

As a young boy I grew up down the street from the Greece Ridge Fire Department. My life's ambition was to be a firefighter. After completing two years in the Navy Reserves, I became a volunteer firefighter and was hired as a dispatcher in 1969. I was appointed as a firefighter the following year. Things were different then; we rode on the back step of the truck, there were no roofs on the cabs and for the most part, you learned by doing. During my time as a firefighter I performed task such as rescuing a skunk from a trap, yes I took a direct hit. My partner in that escapade was a Greece Police Officer. Still while a firefighter, I received the first community service award for the rescue of an elderly lady from an apartment fire where I found her, brought her to the front window and handed her out to a Greece Police officer who had climbed the ladder to assist me. In the mid seventies I was promoted to Lieutenant and became the Ridge Road Fire Districts first training officer, a position I held for a number of years. But in November, 1978, my life changed significantly. For almost forty years the events of the Holiday Inn Fire have haunted me, my family and my organization. I will never apologize for doing my job as I was trained to do.

Times were different then. There were no cell phones which meant people had to use their home or business phone or they had to find a pay phone to use. As the training officer, the District provided me with a radio in my car. There was another thing different in 1978. Policemen and Firefighters often worked security jobs for extra money. For the most part it was the policemen that secured the jobs and then hired firefighters to work them. We watched construction sites, worked security for local events and even provided store security at the two malls. It was while working one of those jobs that I made a quick trip to the post office and while on the way back to the construction site, I saw the glow which was the burning Holiday Inn. Using my radio, I immediately called in the fire, at the exact time others were calling it in from pay phones in the area, and proceeded to begin helping people out of the windows and assuring them that help was on the way. It was an absolute nightmare but little did I know it would haunt me outside of my organization for the rest of my career. The nightmare continued a few days later when I offered to tell the police what I saw upon my arrival. That was the beginning of fourteen hours of intense interrogation, with no food and no breaks. A couple of days later, an arson investigator was brought in from New York City. He determined the fire to be intentional but he based his determination on his "gut instincts". He died this year after a number of falsely accused and convicted people were exonerated because of shoddy investigation tactics used by him and his squad. The best part is, that I never did speak with my accuser. I can't say I ever wanted to.

People ask why I have not cooperated or why did I get a lawyer. The answers are simple, I did cooperate in 1978 and when the recent investigations were headed the same way, I needed to protect myself and my family. I did the right thing that night and I have told the men and women of the District, to do the same thing if they ever find themselves in a situation like I did, no matter what the consequences later may be. To be honest, if the same situation presented itself today, I would do the same thing.

In the early eighties, I proposed the formation of a countywide hazardous materials response team but soon found that the interest was confined to the west side of the county, so, with the help of then County Fire Coordinator Michael Sadden we established the first County Haz Mat Team. Within a year, the team expanded to the entire county and the result is the County Haz Mat Team we have today. I was a team leader until 2002. I was promoted to Battalion Chief in the mid eighties until I was promoted to Assistant Chief and then Deputy Chief. In January of 2001 I became Chief. The commissioner that endorsed me for the appointment and re-appointment for five years was the Towns attorney in the seventies and eighties.

During my time as Chief we became the first internationally accredited fire department in New York State. We became a fully career department and we have increased our personnel and improved our level of service. In 2006 I was named the NYS Career Fire Chief of the Year by the New York State Association of Fire Chiefs. I was also recognized by the County Legislature and the Town of Greece. I have served as a Director of the NYSAFC, the NY Director for the Eastern Division of the International Association of Fire Chiefs and until August of 2017, I was the Vice Chair of the Executive Fire Officers section of the IAFC.

In May of 2017, myself and two other members of our organization were honored for fifty years of service.

I have dedicated my life to my community and other than these false accusations that have haunted me for forty years, I never had a day that I regretted my decision to follow my childhood dream to be a firefighter.

I have announced my retirement which will be February 8, 2018. I was going to just ride off into the sunset but have decided that the story needed to be told. My family, my organization and myself should be able to be proud of my accomplishments, even while always having the events of forty years ago haunt you daily. Deputy Chief Mike Bloomer will be appointed as the interim chief while the District conducts a search for a new chief.