

University of Houston
Oral History of Houston Project
First EMS Call

Interviewee: Otis L. Owens, Glen Morris, Bill Hausinger

Interview Date: February 17, 2016

Place: EMS Headquarters

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Transcriber: Justin Smith

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Abstract:

Bill Hausinger dispatched Otis L. Owens and Glen Morris to respond to Houston’s first EMS call on April 10, 1971, at 12:30 a.m. The interview opens with a recording of that first call. They then share their experiences in joining the department, serving as firefighters and EMTs, and the values that they have learned along the way. They discuss the challenges faced by African Americans, as well as the initial resistance to bringing EMTs into the fire department. Doing 50-60 runs a day while on the job, the men share stories that range from the amusing to tragic. They speak on the changes and improvements of modern day firefighter and ambulance services. Taking a look at their lives the researcher can hear in their voices that they genuinely care about people. All they want to do is be of service. The bond that these individuals and other firefighters, EMTs, and paramedics have is like family, and although the average person may not think about it, they have built EMS in Houston to what it is today.

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DH: We're ready.

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BH: I want to play this real quick.

DH: All right.

BH: I just want to tell you where we end up at.

(Equipment beeps and lists various commands and file pathways.)

(Recording begins.)

Recording: The following information was taken from tapes made in 1971, April the 10th, when the City of Houston takes over the ambulance division by the fire department. Take it away from private companies. This tape was made in the (inaudible 00:47) Building 1020 Bagby. It was taken over at midnight; the president was Steve Cook, his wife Mary, Whitey Martin. Haussinger is chief dispatcher and broadcast is Pierce _____, that's myself. We had Jerry Weakley as one of the dispatchers and the rest I can't recall at this time. C.B..Daniels, I'm pretty sure I heard his voice. The following is the tape.

(Recording is paused.)

BH: Okay, at this point, I was sitting at a double switchboard and the guy had received the call from the next-door neighbor. Then I'm ready to get the dispatcher to these guys, so here's- this is my voice now.

(Recording is restarted.)

BH: Okay, I got a woman about to have a baby at 1818 Brackenridge (inaudible). Right. You got it? You got it? Okay. What? What? Time is 0-0-30. All right, I'll give you the time later, just get to 1818 Brackenridge. [inaudible]

(Recording ends.)

BH: Okay, this is the guy that answered me [points to Glen Morris] and he wants to know what time it is and there's a baby being born. I said a few more things after this. I thought, "What the hell do you want to know the time for?"

OO: Glen took the call for me and I was standing next to him writing it down. He was saying it; I was writing it.

BH: Okay, I'm turning this off.

LJ: That's why you didn't find the time?

OO: Yeah, we had the time right there. (inaudible talking over each other)

DH: So it was just thirty seconds into the day, into the beginning.

BH: Midnight. The ambulance was out practicing, the radios. These guys were in the fire station because they knew they had enough action around the corner, they was going to have (inaudible). So sure enough they were sitting right there. It was five blocks away or something.

OO: It was a little bit more than five blocks, yeah. It was about a mile.

GM: Good thing we didn't have a train that night. If we had to cross the tracks to get to that, with the trains, they run about (inaudible, people talking over each other).

PDP: Could you start by stating your full name

PDP: When and where were you born?

OO: I was born in Zwolle, Louisiana

PDP: Can you tell us a little about your life growing up?

OO: Yeah, I was an interesting kid growing up. I had the name Sherlock, and I could always figure out things. My grandfather told me some of the things about fires. Our home burned down, our uncle's home burned down, and they said it was an accidental fire smoking in the bed caused a fire. Well my uncle never did smoke in the bed. There was a gasoline camp found in the house. Big Poppa I said, well, my uncle never would do a thing like that and it was pretty tragic. He told me "be quiet, Sherlock," and that was just one of the things. But when I was growing up as a kid we was taught, I didn't have a dad at home, I had a grandfather helped raise us, family grew up. Just to make a long story short here, it was I finished high school and I came to Houston and wanted to work for the Hughes Tool Company. I wanted to be an engineer, I wanted to be an electrical engineer so I started there. It was a little boring the kind of job I was doing, I wanted some excitement. So I saw an ad on TV, advertisement on television that Houston Fire Department was hiring firefighters, paying \$500 a month to go to school. So that's why I've, the beginning my life in the fire department. Kid 18 years old, 19 years old, I started with Houston Fire Department in two weeks after I applied.

PDP: Did you always want to be involved with the fire department or the emergency medical services?

OO: Yes I did. went back to when I was a kid, my uncle's house burned down, and fires fascinate me. How can you tell? I just had this you know, I can figure out things as my big poppa

said "Sherlock could." I didn't know who Sherlock was at the moment. Yeah! So yes I really wanted to go into the fire service, wanted to be a firefighter, wanted action, and believe me, I did get plenty of action. The EMS program, yes! That was, I learned a lot, and I enjoyed it. Met some of the wonderful people in the world, some of the best people in the world, I did, my brothers here, and then good relationship. I don't know any other job that I could've gone to, and learned what I did at eighteen years old. Young teenager and hey my career exploded. I went through fire services, EMS was my best, I loved it, and I went on being an investigator for seventeen years, arson investigator. But EMS program is my life.

PDP: Did you have any type of training prior to joining?

OO: Joining the Houston Fire Department?

PDP: Yeah.

OO: No, they trained me I learned everything from fire service, I knew nothing. I didn't know anything (laughter) Nothing!

PDP: You said you began working when you were eighteen?

OO: Yes.

LJ: Do you remember what year that was?

OO: (Laughter) Oh yeah that was about 1968.

LJ: 1968

PDP: Could you start by stating your full name?

GM: Ok, my name is Glenn Morris and I'm 73 years old. I was born July 18th, 1943.

PDP: Can you tell us a little about your life growing up?

GM: Yeah I was born in Shreveport, Louisiana, down the street from here.

PDP: Oh wow!

GM: (laughter) High school went into the navy, spent four and a half years in the navy. Got out of the navy and came home. Shreveport is, my hometown is mostly a retirement town. At that time anyway, there were no major industries, jobs were hard to find, so I came to Houston. Came to Houston, I worked at NASA Space Center, we would mostly be delivering computer components and stuff like that. Then I came to a cookie company I don't know the name.

DH: Nabisco.

GM: Almeda what is it?

DH: Nabisco?

GM: Yeah, Nabisco I went to Nabisco! The guy says hey it's close to Thanksgiving we gonna lay, first come first serve, off. You know, so during the holidays people did their own cooking they didn't need me, so you know boom I'm out of a job. So looking at papers again and the ads and there were openings for United gas company personnel. Ok so I did that, I joined that and I read meters and did gas meters. I worked on that, read meters and then I got tired of walking and then I went to a repair shop where we repaired and got tired of this paint. Painting in repairs and then I was downtown on Austin Street, you know when they had the tower downtown? And I saw these guys jumping out of this window.

LJ: Oh my gosh!

BH: Because of the Caroline?

GM: (Laughter) Yeah, so the training tower was there at the time. So I saw these guys jumping out the window and they were catching them in a net, ok? Three stories you had to you know. So I just said hey what's going on with this? He said "man we're cadets in the fire department." I said yeah, he said "if you are veteran you can come in and the city will pay you and the government will pay you too". So I said where do I go to sign up (laughter) but anyway, started like that and went to the academy and did our time in the academy. Matter fact Otis was in the class behind me. When I was in 68D and you was?

OO: It was E.

GM: 68 E see? So it was couple weeks' difference.

OO: Yeah

GM: We were running into each other off and on the training fields and stuff. So got my training down, graduated and I got my assignment. I was assigned to station 19, which is over on 1804 Griggs at that time. That was probably one of the hottest houses in Houston, they make more fires than anybody.

LJ: Oh wow.

GM: So you went ahead and went through that for a while, I did the piping ladder lid, fighting fires and stuff. Did that for about, I guess I would say for about three years and then this program came up. Chief Ron was asking for volunteers for people to work on the EMS. At the time there was a lot of resentment there, because the guys felt that we were fighters we not emergency medical people. (laughter) They kind of was a little worried about getting into it, but he got enough men to start the program out and from there you know that we grew. Ok, I forgot I forgot how many units we had when we first started.

GM: Was it 23?

OO: 21

GM: 21, 23?

BH: 23 Ambulance.

OO: 23

GM: 23 okay. It was nothing elaborate. It was just an old dodgy kind of van, first aid kit, and a stretcher. That's what we started off with and basic first aid training. That's what it started out with, they didn't have an air conditioning, and you know we rolled winter and summer and it was kind of rugged, but it was different and it was exciting. At that time our ticket, my unit we had three crews, A, B, and C Shift, with those three crews on that one particular unit we were averaging around over 400 rounds a month.

PDP: Wow!

GM: Ok, that's a lot. That's just one unit. So we rode 24/7 and I happily grew, and then they gave me advanced to better units, more trained, and you know that. I stayed on that unit for basically ten years, I think Otis stayed on there for four, and he took his exam and made arson investigator and left. But I stayed there for about ten. Even after I had made the ranking chauffer they placed me as a driver of the Ambulance truck, but we didn't have enough personnel to complement the units so they had to pull me off my regular assignments and ride, fill in on the ambulance, and I did that off and on for several years. Matter of fact I rode it to location right now it was an audit keeper. See that job is not for everybody, ok. (Laughter) Usually it's not, a

lot of guys will make one ride with me and came back and say I can't do it, I can't do this anymore. Take me off, captain, put me out. You know, and that, you know what I'm saying, and then you saw, I worked in the neighborhood where I lived and I knew people, you know I thought I was going to do something. Give back a little bit, you know and you know I went so long after a while I couldn't do it no more. It just kind of burned out, you know after a while so that's when I became a chauffeur worked over station thirty-nine which is bordering the area I was in before, and I was still running over there (laughter). But then, after that, I got kind of burned out on the fires and stuff and then I took the test for a fire inspector. That's where I retired from I stayed there, I did thirty-four years in the service.

PDP: What year did you begin working?

GM: I began working in the fire department 69, February 1969

DH: The station that you started it at was that in the fifth ward, where is that?

GM: Yes, the still just had to move across the street. It's a bigger station. When we had it, it was a two storied old brick dilapidated building, it's been there since 18 something it was you know we had a sliding pole you know it was it doesn't matter. But that's where it started, and then they got a new station across the street, I was gone at that time, I was working on station 39. From that I went into the prevention core of firefighting.

LJ: I have a question for you, I'm just interested because you know taking this job as a firefighter even though like you said "they were paying veterans," that's a really big job to take on just for the money aspect of it how did you feel about it? (laughter)

GM: You know when I first started this was a paycheck thing, but after I got there for a while and I met the guys and everything it got to be exciting really. You know I said this isn't that bad because a lot of guys said "when I get out my 20's I'm out of here." You know I said I'm going to

hang around. Like I said the thing was, it's a joy when you that you helped somebody, a certain joy man. We didn't get a whole lot of praise, but we got some. You know and even in the department there was some of the people that said we're not EMS people we firefighters, you know. Some of the guys in the upper ranks they were kind of against it, because they you know they wanted us to go, they wanted to take away our firefighter credentials away and put us over in you know EMS. They said "nah we firefighters you know," but those guys came around, as a matter of fact one of the chiefs there was hollering and raising hell the most. When is daughter had an accident over lines on fifty nine and we managed to they called us so we had her in our corner too so he kind of came around.

LJ: Right.

GM: As a matter of fact, he sent us a letter of appreciation for the service we had done. You know when you get stuff like that you say, you know I made the right decision. We had so many stories out there you could probably write a book, chief could probably tell you stuff that's coming in and he's sending us out to do stuff. We have another guy he works at the rail yards. David Arson repairs on boxcars and one of these doors fell off the boxcar and fell on him and crushing down on him like a pancake. So these things weigh six-seven hundred pounds or more, and it just flattens him out. We managed to get the forklift to get the door off of him; all his sternum and ribs are separated. He you know we had to do the, with the breathing and all of that, and IV's and everything but we managed to get him to the hospital. We didn't think we didn't know anything about it it's just we were glad he was alive when we left. This is one of the letters that we got, there were a few of them you know, and it kind of makes you feel good. He sends us a letter, he sends a letter to the mayor, you know, thanking us for what we got done for him and everything. He invited my partner and I at the time which was Wes Nottis which is in another

crew. He invited us to a meeting that they were having a dinner at this VHF hall and we were the guests, and he introduced us to his family and his children and grandchildren and whatever. It made you feel good inside, you know that's, that's... that was a job. I admit I'm going to get away from your questions and everything.

OO: Glenn would like to talk now, now he can go. (Laughter) I would like to say he's got a heart that's bigger than Texas man. (Laughter) I'd take some calls we would went on and Glenn and I would tell them that you know you are either the top of the unit, they transfer you down for you're just an engine two. We don't pull that, ya'll doctors, ya'll half doctors aren't ya'll. We say "no we not that." We've had situations where a guy just had this he just wanted to go to the hospital to check it out. Glad to pull out all his money, "can you get a cab, can you get your neighbor". Well, I don't have any gas, Lan and I we would get the money, "there you go," give him some money.

GM: That was another big thing

OO: We did all that out there, we took care of the people out there.

GM: The emergency part it was, it was...

PDP: Some discrepancies?

GM: Yeah! well, what it was is that we were on a, we spoke strictly in emergencies. You can't... it's kind of hard to-

LJ: To define that?

GM: Yeah! You know so, but we didn't have anything to back us up. See they were I don't know if you remember the TV series on what, was it come from Los Angeles? *Emergencies*. So they would make the run and determine the emergencies that they calling in in the private sector to come in to and transport. Well, we didn't have that, ok and most of the time this guy couldn't

afford it anyway. You know, so we got to come, sometimes you have to make a call. I know this guy isn't an emergency, but if I leave him here something is not going to get to where he needs to get. You know, so sometimes we did it and it wasn't an actual true emergency, but it could have developed.

LJ: But then it could have been an emergency.

OO: Yeah.

GM: Yeah, so we had some of those calls and we did, we did some of those. Uh, cause it's hard to say, hey you know and leave 'em, you know especially if he's at home he's with his family and stuff, you explain it to the family. That you know we are strictly for emergencies we can work this, we got his vital signs down everything looks stable there's nothing that really requires him to go right now. But don't wait, get him to the hospital and get him examined by a doctor. It was kind of hard to get that over in a lot of cases.

PDP: Bill, can you tell me where and when you were born?

BH: I was born in Louisiana (laughter)

OO: Oh come on.

BH: Ok, I was born in Houston, Texas on Oakland Heights 1934. And, that's it. I lived in the grass parts of town on the east end and presently retired living in Kingsville.

PDP: Can you tell us a little about your life growing up?

BH: Let's say my father was a firefighter for 47 years, and my uncle 42 and my mother was a _____ farm fire and served coffee, so I was brought up around firefighters, just a little boy running within _____ and things. I spent the night at fire station number seven when I was five years old. My mother went by there to see my daddy, he's a chauffeur on the pumper which is

now in the museum, and he said, "leave _____ with me" so she said "oh no" so, he said, "it's all right, if something happens he'll sit on the seat," and she went on home. And then they had a big fire, she came running in the ladies' office with her coffee and stuff saying "where's _____?" "Asleep on the pumper seat," because my daddy was operating at the time. So I went back to the fire station so I actually stayed there overnight. At eighteen years old I got out of St. Thomas High School and couldn't join the fire department yet, _____ a little bit at the docks, so at twenty years old I joined the Houston fire department. Went to their drill tower on Caroline on East Hill and Block and I had to jump on that net too. I look across that hotel there's a _____ and I said Ben Mylan jumped on that net. So the fire chief, the chief training division officer said, "I don't know what are you guys names but I'm a number y'all". He said I know little Willie here's daddy coming together in the twenty-four 1924. So I was number one so anything that had to be done I had to get up their number one get up there. So we went through that on four quick weeks and assigned a fire stations, I got number twenties on every Avenue F to 73rd right off of Harrisburg and a dead end street of 73rd and into Avenue F, kind of hidden away fire station had good training there we had _____ alarms from the port of Houston, Ship channels industries, fighter fires, and many other dwelling fires at east end. As a matter of fact when I was 18 I was a welder helper and I learned to weld. I was working with shutdowns at these refineries welding, so you can see eastern states put in Manchester when it blassed them. We'd be hanging on the back and we been going down the fork mainly Thompson and Wheeler if they caught you Leoza they will let you know how to get there. We spent some time there and handled between the big tights burning and keep that one cooled, don't worry about that burning or just talking about it, like we are talking now. In 1959 there was only two shifts. On Monday you worked 24 hours on to stay all nights, so Monday morning we going to work and we riding

along and the number twenty stations and 69th and Navigation there's an 18 wheeler park and we go sliding around in the real slowest daylight Thursday. Cause the driver has to get up early and see, I'm looking over there and see the truck coming and I say "Maylene we gonna hit this truck," we hit him and flipped him and we held on and the front bumper stopped got him out the windshield he said he's ok, I said "I hear you but I don't see you." He said "ok," we get there and get a reserved bumper switch the nights of the chain-driven hydraulic brakes, I mean mechanical brakes Big ole excess reserve. So we put all of our hose and stuff like that on that, Friday night I got five men I'm riding on top of the hose. It's more than 20 miles an hour for water flowing on the alarm was _____ or in the 75th and Harrisburg lady was driving a car looking at us with a red light, we just lumber along, she turned right in front of us we hit her spun her and she had with her a seamen from the port of Houston in her van. The daughter they all had beer _____ and went to the hospital and I bounced on the middle of that on top of that my Captain, Senior Daniels. So, I keep all of it old time it got me by the neck. I'm going to read this dispatch off. It said dispatcher, rank or say you captain paid. It says you used all the luck you got go on up there. So I did stay 17 years dispatched, worked all the way to chief dispatch, and retired as deputy chief, but at the time we were working with them we started our ambulance service. We have studied the city of Seattle, I met a man on the elevator just now he's from Las Vegas, deputy chief. The 39th system right here now, he's leaving today at six, he's on the sixth floor. So, the _____ was for my area and Chief Whitey Martin and Jay Cook the fire chief sent them to Seattle to learn their system and they came back. So they rush these EMT courses through the 30 or 60 days or whatever. I wanted to be EMT for myself because I see people injured for weeks from now. So I volunteered to get in and did 41 years at foxy one, wanted to be there where I can help. It's helped me a lot, I still have the card in this pocket it expired on 1972. But, we went and

helped out. After the fire went up to dispatch we took over the ambulance service and when I retired, we were making 150 runs a night. On Friday and Saturday night we called it a knife and gun club nights. 150 runs man god there making \$1,100. And that means _____, so saw that, over the years I kept track of everybody I could, made as many s friends as I can. End up serving on the city of firefighter as pitching boy, 6 years, and learned a lot about investments and my board. And I'm a happy camper and go to fire stations, visit any city I'm in just to enjoy the fire shows and it's nothing like it. It's very rewarding everything you do you help somebody.

DH: Before we go on to the other questions about your group experiences, I have a question for you Bill. Did being a fireman prior to being a dispatcher, do you feel that was that was helpful? And I don't know what the training is for dispatchers today if they had any experience.

BH: I'd be remiss if I didn't tell you we were called firemen until the women got into the departments and the name changed to firefighters. We actually tell people that firemen stroke furnaces on the trains (laughter).

DH: Fair enough

BH: Ok, I use the term myself sometimes you're asking me if it helped me in what respect?

DH: Did it help you to understand what was needed as a dispatcher, when you would evaluate calls they came in?

BH: Oh, absolutely, absolutely, we had firefighters for dispatchers, lot of cities had civilians there, they didn't ride a truck. They don't know where the liner laner or the nozzle or any of that they don't know where that is. We've been there and done that so we talked to the people there better. We can withdraw the information from all that that was a challenge. Because when they

called they didn't tell you what freeway, well they say "the one I use all the time" well which one? there was south west, east end or Harrisburg. what street are you on? We always asked to ask what street they were on. Withdraw enough information while we are doing that there's a man that's standing up with these medals. They had all the location on that here to Harrisburg and come on down _____ street or something like that box number 2782 give to sixes twenties and thirties and whatever let him go. That didn't take me six seconds to tell you that. It takes them a minute and a half with computers because 61 911 gotta be answered first by city and call takers. Then they turn around and ask what you want fire police and you tell them. Finally the fire dispatcher gets there, as deputy chief I promised if I had anything to do with it, we would answer that first call and have him on the way. We can all switch from police to ambulance so yes it was very helpful. We fought and still fight and keep that citizen thing out of our dispatcher center and get good 911 takers. Humongous building by airline Firefight department got a third of its at least here they separate us, and then the middle of the city municipal. So you get a good look down at that I took a hundred steps across it and they all taking calls and dispatching,

OO: It's very helpful.

BH: You got streets with the name the same Lanore and Lanore and trying to find the road and they gotta find the address of it. So we got guys that got records on the side in the middle of the street Houston. To get the story straight

OO: Whitey Martin.

BH: Yeah Chief Martin was the father of ambulance service in Houston. He was a good guy, what else?

PDP: The three of you were the first ever Houston EMS call, could you tell us about, how, what happens starting with your call to dispatch.

BH: Well, Thanks to chief cook we had four shifts and fire alarms. So when we opened that new fire alarm center we put real hospital shift in _____ broke out. we started this ambulance service, real hospital shift. So Dr. Hansen all night long, police, dispatcher till midnight. I ain't gonna tell you what they said when I plugged in at midnight. He said Bill Hausigner we got it take this, there were dispatchers in front of us three or four that we can see. The ambulance called at that time was \$25 to go to the hospital. But if you were deceased, they got 10% of the funeral. So if you were billed code dead your gonna die, they don't know you. We had accounts that substantiated where ambulance would go to two to three funeral homes to get more than 10% of the funeral. We had a case where they put him on a rack on tide rod ends on the ambulance while the man's dead body was just there beforehand. We had one naysayer that said they hated us because he ran this other ambulance service for the docks and he said he was gonna sue us because we took over that night and said he was gonna sue me for a million dollars but he never did. _____ his name, he was a teacher at Austin high school, but he was a nurse also in the ambulance service. So we had a lot of opposition that night to start with, half the fire department was on tests and radio, ambulance. We started off with 23 now we got 57 the last I counted. We wouldn't have the experience of riding the truck and try to make those locations unless you've been there and done that. So when you go up there working, you partner with that guy you are with. The worst fear is three of them running together and hitting each other which it sometimes happens they cross coming from different directions...

PDP: What were you thinking or how did you feel at the moment?

PDP: At the moment of the car, how did you feel? What were you thinking?

JT: Get out of my way and let me do it or?

BH: I told them about 30 minutes before, Fire chief, his wife and I said “ Chief, I'm going to pull right and dispatch the first call.” We have two switchboards like you see on T.V. plug in plug out. So 12 midnight I moved over there on the chair and plugged in and said that we got it, we taking over, it's 12 midnight. So this guy here keeps taking calls from the department, he went through extensive information getting from his first call. Found out things like the guy that was calling was about his sister that passed away. I mean they were having a baby etc. In proper standings _____ but he had already mentioned in 1818. He had people in port looking and of course I knew it was 19, I knew the street there. So I had to pull that car out of stepped it right it out of there stuck it in at 19 and went right on it was pre-planned that I was I going to do that and I knew someday I was just sitting there thinking someday I'm gonna tell ya'll about it.

(Laughter)

LJ: What was going through ya'll heads though?

OO: Glen didn't want the first call.

GM: None of us wanted the first call.

OO: We all wanted the second call (laughter).

LJ, PDP: Where, you know before, where were you guys?

OO: We were ready, we were waiting, we firefighters here we were always ready. We were always ready.

BH: They were testing radios all over town, we were ready to go somewhere. These guys knew where they were at it was gonna be close.

OO: When he said 18 we knew all the streets out there we train for that we know every plug, fire plug, we know all of the main areas.

GM: It just worked out, everybody said it was gonna be nice they had said that nice and stuff.

BH: Nice.

GM: Everybody said it was gonna be nice, pretty good after midnight. I don't know if they went to set up or not.

OO: Yeah they went to set up after we did.

LJ: Oh okay.

BH: There was four roommates that were supposed to wake each other up. Those guys at the station wasn't getting any sleep either because these guys work night and day. On a full seven, I get off dispatch and I go home, I get rid of this stuff you know? Sometimes like for a hurricane call we stay in the office day and night just messing around we get all these calls strange calls, good calls, bad calls. All these calls old lady wants me to pump the water out the yard, I say lady where am I gonna put it, this water been out there for five days. The other lady, she was worried, excited elderly lady, she said to "send fire trucks over here with that hose," I said "yes ma'am what street?" She said "just send it over here," and I said "well tell me what you need-- is it for a grass fire?" She said "no there's two dogs stuck together and I think I'd ought to spray them with water." Had it on tape too (Laughter).

GM: Getting back to what you were saying, what were we thinking about? Ok, so you have to look at station life in the first place. The guys are stuck in the territory, you're eating, or watching TV, and doing you know something.

LJ: Something. Just doing something.

GM: Yeah just you find a way to occupy your time.

BH: You spend more time there than you do at home.

GM: Yeah you just find a way to occupy your time Most of the guys you start on your territory, some of the guys going to school work lessons and stuff, some of the guys just sitting there watching tv just relaxing. So I think at midnight though everybody was kinda laid back you know, we wasn't in bed, though, and we constantly knew something was coming.

LJ: Right.

GM: So back to this topic, we had, they had finally built us a little, main station in a little shed with a little room, two clocks, telephone (laughter). While we were there just disturbed the rest of the hour (laughter) some of a couple guys just running a little tv you know.

LJ: Right yeah.

GM: So that's why we were doing, just sitting up on the counter relaxing because you know sooner or later something was gonna happen. I was hoping it wasn't gonna be us on the first, and on top of that an expected mother lord.

OO: Oh boy. (laughter)

GM: I mean, all the training we had we were expecting, we've been down to the moral for a week, we've been here for a week, we've worked at Jefferson Davis, and delivering and assisting the doctors in the Emergency room and all that, and you know, maybe we'll get a car wreck or something like that you know.

BH: How many babies you might have delivered?

GM: Probably about 50 or 60 over a 10-year period (laughter).

?: 20-25

JT: No way!

OO: Oh yes he did.

GM: They broke records. The birth records Jefferson Davis was breaking records every month,

OO: Yeah.

BH: Kina like JD hospital.

GM: Yeah that was the county hospital. Every month was a different number over there and the numbers was going up all the time.

LJ: Wow!

OO: Yeah The training there I had delivered 15 of them.

GM: Cause the doctors would say get you some rubber gloves and say come over, here and help us.

OO: Oh yeah.

BH: Every time I went though they knew I was a dispatcher, I ain't have to deliver no babies but I was going through it at JD hospital. The guy with me was Wholebrook he's out on the field, so he's going to deliver babies. It comes a time at midnight at JD hospital we training 87 ambulances, I mean in baby mother beds closer as it measures how big comfort this is to when the baby was gonna be born. So at midnight we gonna deliver the rest of the night, so I took Wholebrook and he went and said okay you can deliver or we're going to have a cesarean section coming down right now.

LJ: Oh wow!

BH: Would you like to watch this cesarean section? I said sure. So we brang it in and the girl has lost a couple already, she was out already. So I come to the elevator come down to the emergency room they were birthing her already and that guy had that hand holding that baby in there so he was holding it while they put the sheets all over her and took that out or the doctor did and said we're gonna start right here and the guys hand was still in there. So we opened it and they searched for the blood and I was sitting there watching. So when they pull it back you can see his necklace. So that doctor looked at all of us and said ok intern, make a stab right here, right here really quick. He said no that's my hand (laughter) so the baby was born and they dragged it immediately, put it over there and the nurses took it, but that was my experience in watching a cesarean rather than deliver, but I never delivered a baby, I knew I couldn't, but there's nothing to it.

GM: Oh we had enough practice though.

OO: Gotta practice.

GM: I mean here's the thing. Being in the county hospital you don't take a lot of time. If you ain't ready go home.

LJ: Right.

GM: You come in here having your pains and stuff and there are going to be like “No she ain't ready.”

LJ: Oh no!

(laughter)

JT: Awe man.

GM: For real that's what I'm telling you. So they tie am up, the doctor will do his little observation and say get a cab and send her home.

LJ: Oh no so it's not like today where they, you know people sit in the hospital.

GM: No this is the county hospital they don't even got the room.

LJ: Oh right okay, makes sense.

GM: So they put her in the cab and on the way home the water breaks. Okay so the captain out here out of his mind and is like “where is the nearest fire station?” So we go out there he's out in front of the station blowing his horn and everyone is trying to figure out what was going on. So we go out there and sure enough, the lady says I just left there.

LJ: Is this the first one? Or is this the one later on?

GM: No this is one incidence.

LJ: Oh okay.

GM: She said "I just left the hospital doctor talking about I wasn't ready" But the baby is coming.

LJ: Oh my gosh!

GM: We got to get together and try to protect her the best way we can and everything.

Anyways so take her to the hospital. But this happens a few times not only one time, it does. The thing was Not having enough room at the county, they don't have time you know, the baby that would be like be wait here we'd be right back. They had people all up in the halls especially and like I said they were breaking records of women having children so many kids a month. You know every month they would go up. But then again I don't know what they could've done, but they didn't have enough time. If you were not ready at the time you came there you were sent back home. We had a lady that we passed her house.

OO: Oh yeah we just kept passing that house.

GM: We got the number wrong and we went out three or four houses that she came to the door and the baby fell out. (Laughter)

OL: Oh yeah we saw it all there.

GM: She got up and walked she was waving hey my child and her baby came. So we had to dispatch two ambulances we took the baby and the other guys took the mother. Because when the baby came out you know we had to resuscitate.

LJ: The baby.

BH: We had the same thing happen. When we had that first call I think it was someone at Barnes that someone has been shot.

BH: So one of the calls we sent. So the ambulance got there on _____ street and took him down hold him down at Ben Taub Hospital they did whatever they could. So five minutes later 10 minutes later call come back we got a man that was shot the same place on _____. We just picked him up, no you picked up the one we liked, and the one we didn't like is over here in the weaze.

LJ: Oh my god.

GM: That kind of stuff. Gangster stuff see.

BH: So you got conflicts out there with people being, we got two ambulance drivers coming back from Vietnam they knew how to act. When they get to this drunk of off leport road he was gonna whoop them and when they asked for police they came and it was five of them so the police will talk to them.

GM: Yeah we had altercation.

BH: The other case I was riding by myself and said please we need an escort and an ambulance we said we can run that and we get up over the guy starts kicking he was tearing inside the ambulance Two paramedics were looking at each other. I said "what are ya'll doing?" He said well chief he's tearing it up we can't handle him he put policemen down. I said open that door, and I went in there and grabbed him and put him on 260 _____ he behaved. They said you're lucky we seen him whoop policemen before, never seen a dude do that before.
Superhuman strength

GM: They had this one guy too. I know you're probably tired of these long stories. there was this guy at a funeral, oh no not a funeral a wedding.

LJ: Wedding.

GM: There was a shooting in a wedding. Shooting at a wedding, and the ambulance guys went over and picked him up and they did the vital signs you know no breathing and no pulse said this "man has no signs of life." So they was picking up their gear and putting back in the unit some of the wedding people said "what are you doing?" They said "well we getting ready to go." After he calls me to come out we need to get the police. They said "Nah you taking him to the hospital," we said all signs in this man are dead there's no life in the body. So you know we're not transporting a corpse and he said "no you are going to take him"

LJ: Oh wow.

GM: I said no. So the guy couldn't get to the radio because he needs help now. So everybody some people were getting drunk and you know drinking and stuff. So they take the stretcher, put this guy on him, put it back in the unit Okay? The guy says my driver is not driving me, he took the driver out of the unit and made the MT get in the back. They were going down the street and the guy, the MT didn't realize that his driver wasn't driving. So he looks out the back window and sees the guys backing out the

BH: The firemen were waiting. (Laughter)

GM: Yeah! This guy took the wheel, I'm surprised he didn't have a wreck he had the sirens going and he was just going crazy you know.

LJ: Oh my god.

GM: You know what I'm saying.

LJ: So this was someone from the wedding that did this?

GM: Yeah, someone at the wedding party.

JT: He just hijacked the ambulance.

GM: Yeah hijacked the ambulance, and had the other paramedic get in the back and made them sit there like he performing first aid stuff on this guy.

LJ: Oh my god.

BH: I hope ya'll could clean all this up.

JT: We'll do our best.

GM: I mean there was all kinds of stuff. Another story and I'll shut up.

All: No please keep talking.

OO: What about the guy that tried, we were coming back from the call on Collins worth 59 where he passed out he just came in front of our unit and just fell out. You remember that what his name? Peach what was his name

GM: I know who you're talking about.

OO: Peach Cake? We made 50 rhymes on him.

GM: Sweet Cake.

OO: Yeah, Sweet cake.

GM: Sweet Cake, that's him. you remember him, don't you.

GM: You know. Then we had another deal.

OO: We could tell you a lot of stories, oh my God.

GM: Motorcycle club they were riding down the street you know holding up the traffic so they ran through the group two or three dividers one of them hit the rail and stuff like that. So you know they're injured and stuff like that, so we get the call. We went up there, two guys down one real serious problem, the other one you know. So I'm down I've got my IV going and getting the guy dressed in bandage and stuff like that and somebody drives back through and starts shoots in the crowd.

LJ: Oh my god!

GM: Yeah you know. So this guy standing over me, he's like "I've been shot" and you know they shot him in the head. You say good lord get on the radio and call for more help because the PD didn't show up yet, police department. We get there, they don't get there until an hour we've been there.

LJ: Right.

GM: So we were calling police assistance, even though we got a call from them earlier because you know it's a pedestrian or whatever. Now we got a shooting, Guy shot in the head. We called up life flight they had to land down the street there, but we took the guy with the most serious injury right then. Life flight came and helped out but it turned out to be the other guy wasn't really that bad but we didn't know that.

LJ: Right when you're looking at him right there.

GM: The guy that got shot in the head, did it end up being so bad.

BH: My last scores 24th ambulance. Take it this way, we got four system and fire alarms we don't remember what happened the day before yesterday, or the day before that. They got three shifts out in the field 24th had a man that had a sister in the hospital. He go out there he's laid down by his cell phone, oh yeah they didn't have any cell phones, he went to the phone booth and called the city and said he had heart pains. So they come in and load him and carry him and then go back to turn them over to the hospital. He gets off from his gurney and visits some sister next time he wants to go see her he does it again in the new shift. Well, no one was wise to know what was going on.

LJ: So no one knew what was going on.

BH: That's how you get bad calls.

GM: See that's the same thing with this guy Sweet Cakes.

OO: Yeah Sweet Cakes I bet you 50 time he knew what was going on. He knew all the doctors on the shift in the hospital. So we push him in, "hey that's sweet cake". (laughter)

BH: Look at all the good these guys were done.

GM: Yeah you know.

BH: Moms calling me telling my baby isn't breathing, or my husband has been shot.

GM: Yeah you get some from domestic violence.

BH: "Yeah they shot Maria in the good eye." Well, what do you mean the good eye? "Well, she's blind in the other one." (laughter)

GM: Well you know overall though, I think Otis will agree with me, like I said you know It was worth it.

OO: Yeah it was worth the job. It was tough, but we enjoyed doing it. We saved a lot of lives too.

GM: There was a lot of good times too. Like I said every now and then we get calls like yall helped me when I needed it and I'm thankful for it. You know. A lot of times, you know a lot of people you knew like I said I worked in a neighborhood I knew and they come to you for everything. You know it you

LJ: Yeah let's go to him he can do it

GM: I was there and I was able to help them. and you miss it you know miss it you miss it after a while you do. You just hope someone is out there if we ever need help, they can help you. You know that's the main thing. Like we said We've gone from 23 units to how many now?

BH: 57 last I heard.

GM: Okay and we need more. Houston is grown so much, that was the thing back then when we first started with 23 units the thing was we got to grow the population and we kind of you know

JT: I did have one question, not to derail you. It hits home because y'all pick me up from the side of the road not too long ago. What did you do you know serving for so long in the same job, you said "a lot of people they serve for one call then they were done that was all they could handle," What did you do to clear your mind? What did you do to motivate the guys that you

work with? Obviously you know it can't be the only thing you think about or you'll go nuts right?

GM: I was into music I play the guitar.

OO: Oh yeah he can play it and he plays it good.

GM: Well like you said You have to find something to keep you going or else after a while it will make you go crazy with all this negative stuff coming at you. Some of the guys are going to school, some of the guys are taking extra classes. Some of the guys do repair work and stuff, sheet rack, so you know a lot of guys did something different. If you look, we have a small paper that comes out so often there's a whole section in there of guys doing a different type of things like electrician, they're carpenters, etc. A lot of guys are into sports, the average guy that you meet had something on the side.

BH: See firefighters don't draw any Social Security they don't pay any paid social security they get to get paid in pension. So you got to work somewhere else to earn a Social Security if they want it.

LJ: Oh I never knew that.

OO: What he saying is if chief gives you a call and tells you to go out there, we can't select it's too cold out there, or it's too hot, it's too dark or is there's too much rain. We can't do that.

BH: I ride my bicycle to church on rain or cold I don't care I'm going to go. Fireman's don't let their wives drive I can do it on my own, women we go. I tied myself to a tree when Ike came through, with ropes, I tied ropes and went out there like an idiot at 2:15 and the wind was throwing me I didn't think of the debris flying over my head I wouldn't have done it. These guys

OO: We don't decide what kind of calls it is. You call us we coming, we can't say that's too much blood for us to see we can't look at that, we can't see that, granted we've seen everything. Every trauma you can name we seen it.

BH: Every experience matters whether they on vacation in Florida.

OO: Exactly.

BH: Or high peaks and something happened right there on the spot

OO: I take care of that person

GM: A lot of that stuff you take the little knowledge you have and it's not just job training, we have to improvise a lot of stuff you know. For instance, we had a guy that flipped over in the bayou of on I 10 and the water you know there is nothing to tell you how it goes you know what I'm saying. Just got to take your own initiative to get the guy out there. We've had one of the worst calls I made was on the 10 and metro behind that area. Car flipped over on the freeway and we weren't able to get them out. It happened so quick, by the the time we got there, there was a family was trapped in the car, and it caught fire. Before we can pump our rubbers out. By the time we could just jump out the back of the tailboard and try to grab something, you know it just burst into flames. I see that all the time you know, but there's nothing you can do, it so fast. I mean we put the fire out but there wasn't enough time to save them.

BH: Well me and y'all know some firefighters can't take that box. There's a few that can stay on and a lot of people don't want to be firefighters.

GM: That's what I said, at 10 years I decided I couldn't do it no more. I mean I guess it was my age and all of that too but you put. You have back pains now and that it comes out later your muscles and stuff your strains. We had people downstairs weigh 300, 400, 500 pounds. We had

to get this guy out of the window because we couldn't get him out the house because you know.

All this time it's time, time if the house is on fire by you know gas or what ever you have to do it right now you don't have no time to wait. Well, let's call someone, there is no time to wait we have to go onto the next one. A lot of the wreckers drivers today. Were you one of the drivers?

BH: I didn't drive the wreckers.

GM: I know Chief Martin did. People trapped in cars, and they hooked those cars with the wreckers and pulling them. They have all this stuff now with the radio and jars of life, but we didn't have all that stuff back then. See we came a long way.

LJ: Yeah you guys were the originals.

GM: We didn't have all that, we had our hands. You know like I said it makes you feel kinda good, though, we went through that and we did that. Every now and then you ran into somebody and said "hey wasn't that you over there?" So you know that's the way It went.

JT: Awesome, and then it's obvious to see you guys just how close you guys are and what that does. You know just the small things I have experience different hikes I've been on where you think you're going to die and then you don't, and the way you feel about your brothers and sisters and all. What does that do for y'all obviously you guys are friend this many years later what kind of a bond is that

GM: Like a bond, like you said we sleep together.

OO: Eat together, got the same dishes, eat with the same fork.

GM: We had our squabbles.

OO: You just go through because at the same time that's your family at the fire station

BH: I tell my old buddies now take care of yourself because you don't want me giving you mouth-to-mouth. (Laughter)

OO: Oh yeah.

BH: I did it once at the barbers cut, guy coming and offering me some cheese cracker and I said no he been on that shit turning them containers loose. He goes back and lays down he comes through The front door and he goes back “fireman, fireman, come here quick,” and I went back and he's gasping for air. I had mouth to mouth, and I ate cheese crackers.

GM: Now that's one of the worst experiences that I've had. Dr. committed suicide he took and overdose and it swole his trachea. I forgot what the drug was, but he was _____. The nurse came in there and found him and he was, and what was bad about it though was he and his brother were doctors. His brother was having some type of family problems. Anyways, I got him down on there on the floor you know they I didn't have a bag with me and I was trying to breathe for him, and the other brother came in he had another office down there and he said “no we have to do a tracheotomy.” I said “whoa I'm no doctor I can't do that.” He said “well I'm a doctor I can do it.” So I asked the nurse and she says he's a doctor. So he got his little scalpel and cut. But he cut too much, okay, he cut too much but he lives. He lived, but that was the worst thing I have made in days, cause the blood and stuff and I didn't have my bag

OO: What he was telling you he did mouth to mouth.

JL: Yeah because the CPR they always tell you to have like a mouth guard.

OO: Nah we didn't have that, But the mad was dying.

GM: He lived we went to the Saint Joseph Hospital and I never wanted to do that again but I did it.

OO: You have to do it.

GM: Well you know that's stuff thinking about stuff I didn't do in years. That's just another thing for children, you go overboard.

OO: I don't see how we did all that. We always getting to think about it all those calls we did all that, we have so many. That's what I wanted to do I like helping people that's what I like.

BH: One death Harrisburg and Dumble, I mean helping boat works, I was driving chiefs car in Harrisburg come down here and there is this lady standing at the window flames way behind her she done thrown at her husband out he's on the concrete with a broken shoulder there helping him. Here comes a fire truck she staying there, I don't have my suit, I didn't have any gear on at the time, I'm trying to put it all on. I tell her "don't move don't move" and "here comes the truck"-- she turns around and walks right into the flames.

LJ: No!

BH: That's the only one I saw.

GM: We lost one paramedic in an accident.

OO: Callaway.

BH: No you talking about the white van that got flipped over on Wells.

GM: Yeah okay. I was trying to think of his name.

BH: My family doctor told me y'all got the worst thing in the world the ambulance is a World War II. Some lady was in there riding with her son and it bounced and cut her fingers off. The seat mashed her finger off.

GM: Yeah, I was trying to think of the Wells name earlier it was up on Westheimer. All the running we did like I'm saying I think we've only lost in the accident one guy, am I right?

OO: That's right just one.

GM: We were fortunate there you know dealing with traffic in Houston, people don't give you the right-of-way and whatever. So we just lost one guy.

BH: See there was guy on the train Hallaway was working over there in the training division he's going to go over there and take pictures he climbed up to the top of the ladder to take the pictures it closes off and kills him.

GM: Probably never found anything, yeah he shouldn't have even been there.

DH: I have a question about how have things changed, today we hear a lot about insurance you have to have insurance going into the hospital. Was that a factor when you guys started?

OO: Not with us.

GM: It was the hospitals.

BH: They have to treat them.

GM: With the hospital, we have to take them. I can't legally leave him here. So I could name the neighboring hospitals that will not take. So when we get a call I tell them and tell them look take them to them. I'd tell them we've had experience with that hospital it some problems there I suggest Ben Taub, County you know I mean we're not supposed to but well you know technically you can't keep them so I just suggest Ben Taub, Saint Joseph, Saint Luke, Methodist you know they say "well I ain't got no insurance" they'll take them and stabilize them at Methodist, Saint Luke, and Saint Joseph if they don't have insurance and check them stick and

IV In them and call us to transport them to somewhere else. But you had one of these neighboring hospitals that wouldn't even want you to go in the drive way.

OO: Nope they even show up.

GM: They had a big ole emergency sign outside. That was one of the big problems glowing emergency. I'm gonna tell you a little story these two guys got into a machete fight.

OO: This is all true.

GM: One guy hit on here and the other guy caught him there kind of like in the artery thing. They got in a pickup truck together went to the hospital and we followed them on. Believe it or not, you have to go down and go to the emergency door to get to the elevator. So we pull up there and I say you know we go down there and follow the blood. We in the elevator and it's not funny and they were laying out and the nurse is like "my god." We call the life flight and the life flight landed in the back and took the one that we can carry and they took the one that was most serious. Shit there were no doctors on the scene just a lady bandaging people. There was a lot of that places we took this lady she told us the emergency nurse I want my doctor, but the nurse said the doctor wasn't coming. Where doctors said that they weren't coming after we had transport he said I ain't coming after that.

BH: My daughter has been doing pediatrics and Ben Taub for seven years. She burned out, she was number one in pediatrics she was number one in the nursing she finally burned out. She now works three days a week because she's still tired.

GM: That was a lot of things that needed correcting. Some of it they did some of it they

emergency they didn't even take the emergency signs down.

PDP: So people wouldn't waste their time going there.

GM: Several occasions, there was another girl that got shot, parents took her there, and we find out that she was still on the driveway when we get there. The people that told me said "we not gonna take her", she died right on the driveway.

BH: Let's talk about the after story when we dispatched y'all if y'all remember Charlie Hall.

OO: Charlie Hall yeah.

BH: As soon as there was a right take and _____.

GM: They do they do then they hurry them to Ben Taub they had a reputation. But they had one of the best emergency rooms.

BH: That's where I want to go.

OO: Yeah.

GM: You know growing. You know everybody said "if you cut it off and you can find it bring it in and we'll sew it back on." Really it was basically true, and we had a guy in a Volkswagen flipped his car threw him out he hit the guardrail going on and it took his leg off. So he fell down on the road and we come in and we couldn't find him first so then we found him hollering and then we found him but we couldn't find his leg. Police officer says oh we're going to stay and look for it and we put him on a tourniquet and all that stuff on and transported. Got them up there the docs is cleaning up and everything and he say where is the rest of his leg? We say that the

guys is on the way and we finally found it. So they finally found it so now they bring it in transport it in and he stuck it on.

LJ: Oh wow!

JT: No way!

GM: Yeah they did, I don't know how long it stayed, but they put it on. (Laughter) You know what I'm saying you know when I came out I said bring it in we'll try it. They did some marvelous stuff out there man I've seen those guys do some all that there like a team too watching them work and stuff.

OO: Best in the business.

GM: We've always said if we ever get in an accident take us to Ben Taub take us to Ben Taub You can transfer us later but just take us to Ben Taub.

BH: That night me and Barb was watching them bring him in and they had a guy with his nose. He said "firemen come hold his hands down". They kept working he kept fighting us. Arms were raised of that floor just to show you the strength of that fellow probably forty years old. He's raising me up and the doctor saw that and said "we're going to put a stop to this" he grabbed that Adams apple and twisted it. He gave in then.

DH: Darth Vader. (laughter)

GM: It was a whole lot of things that went on. Especially for a person that never considered the medical field. You know you just come in and then boom.

DH: So you guys were the first call but you guys were also part of the first crew of the EMS

people. I know you had some procedure in place, because you talked about how you went through training and what not did those procedures stay in play for a while? Or after you got out of the field you were reporting back hey this isn't working some things changed.

GM: Yeah some of it we were like we need more so that's when they came up with an advanced training system. Guys started innervating you know the need was we needed to improve and move on to the next step.

BH: From EMT's to paramedics.

GM: Yeah it was the paramedics then it was the IV. You know to start with the basic stuff.

BH: Do y'all have scanners at home? Do y'all ever listen? I have a scanner I turn it on and listen sometimes and about two minutes I'll turn it back off.

GM: No I don't have any scanners.

JT: It's probably healthy.

GM: Believe me right now I don't siren got to go the other way

BH: You drive along someone else, and they say look it's an ambulance up there look at the red light.

GM: Go the other way.

OO: If I had a scanner Bill I might just start running grab my self oh dear?

GM: Like I said when I burn out I burn out. If I'm there I'll assist. I think we were on a cruise and a guy got hurt, we came back from Florida and you know when none of the fliers were there

he had broken legs so I helped, but other than that I haven't been involved in anything. You sometimes I used to bring some of the stuff back home with me.

BH: Yeah the wives and the noises.

GM: Yeah we had a lot of those, police and firemen have a lot of those, but after a while you know I began to accept you do what you can do and have to let the rest of it go. There was a lot of cases I used to question did I do the right thing?

BH: We get off work you know you go help so and so paint his house our whole shift we helped paint his house. My wife said you could of done cheaper at the shipyard.

GM: Yeah questioning what you did, you know you have to get over that. Did I do the right thing? If I could help this guy I well that comes in when you're making the call whether this guy is an emergency or not. You kind of have to say hey look how am I turning this guy down because I don't want to make the trips, does he really need to go? Am I doing the right thing by not taking him? Because we used to get calls like guys "you're unloading too many you know." Like Sweet Cake, he finally died I think, every time you're going to make it but one day of your shift you'll make him. What was that girl name?

BH: Ten speed.

GM: Yeah Ten Speed was another one.

OO: Yeah Ten Speed.

GM: She used to come ask for us, man.

BH: That old switchboard with all the fire stations numbers on it man that was Ten Speed job. He'd be like Ten Speed is here.

GM: These are multiple characters.

OO: Oh yeah.

GM: Gridsteen.

OO: Yeah Gridsteen that's right.

GM: We came back here and everybody else was gone you know they went off to the fire, we come back and she's sitting up there watching TV.

LJ: Oh my gosh! (laughter)

GM: "I need to go to the hospital." She was in the middle of the intersection Waco and lanes avenue. Man in the middle of street not a red light.

LJ: Oh my gosh!

BH: I know a good one. In a fire station about two year in, a lady came in on _____ husband and wife. Some girl was upside in the car on the 75th canal, but she was four blocks away. We got in the hopper and we drove there. In the middle of the vacant lot, there was a woman there leaning over her bridges were down and she was moaning the full moon.

LJ: Oh my god.

BH: She wasn't hurt at all. What are you doing ma'am? "It's a full moon!"

GM: _____.

BH: That was shocking to a new guy like me. You could tell sometimes when the full moon is out people act up a little.

GM: Exactly.

DH: So you're talking about Waco and lanes I'm familiar with where that is because I have like three alternate routes I take to campus. On some days I come in on 59, so the traffic is really bad. I get off _____ and _____ and sometimes I go off Waco and sometimes Navigation. So I know that area.

GM: Oh yeah she's in the middle of the street laid out she'd let someone run her over and kill her. Okay? When we go their people now they call up and are like "oh you guys aren't sensitive to what's going on this woman is sick." So we just pick her up, put her in the ambulance and just put her down the road a little bit. We'd say Gridsteen what's wrong with you? What's the matter? "My boyfriend."

LJ: Oh my gosh! (laughter)

GM: I said okay look you're messing up now we're not going to take you the hospital. If you're not hurt, we're not transporting you. "Well okay then,," I say well, where are you living now? Two or three blocks away from the street of where she was living. Well, then I'd say let's get her out of here, because you know if we put her out, she was going to be back out there. Calling the police, you know. Okay, you're here, drop her boom we're gone. I bet we didn't even get back into the ambulance and this guy runs out there and yells out "hey man don't leave that women here, don't leave her here."

LJ: Oh it wasn't her house?

GM: Well no, it was her boyfriend's, but he was with another lady. (laughter) Like I'm saying you know you try but you already know what's going to happen. You know so just get her out. We had a guy shot three times with a 38. I couldn't believe it we got the IV going on our way to

the hospital, he said "take this stuff out I'm getting out." He gets out of the ambulance and gets the back and falls flat on his face. Now we have go through this all over again.

LJ: All over again.

GM: It was a lot of calls a lot of judgement calls that you'd have to deal with. I mean even though we kept going for Gridsteen we knew nothing was wrong with her, but you know. She even told us her and her boyfriend are having problems, but we didn't know that was his house. I'm just trying to take her back home to her folks and let them handle it. You know try to keep her silent for another week. Because it was at least once a week you deal with a bunch of characters and matter of fact they made the Houston Chronicle. Sweet cake was in the Chronicle I believe they had him up there and had he was transported 50 times by city services. But he finally died.

DH: Did you ever have people that refused to go to that neighborhood or did they want to go to certain areas where they didn't have a lot of problems?

OO: Well that was the high volume call area. Working in the north side of Houston they get a lot of calls. So you know they want to get out the firefighters wanted to go out. You know those guys are dedicated professionals, but they don't want to run all night long not even get a slight break.

BH: What did they do for y'all when you'd burn out? Would they send y'all to another station?

GM: They were supposed to, but they never did.

OO: They rarely did that's why I _____.

GM: That was the original plan.

OO: Right

BH: Right.

GM: The original plan was you know when you guys burn out we'd send you over there. Like these guys make 10 runs a month.

LJ: Oh my gosh.

OO: Yeah we're making 15-20 _____ we got the decisions.

GM: You think those guys would leave.

BH: They have to clean the ambulance afterwards.

OO: Yeah we have to clean up everything, we have to change, we have to go underneath the hoses.

GM: Those guys that were making 3-4 runs.

OO: Yeah they were sleeping at night.

GM: They were going to leave, and come over there. So that died quick. Like I said this job wasn't for everybody, everybody couldn't do all of that, just the neighborhood alone was enough to stress you out in some cases.

LJ: Right.

GM: _____ he played for the Houston Oilers.

OO: Yeah.

OO: Yeah we ran him out of arson.

GM: I know it. Look here man, the captain put him on the ambulance. We made a call over this trucking outfit this guy was up on the forklift putting the canvas over on his 18-wheeler he fell head first boom broke his neck. So Whit and I pull up, well we went through all his bones, and he said man I can't do this. You know he's a hell of a talent but I found out I didn't have any help. So we finally managed to get some of the guys to give me a hand and transport the man to the hospital. He died later on. We get back to the station; Whit tell the captain "listen I can't do this." I can understand you know, if you can't do it, then you can't do it, but the captain shouldn't of him forced him he was doing this for punishment. See Whit he was a guy who was big and tends to be a bully

OL: Yeah we didn't need him out on the streets.

GM: Yeah, but when he went up to the captain, the captain said "I'm in charge, I'm telling you, you're going to go." I can't tell you, but anyway, I didn't have any back up I had to do most of the stuff myself I didn't have help once we went out there on the scene. There was a lot going on, you had to deal with station personal and stuff. You had to know your territory. We had a run expectancy time, you know you were given a location, you'd be expected to be there in four minutes. Especially on the truck, they'd leave you behind.

BH: Before I quit driving, I pulled in behind 29 to see Captain Sims out there talking to a couple of guys before 8:00. We were out there chatting and the speaker came on, this female voice came on and said: "all you mother truckers come in and eat." I said who's that? He said that's Nurse Lisa she's our cook. I said let me go in first. So I walked in and said, ma'am, I'm

embarrassed by what you said. She said, "well I said was you mother truckers come and eat." I

said well you see that's not what you sounded like you were saying. I'm the man of the cloth.

She was so tiny and she's driving a fire truck from here to yonder.

GM: That was something that a lot of ladies would be nurses, or drive the ambulance but they didn't want to be firemen. I don't want to be a fireman but you know I just want to be an EMS. You have to be in the fire department first in order to be in the EMS. You know that was one of the requirements at the end. The one time they were just hiring people for the EMS because we got short. We were short a personal but this wasn't for everybody you know you have to have a selective group in there that liked what they were doing. That's why I stayed on there for so long. I had gotten off I was driving an engine operator also drove the truck in 1992 for a while, but I never did my regular job. I was in the ambulance they pulled me off. My certification is still good now get back there. I said man I'll transfer out I'll go to station 39. Now that was after being on there for so many years.

BH: My son worked the elevators construction all over in the Greenway plaza he fell 20 something feet and landed on an electrical box with nothing in it and it caved in like the hood of a car. Well I don't know all this except, someone got a hold of me at the union hall and I called home. My wife said, "Felix got hurt." Well, I said let me find him don't jump and run. It was my wife and Felix wife. Don't go nowhere yet so I picked the phone up and called dispatch and told the _____ did you make the call on the Greenway Plaza? He said, "Yes sir we did." I said well what's the code. He said "Code one" well instead of code three it's code one that's bad. He said that's your son. So I hung up and called me wife and said: "y'all take your time." Helicopter landed so I got to thinking well they're not going to tell me it's code three.

BH: So they lied to me. I tear up but he was alright. I walk in the hall I see a cut under his arm, his teeth knocked out. He tells me "I'm okay daddy." My daughter was right with him and the doctors they don't always tell you how bad it's going to be they break it down.

LJ: After all those experiences you had, you still, wouldn't be able to handle it.

GM: When it hits home it really hits home. I never forget this guy he was a supervisor, we had this young lady she attempted suicide and we came in. Some people are hard you know they want to be hard in any situation. He came in there and he just says something that he shouldn't of not realizing that you know she still alive but she's just injured. The guy was like you know slack up a little bit.

BH: When the planes ran into the Twin Towers in New York, I turned it on and started watching the TV. My wife was working, my daughter calls, daddy wasn't _____... As hard as I was, I listened for three days and all of a sudden on the 3rd day I cried.

GM: Back to the guy I was telling you about. It was about a month.

BH: I was in France catching board copters, two weeks later we had a main tag and that was the first time you could fly after 9-1-1. There was a lady over there talking to somebody and my wife walked over, the lady looked at my name tag she had made eye contact "Sir are you a firefighter?" I said "yes ma'am, Houston, Texas." She just started shaking, "sir I walked down from the 86th floor and your firefighters are on every step.

GM: 86th floor. Not only that they're still falling from the aftermath.

OO: Yeah.

GM: You know the first responders are guys that had cancer, all kind of problems.

BH: It's such a strenuous job, that if you had a heart attack at, near, or right after a fire call so like Butch died right after they evacuated the station he died the next day. They just now honor these people in Colorado Springs once every year.

GM: Well look at the chemical here, didn't all those guys get messed up?

OO: Yeah.

GM: Years later.

DH: Like ammonia?

GM: Chemicals just chemicals. It was right downtown. A lot of guys there started having right there in Jackson.

OO: No Redwood, the chemical plant.

GM: Yeah it's right there where they're building the hydrogen, you can see all that stuff right now. But a lot of guys were in there and they're having problems, respiratory, cancer lungs and stuff like that. Because we didn't have enough breathing apparatus.

BH: We were sitting in the dispatch, the guy committed suicide by jumping to death. What he did was, he hit glass that was protecting people from walking into the elevators. When they called us back they told us, man, when he hit that glass half his body went under and the other half went on top.

GM: I remember.

BH: Yeah it split him in half.

DH: I remember that. I worked at Holiday Inn downtown, then right over here. You know everybody was talking about it, because...

GM: You were actually there?

DH: No I wasn't at the Hyatt, but because it was our group, our competitor and you know people you work with at conventions and what not.

BH: Do you remember that far back?

DH: I do.

OO: Ole Holiday Inn there.

LJ: I have a bit of a question. We talked about this before. So we talked about how some of the firefighters didn't want to be or do the EMS. I want to know more. So this was 1971 how were you guys received with you being African American?

GM: Believe it or not, on, I'm trying to think if I was ever on a call with a person who didn't want me to treat them or help them because I was black. Now, here's what I do remember...

Pasadena. Members of the Houston Fire Department to start of their programs, everybody was on board because it was really needed. So they were going to hire some of the guys on their days off to work with them. So I call the guy and I was acquiring about it, he said we have no objection with hiring you but you might receive a lot of slack from the citizens because of who you are. So he left it like that, so I didn't go because there would have been some serious racial problems over in Pasadena at that time. You know, so I just didn't go. Did you ever talk to the guy, because he was calling around?

OO: Yeah I didn't want to work there.

BH: Three months after I came in, they opened 42. Which was the first time that black firefighters were parked in the station I sat there as an extra chauffeur to get the ladders.

OO: Yeah Jackson, Johnson.

BH: Those guys. We had a good time.

GM: Well back to the racial thing, as far as the EMT, no. Most of the negative came out of being, we want you guys separated from the other firefighters not because we're black but because we were EMT'S.

LJ: Right.

GM: Houston Fire Department has some racial problems of their own. I don't care what you say you can't get away from it. They worked on things and tried to improve, but that didn't come over night it came out of law suits and stuff. Also with the ladies

LJ: Yeah the women wanted...

GM: Since 1860s.

OO: What was that?

GM: Because, the Houston Fire Department, it's been here since 1860? Been in existence since 1863?

OO: 1816.

GM: Something like that. A long time. It was a club, like his daddy, granddaddy were firefighters but you were an outsider. But the way that came about was, like the station 42's over at Clement Park...

GM: Those stations were in black neighborhoods. Clement Park, Walter Brooks and all of them guys they were 10. We called them the Lucky Ten. Brooks is one of the ones.

BH: How many promotions did they make when they first opened the ambulance services. Because I know they didn't want all those ambulances but they wanted the chauffeur jobs to the supervisor. It used to be where they had to make ten chiefs a year. Now they're making 13 to 25.

GM: Oh yeah that opened up a whole lot of spots for people, but back to that. I was a 65th or 66th black person to be hired. You'd figured if this department was here since 1865...

LJ: You got here in 1960?

GM: 1968, and I was the 65th person hired. So they didn't start hiring until the 1950's. I guess it's moving forward. Now I wouldn't. One lady, Linda _____, do you remember Linda?

OO: Yeah.

BH: Yeah her husband ran the switchboard. Sir, how long did these guys graduate from the training tower? I said well depends on whether _____... Well, my wife was in that school, she's not home yet I mean you had 49 other firefighters taking care of her so quit worrying.

GM: Yeah that was _____. She came pulled the truck and played the rope but she was facing station nine. She's about to roll up the hose and do everything that you did she did.

BH: Yeah but we had a long building that didn't have enough men. I'm walking over their watch because word got out _____ making her _____. So I get over I'm standing back my white shirt and tie with a couple of other firefighters that were with me. We saw her put a doughnut on her shoulders and go up the 6th.

GM: Chief Cook put her and they have Captain Baxter. We don't have... with the showers, and the rooms with bedding they weren't Co-Ed okay? So she had to deal with all that you know. You'll always have some wise guys.

BH: She was the first women firefighter to retire on pension in the state of Texas.

GM: She paid her dues. Now someone was telling me we have...

OO: Two assistant chiefs.

LJ: That's a lot of change since then.

BH: We have 16 or so fire chiefs.

GM: And inspectors. I don't know if we have inspectors.

OO: Oh yeah we have some female inspectors.

GM: Like we were saying from 1865 all the way up to 1950 something, they had stations 42 open on I-10 an all-black station there except for the officers. Eventually, it came in you know. There should be no excuses now. I tried working in recruiting and tried to recruit. I don't even know if we still have recruiting officers anymore.

DH: Yes, they do!

GM: you know with the times it changed.

BH: Do y'all have kids in it now?

GM: Oh no.

OO: Yeah I have a son in it now.

GM: It's a good job. It's a darn good job. I mean I don't know what the requirements are now, but when we came in all you have was a high school education.

OO: It's college now.

GM: See, it's equivalent to something, you know. At that time it was just high school. But they go "I don't wanna fight no fires." You know. (Laughter).

BH: Do y'all imagine the strain, you do know too, the police department's under throughout the United States. We don't have a stigma at the fire department, they'll shoot at you.

[inaudible].

GM: That has always been true.

BH: I went upstairs at number 20, going up the steps, they told me slow down Bill don't go up there now. I said why? They said look out the back window there's Harley laying there, a police Harley. I get up there and one-eyed Burk was sleeping in my bed, sleeping his drunk off.

GM: Publicity that's what the police is. Like that old saying, if you get in trouble, call the fire department. I don't know if ya'll heard that or not, but even years back, they said when we used to have those boxes on the side of the street. If you get in trouble pull a fire box, because you don't want to wait for the police to get there because they might not show up. It's still kind of the same thing now because you know we have a response time. We stuck to that. I know in our station with three men, at the location you slid those poles in three minutes. Now if you were slow, you back in the...

BH: I bet these guys are going to tell you the same thing I told my wife and her friend. If you're ever in trouble go to a fire station in any city. So they walking and lose their way in New

York City, and my wife Nancy say let's just go to a fire station to see where we at. So her and three girl go into the fire station and told them they needed help. He said "let me get the captain," and they got the captain. He came down and walked them to the fire station. She took a picture and two weeks later and he was at station 10.

GM: That's right firefighters have a reputation.

BH: One brotherhood all over except in Saudi Arabia. I was there for a shipping company and the firemen there wouldn't let me take a picture. It's not the same over there it's the same everywhere else in the world.

GM: I was going to ask you a question when the program first started out we had several doctors from the health department. Doctor Francine Jefferson...

BH: Yes, sir!

OO: She was one of the best.

GM: She ran our program with Doctor Colter. Doctor Randall who was the director of health at time.

DH: We have homework to do. I can tell by the questions you're asking me.

GM: Also Doctor Lou Baker, he was the chief of the EMS.

DH: Oh I'd love to meet him.

LJ: I was going to say we should look those up and...

DH: There's a lot we need to know.

GM: Because they had a lot to do with it. Well here are some badges.

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DH: Oh wow thank you!

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LJ: Yay!

BH: You got enough?

DH: If you have one more, we have one person who's in class and couldn't come with us today. Well I just wanted to say we appreciate that you served our city for so long, admirably and we very much appreciate it.

OO: Thank you so much we're glad to share these memories with you.

LJ: These stories though I mean...

OO: Oh yeah we could do this 24 hours. You don't have the time, believe me. Each one of these wisdom implants has a story behind it.

BH: Talking about playing the guitar, Chief [inaudible] and entire _____ 20 moved out to Arkansas, and he took three firefighters with him. B.R. Cunningham. He goes up there and stays in the cold and swapped all. He couldn't come back. We got him back in the fire department. What B.R. Cunningham learned was about 1000 more songs. He was playing that guitar in the snow. Wrote orange blossom special. Him and 50 others claim they wrote it.

OO: Every name you think of we got them in the fire department. They can do anything and they are the best people in the world. That's why I recommended my son coming. Look at how many friends I've got, if I'm sick they'll help me, they'll ride for me, if I need anything done in the house they'll come do this and do that.

GM: I took his wife to the hospital, and she had twins.

LJ: Oh my god!

JT: This is the impromptu [inaudible].

OO: He was with me when I met my wife.

JT: My wife isn't pregnant yet, but when she is I'll give you a holler.

?: Did he introduce you to your wife?

GM: No we met at the same time.

OO: She liked Glen at first.

LJ: Oh my god.

OO: Yeah she told me "I liked Glen at first."

BH: Talk about that in 1924 my daddy and his firemen were standing in front of his fire station listening to the girls that went by. These two sisters kept walking by. They finally fell in love and they married them, one of them is my mother, and the other married my uncle, Franny. They argue all the time. You ain't my brother-in-law, her brother-in-law.

OO: It's a family.

JT: The whistling method doesn't work anymore.

OO: Glenn and I had a good time on the unit, we had so much good times, friendship and it was just great working and I hated leaving him. I left five years' man I burned off I had to go.

BH: He used to come by and watch American Bandstand in the afternoon. They would use our love phone. Stanley Russell ran a yellow light five blocks from the station he pulls up to the drive way the police follow him in there. Stanley comes in and the police wrote him a ticket on

our table. We said you really going to write this man a ticket? "He ran a red light." "Ok." So, the captain after he left said, guys, if the police comes you turn that TV off you get on the love phone and you tell me when that police man comes back and apologize. That's how close we are.

GM: You don't do that. Especially if he got his emblem in the window, and you know, stuff like, or you find out on his ID. No, you don't write your fellow [inaudible] members tickets. No, you don't want to be acting a fool or nothing, just because of that...

BH: I told you about jumping out of that hotel, I mean that room [inaudible] over there. I went to Haynes barbeque over there on [inaudible]. White people had to go through the back door and he gave me the BBQ sauce empty in a whiskey bottle washed out. Four people. The chief sent me about 9 o'clock at night. So I got an empty, washed out half-pint whiskey bottle that he filled with BBQ sauce. I'm driving in Houston and ain't nobody behind me. All of sudden pretty red lights... Here come this guy walking up, I said "Ben Bowling!" "Bill, I'm Ellis Bowling, Ben Bowling's a hotel downtown." I went to Saint Thomas high school with that guy. He said "you're in your uniform and you're drinking." I said "It's BBQ sauce!" I said, "you can't put me in jail anyways," he said "well, you made me lose my hiding spot," see cops hide without the lights on. "Ben Bowling is a hotel I'm Ellis Bowling." I said, "Well I've slept." (Laughter)

LJ: That's funny.

OO: If y'all have a chance come visit the fire station any of them in Houston. They are going to give you love and dignity. They love when people come and ask questions want to see, want to know about your job...

GM: Especially if you got kids with you

LJ: I was going to say my little brother is coming over for spring break so that's maybe something I should do.

OO: Oh yeah take him down to our station.

LJ: I think he'd love too.

OO: Oh she's so sweet. It'll give you something to do it's not like I don't have anything but shit.

BH: This is your life.

GM: Yeah I was talking about things we were doing and how we got to be what we were. Otis is a private investigator and when he came out of arson from the fire department, he already had his commission as peace officer. He opened up his own business.

OO: Yeah I learned everything from the fire services. So they say I'm the most sought out investigator. Oh yeah.

BH: Are you packing? Because if so I got you to fight for me.

OO: I said Bill is 100. Yeah, like I said all those old training officers. That's where I learned all mine in the fire services. When I came in I was just a teenager made me an adult worked with fine men like these two and many others a 1000 of them.

BH: I take a gold wing motorcycle travel all over the United States I leave my house and I go where ever the front wheel takes me. Stayed in fire stations all the way.

OO: They'll feed you, give you coffee.

BH: When I get there I'll call my wife line and I see Paul get off with his little helmet and off we come home. Then we stay in hotels.

GM: Do you know Olson Parker?

OO: Yeah, Olsie Parker.

GM: He was a motorcycle guy.

BH: We lost seven firefighters motorcycling in off-duty time a couple of years ago.

GM: I think he was killed up in Arkansas.

DH: That's how he got hurt.

OO: Oh really?

DH: Well.

JT: It was a scooter, but yeah. It was a pothole, and I--

GM: You lost control?

JT: Yeah. Tumbled down and got myself some scars.

BH: I got them right now from my bicycle I fell a couple of days ago because of this little curb got a sharp cut. It's a little bitty one. A guy comes walks in front of me so I had to cut that way, and when that tire hit that over I went. I've been doctoring myself

LJ: It's just funny because you experience all this craziness and a little thing like that can cause issues for you like you know falling off of a bike or something like that. It's crazy.

BH: My wife asked me if it hurt my feelings I said well it hurt me but not my feelings

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DH: Well thank you all very much.

LJ: Can I have a picture with you guys? [overlapping talk]

PDP: have a question the baby that you delivered on the first call did you have contact with them later?

GM: Yeah, well not later but he found out...

OO: We found her that the lady that we responded to delivered the baby, she's deceased.

DH: The mother or the baby?

OO: The mother and... the baby died and the mother also. But the person that made the call, the brother is still alive. Y'all want to speak with him?

[End of Interview]