her mouth to mouth or our eyes open, she looks at me. First thing she does is whack. She slaps me across the face she was she had too much to drink that night. So smoking dropped the butt on the couch and went to bed. So if he slapped me across the face let me think I'm in when I'm another time I'm in 39 would get a job Oh, this is an interesting one. I'm in 39 we get a job around Christmas time. High Rise multiple dwelling fireproof. First do we go in high rise fireproof multiple dwelling in office building fires are the toughest fires you can have. You can make the whole without a mask. So we go down, we go down we go down and the upon we knock the fire out we have Christmas time we have to do ways a mother and a child very sad, very terrible. And the husband was away on a business trip a very, very good successful businessman very wealthy. He said he came up to the firehouse when we were chatting and he said I don't want to see this ever happen to another father. So he put a group together and they developed the first commercial retail fire smoke detector as a result of that fire so I was at the fire where the residential smoke detector came the first one it was like this big and it was like 75 hours when I was at that fire very tragic fire another fire I had when I was there we had a job to lose second to engine mother high rise fireproof first engine was in we will hook up on two floors below and I said let me get up get in and get a layout low and going up to get a layout Lieutenant so I go up to get a layout and fire crawl down a hallway a crawl in the fire pocket get a layout next thing I know it's down to the floor flies going nice thing I don't see a naked man. Oh shit. I got one. Now he was completely naked but he was if you ever pull somebody out of a fire that is very sweaty. Yeah, so I started dragging him out and a guy from the truck says okay, I'll help you. So we get out of the hole in the hole is charged it's an L shaped tool so at the end of the hole and makes a right turn and then you go left to the hallway so I got I'm carrying the front part the head he's got the back but and I can't see where I'm going Rams Head into the wall sorry he's unconscious we make the turn we get into the stairs and I any slimy so I dropped the rolls down this is the the floor below. Now this guy's a man. So I immediately started chest compressions. I wasn't gonna get demand knock them out. So I beat the other guy to it. So he's given a mouth to mouth. We bring the guy back save his life transport him to the hospital and everything nice job Nice job the big truck company obviously calls the guy up he said we want to put a guy in for a rescue. What do you think my will kinds is? Well, Mike I found them. Hey, Joe, what are they want to put the guy in for a rescue. I said well, it's going to be hard to explain how to secondary engine when found the body so I don't think we should do that. So anyway, at three o'clock in the morning, the marshals fire marshals come to borders. And they go well who's the guy? The guy that found the guy says that's me. He said, we're going to make everything suspicious. I said why? Well, that guy was all full of bruises. He had a he had a big lump on his head and have bruises all over his body. We think he was beat up and they set a fire. Wait, no, let me explain this to you. I rammed his head into the wall. We randomly rolled them down the stairs. Not suspicious. So I was like it was nice. I came from the culture of this that that that was your job. I had an old German Captain 16 truck and we put plenty of people out and that was your job. And adults were not part of the job back then. You know, when he was laid, everybody got rid of metal you know, but anyway 16 and 39 Great House 36 engine great house. Now I'm going to John Jay. I'm going to hunt the college. And I had the layoffs I went through the layoffs I went through the freeze the hiring freeze with nobody got promoted for a few years. I was on the bad end that ad and the layoffs was a terrible thing and I believe the layoff sort of 1975 within later today As a fireman, and then a lot of them got jobs as bus drivers both days was very terrible the day of the strike and the day of the layoffs, they really, the dissension in the fire department was terrible that day, and there was a lot of in house fighting and everything and I'm sad that that we had to go to a layoff. I felt sorry for the guys. And I felt sorry for the you know, the that whole scene with the layoffs and the strikes, it was just terrible times in a fight upon. And it was busy as hell and O'Hagan was cut and companies making 7475 We cut a lot of units. And we were just the viability was through the roof. So anyway, lighting, I studied for

Lieutenant. And I didn't I studied, like I studied for tests in college like the night before the test, which is not the way to study for civil service. There's so many things you have to know in civil service you have to do you have to read it 1000 times to recall it. In college, you studied whatever and then you put the book away. I went to della Hannity's, which was a fireman school. And they gave us homework, I did the homework, I put it away. And that was it. Okay, so I passed the test, but it didn't write a great model. And I was in the freeze. So then I get promoted, I was lucky enough to get promoted. And I went up to the South Bronx. And the best thing that ever happened to me, I'm working in these days. Now this was 76. So the wars started the really busy times really started around 6667 where the Exodus began, I worked with guys and I was in primary school live with guys that lived in the South Bronx. But then the Exodus started. So that's when it went nuts. And all these companies were great companies, they worked a lot in 94 and 48, which was second dude 82 or 31 Dennis Smith wrote the book in 1972 that put FDNY on the map report from engine company 82. Now, I'm working with these guys in the book. These these are like Legend, these guys. And I got the privilege to work with them. And, you know, it was like, and I work with legendary guys, you walk in the door and at you know, and it's funny because when you're recovering offices, they don't know you but you walk in and the first thing that goes, Hey, look at how you went your wife. You know, they want to know your pedigree. And you have to tell them and if you worked at a really busy company, okay, you okay? If you worked in slow company, we got this guy, let's keep an eye on this guy. If you worked in an engine, slow company engine that really ought to keep an eye on your work. So you had to prove yourself at every fight. So we go out the door. And they didn't I didn't wear a mask in those days, I looked to the left that I looked at a right the eye and steam was not wearing a mask. I wasn't wearing a mask. So we'd go to five do a good job. I went in as far as they went, came back to court is going to bear fruit throw up have a headache. And I'll let him go out the door again. Have another job, come back throw up and have a headache. But you know you want it to be as tough if not tougher than now you should go to 25 years with them and prove yourself. Okay. But at the 21st fire for some reason you made a wrong turn or something. Now you're now you're a piece of crap. Oh, this guy's a piece of crap. He went the wrong way. You know, build a build, build 1000 bridges. You're the Great Bridge Builder. But one that fell down us think so. The fire service you're only as good as your last job. So I got the I proved myself up there. I work with legendary guys. I work with a captain Bob Farrell in 31 truck, who was his nickname was God with a little g.



1:04:24

One of the most knowledgeable firefighters in the in the in the city. Winner of the highest award in the city. The good and bad in metal he was a lieutenant in 31 truck and a captain. He wrote the book on him and John O'Regan and some other guys they wrote the book on Camelot operations, roof operations, the SOAR bulletin. We didn't have saws they finally got stolen. The rescuers had sores then when the truck companies got saws. He wrote the bulletin. He wrote the book. They wrote all the bullets on it. tactics, John Reagan and those guys wrote the bullet training bulletins because they will go into fires. And they were they were learning and they wrote it down. It was the best thing that ever happened to us. There was a John Farrell and Louie Andre. They were known as Batman and Robin up there, they would show tremendous offices. And I'll tell you the story how they got their nicknames Batman and Robin. They'd go you know, they'd be going to fires and fires and fires and then they'd be out and they'd hear a job coming in. They say that sounds like it's gonna go a second let's sneak over there. And I think it was chief was a Kelsey was an Irish chief Kelly Kelsey, one of those guys really great guy. He would they would sneak up behind them and be standing there and when when he was getting ready to transmit the second he tell the eight transmit the second now. Pharaoh with

top tapping on saucers, we're here. And he turned around and see Andre and Pharrell said he said, What did you guys come from the Batcave. So that's how they got the nickname Batman and Robin, to tremendous Fire Officers. So I got the I had the honor to Lieutenant Tom Simmons, another legendary guy in 82. I think he blew out his knee as minister. So I got the pleasure to do his long term medical leave in 82 and had the honor to work with all these guys. And it was, it was a wonderful experience. I had to actually get to know somebody to get into one of those companies believe it or not, especially a truck company. You can get a truck company. There was three engines for every two trucks. We had 250 engines, 125 trucks, twice as many engine trucks. So you had to know somebody have hat you had to have weight and I didn't know anybody. So I wound up in an engine company. 38 great country. Great company. Great guys. They're in the top 25 today. One of my proviz was a guy named Jack McGee. You remember the rescue me? Dennis Leary series?

 James Geering 1:07:18

I do. Yes.

 1:07:20

Remember the chief? Yes. The chief. That was Jack McGee. He was my probation 38 engine.


 James Geering 1:07:26


Oh, really? Yeah.


 1:07:28


He was a fireman 10 years he decided to want to be an actor. I said what do you not? Subject and he was my probie. So I spent some time up there. Study for Captain again, like the not the greatest stuff here. I got promoted, I got promoted the captain. I said, Oh, I hope I go to Brooklyn. I've been to Manhattan. I've been to the Bronx. I want to go to Brooklyn. Where do they send me? First Division Manhattan. One of the first division is lower Manhattan. The third division is Midtown ran both places ever worked in a fight upon the most difficult areas to work in the first and third divisions. The most difficult fights, they don't have a lot of fires, but they have difficult flies. The structures are all different. You have the office building fires a horrible sub cell as I had the, let's say, the World Trade Centers. I had the Marriott when the Marriott was being first occupied that was the hotel, the hotel between the trade centers. The south tower did collapse into the Marriott and killed a lot of firemen that were in the Marriott on 911. I had a job and that I was in five truck and I was in five truck. I forget what truck I was in. But anyway, I get out. One of the upper floors say the eighth 10th floor and we get a hole. We had a room with about 20 matches is stored in the golden stone in Maryland. We stretch the house line. But they hadn't charged the standpipe yet they had to run a line across West Street. Charge the standpipe they had done that yet. So we we stretched the house line start water and the water's like, I have my thumb on the end that a house light and I'm operating in this room that's fully in golf. She said How you doing up there? I said well, if you tried to standpipe we'll put the fire out. So I'm in the room and the room the witness let go in the room, the room


lights out, lights up. So we bail out we roll out. We roll out of the room they get finally they get water in the standpipe. We're going to put the fire out. That was the one fire I had in the Trade Center. Had a lot of interesting fires and like identify We're in a loft one day. And Manhattan's nuts they had basements, cellars and sub cellars and these old lofts and they're it's like a six storey five storey loft full of smoke and the truck to search and I remember reading an article about law fires while I was standing by we were first still engine I had my guy stretch to the front door and I took I went down to the basement and I went down was charged and I went down to the cellar was charged and I went down to the sub cellar was roaring merrily All right, very true bring our lion chief we got to find them in sub segment we put it out but the construction down here was very difficult very hard fires had fired off its billing to two and a half inch lines and we could barely make it down the hole we went to two and a half we we went foot by foot by foot finally we get down here fires out deputy comes up says Great job guys you put the fire out chief look around there's nothing but ashes in here we didn't put the fire out it burns itself out in an office building tries very difficult and very difficult place to work but I enjoyed my stay down there very interesting area that's when Alphabet City was burning. You know and also that's when Soho all our garment industry was going overseas. So all the loss we're going vacant then. And you could have bought a lot for 250,000 Donald's. Now you can't buy a floor for less than two and a half billion balance. Match if we would have no

 James Geering 1:11:50
female female

 1:11:54
33 and nine it was I love being a captain down there. Met some really great

 1:11:59
people. Um Let's see interesting fires down here. I remember I had a fire in it I was covering I met Steve Buscemi You know Steve Buscemi,

 James Geering 1:12:12
yeah, I'm still working on trying to get him on the show. I mean, his story is legendary.

 1:12:18
If he was in the he was in 55 engine I worked some tours with him. He told me he was going to be an actor he wanted to be an actor. I looked at Emory shouldn't like look like Tony Curtis. I said interesting and you want to be an act as Yeah, so we have this job I'm in 55 engineers company we turn a quarter it's blowing out one window. In one of those days we had a signal called 1030 which means you have a working fire they no longer have that single they have a single call 1075 now which is you have a working fire and you want for engines to trucks and the rescue. Those days 1030 just means you have a working fire that's why is that one window?

We stretch up but the fire battalion chief I don't have to have my suffice. Our chief fires under control that pull the ceilings we got it. He says okay, come on down. I want to talk to you. downstairs. She felt like great guy. Plenty a boy. I didn't know him at the time. He said a capital I told him What's up chief he says How come you only transmitted a 1030 and you're not attend 75 I said while chief I looked up and fire was out one window. One window to me means it's only in one room. One room requires one line. I go up my one line I put the fire out. I'm getting two engines on the box. So if we need the second engine we got the line we don't need three engines, two trucks the rescue in the wrong hands. We didn't need all that for that. That's a good answer. I like that. So that's how I met my friend linea boy, boy, you know but I enjoy I 33 Nine great companies 33 engine. Unfortunately they were they were killed on on a 911 that the company a lot of Jimmy Boyle and lieutenant and Pfeiffer, Lieutenant Pfeiffer who was the chief in charge the first chief on the scene chief Pfeiffer. That was his brother. He Pfeiffer. They were in the north tower. And his brother 33 engine mile company went in and told his brother to go up above and that was the end of his brother 33 in ninth grade house. There's a famous painting of a fellow named Leon polisher sitting on House watch. It's a thing I was painted with a cup of coffee and a cigarette. Never see that painting.

 James Geering 1:15:04

I haven't seen that one though.

 1:15:07

That's a great one. That's I think they call it the house watch or something. And Leon was another great fireman.

 1:15:13

All right, 33 in line. Great place to work. Second do to Alphabet City. First do over at NYU. Every gentrified now very beautiful. You can't touch the area.

 1:15:34

I get lucky enough to. While I'm there, IMEs I meet a fellow named Anthony Fosco. Who asked me to join his study club. I said, Yeah, I'd like to join your study club. All right, this is your assignment. You read this, this and this. And we had four guys. Everybody had this cyber and we'd meet once a week. And then he said, Tell me how you study. And I said, Well, I do the assignment. And he says, no, no, no, that's not how you study for civil service. He says you have to read everything. Printed, every manual printed once a month. I said everything said everything. The best I could do was get accounted 35 days. But I would now he taught me how to study for civil service. He's just don't do the homework, you study five hours a day, just 37 days a week. And that, and then we will go into telehealth these and we would take tests and it became very competitive. Who would write the highest mark on the test? So I didn't think I could do it. But being motivated by Tony Fosco. I studied for 23 months, five hours a day. So that's the way to study for civil service. And Tony wrote like friggin 98. And I wrote a I believe I wrote a 92 on the test I But anyway, was one of the highest marks on the test. So as a result,

when the list came out, I was like, I think I was fifth. I wrote number two or three and not But didn't they I had no seniority. So I think I was number 15, something like that. The day the battalion chiefs list came out the first day, I got promoted a group of us. So I said, Oh man, where

 1:17:43

am I going to go? Let's say away from Manhattan to the Bronx. proximately. I hope I go to Brooklyn. Luckily I went to.

 1:17:51

And I was luckily I was assigned to the 11th division, which is a busy division. Now, I never went to Officer Training School as a lieutenant never went to Officer Training School as a captain. And one day I'm a captain next day, I'm gonna pretend you never went to train today. Every time you get promoted, you go to Officer School, which is great. At every rank, fine, never had one formal day of training. I did all my training was on the job training. So luckily, my first tours I went through the full full battalion in Brownsville, which is the busiest battalion in Brooklyn at the time. And I met, I didn't have to tell them what to do. They know what to do. So I, my job was to keep them safe, make sure they were safe and get them more help if they need more help. And to observe. And if I saw something, say something. Someone with a lot of fires, and every time I came back from the fire, I would I kept a notebook and I wrote down what went good, what could have gone better what I should have done. So I was learning on the job experience. And I went from the four four over two to three four where I met some stars that were FDNY stars that were legends guys like Ben is cross Eddie Gary. And a lot of those guys and I learned some more over there. And then I didn't medical little longtime murdered medical leave. And then the chief passed away. So they fill that spot. I went from that spot to the five seven battalion which is in Bedford Stuyvesant, very busy but time and I had a lot of fire duty there. Work with the best guys ever. 111 truck 230 engine, 235 engine, all these great companies and I had The number of interesting fires I had a fire on Bedford and Atlantic and a taxpayer once we went out the door I could smell it. I knew we had a job. And there was a taxpayer going on the land again it was very long taxpayer exposure to was a five storey tenement, vacant above. Rug store on first full disclosure full with three two storey buildings that the taxpayer ran around. I transmitted second as soon as I got there, we were operating it was a tea store. So went down and went around behind the other stores. We were operating towel ladders, cutting the roof, we couldn't put the fire out because it was spreading behind all lines and went through 16 inches of brick logging into the exposure that


 1:20:52


the staff chief came in. Was a very nervous staff cheat. He had a nickname. His nickname was Skippy. I don't know why they call him Skippy. I hate to be derogatory but I think somebody said he skipped around doing a lot of work. So that's why they call him Skippy.

 1:21:09

So skin He's very nervous. He doesn't want to transmit the fourth because on the fourth the

So skip he's very nervous. He doesn't want to transmit the fourth because on the fourth the cheaper operations would come in and No, no chief wants another higher chief to come in and the fifth the Chief of Department come in. So my bar were operating. And next thing I know it flows out of the exposure too, because had gone through 16 inches of brick. So he said, Oh my god, transmit the fourth. And he runs down the block and he says you're in charge of the roof get up on the roof. So I went up on a roof and I got the guys from squad in the restroom, we cut a trench we got bent tips. And everything we stopped to fire at the trench we saved the tenements but anyway went through fifth along very difficult, interesting fire. They use my bad flag, you'll go back and I write the fire report. So I wrote the whole fire report. They liked it so much. On the next battalion chiefs exam. For the essay for a fire, they use my fire report for the essay on fire, which is pretty cool. I think that's very cool. I had a lot of fires in the five, seven met a lot of great guys and everything. And I just was promoted a short time. Everything in life is timing, right? Like when I was the captain, the short time I took the battalion chiefs test now I'm a tangy for short time, like very short time. And I the deputies test test comes out. So I had just saw I said no. Tony Fosco. And I said let's study for deputy. So we studied for like eight months, but I had remembered so much from being the battalion chief. I passed the deputies test. Only 17 guys passed the test 17. So they make a few changes to get the list of the 29. So luckily I've been to as a battalion chief, I was in all these busy battalions and I, I really learned a lot. And I had especially I went from the five seven to the two way which is in Bushwick. And we had row frames and a two eight. And that's multiple alarm country. A lot of brownstones in 571 alarm fires, the two eight second alarms on arrival, not only in the building, but it went into both exposures. So a lot of times the Blackwood learn burned down or burned down to the vacant lot where we used to have a building so I had a lot of multiple alarm exposure in a to eight and so I handle them I can handle a lot of multiple ones. Met a lot of great firefighters legendary firefighters, they're my lieutenant was pre dancey. In my truck company in the quarters of Mills precancer, who became Chief of Department he can see who was killed online alone. Dennis cross killed on line 11 became a deputy. George isaa became a battalion chief died of 911 cancer. jimmy allison formed the squats died in 911 cancer I had all these magnificent stores I worked with that made me look good. And so I wasn't afraid of going into fire wanted to go fires. I got made deputy because I remembered so much from being a battalion chief. I get assigned to operations in a desk job. I started something called projects and planning random deputies were assigned for three months to operations to learn what goes on in headquarters. And he worked directly for the Chief of Operations. Chief of Operations was the chief came home efficient if you recognize that name, nine out of the most, one of the most famous chiefs in FBM, one very tough piece or never smiled, made all the tough decisions and FDNY wasn't popular because he made all the tough decisions, eliminated the units. He cut units and he was never smile. It was a tough guy lifted transfer guys on a heartbeat. Myself and achieved named Kenny Sorento were the first planning and project officers. Kenny sir went on to become an assistant chief. He worked in the seventh division Kenny had their Happyland fight you know about the Happyland fire right?

 James Geering 1:25:58
No Sir doesn't doesn't ring a bell either. Fire was a

 1:26:01
social club for he had 78 D always 78 They always



James Geering 1:26:06

saw the one where they threw gas at the entrance. Yes. Okay, so I'm familiar with it. Yeah.



1:26:11

78 do a stat I, I was going to Sixth Division. He was in the seventh. That was two blocks out of my area. Thank God. seventh eighth deal is imagine that what Kenny and I were the first planning and project offices up there. And Homer was a tough piece of work. Nobody he never smiled, always broke chops. So I, I was I was kidding around. I always like to have fun and work and join myself and get the job done. There's a funny story. So I told this story on to another bunch of group of guys. One day I was in a bookstore and they had this big tall chimpanzee. I forget what it was selling a cardboard cutout. It was like six feet high. So I asked the guy can I have that? What do you want to foil this guy Give it to me. I want to bring it into the foyer tomorrow. So he gave me the chimpanzee cut at home. I used to come to work in the morning. He'd get in around 830 He would walk in straight and never sownload Anybody with a frown on his face, go into his secretary's desk, get his key. Open his office door. He came in in a suit, open a sliding closet to change into his uniform. So one day I said I'm going to do some. So I bought the chimpanzee and I went into the secretary's desk, open up, went into his office open the sliding door. And I dressed the chimpanzee in his uniform with a white shirt on with the four stars and the jacket. So the first thing he's going to see what he slides is Thor is a chimpanzee everybody said you're not you're crazy. He's going to transfer you to Staten Island. I said, now he's not. He's not we're gonna get a smile at him. He never smiles. He comes in the morning. Everybody's like peeking around the corner. The door. He goes in his office. We're trying to see it. We will hear him call out. I think his secretary was effortless. And Elizabeth is in Alaska. Yes, G get a binotto in here. He knew right away. It was me. I go in what can I do for you, chief? He said Don't you have anything better to do up here than this? I said, Chief I thought you could use a smile because you're always on there's so much pressure to get out of my lungs. But I could swear on the way out of the oversight saw him smile might be the only time you have a smile. So So what did they send me? They send me after three months they send me out to Queens to the 13 division. At that time, queens had two divisions 13th and 14th. And they they really weren't doing any work out they're doing another medical leave out there for Chief thing James Joyce. So I'm going through a few fires, but it's mostly private dwellings. Okay. And like I'm really not doing anything. It's not a it's not a deputies job, private dwellings. I didn't do much work out there. So chief choice passed away and the borough commander asked me to stay. I said look, I'm a young guy. I can study to not go to fires. I want to go to fire. So I'm, I don't want to stay I thank you for offering me the spot. But I'm going to I would like to go to a busier place. At that time. There was a borough commander in the Bronx was a chief that was very stern. Very not well. Light, always fighting with his chiefs, strict disciplinarian, not well, like nobody wants to go there. So a chief in the Sixth Division was getting transferred out for a certain reason or he was wanting to go just want that to change. There was an open source. I don't want to go to the Bronx. So they said, Why do you want to go to the Bronx? Will you then have to pay a toll? You're going to add a half an hour to travel time and pay a toll. And you know, it's very busy. I said, Yes, that's why I want to go to the Bronx. You pay to go to the movies, I'll pay a toll to go to the Bronx. So and nobody wants a place so I put into the Sixth Division, I got it immediately. The best thing I ever did in my life. I went to the division was located on 167th in Washington Avenue 5019 that the engine 19 truck, greatest bunch of guys guys in the world, crazy guys. Best fireman ever. And I just loved it that was going to 3455 as a tool. And it was just it was like I died and went to heaven. It was the best time of my life. Best

firemen the best firewall of the city. But just that sense of humor we kicked it around we had a great just the greatest time of my life I can tell you a million funny stories just I just loved it up there guys are great they took care of me and I took care of them I went to so many fires up them at so many characters up there then I'm trying to read and I went to a gazillion fires and luckily nobody got hurt now I went to you know I being a firewall walk down the driveway come out of the driveway the side alley and the building the crime so or we were in a room I got a big Hi Come on out guys take a blow away. All right, come on out. Take the boat before the floor collapse on we would go up and go up to the roof check things out come down the stairs, the stairs collapsed. It was all I was so lucky. So lucky. And I always say this guy said you were good. I said no, I wasn't good. I was lucky. And it's better to be lucky and good. Better be lucky than good. I had a fire on Nelson Avenue in the Bronx. And exposure to was a lot which was filled with rubble so I couldn't get the talent ladder and when I turned it was three o'clock the morning turn out from quarters about 15 bucks way to fly. I could see it in the sky. 15 bucks away. I call the bronx's The Sixth Division that runs make sure I have at least two talent Arizona slots that's what your location is as I'm on the apron but I could see from you on the way there I see embers coming down. sighs a softball they said on the way there I said special call to engine companies threat Amber patrol because I get there. And the guys are making an aggressive attack and I want to put 44 trucks and exposure to but there's Rubble there they can't get in. Alright, so it looks kind of hairy. So I'm starting to back the guys out starting to back on you guys gotta come out. There's too much flight. It's too much fight back out. Let's just towel out of this with that a guy and rescue three who's in the race as a chief. I see a crack developing in the building. So I said okay, urgent, urgent. Everybody out. Everybody out. Within 60 seconds. entire building collapsed into the lot where I was going to put 40 foot truck. It was just a matter of luck. That fire makes the cover of White House magazine. You should see that way I have to imagine it. Now they had a bunch of wires coming through the lot. cable wires, electric wires, everything else. It was about six, eight inches in diameter. They were all grouped they were running through the lot to a telephone pole in the street where we had the command post. The building hit that wire. It didn't break the wire but the shock transmitted to the telephone pole. The telephone pole snapped in half. It's it's fun like a propeller. Imagine it was about Got a feet away from us where we had the command post. We all turn white looked at each other because we, I don't know none of us were killed. It was a miracle. So we had two miracles at that farm. I didn't put 40 foot truck in the exposure and when the telephone pole didn't kill, kill any of us. I had so many big fires up them. We had a fire and Shakespeare everything Shakespeare really was a top block. They had just, they had a rookie cop sitting in the car on Shakespeare 167 and



1:35:35

Shakespeare. He was sitting on a building that they weren't they were monitoring.



1:35:40

Some guy came up, blew his head away one night. That was a tough Street. Most of it was vacant. One summer day I get Shakespearian 167. We could have started and we have like five buildings. It started in the middle, the middle building and went left and right to two other buildings. And then there were two on the end, there was five buildings. It was about 98 degrees. I get in there, it's a hot summer day. Second alarm on arrival. I got a towel out and working on the fire building. I got the second alarm going into exposure to the third alarm goes

into exposure three, I transmit that third it's 98 degrees. Now gets into the fourth building and the fifth building in Apocalypse. The whole blocks on fire. So I'm standing here with my eight big Sal and Sal smoke. We all smoke cigars. Sales hackers big stole he was standing there in front of the at the command post and he's standing there was the smoking of exposure for B was occupied. So but they're taking the pollen ceilings on a club floor, they taken the glass, they take the glass at a shot come shooting out sounds standing like this. And it cuts his cigar right in half. If it was six inches this way, it would have been killed. He looks at me I looked at him. I said I think we got a backup. But you know, that was just a gazillion fires. And we had this placed on river Avenue called the Bronx Terminal Market. All the produce for the Bronx came in it no longer does it goes. It goes the Hunts Point in the market. All the produce for the city in New York comes into the hunts market it used to come into the Fulton Fish Market. And that's gone that's up there in the hunts terminal market now. So anyway, it used to be on River Street the the building was 1000 feet long and it had 100 occupancies in it all produce. It had 15 foot cement roof 15 foot ceilings. Two was two stories very small second floor with bins of you had bins of corn and straw hats and everything in the world that you can think of used to go to a fight as every week. It was some of the fires was so bad when we turned the corner on river avenue you couldn't see where you're going. I had to get out in front of the chief Scott and walk in front of the cheesecloth to guide the guide the driver there and we had fires in that all the time and that's where I experimented with positive pressure ventilation. Because they used to use the fans they hang them to suck the smoke out of the buildings. Then we decided to go with blowing smoke blowing the air into the buildings and it worked tremendously. At a job in the market one day and I special called the high X foam you that because they have a giant fan of high X foam they get the acid put the fan on I tell everybody back out let's put this on the pressurize the building because we we couldn't see where it was burning was down to the floor within 60 seconds. If it seems you could see we could find where it's burning, or we could put the fire out. It's amazing. Another thing we used to use in the high rise projects we'd have we experimented with positive pressure, I would have them open the lobby door open the stairwell door and the roof door and I'd have them put fans in the lobby door and put fans in the stairwell door and the stairwells would clear up immediately. And then if you open the fire attack Florida, it actually will clear the FIFO so we experimented with all that stuff. And it worked This stuck in the fence the smoke out that never worked out. That was no good. Let's see. I just haven't had that coffin factory that was on the cover of, of firehouse magazine. I had that numerous times. And it was like not like saying to the guy fire out 78 windows. Fire out 78 When was and it was Old Mill construction. If you couldn't burn it down, they made it into condominiums. Also, when I went up there, they still had a few breweries left that were vacant. We had fires in the old row, you couldn't burn them down. They were all milk construction, Sheffield milk farms up there was a black loan, a city block loan, I certify as an old mill construction, you couldn't burn it down. Then in the 1990s, they started to the construction of this started to go into this lightweight trust stuff. vein, very dangerous, very scary stuff. And firemen kill us. Because they collapse like that. They use that pressboard glue, gusset plate construction, very dangerous. We wrote a bolt and a six division bulletin about them. And we didn't want anybody going on the roof, etc. And on both it was so good. The Jersey City Fire Department used it as a training bolt. So the guys that they were great, that was smart. You know, they best firemen in the world, just like the ones in Brooklyn and Manhattan and all of all, firemen are great. You can take a fire him and put him in the slow company. If you put them in a busy company with great farmer, he's a great farm and a slow company. It's just about the luck of the draw where you get assigned. That's all. I met very few firemen that were for firemen. And I met a few for company officers and chiefs. Not everybody. Just because you have FDNY doesn't mean you're good to great. You know, but I'd say 95% of them are good and great. It's just a matter of fact, that way you're assigned and who trains you. Okay, and I what I start taking ice when I'm a captain, I started taking my son to the firehouse because it was my

firehouse. So I started taking my kid in. And then when I made battalion chief who's riding with me on the weekend and all those busy battalions, I would bring him in and pull ceilings in the smoke and the size of the war watering. And he developed his love for the five stars. So he knew he wanted to become fine. And his first job was a fire alarm dispatcher on Long Island, and he became a New York City Fire alarm dispatcher in the Bronx. So we'd be working together and I call up and say Joey, give me a special call for that box. Or I knew all the fire alarm dispatches in Manhattan, and the Bronx. And I made it a point to always bring them cake or something. Because if I needed a favor, they would take care of me. You know, some chiefs got on the wrong side of this patch. And you don't want to be on the wrong side of this patch. Because I used to like if it sounded interesting, I would call a dispatcher up. There was a dispatcher in Manhattan, named Harvey iser, who was like the number one dispatching there was a dispatcher in Brooklyn called Warren fuse. They call them the voice of broken Fire Radio. Now the great dispatcher, there were dispatches in the Bronx, Joey pots and pans, and got O'Connell. And those guys I know, I knew all those guys. So something interesting came in. Like there was a gas explosion that happened the whole sign of a project. So I know that sounds interesting. So I call up the Manhattan Harrowby special coil another deputy to that box me and he would do that. So we go over there and I observe and I learned different things, you know. So it's good to be nice to the dispatches. So Joey would come to with me, and then he actually eventually became a at the Bronx dispatcher. And Joey, she Josie, you know, call me to this box and they would call me to the box. And then in 1995, he he got his lifelong dream he got appointed certify service he was appointed to and he was lucky enough to be pointed to 56 truck which is a very busy truck company in those days that they rotated the proviz around three different units because they want them to work in three different air Read as they want them to work in engines and trucks

 1:45:02

that they don't want to do that. So he went to 56 truck. And then he went to 47 engine in Harlem. And they got a Unit Citation 47 on any great company for seven years. And

 1:45:18

then he went out to Queens. I forget the number of the company, Mr. McGinnis Boulevard in Queens and engine company. At that time they'll say him, you know, they'll say right now, I don't know. We'll see him was the first deputy FBI commission that was killed on 911

 1:45:44

held every rank in the fire department. And they made a movie about him. It's called the chief.

 1:45:50

Okay. Yeah.

 1:45:54

He was five commissioned, killed a first deputy FBI commissioned, killed on 911. Great guy, Bill seeing and those guys decided that they were going to bring the squads back. But they were going to make them like many rescues. The old squads are just manpower companies. Now they want to make the new squads they first called them enhanced engines. But they were like they got received the same training as the rescue companies. So they received all the special ops training all the rescue disciplines. So when you if you had a working fire, you got four engines to trust the rescue in the squad. It's like having another rescue there. And they were backups for the rescue. So they were forming the squads. How do we man the squads? Well, first of all, you gotta get guys that have the technical Special Ops knowledge. My son, luckily had attended. FDIC, you know what FDIC is right. I do. Yes. Fire engineering, and firehouse magazine. They have this symposiums every year. And you can go out there and get all the training in the world. You know, all the special ops training, collapse, straining tunneled training, trench training, hazmat training, the only thing you can get out there Swiftwater. So my son used to go and he got all the training. He had received the training on his own through his volunteer fire department. And he knew everything about ropes. We used to drill at Stony Brook University Hospital, where they would give this the elevator shaft and we'd be rappelling down the elevator shaft and Stony Brook hospital. And then we'd get the power company to dig us a trench at the firehouse and we do trench rescue at the firehouse. He had all the rescue disciplines except Swiftwater. So when they were forming, Eddie Garrity came to me at a guarantee who was another famous chief also died on 911. So Joe, you think your son would like to come to the squad? We're forming the squads. And we need knowledgeable people in them to help teach them. I said, Well, you ask him, I'm not going to ask him you ask him. But I think he'd liked that. So he didn't finish his rotation, Eddie Garrity approached him. And he said, Yeah, I'd love to go to the squat. So he went up to squad 61 in the Bronx, and he was a charter member of our plank member of squad 61. And he helped form that company. He knew all the disciplines already. That's 90 that's 19 I believe that was 98 when they form reformed squats, okay, now. I used to go with him to Indiana, Indianapolis and Baltimore and I would take all that training and also sometimes I was asked to act as the safety officer down here anyway. So they fall on the squads he's in squad 61 2000 comes and Captain Ralph t. So Captain a rescue highly decorated. well respected Captain calls me up one day he says you think you son would like to come to the rescue? I said, Listen, don't ask me. I don't want anything to do with it because they have a saying in the job. You know, they have a saint same job. Yesterday how many years you got on jobs 10 years well, how many years you've been five and a five but I was five years to come. So they call a cop time. You know, you got five years in a job and you got five years cop time. Then they have another same tack time. That's cool. My father is a chief. And it's a Bantayan company that's hard to get into. And all of a sudden, Chief Jones, his son is assigned yet. Ah, you got pop time. Your father got you there. I never wanted to do that. So I tell Ralph, I said, Listen, that's between you and him. I want no part of this. God forbid my son. I asked you to take my son here and something happens to my son, I would have to relive it that the rest of my life that's between you two. So Ralph calls him up. You like to call that a rescue? Cap? I only got five years in the job. He said no. But you have all the special ops. Right already. You already have that knowledge and you teach at Indianapolis, you'd fit in perfectly Don't worry about your time you have the skills. So he said that was trying to do whatever you want. So he went over to the rescue with five years which is unless you have pop time, it's unheard of. So he went over to rescue and we got to find out together and I would go division six to rescue rescue for above. What do you got? Because I would talk to the rescue officer and the rescue floor above and different positions. And they would we got no expansion chief and it was him. So then also on the radio, you hear



1:51:36

rescue for both to daddy. Radio, rescue daddy, yeah, your daddy, they break but he could take



1:51:45

it with us. And they were just great guys interested. So 911 comes? Oh, I was at the 93 bombing that but that's another thing. That's another famous fires that one funny story about the 93 World Trade Center. I go down in. And if that would happen today. It's still beautiful. It'd be the 93 bombing, which set off from the garage. Now today have these electric cars. Battery operated, you know, lithium ion, you can put the phrase out. Imagine that about 100 and something cause going on the three levels below with a 93 bomb. Kenny Serrano went down there with a bunch of guys. They put those fires out on three different levels. That's what was burning was over 100 cars on fire in a confined space. Today, if those lithium cars were there, they would have never put that fire out. At every car in every parking level would have burnt it if it was snap fine. It was thinking. But anyway, I got down here. And I Chingford upon was fast. Go to guys, Tony, what do you want me to do? He says, I want you to go to secondary search of I think it was the South Tower. I'm not sure. I said, Okay, give me give me six truck companies. And I'll do the secondary search. He's a coordinated with the police. So I went over there to command the police officer. So we're going to do the secondary search. He said, Okay, what do you want? I said, Okay, we got 110 story building here. We'll take one 255 You guys 255 210. He said, Okay, I wasn't woken up phone ringtone. So, I started out with six truck companies and people are still bailing out. Every now and then a very pretty Secretary be coming down and they'll call for an order. You know, look Thai and so one of the young firemen go, are you okay? Can I help you? Okay, I'll help you. So he helped it down. So I told the guys I'm going to go we're going to slap every 10 floors. With a secondary search, we'll listen to the walkout where I'm going to I'm not going to go up. I'm going to give you guys a break every 10th was because they are carrying a tool, Scott mask. And you know, you know they're pretty, they're pretty, a lot of equipment. And it's a lot of force. I'm just carrying a light and radio, make a mortuary should I stopped at the sky lobby on? I think it was might have been the 50th floor or something I turned around.



1:54:43

There's two guys left. As a way to read the rest of them go. They said every time a pretty girl came by they help them down.



1:54:53

So I did the secondary research at that 93 bombing. I tell you what, man That was 55 floors I can't even I and Oreo Palmer got up to at the at the 911 Oreo got up 70 Something floors. I don't know how he did it. And I wasn't carrying any tools. And those guys that were carrying the tools I don't know how they did it. And I to this day, my friend Jay Jonas, have you had J Jonas? I have not no, you gotta get him. He was a guy with nine trucks. Nine truck 39 engine stuck by the miracle guys. They are the ones that carry the lady down and got stuck will live through the will they live they were in the hole in the stairwell during the collapse. They're the only ones that lived through the collapse. And those two police police officers, you got to get him on the story. He's the story he tells us. It's just a miracle that they that they lived.



James Geering 1:55:58

I need to have one of the two police officers on the show. Tell him that story. So it'd be interesting to get Jays perspective as well. The building



1:56:05

collapsed around them. They they had no idea. And he couldn't he was talking to them on the radio and he had no idea where they couldn't even say look, I'm in the South Tower. I'm in the B stairway. I'm on the fourth floor. Why can't you find me? He had no idea that buildings came down. Alright 911 my aide called me up he said turn on the television. What's going on? This is playing into the World Trade Center. Turn it on it's beautiful clear day. It say oh maybe a Piper Cub or something. That's that's a big call. This is something that right is something is not is there's not right. That's a big hole. Okay, I'm that blah, blah, blah. Then the second plane hits right. Now we know what's going on right. Now, if you were to tell me today, the World Trade Center is going to collapse. I would say it'll never happen. Still, I still think it will ever happen. But it happened. My son called me so what's going on? They were in Brooklyn at a side job with a bunch of guys and rescue three. What's going on? And what I said is playing into the World Trade Center. He said oh, we're leaving a side job. He was roll the guys from rescue three. We're heading up the rescue tree to get our gears. Okay, be careful. I'll see you down in his whole company was killed. So I'm watching this and I said they're going to need help. So I got a hold. Joey had formed the Brookhaven town technical rescue team. They never had one he formed. So I called the dispatcher out where I live in Stony Brook. I said put it out on the on a frequency. I want all the guys in the Brookhaven town Technical Rescue Team meet me at station three. We've gone to the fire. So a lot of we got a convoy. We loaded up ambulances with structure structural lumber. I mean, I'm when I'm thinking you know, I'm thinking it's gonna be a little local collapses someday. And so I ran to Home Depot. We went to Home Depot, I loaded up the local three ambulances with structural, all the structural lifting tools and all that. We made a convoy we drove into. They were having a form they were forming up in Queens. And in Brooklyn. Okay, when I got there, that now the two towers had come down. Seven was burning. I got to the one at in Brooklyn. And they said that they're letting nobody over the bridge. And we're going to have a big task force out here. I said, Okay, I'm going over the bridge. The cops will stop at over everybody going over a bridge. I said I'm going to the thing he said go. So we got down in just a second was coming down. We formed up on West Street. And now it was sort of getting controlled troller things and they told us to stand by and there was a lot of FDNY off duty guys that they weren't letting into the site and they were there's you unbelievable. But it was like it was like it was the end of the world. Everything was gray. And the dust was this high in the street. And on the lampposts everything you couldn't breathe out put a red handkerchief over, we all had handkerchiefs and put them over. In fact, you could not breathe. It was gray at all. I think that's, to me, it was like a nuclear explosion. It looked like a nuclear bomb went off the depth of destruction and devastation. We couldn't even get to where we want them to go. So when we had to go through the financial building, came at the second floor window onto the rubble. And I was looking for rescue three. So I kept asking around. I know everybody I knew that was there, a chief? I said, Where's rescue three? Anybody see rescue three. And they knew they probably knew that rescue three was gone by them. But they didn't know that my son was alive. So they Nobody answered my questions. So we fixed the round and everything and trying to get organized, just trying to see what was going on. And I was on one side of the collapse. Then I went on to the other side, you couldn't get up on the

thing. It was it was burning, and you couldn't climb on it. You had to be a mountain goat. And about three o'clock in the morning, I remember that I was with a couple of the big chiefs. And they wanted to know what was going on in a certain place that I had just been. And I had the answer for them. And I made a couple of suggestions. And then they said, I said I have a bunch of tech rescue guys here said they're not we can't use them on this week. We can't use them. However, on the south side of the fire where we were. There were a bunch of the chiefs that I knew they were putting the volunteers that showed up to work and putting into work. The whole city with the whole Bahamas city would have burnt down if it wasn't for them because they was put down. Hundreds of call flies on the streets and structural fires, the water mains were broke, they would draft them from the river. They're all going crazy over here on up here they were. They were little knocked out a little aggressive. So and they were holding all the guys from FDNY and reserve over here. Once you've Joe Cowen, he's in that video, that 911 video in the lobby. When I got there, he was sitting on the side of this on a sidewalk, covering great eating an apple staring off into space is a joke. And he was like, yeah, he was in shock. So I got to I got him, I let him I threw him in an ambulance, it was in shock. So anyway, did a lot of stuff moving around and everything. And then there was this clash between, they didn't want these guys to put these guys to work they want you to put the city guys to work for so I told my team. We're on the wrong side of the flight. They're not going to use us. Let's go home.



2:03:09

I went home. The next day was a Tuesday and the next day.



2:03:17

I called up all mine. All the old deputies that I know, I wait, I say everybody goes to the Division of training. Let's have a meeting and see what we can do. So we went out to the division a train. And we had a big meeting we said we're going to we're going to be the official notification, guys. Because the chaplain and the regular guys are all busy doing this. They went on like 24 on 24 off. We'll do all the dirty work, we'll notify families. So I formed the family notification unit. Which is what I'm told the wife or the mother that loved them was gone, which was a horrible thing. And I split I took Long Island and I and then I broke it up into pots. So that's what that was the first thing I did. And then every third day, I went to the pile with the rescue rescue three and dog for survive, you know survivors or pilots or whatever. Every three days I was digging and I was making notifications unfortunately, weren't finding anybody that was I was we were hardly making any notifications at all. You know I one of the saddest things ever that I remember going knocking on the door is young widow with a knit three little kids was horrible. Worst thing I think was the hardest. One of the hardest things I ever did in my life was notify somebody that their father or their husband was not coming home. I made a number of them. And then they weren't finding anybody. weren't finding anybody was just was terrible. out every three days down there on my hands and knees digging, digging, hoping to find somebody went places you wouldn't believe I got down on the subway with a building came through the subway. I mean, the slough I saw you with then the things that guys the things that they did is unbelievable. The places they went, the most dangerous things they did that in normal times would have never allowed them to do. Like I can tell you, I don't want to tell you horror stories, but they are stories with bodies were trapped. And to get the body out you had

to cut the body in half. I mean, it was just cavitations all that stuff. So I went there and went they went there with them. Then a lot of feuding started with the there was a lot of internal strife with the police and firemen. I don't know if you knew about that.

 James Geering 2:06:00

This is the most most apartments that I've seen.

 2:06:05

And they'll divide upon but really did it stupid because they would when they find somebody, the first thing they did was call the chaplain and the TV heard that wasn't begging 90% of them weren't thinking they would come to do the carry. And I remember there was an Italian restaurant on Canal Street that was feeding all the first responders. We jump in a golf cart and go up there to get something to eat. I would go in this coffee with that dust, our hands our mouth placement, we're in there. Just like you're nice, no dust. So there was a lot of little animosity there. Rightly so. And I'm not playing the average cop or anything. I have nothing but respect for police. Oh, my friends are cops. And the last night I was there. We were in the South Tower and we found the guys from rescue four. Now to get it got to be a mountain goat to climb up this on the pile. We call it the pile. You just couldn't climb up there was one way up. And then there was a hole. Maybe the hole was five feet by four feet. The guys went in the hole and they're in this rubble. It's amazing the things they did when they found the guys so it was getting a little hairy at that time. So they put out the call. We got the guy some for but the Chief of Department was now Dan aggro and the chief of police was chief Esposito thought it was too dangerous so they wanted everybody off the panel. Everybody off the soundbar but now I didn't go in the hole but I was in the I was in the pathway to the hole behind me were all police officers and they wanted to get past me to get in the hallway they found the bodies and I said no I'm Excuse me, but I can't get past me Mike Heiser in. Chief can you get out of the wait, no, I'm not getting out of the way. And that there's no way they could get past me because of the precariousness of the situation or you got to be a mountain goat. So now they order everybody off the pile. But I know as soon as we come off the pile ESU is going in there to get the bodies and then there's going to be a fistfight. There really is going to be a fistfight brawl, so I'm standing there. Everybody wants to pile. Nobody's moving. Everybody out the pile. Nobody's moving. Then I hit de Bernardo de binotto. The police sergeant taps me on shall I say my name is on my back. I think they're calling you I suppose I can hear them even on Oh yeah. What do you want Shephard upon wants to see you. Tell them I'm busy. They know about five minutes a day but she wants to see you come on down. Now all all the guys a couple of guys came out at a hole. So now I work my way down the pile I go to the Chief of Department says what's going on? Okay, I want everybody off the pile is with Esposito. So I said, Well, chief, now I go work for the one time I was his boss. Because I was a staff chief at one time I held every rank in the fire department from firemen to staff to the only thing I didn't hold was commissioner But I hold every uniform. Right. That's another story. I know Nago reported to me when he was a deputy. And I was a staff chief. Now he's Chief of Department. One of the smartest guys ever knowing what's going on up there. I said, Well, who found the guys from us before. But as soon as you pull our guys out of the hole, they are going to go, his guys, I point as busy are going to go into the hall, and you're going to have a fistfight up there, you're going to have a brawl, you're going to have a really bad scene. So I suggest, if you're going to pull them off, you'd better get some high ranking police officers up there and get them off the pile.

Well, there's gonna be a riot. So he says, Joe, we have to cooperate with the police. I said, Well, I agree with you 100%. But the police have to cooperate with us tell that to that man standing there. Esposito is looking at me right now is kind of like them. It says guys, who are the problem? Well, we got to do this as a chief, I've got a new chief viewer them off the pile. Excuse me, this is gonna be a fistfight, and it's not going to look good. So if you get the capsule, if your guys are caught off, because they follow orders, and I started Taiwan, either you do that. Or you pull the whole fire department out of the scene here. And let's all go home, and turn everything over to the police. And let's all go home. And he looked at me, and I say tonight then and say goodbye. And I never went back. I never went back. Because that was stupid, stupid stuff. Come on down. Danny Nagraj was one of the smartest guys ever met me John. When he was a fireman. He was on Jeopardy. I'm really a smartest guy. When I was on this, I was cheated upon. Fosco was after me for a while to get on to go onto the staff. And I was Giuliani had came in and changed the city around tremendously. He really fires went from here to here. Any let the cops do their job. The broken windows policy and everything the fire duty went and cut in half. He really cleaned up the drugs. They used to sell drugs in open markets and vacant buildings used to go into vacant building there'd be a hole in the wall to the next vacant building. To tell them what you want to put your money through to hold the drugs that come out of the hole. You'd walk out of the building and the runner would bring the next person brought daylight. When the Kelly and Giuliani came in. They claimed that all I mean it was shootings every night. It stopped the shootings. They claim that I when I used to go to work on 150/5 in Melrose, I would look I'd run in the firehouse, the first night of finance they put six nine millimeters through the door. When Giuliana came in, now we're getting into the late 90s. I support the car. I walk down 240 149 sheet and 30 Every year the hub and have pizza and coke before going to work. Same area was afraid to get out of the car. Before Julianne that said what good of a job he did. So he was a great mayor. I don't know what Hampton lately, but he was a great man. So anyway, I have every rank. Tony Fosco asked me to come on for years I finally went on. And that was nice because I wasn't charged in the whole city for 24 hours. And half the time when I went to Brooklyn, I couldn't find the fire that was lost. But it was interesting. But the police, the Fire Commissioner at the time, was not very respectful to his staff. His name, He was a former Fed federal law enforcement. And he was just biding his time to lead became police commissioner. And he did not treat the Chiefs with respect. And I didn't like that. So we had a meeting and I said that. I think we should all throw a badge on the table until he learns how to treat us teachers treat us with respect. He made two of the senior chiefs retire he he said retire I'm going to demote you. So they retired two really great guys. This guy did become chief of fire a police commissioner. And that's when Vaughn SMU became fire commission. All with this Giuliani deal. Now if I national was a fireman and the head of the firing union, I thought it was gonna be one of the greatest fight missions we had because he really loved the job. Not so he just was a different breed. Now we're getting to Black Sunday. The ropes person, the old dog, the ropes that we had in the job are archaic. They were in the they weren't well designed. If you had to bail out, you had to find this substantial object. And then you had to put your rope, you know, with your Boehner or your hook or your carabiner or the device, wrap it around the substantial object hook in and go over the window and bail out. That takes seconds. 10 seconds. When a room lights up, you don't have 10 seconds. You don't have one second, as witnessed by the World Trade Center fire when people were jumping out 100 floors.



2:15:45

When you're getting birth, you go out the window. Well, the ropes that we had had reached this shelf life 10 years. So my essence said that those studies, how many times have they been

used? I think they will use seven times or 17 times or whatever. But they were used. He said it's not worth the million dollars. We're not they don't use them. They don't carry them. They're too bulky. And in a sense, some idiots didn't carry them. When I was a fireman. I always had my own rope in my pocket in case I got in a bad situation. Okay. The older division sent the report and say don't get rid of the ropes. The safety battalion. Road wrote a report saying don't get rid of the ropes. The safety battalion the Firemen's union, that he was the president of the safety officer Charlie Bolden, who he worked with for years in the union said don't get rid of the ropes. He gets rid of the ropes. Just night 2005 They go to Kenya and fly them to 1000s of tenement fires. But one thing in a fire services. You never know. You never know what's going to happen. You know you should never take anything for granted. Nothing's routine. Why it can always come up and bite you in the butt. Reported people on a top floor typical Bronx tenement they got a fire sign that it's a forced retirement in the front five stories in a real typical tenement. Go up the stairs is for apartments on a floor. Front apartments rear apartments reported people on the top floor up by by fives on the third floor. It's a perfect storm of everything that could go wrong. That night they had a blizzard. Snow was on the ground. snow on the ground needs a slower response. Right? Number one, number two was freezing out. Freezing out frozen hydrates. Number three, although was installing the wind was still blowing, wind driven fires kill fire. Okay, three things to start out. Number four, they took their ropes away. Number five, the building superintendent or whoever did it subdivided the occupancies. So instead of one paying page, one person paying rent in this apartment, they put cubicles in the apartment. So they subdivided the apartment. So where you had one bedroom, a living room, two bedrooms, they subdivided the big living room into another two apartments, okay. And they didn't even put the dividing wall up all the way. The one thing so that's another. It's subdivided into SRO, single room occupancy, it's not a strike. Not only that when they put the partition, so they blocked the exit, put a fire escape. So you got like six things going against you. fires on the third floor, blah, blah, blah. Having trouble getting fired, there's a fight they have a line on the top floor. Then they hit Ville, they're not going to find out but it's lighting up. The partition did not go all the way to the ceiling. fire is burning on the other side of the partition. It started in an electrical outlet because three bedrooms were plugged into one outlet, you know. So now it's burning on the third floor and it's extending to the fourth floor through the walls and floor. You go up on the now they're up on the fourth floor. You go in as a kitchen to the right, just the kitchen. I totally see bedroom to the left. Living into the left two bedrooms. They're making a search. Jeff cool. punches a hole in the kitchen wall. There's fire in the kitchen wall. Oh, before they heated that they lost water on the line on the third floor so they bought the line from the fourth floor down to the third floor. So now they're up there with no line. Jeff punches a hole in the wall sees prices. Guys it comes around the guys in the living room 27 truck. He says guys, we got fire and behind this in the kitchen. We got to we got to get out of here. With that the fire from the third floor, burned through the top floor. Now it's roaring behind this wall that they can't see they can't see this wind driven fire. It blows the fire down the hallway to win it into the kitchen. And now Jeff had left the kitchen and I'm telling the guys in the living room and we gotta get out of here we gotta get out of here is fire in the walls. Now that the fire is looking for oxygen reverses itself and it heads towards the windows where they're standing. The room lights up. So below is that the extreme right window by the politician. He leaps for the fire escape that's blocked off. He doesn't make it. He leaves a wife and four, four babies. The next window is Curtis Meyer and Lieutenant Myron just covering for the tour a lot of 27. Eugene still Loski and Brandon calling Brandon so probably first fire. His brother was killed on 911 They're hanging out the window. Next to that window is Jeff cool. He's hanging out over an air condition. The room is engulfed in fire. These guys are burning up against the made aid and made a tomato you can hear that in the tapes. I'm still asking and calling low. Lower my current wife and three kids. We think he died on impact. Gotcha. Then Eugene lowers the proby. Brandon and Callie first fire. I talked to him in the hospital. He says he remembers floating in space. Any endeavor

remember he's telling me this but he told me this last year I remember it was like slow motion. I'm going back. I could see Eugene in the window with the fire over his head. And all I could think about was my mother and father who lost their son online. 11. I've got to lose another son. He said I swear my brother was holding me up and he hits the ground. Eugene, now is burning up. So Eugene dives out the window. His mask gets hung up on the child God. So it swings him down like this. He reaches back and he frees himself and he goes he's really broken up. He suffered an internal kaput decapitation where his skull was separated from his spinal column. They didn't know that for 24 hours, by the way. Luckily, there was an EMT paramedic in the backyard from another company I think. I don't know if it was Steve Gillespie or one of those guys. That was in the radio that stabilize him. The next one though, Jeff's got a rope but he the rooms engulfed in fire. He can't tie the old fish and roll for the next room was Joey hanging out the window. So Jeff says, Joey I got a rope. I can lower you. I can't tie it off, but I can lower you. Joey yells back you got a wife and kids. You throw me to roll out oh, you know I love you. No less. No time to argue. You're married with kids throw me in a row. Jeff throws on the rope Joey wraps around his body and his arm. Jeff goes out and he pendulums he goes out this one though. Like this a pendulums hits the side of the building. loses control falls in the alley. So we only fools three stories. For for third for the end like if there was five surgeries in Korea but he fell. He fell one less story plus he got a few feet with the rope. Okay. saved his life but he broke everything. He shattered his pelvis which cuddle protocol was internal organs took 78 units of blood in the hospital. Drunk every everything. I went to visit him his organs were on the table back shattered take the organs out of his body, his wife and two children. Now Joe He goes out, loses control. Eagles five stories, breaks everything below is raced.



2:25:07

bangs his head, blah blah blah I'm in Hawaii. I get a phone call. First vacation avatar. I got a phone call like five or six o'clock in the morning.



2:25:27

Hello. These guys that we used to call each other fire without going break chops to wake each other up. I feed it breaking chops again.



2:25:36


Yes. It's a guy from Long Island call me Hi, Chief. How are you? How's this? This is solid. So I know immediately. I said Is he alive? first words out of my mouth. Is he alive with that? He's alive. What happened? They bailed out a window in the Bronx. Okay.



2:26:01

Just tell me the truth is Eli. He's alive. Two other guys are gone. All right. I'm in how frequent Hawaii I will get the first plane. So luckily I closed with the airlines. That got me on a flight first flight out of there that night I had to sit there all day wondering what was going on. Like I didn't I flew only to do it. Motorcycle escort to the hospital. I had him in St. Barnabas. And my wife got a phone call. And she was it was the blizzard app they had to come and figure out. And Suffolk


County PD picked her up. took her to Nassau County Line NASA Kaline TV took it to the city line city line PD took her to Jacoby. Jeff went to St. Barnabas. I got to Jacoby. He was still conscious. But I knew Jacoby's good hospital and everything but I the best hospital in the city for his injuries, which he broke everything below his waist. struct, his head of the whole nine yards. I knew Hospital for Special Surgery in New York. I told him I talked to the head medical doctor. I said I want to matter here I want him in Special Surgery and angry with me. So that night we transported into hospital Special Surgery that day. The number one pelvis doctor and Special Surgery, put his pelvis together and started putting screws in his legs and everything. And next thing the nurse came out I said how's it going? She said Good, good. Everything's going good. I can then run our lady. She said she can actually don't go home. So when she says don't go home, hang around. I'll be back with you. When you went into coma. You know, my guess your your body goes into a certain kind of shock defense mechanism. And then when everything slows down, that's what it is. So you went into coma, intubated him. Bah, bah, bah. And he was in. When he was in coma, they put all the screws in its legs and you say got more metal in me than to care. They screw them all back together. We were living in a hotel that next to the hospital that the union provided for us. The union was fantastic. The officers union the Firemen's union, they would they couldn't do enough for us. And then they brought the Lasky down to that hospital. And I was talking to his surgeon and he said he's only know seven people in the world that ever survived this decapitation thing. And I said What's the odds of him walking again? He said one and 100 Gene walks today and hits his head. Scholars fuse to his spinal column. So he has to talk to you like this. But he walks his wife was pregnant with twins. The twins just graduated from high school. The great athletes isn't that a nice story you got to see his twins graduate from high school.

 James Geering 2:29:35

That's amazing. Um, and you hear of internal decapitation I mean it's just you know, terrifying when you think of the the MRIs and the X rays.

 2:29:44

So gene, so they were they were all hospitalized for months and then from hospitalization they all went into nursing home and from nursing homes. This was like an ordeal six months If this was going on, so eventually they were allowed to go home. But they had to go to rehab. And then they started their campaign for safety for fire safety. Jeff call Joey, Eugene and Brennan. So they started going around the country talking about fireman safety, safety ropes. You know how you you know, you don't we look out for the public, we don't look out for ourselves. You know, we don't equip ourselves with safety. You don't send a cop out on the street with in yo punk kind of see because he the sheriff, never use this gun. So cost cutting measure, let's take his gun in his vest away, never used it. So that's the same logic. Oh, they hardly use them. They hardly use them. Only half those use it once. And that's one less funeral you have to go. So, you know, John Socha?

 James Geering 2:30:57

I don't know him. We haven't met but I'm aware of him and his books.



2:31:00

You know, John soccer and Mike Dugan. Those guys are? Yes, sir. I have Mike on the show. You know, Mike. And John said, you know, we got to do something. So let me go. I skipped a little content. So they're going around the country talking to get the law changed in New York state where you have to certain municipalities, you have to have safety rules. Shall we had short term memory Lewis from the accident? He can tell you what happened 10 years ago, but he couldn't tell you what you had for lunch yesterday. And he would forget things. He said that. How about we do this? I said we did that already last week. Oh, I forgot. So he had a lot of soft short term memory loss from the accent. I talked to him that day. The night before he said, I'm going to Pennsylvania he had a new girlfriend. He said I've got I'm picking a vacation in Pennsylvania. I just made my reservations. And I just ordered a new thing from my computer. And one other thing. Oh, yeah. He registered it ca Suffolk Community College. I think I want to be a counselor. So we went over that he was going to go into counseling because he was doing counseling for Brookhaven town. Anytime anybody got injured since his injury. He went around to talk to family and everything. She said, I want to be a counselor. I registered at Suffolk. I got a new girlfriend. I just got off my computer. Okay, great that we talked on phone. That day came over the house, not those who want to go to lunch. I said no, man, I'm trying to lose weight. You want me to go to lunch all the time, right? And I don't want to go late. So he left. So we surmise. That night, he took us meds. Had dinner, forgot that he took his meds and then took his meds again. And he didn't wake up in the morning. So that's what happened. He short term memory was because I was claiming to go to college become a counselor, brand new girlfriend that he was all hopped up about. Everything sorta was like, finally going straight. They went and forgot. He took us for a good man. So we have three he passed away. By the way he is that his funeral was amazing. They came from all over the country, because he was known all over the country from teaching out in Indian town of Baltimore. Guys came from all over. It was like 1000 guys at his funeral to shut off all the streets in the area that had American flags, right that of all the main roads. We had motorcycle escorts, we had the it was a beautiful Sentinel, it would have loved it. So about six months from then Mike Dugan, who you met and John sviluppo, who's a legend and those guys so young, we got to do something for Joe he's memory. Why don't we Why don't we form a like a group and do certain phones. So I said, Okay, well, former foundation in his memory. So I read up about it. And I got the download of the former's 5013 C non for profit. And reading this stuff is a this is Greek. Understand this. So I went to a local business, local accounting firm, I knocked on the door Seanie Reeves and whatever it was. And I said that I like to see the boss. So what's it about? And I said, she said, Okay, let me see if we'll talk to guy comes out, what can I do for you? I said, you can help me do this and said, come back tonight. Come back to five o'clock. I went back at five o'clock and this guy sat down with me for three hours. I said here, this is what I've made out. This is what I don't know how to make. And he helped me make out the 5013 C I filed that we became a non for profit and we got My first seminar was a one day seminar with a little meet and greet the night before and I got Mike Dugan Jenni done, you know the names any done right, sir. Okay, then it goes number one in America, my do's and John's they're all number one a you guys come on to teach me and we're gonna teach you. I got Brookhaven National Lab. I had like 60 students, and we raised like \$10,000, whatever. And we made our first grant that year. And then, hey, Joe, I'd like to teach for you. So I got a lot of sweet with doing a meet and greet at night. And a teaching in the day, and everybody and his brother wanted to feature me. And by the way, these guys get three, four or 5000 hours of lecture, they will deliver me free. So we are getting bigger and bigger and bigger. So last year, we had, I had two segments, we had 365 students at A and we went from a lecture to two days hands on where you actually cut roofs and put out fires and all that stuff and one lecture and I've ever had anybody in the fire

service that anybody has come and spoken for us free. And I had 300 students last year at our Long Island seminar. And we have a seminar out in Texas. We've given to hundreds of Texas firefighters and I let me just give you my latest stats. In 2022, we were able to provide 15 departments across the country, a total of \$166,000 for the purchase of 2007 years 278 Pss systems. Plus we train them for two days. Now the guys we trained these turns these guys go home and train the a platoon. So one guy trains five, and then they train other guys, so it's exponential. So every one guy that comes and teaches, learns from us teaches 10 And it's just gone. We've we've trained. We've given out, this was last year \$857,000 in grants to 83 departments in 25 states. This all started out with one a couple of guys 3065 Guys, and a couple of guys. We bought 1598 Safety Systems. We've trained over 2120 firefighters. This is as of last year 2022. This year, this doesn't include 1000 2023. We did 165 in Texas, and raised another 30 grand and this year. Like I said this, we're up to 157 pounds. I have as of last night 22 grant requests from all over the country. I'll read them tonight South Carolina, New Hampshire, Virginia, Kentucky, Connecticut, North Carolina, Minnesota, Massachusetts, Ohio, Ohio, Kansas, Tennessee, it goes on and on. This is over \$200,000 in grant request that I'm going to try and make this year if we get enough donations, and if you put \$200,000 on top of 150 \$857,000 We'll have given away over a million dollars. Now, if that's all because of is really only three people that really are the main guys trying to sleep. The actor has been given us \$25,000 a year. And he helps us tremendously. His foundation they're very good to us. wouldn't have been able to start without Dennis Leary and Robert J. Bird the act that Rob Robert J. Bird put us in touch with Dennis and Dennis is as his own federal patient the Leary Firefighters Foundation.

 James Geering 2:39:51

Bobby was on the show as well. Amazing guy. He was yes yes sir. About a year ago now a thing

 2:39:59

Oh, So you know all about the Worcester collapse and all that he where he lost his cousin in the western collapse. That's why he got into the charity business. So Dennis is great to us. Bobby Burns. Yeah, it


 James Geering 2:40:12


was just to be clear as Bobby had on the show, not Dennis, but Bobby's obviously told me about. Yeah,


 2:40:17

yeah. So, okay, so and then Bobby's could find them all as he raises a lot of money for us. Danis \$25,000 a year. And then, Bob Farrell, Batman, of Batman and Robin was very successful after retirement. He got into the fire tool business and he owns fire hooks unlimited down in the jersey. All right, he sends me he sends me every year sends me all sorts of tools 1000s of dollars worth of tools that we raffle off at our seminars. Not only that Bob foul, wrote a book wrote a book called The warriors. No. It's the Warriors. It's all about his experiences in the fire

department. And he gives 100% of the profits away 50% Go to the on the Legion, FDNY on Legion, which is the medal winners. And 50% goes to my foundation. So far, Bob's probably given me \$50,000. So Bob, and his theory Bob, a fellow named Frank Trotta, who is the publisher of fire news on Long Island and other publications is very philanthropic. He sent us a check for \$10,000 recently, and I have a lot of friends that send a check for \$1,000 or \$500 \$1,000. But I have multiple people send \$25 and \$10. And we sell T shirts, we make \$5. On a t shirt, we sell coins and make \$5 on a coin. But our big thing is our seminar, which we're having this November. I'll give you Jimmy a plug about that. But thank God for Bob Farrell. Thank God for Dennis Leary, and Bobby Burke, and all our great benefactors so that without them, we couldn't do anything. And I had friends that I went to high school, my neighbors next door. They said, Give me a check for \$5,000 every year and it just there's so many great people out there. We couldn't do without them. We couldn't do without Mike Dugan, John soulcal. And all those guys that teach for us they need done and they teach for us for nothing. We have a great training seminar. Because up in New Hampshire and those states up the up in New England. They don't do live birds. Oh reading a lot of Delta live burns. And we do live burns. And we have a flashover simulator that we bought for the Suffolk County Fire Academy \$30,000 that you can. It's fantastic. We do the air, this great training with this guy named Bobby Akkad. He gives great training. And Aaron Heller, his group, they give great training and the Chiefs out in colony in Texas, they give great hands on live training. We live buses, cars, we put cars on the buses, we do trench rescue, we do elevator rescue at the hospital where you can repel down 20 stories. Where else can you do that? You can't do that. We do that we get the best training in America. The students that leave us say it's the best training I've ever had better than better than fire academy. You know, you wait, can you go and repelled out of 20 elevation 20 storey elevation, you can't do that. And it's hard to get trench training because nobody wants to dig a trench and you can't get do live burns. achat does a live burn where we burn hay. And he makes a roof and you actually cut the roof. And we end the steel studio. It's great having students that love to learn. Roger, we were just out of Texas in March and the guys out there they just oh, this is the best training I've ever had in my life. You guys are coming back. I've never had any such great training. We have this. The greatest instructors in the FDNY instructors. They all come and teachers were given a class this year on this lithium ion battery fires. That's the that's the hottest thing around we give a lot of leadership classes. Oh another group. I forgot. Oh, god forbid the Navy SEALs. Okay, bird's eye view was formed by a Navy SEAL called Ryan parrot who's

 James Geering 2:44:53
a good friend of

 2:44:55
mine, sir flown out of a Humvee in Iraq. He sent us 25 \$1,000 Last year they did a fundraiser they were shooting guns out of helicopters and jumping out of planes. Bobby home you know, Bobby holder right? Yeah,

 James Geering 2:45:10
I had him on for about three years before he passed. Yeah, he



2:45:14

passed Bobby Hall and Jeff cool and Ryan were jumping out of airplanes in Texas. They waste like 25 grand for us what a great guy Bobby Horton was he was and Rudy parrot raises money for us all the time. I'm an owner or a Navy SEAL. Excellent. They may be an honorary member of Seal Team SEVEN. Guys, like, you know guys like Warren for the country jumps out of planes and does everything you can think of him and his son is these physical things he runs 40 miles in 40 days, and he raises money for us and a lot of Joey's friends did birthday fundraisers. I just tell you, you meet the nicest people in the charity business. You know? I hope I didn't miss anybody. I got Bob foul. And Brian parrot them Dennis Leary. They're our biggest contributors in Frank Trotter sent this 10 grand and teaches Vinnie Dunn and Tom berry John F. Tom barrier.



James Geering 2:46:21

I have not no.



2:46:23

He's another good guy to have on very experienced, but they Foundation is doing well. We're helping people with saving lives, which you know, just by our training on live burns in our residential on a taxpayer training fires. People are putting out fires more efficiently in their community. They're saving property. We do the bailout training that they're saving. We're saving Firemen's lives. We're doing the extrication and motor vehicles, buses, collapse training, we we actually collapse buildings and go in and lift insurance. So we're saving life was saying that not only saving firemen slides, saving civilian lives. So it's all good. It's all good.



James Geering 2:47:09

So I started the fire service in 2004. And my very first apartment was higher layer in the Miami area. And we actually did carry ropes then and I bought my own beaner and an eight to make sure that we had something and it was just the you know, the webbing Hastie harness if the shit hit the fan, but then as I progress through Anaheim, California, which I know is a good a good relationship with FDA and why they started bringing in more advanced bailout training so we did the latter bailouts and I can't remember we had the equipment but we had the ropes on the Scott's by that point. And then fast forward Orange County and we actually got the harnesses and you know, the descenders and the hook that went into the, the windows,



2:47:52

the whole system, it's not cheap.



James Geering 2:47:55

So talk to me though, so for people listening, you know, in an ideal world, what does that

system look like I'm very fortunate I've seen it in person but for people listening



2:48:05

I have one laying around here the you have the harness, and you carry the rope, the ropes got a hook on the end, it's so simple now you just put the hook on the windowsill or put the hook on a and it has a descending device on this rope is a descending device that controls your descent not cheap the stuff well all this stuff so you can go out hands free and you lower yourself and they they're making the getting better more lighter stuff the original stuff was heavy, it's become lighter and it's only like 50 feet of rope but just meant to get you below the fire it's not like a roof rope where you would have 150 feet long you go all the way down well it was just meant to get you below the fire that's all and you can and you can be hands free and then you go like this and you think lowly so and they should have and the reason they don't have it is because expense a lot of these fire departments like they talk all around the country mainly the hose and ladders and that comes before you know in the budget and replacing apparatus that all comes before hate to say it safely everything's you know salaries come first that's the biggest expense. What is salary quarters? You know, apparatus and quarters it's a big you know, apparatuses today a 3 million 3 million balance match what a tower ladder costed and it's it's all good. It's at a bad came good. You know? And it's all because one stupid guy by find Essen hope he's listening, took away the ropes and I can't believe a union guy would have done something like that. He could have been the best He made a decision and it was the wrong decision. You don't send you don't send, like Indiana Jones. Right? He had a, he had the guys there with a knife. And he had the gun in the whip the knife in his gun. So why would I use a knife? When I have a gun, you don't take a knife to a gunfight. You don't put the fireman you don't put a cop out there without his vest, then it's gone. You don't put the fireman out there the stuff I had written down. I had some some tips that I had given once before, if you want please. Okay, I wrote a few down. I had given these up before, these are my tips. And they were the expert. I've been to 1000 fires. I don't consider myself an expert. There are no experts and firefighters. Because every now and then, like Sunday, 5:10am and five into 10,000 10am flies in never know what something's different. Something's going to happen. So don't become. And you get these guys, when you go to these conferences around the country, he's going to give you a lecture on firefighting because he put a good stick together. And he spent the 10 fires in the last 10 years. You know, but he's an expert and he's going to teach, there are no experts. There are no experts. Train, train, train, and then train again. And the infantry will use the black waves to be able to take our weapons apart, blindfolded and reassemble them. And why is that? Because in reality, in the dark in the night in the middle of a monsoon, you can't see six inches in front of you. And if your gun jams, you got to be able to take it apart and reassembled at the clear. So what you want to do is train train, train train. So it's muscle memory. So you practicing the Ruffo single slide. You do it you do it do it you do it until it's muscle memory, you don't have to think about it is it three turns that arrives at three turns though I have a where we put the hook or it's so it's develop muscle memory. So at three o'clock in the morning, on a smoky snowy night, you don't even have to think about it, you just go right into muscle memory. And the only way you're going to do that is train train train and the best training but the best drills I used to give I love to get this man down. The worst thing in the world you want as a fireman as a fireman down. And I swear I'd go around I would pick the biggest guy that comes down a basement and lay on the floor, turn the lights out. And we're going to do a mayday and I will get the small sky and I said we've got a lot of times we black out their face piece down there. Make a search. Give us some a day when you find them. And they will do that. And I said you you're going to be surprised how long it takes to get the guy out of the basement after the meeting. I picked the big biggest guy go down. Doc. He sent the

guy down he gave me they now he's trying to move this to one and 25 pound guy. We're in bunker gear with Scott Key. So he calls for help. To tour them they can get the guy up the stairs. And now this is not out of fire. This is no smoke. And it's not another stressful situation. You'd be surprised how difficult that is until you teach them the tricks to deal with the weapon. There are tricks that you can do with webbing to help you lift and carry. The only way you're going to learn that is by training. I spent Sydney watching the ballgame should be found the basement lifting up your friend. We had a fire in the city where a big pretty big guy went down in a basement fire in a in a small basement and PD couldn't get him up. They couldn't get him up the stairs. The guy wound up dying he had a heart attack. That's the man down drill I give it all I gave it was one of the best tools I have again. Here's a go and see the big picture. Don't have tunnel vision. You're coming down the block flies out the window and you see the fire and you look and you're looking at the fire coming out the window and you come running to do your job now. I was recovering Lieutenant went to fire in Harlem. I think I I was like the foot dual engine or something of a second alarm engine. And the I reported it and chief said steadfast everything by bullets was Black Jack Foley tuffeau. Chief really noticed. Turnaround Lieutenant. My father was the firearms and for for Chief she was there. How many a windows are on the fourth floor? What color was the smoke? Is there a front fire escape? What's exposure to what's exposure for it? I'm there. The the, you know, when I all I did all I could see was the fire out the window. I didn't see. Was it exposing to the floor above? Was it on a fire escape? Was it off the fire escape. So my thing is see the big picture, don't just zoom in on the fire. You know, your response area says sitting around on Saturday after the ride around, go into the stores and ask him where's your basement entrance?



2:56:03

Is it behind the counter and take a look at the back door. See how he's got the back door barricade.



2:56:09

Go up on the roof. Look for big air conditioning units or something where there's going to be heavy weight. Because you might have a fire in the basement. And you'll say, Hey, I've been here the entrance to the basement is behind the counter, the back doors got Fox lock on it, you're never going to force it. The roofs got a heavy air conditioning unit right over that spot. So these are things you should all know your district. And know before you go to a fire where the trust this new construction is horrible. It's dangerous. It's going to kill firemen. And everything's up there as being trust. Check it out when it's been built to see if this fire stopping in the car both. And you know, they're very dangerous. And they find each other so beware of any trust construction. I fear it. Okay, you get promoted. Just what I always told my first of all, one of my officers new officers came by I get to do Lieutenant Captain battalion chief reporting cycle division they report to me have a seat have a cup of coffee and the first thing I would tell him was you promoted to serve your men not to have them serve you know, some guys think they were Chief now. I know you are there to serve your men not to have them serve you. I always ingrain that in in the wolf is. Another thing is to tell the company offers be the tip of the spear. Don't be stone over say hey, how you doing? How you doing up there, you got to be up there. You're the tip of the spear. When I was in an engine company, I was the backup man. I told I used to tell the guy see my this is my back of my coat. Nobody he goes past me. Nobody goes past me, I'll be with the nozzle man. I'm the tip of the spear. I'm not going to be at the

doorway going, I am going in there guys lose respect for you. I hate doing that. You have to be in there with them. And you are the tip of the spear be a lead a leader and you lead from the front. Because there's nothing like a shit officer. They don't have any respect for you, you know and tarnishes the badge. And another thing I would tell all my new officers and even the senior men treat all people with equal respect. I treated I talked to probies like I took the chiefs. I treated them with. I didn't treat him any different. Every man, you treat every man and woman with the same respect. If a guy's if the guy sucks, I just didn't talk them. Right? I didn't just respect them, but I didn't talk to them. And but I taught I taught the probies I sat



2:59:14

like when the when I would come in the kitchen, the probies would stand up.



2:59:21

I just sit out at that. One quarter chief like he called me No, no, sit down. I'll get you both and you know something like that. I like that. So treat everybody Respect, respect. Treat everybody with equal. And there's my last thing I'll tell you is show your front piece. And by that I mean if you're the lieutenant or the captain or the chief. They want to see you at the fire in the fire. They don't want to see you in the street going or you don't want to you know watch I've been watching this. I only want to tell you the show. I watch some live action fire shows. I mean it's disgrace some of these guys they're a disgrace. I used to like when I got everybody organized, everything settled and we've grown on the control I'd love to go into the building into the smoke and come walking through the smoke and they see the deputy chief the gold piece of shit the deputies up yo, what's up chief? How you feeling? I feel fine. You want to blow you want to go? No, we're good. We're good. You sure you guys are on right now you guys took a beating get out of here. I'm going to relieve you by you guys go home. I'm gonna really give you guys some rest but be fearful note that a lot of Deputy standing walk up to the fifth floor and want to walk up there five flights of stairs but I always made it a point. I had captain of a 92 engine was a guy named Ed Kilduff. He became Chief of Department. Jazz, I've got him on.



James Geering 3:00:53

I haven't had a chance to get him on yet. No.



3:00:56

Great. And when he was the captain in 92, he said I used to love to see you walking through the spoke with your little clipboard. I said that clipboard and little clipboard was my command post. And I put out a third along with that clipboard. Now they got these things with like Tronic, TV screens and beepers and lights and everything. I had a clipboard with a grease pencil, good dough third along, and I knew where everybody was. That's another thing you always got to know where everybody is, in case of opponents. You know, I want you on the roof. I have I draw my little drawing. I had them on the roof. 39 To go to the third floor. And I have 39. So I if I collapse, I know where everybody is. But showing the front piece they love. I mean, I worked in areas where some chiefs didn't get in the car because it was a vacant building. To me in any

case, I what do you what do you want me to do? So you want to you can go up and see how you're doing? Okay, I'll do that I went in, I was in the building, showing the guys that I could. I mean, they had taken a fee with them. And then I got the respect for that guy that was sitting in the car and you can't get respect. So those are my tips.

J James Geering 3:02:13

You just maybe wait. I'm sorry. I just because you just made me I just hadn't thought about this in years, but I just flashback to hire Lea. I don't know what the backstory was. But I was a brand new probie and it was a car fire. The LT and the engineer sat in the rig obviously he must have sent me water. While I put that out on my own. You know what I mean? So you just with you saying that it's not even the chief position. And so we're gonna make your LT and your your engineers sitting there, you know, and I'm a pretty new guy. So I'm gonna could have been right up on the frickin wheel well and blow my knees off or who knows, you know, a little experience would have helped but But yeah, that's a classic example from earlier in my career of even though

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we are probing, you click you know, tires, blow gas tanks, Ignite, I, I've never seen I've been to conferences, hundreds and hundreds go, I've been lucky. I've never seen a guest tech lead, where there was an explosion. Never. Now a lot of people have but I've never done that. I've never seen it. So but and also, I have not had a lithium ion call for you yet. Which is another problem. And that I have to learn about that. Why do I have to learn about it? Because I might go somewhere in like when I was just out in Texas A lot of guys were coming up to me and asking me questions. And you know, if I could have the answer I share with them but they they might be coming up and asking me about these coffees and I gotta go back to school. So we were having two guys from hazmat give us a class and that was I want to learn about that. So when I got to Texas as somebody and chief What about these qualifiers is the only thing I heard is you got to put them in a dumpster full of them times the full order put him in a dumpster. To stay reignite.

J James Geering 3:03:59

Yeah, I want one of my guests is a British firefighter was saying that they've seen you know the the explosive element to it, but I think I want to see if I got this right. A female I think it was in the UK a female firefighter was I don't know that's what it was. It was it was a resident My apologies. A resident of a building. Someone had put their electronic scooter which is not very big as far as the batteries outside and outside the flat and caused a fire and she died. Yeah. So you imagine the explosive quality of that. World Trade. Exactly. I think he said the same thing. If you put x amount of electronic vehicles under a building that you want to take down in 2023 we have a completely different problem now.

i 3:04:45

We had said we have had 17 deaths in New York City with lithium ion batteries. I've seen video security video of where they store them like a Chinese restaurant that make their deliveries

security video of where they store them like a Chinese restaurant that make their deliveries with them so they store them inside at night. They're close. I I've seen actual videos of them going on fire. And it goes, they explode. And it goes from nothing to completely involved in 30 seconds. Yep. I'm Unbelievable. Unbelievable. And it's, and it's been that culture the problem, because when you buy the scooters, the battery is only good for X amount of time. You're not going to spend 20,000 on a battery, you've got it for free articles on a good battery, you're going to buy the cheap imitation made in Hong Kong. And what happens with that? This is what I understand the battery and the charging system don't talk to each other properly. The good battery they talk to each other properly. The poor battery they don't talk talk to each other properly. So this thing awaits and explodes. And you know, where did they put the right by the door on the way out? And then they can't get out? Exactly. Wait all the all these electrical cars thought you know going on fire.

 James Geering 3:06:08

Yeah. Well, even extrication. I mean I transitioned out to do this full time. Fie almost five years ago now. And I never really got exposed to a lot of extrication of electronic vehicles because they were just starting to come in the Prius and some of those and you know how it is, you know, the scrap yard usually it's pretty old cars that you get to tear up. So I can't imagine trying to do an extrication now with all these cables running through the a post and B posts and all these other areas,

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they say you can't displace the dash because the floorboard if you compressed into the floorboard, it disturbs the battery compartment. Because the whole frame on the carriage is lit. There's the batteries. So if you do the dashboard displacement, you know, it's going to disturb the shield of all those batteries. And you've got to create another problem. Yeah. So there's a lot of things you got to learn. Everything's changing, the airbags are changing. Everything's changing his batteries in the back of the car and his batteries in the front of the car. Even though I'm like my car's got two batteries in the SUV. It's got a regular battery in the front that's got a little battery in the back. And they say, you know, don't cut the batteries because you can't open the doors, you can get the people out. There is so much to learn. You got this constantly evolving. It's not like the old days. The old days was simple and easy. And it was just it was good. Well, I

 James Geering 3:07:39

want to I want to I'm sorry. I want to be mindful of your time. But I want to make sure that before we do close up people know where to find the foundation. So you've talked about the conferences, you talked about the ability to donate, where's the best place online to find you?

 3:07:55

Joey D foundation.org. Joey D foundation.org. We have a website. It'll it'll tell you a lot about us and everything. You can look at all the departments we've given money to you can see what's going on. We have listed all our donors and sponsors on there. And it's a great little thing we've

got going here I don't know how long I'm going to be able to do it I hope to continue on when I can't do it anymore. I'm getting a little up there. But that's my life. You know, my friends are playing pickleball and golf and now I'm doing this and we're just gearing up again now for I just made my contacts with the hotel and everything and we're just gearing up we're going to get gear up we've got a Home Depot and get the Home Depot donate some lumber gives us a good price because we build all our props that they cut off and burn. We have you know, taxpayer burns, residential burn, and we build our roofs. And then we have guys cut roofs which already hit the kind of roof see in the old days we used to in the city when everything was vacant going nuts. We take the progress to the vacant buildings and cut roofs for stores. That's a great that's another training prop that's out there that they have some great doors to for learn how to force doors, great training props that we did not have. So I got a great skill to learn for some doors. So far firefighter so if your rabbit tool only a bunny to break she got to use the halligan in the axe you got to know how to



3:09:38

do it. Like I said train train train. I used to go we used to go over to



3:09:46

to the training and go on the roof and we would not secure we would do roof rope rescues without securing them. We would just have two guys hold on to the rope and brace themselves against the parapet and guys go over there roof, because that's going to happen someday. We can't tie off the one they did recently in Manhattan. That was on all the news. Yes, you should I would write that you know what they did? They put a hook in the doorway, a hook in the doorway of the entrance to the apartment. And they tie it off on that. Is that smart thinking? It



James Geering 3:10:23

is? Yeah, absolutely.



3:10:26

So you got to think outside the box, because everything isn't always going to be perfect. It's good to conduct a drill and say you need six items for the drill. Pull out item number four. Let's see how the drill goes. Let them improvise. You got it, you got it. It's all up to the officers in the leadership. And so the guys and the beauty of giving seminars is a meet hundreds and hundreds of firefighters that want to learn and officers that want to learn. And nothing like being a teacher that have a student that wants to learn. Just half your job is done already. They're motivated. It's the greatest feeling in the world when they come up with a quiz and say, Thank you so much. I learned so much. Go back home and teach that. So we got a great thing going here. Let's keep it going. Send us a very buddy out there. You got 6000 listeners. I said the same thing to on another thing. I said if everybody you told me he got 4000 listeners just have him each one of them send me a trial. That's 4000 1000 I could buy five systems. So you got 1000s of listeners. Just send me \$1 on Pay Pal. I get 97 cents from the dollar.



James Geering 3:11:47

Wherever you everyone listening. That's your challenge. We put



3:11:52

\$1 I mean, what's the dollar? Was it \$3 To get a pizza pizza nowadays? Somebody \$3 Even better. Joey the foundation battle. Jeff cool. Bob Farrell, Dennis Leary. Ryan parrot was great guys, Frank Dryden. All the guys that teach for us. John saw the mic to them's always teaching for us. All those great guys have any done. They're all legends. You guys learn from the best where we're not going to be around much longer. So you got to pick our brains down.



3:12:27

Absolutely.



3:12:28

I hope I helped you out a little here. I hope that you enjoyed our discussion. Yeah. Well,



James Geering 3:12:34

I was gonna say I want to thank you so much. I mean, you leading us through I mean, even just the Vietnam element itself was was stories that you don't hear very often because even that generation, as you said, are getting older and we're losing more people, but then leading us through your career and obviously, you know, your son's you know, the tragic event that happened and also clearing up some you know, some realities that are, you can survive an incident and still carry the physical elements and the confusion, the brain injury that led to that. And then the beautiful foundation that's grown out of this. So I want to thank you so much for being so generous today. We've we've talked for over three hours, and it's been an amazing conversation.



3:13:19

I didn't know what I was gonna say for 10 minutes when you smashed it. But someday, I'll tell you some, between you America to Vietnam stories, they don't talk about that, oh, curl your hair. But that's another thing. Thank you for giving the opportunity to let people know about my foundation and you have your guests are amazing. And keep up the good work and of keeping America safe and keeping America's firefighters safe and America's military and veterans and all the special people that you talk to on your website. It's a beautiful website. God bless you