Madison Historical: The Online Encyclopedia and Digital Archive for Madison County, Illinois

Mike McNamara Oral History Interview

Meghan McNamara, Interviewer

October 11, 2018

Alton, Illinois

Meghan McNamara (MeM): The following interview was conducted with Mike McNamara on behalf of the Madison County Oral History Project that is part of Madison Historical, the online encyclopedia and digital archive of Madison County, Illinois. The interview took place on Thursday, October 11th, at the home of Meghan McNamara in Alton, Illinois. The interviewer is Meghan McNamara from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. Mike, when and where were you born?

Mike McNamara (MM): I was born, um, in May of 1962 in Alton, Illinois, Alton Memorial Hospital.

MeM: And what were your parents like?

MM: Um, well, they were both working, uh, class people. Uh, my dad was, uh, he worked at the, uh, Alton Box Board for the majority of my life. Uh, before that he was a salesman for Black Flag which is a pesticide, uh, company and, uh, they, we had relocated to Quincy, Illinois, for about a year I think, uh, when, uh, my younger sister was born in Quincy. She's two years younger than me, but my mom soon got, uh, homesick and we came back to Alton where we lived for the rest, you know, of our lives. And, uh, my mom was a, a hard worker. She, uh, worked down at the Alton Telegraph for 45 years. And, uh, my dad finished his, uh, career up until the time that he, uh, he, uh, he had a massive heart attack and, uh, had a stroke and was not able to work after that period of time. So, uh, he went on disability, uh, after that massive heart attack, but he worked, uh, numerous years down, uh, as a pipe fitter down at the Alton Box Board.

MeM: And he was also in the military, wasn't he?

MM: He was. He was, uh, in the Marine Corps for, uh, I believe two years, uh, just right after World War II so he didn't actually have to, um, fight in World War II because the war had ended but he had planned on fighting in that world war.

MeM: What was it like growing up in Alton?

MM: Alton was a very, um, very nice, clean community. Um, it seemed like, you know, it was, uh, everybody kind of took care of their houses, took pride in their homes. Um, you know, we developed very good childhood friendships, uh, in Alton that I still have, uh, today. We were, uh, outside every day playing. You know, we were, we didn't have computers back in those days so everything we did, we played touch football in the street or, uh, whiffle ball or we'd play baseball down at, behind the East Junior. And, uh, so, and we were, you know, in the winter we went sled riding and we, um, we spent a lot of time in the woods, you know, making clubhouses and, uh, we just used our imaginations and, uh, we

didn't spend much time inside unless it was raining and it didn't matter what the weather was like. Whether it was summer or winter, we were always out enjoying, you know, what kids, which I don't see many kids doing anymore but, uh, we didn't have other options. Uh, we didn't have any video games. Uh, we had, you know, television, uh, that we'd watch but it only had five channels. And, uh, we didn't have internet. We had our one telephone in the house and it was a rotary phone. Uh, most young people don't even know how to dial one of those old phones. Uh, we had, there was no cable so we didn't have cable channels. We didn't have 24 hour news, which, you know, is almost bad today I think 'cause you get too much news and we used to get a half hour of news and five minutes of weather and 10 minutes of sports. And, uh, you saw the news at, at five and 10 and that was it.

MeM: Did you guys do family dinners?

MM: We did. Uh, we were very, um… uh, very family oriented. Uh, we had an evening meal and everybody was expected to be there. Uh, we didn't have a whole lot of activities like, it seems like everybody does now. We, um, my mom worked all day and she'd come home and we never ate out 'cause we didn't have the extra money. My dad didn't like fast food. There, there wasn't any, that many fast food places, uh, at that point in time. Uh, but very seldom did we ever go out unless my dad was working shift work and going out for dinner meant going to Jack in the Box and getting three tacos for a dollar.

MeM: [laughs]

MM: But, uh, normally every night we'd have dinner at, like, six o'clock. My mom would come home, begin making dinner. Uh, we had a good variety of different dishes my mom would make and occasionally my dad would request breakfast because he never had breakfast. He didn't take time to eat breakfast in the morning so that was one of his favorite meals to eat but I always hated having breakfast for dinner. [laughs]

MeM: Did you attend church on Sunday?

MM: We did. Uh, um, my mom, uh, my dad was Catholic religion and, uh, when he got divorced, um, he did not really keep up with the, the Catholic Church anymore other than occasional going in for a private prayer. But my mom, uh, we went to, uh, Cherry Street Baptist Church. We didn't really attend church so much as, uh, other than, uh, Easter and Christmas I think but we always went to Sunday School class and, uh, we pretty much attended every, uh, every Sunday morning we'd go to, uh, Sunday School.

MeM: And did you attend public or private schools growing up?

MM: I attended, uh, public schools. Um, started out, uh, at the old Lincoln school, um, when we lived over on Alby Street. Uh, it was, uh, my first school. Uh, kindergarten, first grade was at Lincoln which is now no longer a school. And then I went to uh, we moved and, uh, we moved up to Donald Avenue, right there at the, uh, corner of Washington and Donald. We lived in a, a very old home. It was really cool. It, uh, had about 16 rooms, uh, very large home. And, uh, so once we moved, I moved up to, uh, the Upper Alton school district. So … back then, what, you went to Horace Mann, um, so I went, attended Horace Mann in the second grade. In the third grade, they moved, um, we all went to, uh, it was just, just the way it was set up 'cause the school wasn't big enough for the class size that we had, so all of our third grade classes were at a school called Dunbar, which is no longer a school. I'm not sure if Horace Mann is still

operating. I think it is. And then we went to, uh, Lowell in the fourth grade, so, and then, uh, in about 1973 they were really big into the desegregation, uh, so they started redrawing school boundaries. So even though I lived in the same house, instead of, of attending, going, I woulda went back to Horace Mann for the fifth and sixth grade. But, um, so in 1973 I lived on the opposite side of the street. The people on the, on the north side of the street continued to go to Horace Mann. I was on the south side of the street so they sent me down to Clara Barton. So all the people that I'd known going to school since the second grade, um, I no longer went to school with so I had to make a whole new, new, uh, set of friends down at Clara Barton where I attended the fifth and sixth grade. And, uh, then attended East Junior. It was called, it's East, East Middle School now but, uh, it might even be an elementary school at this point. I think it is, um, but I attended East Junior for the seventh, eighth and ninth grade and finished out my high school career up at Alton High where I attended 10th, 11th and 12th. Um, I did go to, uh, Monmouth College, uh, the following year. It was a private little school up in Monmouth, Illinois, which is north of Macomb. It was about a four hour drive. And a very small little private school. Uh, but I only went the first year and then my father who I'd mentioned earlier had, uh, this massive heart attack and, uh, stroke and became dis, dis, you know, went on disability, therefore, um, they couldn't afford to send me to this, uh, private little college so I started attending Lewis and Clark College where I obtained a, a business administration degree after completing two years. And, uh … uh, I ended up, uh, finishing, uh, my four year degree. It was in criminal justice at Sterling College which was an off campus, um, uh, that I attended over in the St. Louis area.

MeM: What were some of the jobs that you had before you got your career?

MM: Well I was always, uh, I was always interested in making money. Um, I always liked to work and have my own money because my mom and dad didn't have much money. I mean we got a small allowance for cutting our grass and taking out the trash and cleaning up the house for my mom and dad 'cause they both worked full time. Uh, but I always, that was never enough money for me so, uh, I, uh, I chose to go out and I had a paper route for one summer. I didn't really care for the paper route because it was, uh, it was a huge route and it went, uh, it had a lot of hills and I had, I think I had over about 100 papers so, and I didn't make much money doing that so I found that I could make more money on my own by cutting all the neighbors' yards. I think I had about five or six lawns there in my own neighborhood. And then, uh, I'd make money in the fall by raking leaves and then I'd make money in the winter by shoveling snow and whatever I could do. Doing little odd jobs, uh, you know, I helped neighbors out with, uh, putting insulation in their attic and jobs that they didn't want to do and I was certainly willing to do it. And then when I turned 16 I was, uh, I was one of my first friends to get a job. I went down and, uh, I was, my mom worked with a, a girl down at the Telegraph who was, uh, related to one of the bosses down at the Broadway and Main Produce Market. His name was Tom Twitchell and, uh … my mom, uh, made an arrangement for, uh, me to go down there and do an interview and they were looking for a stock clerk, uh, bag boy or whatever and, uh, I was able to go down there and land that job at Broadway and Main Produce which was a perfect little job because, um, I'd get out of high school at, um, what, three o'clock and then I'd work that little job down there, uh, Monday through Friday and sometimes Saturdays, but from four to eight every evening and then, and we got paid in cash every week. I think I made, uh, started out at $2.35 an hour and I think by the time I quit the, uh, Broadway and Main Produce which we all called the fruit market, it sat at the corner of, uh, Broadway and Main, it, it's no longer there. Uh, it's where the, uh, Casey's gas station is now but, uh, I was just a few blocks away so I either, uh, usually rode my bike to work or walked. And, uh, then I left the, uh, fruit market for about six months and went down

to National Food Store, uh, down in east Alton and I was a stock clerk down there. I left because I was, uh, able to make more money but soon after I went and, uh, work for them they closed that National Food Store down. So then I had to go back and beg for my old job back and I guess I was a good enough worker to, uh, for him to hire me again. It was the, the Zaner family that owned the fruit market and I think, uh, they had, like, at least three generations of Zaners that, uh, ran that market throughout the years. And, uh, then, um, I worked at the fruit market until, uh, I was able to get a full time job, uh, as a maintenance man out at Hillcrest Apartments and I, uh, I got that job because, uh, I'd had my first child already and at, like, 21 years old and I had to get full time employment to support, uh, my wife and, uh, my baby. So, uh, my interview, I, I didn't really know much about maintenance work other than I did know the, the manager very well who happened to be my, one of my best friends' mother and, uh, they, I knew that they were looking for a maintenance person and so she had me come out for an interview and I was interviewed by the, uh, the maintenance supervisor at the time, Ron Richards, uh, who was very talented and had a lot of skills. But, uh, during my interview he asked me, he said, "So, do you know anything about electrical work," and I'm like, "No, don't really know much about electric. All I've done is work for the fruit market." Uh, he said, "How about plumbing skills?" I'm like, "No, don't really know any plumbing." He says, "Well what about, uh, carpentry? Do you know, do you have any carpentry skills?" "No." "How about painting? Are you, do you have any painting experience?" And I'm like, "No, not really." [laughs]

MeM: [laughs]

MM: And, uh, well, I later heard that, uh, Ron went back in to Judy Marquis and said, uh, "Well, he, I would say go ahead and hire him. He doesn't know anything about maintenance but at least he's very honest." [laughs]

MeM: [laughs]

MM: So I was, I got that job and, um, I was able to hold, I had that job for three years and it, it was a nice, very close to work. Uh, I lived, uh … within about a mile away from there and I, it was a straight day job with weekends off. Uh, on call occasionally, you know, when my maintenance supervisor wasn't available but, uh, it was, it was a good little job. And, uh, it provided us, uh, with a living, uh, to allow my wife pretty much to stay at home. And, uh, we, we didn't make much money but we were getting by and we were not on any kind of government assistance or, uh, never needed food stamps or anything or, but we, we were considered what I would consider poor. Um, you know, just, but we were able to pay our bills. And, uh, and then, uh, I had a second child, who'd be Meghan who's interviewing me today. And uh, so I thought, "Well, I," and I, I started finding myself falling behind some of the other people that were my age. They were starting to get better jobs at Boeing and, which was it, McDonnell Douglas and Shell Oil and I only had the two year degree which really didn't help me land any kind of a business job at all. You really needed a bachelor's degree. So, um, my mom and dad had mentioned to me that the police department was hiring. So I thought, I didn't really think of myself ever as going into law enforcement. It wasn't a lifelong dream or anything like, a lot of these cops, they, that's all they wanted to do from the time they were kids but that wasn't the case with me. I was a little on the wild side and I didn't really ever see myself going into that profession. But once my mom and dad mentioned it and the, the fact that I was going to be getting about, oh, I think I only made about a thousand dollars a month out, uh, doing the maintenance work. Uh, so I was gonna immediately double my salary by taking this police, police job

'cause I think they were making about close to $20,000 at the time when I started. So I started looking at, looking at it and, uh, I started really observing the police officers and, you know, I didn't know much, anything about police work at all but I started mainly just seeing police officers driving around and, and most of them, you know, it was like, well, you know, I don't know what police work's all about. Uh, you know, I know you gotta arrest bad guys and, uh, work traffic crashes but I was like, started really thinking, I was thinking, "This might be the perfect job for me." So I went ahead and applied and, uh, it was a long process, a very long process, and, uh, there were over 300 applicants. So, and I think they were hiring five positions, um, so it was a, it was a very good job at the time, you know, especially if you were, you had to be an Alton city resident, which I was so I didn't have to move. Uh, you couldn't even apply without even being a city resident so, uh, that has since been lifted. And, uh, but any, you know, we, uh, I, I started the hiring process and I was able to, uh, after about, it seems like it was six months before I was able to get hire, uh, hired. I came out number one on the list and my DSN, my number, was, uh, 80, I got hired in December of 1985, so my DSN was 8501 and, uh … so I started my, uh, life as a police officer in the city. And, uh, I did, I was pretty much, uh, very lucky to, to, to have done just about every job there was to do down there. I started out of course, as everybody does, as a patrol officer, which I did for about four and a half years. And, uh, then I was offered a position in the traffic division, which was clearly, uh, better hours because you normally were working straight days, uh, seven to three and, and weekends off and as opposed to shift work. And our old shift was horrible. It was a seven day rotating shift so you worked seven straight days and you got, like, a day and a half off and then you worked seven straight afternoons and you got a couple of days off and then you work seven midnights and then you'd get, like, you'd get a long weekend, uh, 13 times a year so we got one weekend off a month. So I was happy to go to the traffic division mainly for the schedule. And I spent about six months in traffic before I was offered a, a position in the detective bureau. Uh, and I jumped at that because that's kind of what every cop strives to do, is, is make detective. And there was no, um, everybody thinks that when you make detective you make a whole lot more money. You really don't. Uh, it's, it's, it's a lateral position but it's just a little more prestige. You're wearing a, uh, a suit and tie or a coat and tie everyday instead of a uniform and you're, you're basically following up on all the, uh, felony cases which are the more serious cases. And I spent, uh, oh, roughly I think four to five years as a, no, I'm, I'm sorry. I, I think I spent about three years as a detective and then I took a promotional exam and got promoted to sergeant, which, uh, they only, there is only one detective sergeant and he had seniority so when I made sergeant, that forced me to go back to uniform and back to shift work. But I was at that time a, a street supervisor which is your first line of supervision, um, sergeant is basically in charge of, and there was two sergeants on each shift. When I went out I would have been the, uh, the junior sergeant. And then, then we got one shift commander who was over the two sergeants, so you got a lieutenant, two sergeants and then usually like six or seven patrolmen. So I was responsible for the six or seven patrolman and as a supervisor basically you're, um, you're making decisions out on the street that a lot of, uh, young cops need help with making decisions. Everything isn't black and white, you know. In, in law enforcement there's a lot of, uh, yeah, there's just a lot of decisions that need to be made by experienced people, uh, who've already been there and done that or, uh, or have already experienced it, you know? Uh, so I, I, I was a street supervisor for I don't know how many years. And then I was, uh, I was lucky enough to be offered the, uh, the detective supervisor's job. So I was still a sergeant and I was able to move back to detective's so at that time I was a, a detective supervisor. Uh, and they, you know, I also worked some cases. Uh, my caseload wasn't near like a regular detective because I was in charge of approving all of the detectives' paperwork and, and supervising, uh, felony cases and murders and armed robberies, all the serious things that were happening in Alton. Um,

and I had, I was under a, a lieutenant initially and then, uh, and then it became, a captain ended up being, uh, in charge of detectives. So, um, I did that job up until the time I, uh, was promoted again, uh, to the rank of lieutenant. And at that point I became a, a shift manager which is in charge of a, an entire shift, a couple, two guys. And, uh … that was a good job. Um, you still were working shift work but you did have seniority and had your choice of vacations and, uh, first choice of vacation. Pretty much could have a comp day any time you wanted because you had the two supervisors there under you. And, uh, so I did that job until, uh, Chief Sullivan came in. And he, he made me an administrative lieutenant, uh, which basically was, uh, they called it support services. So I was over the records division, I was over the traffic division, I was over the jailers. Uh, and that came later in life, uh, the jailers. We didn't used to have jailers until we, uh, were able to get the new station. Uh, we, we, uh, always were in the basement over there at, uh, on Third Street below City Hall for the longest time and I never thought we'd see a new police station, but, uh, that was, uh, very nice, uh, to be able to have that new station, the Donald, uh, Sandidge Law Enforcement Center, and they were able to put the court, the Third Judicial, uh, Court, there in the same builder and we shared space. But, so when we, uh, we were actually had a lot of input with the architect on what we, how we wanted to design this, uh, new station because the way the old station was designed, it, I don't think it was ever designed to be a police station. When we'd bring people in, if somebody's been drinking you either had to take him through the basement and come up about 35 or 40 steps or you had to get him out on Third Street hill and it was never good. Um, especially in the winter, snow and ice made it very difficult to park on the side of the hill. Uh, so yeah, it was, uh, it was very needed. Uh, we, we finally had the space that we needed, uh, 'cause we were out growing, uh, they were putting, making offices out of broom closets down at the old station. We were just, uh, and I think we only had about, we might have had a dozen cells and then it only had one female cell. And at times we'd, we'd way overload the females back there. There was only two beds and I, and I know we had more than, more than that in there. And, uh, all the females had to share one toilet, uh, if you were thrown in that slammer. Um … I don't believe we ever double bunked anybody, uh, at the old station. We'd, uh, if we, if we ran out of room, uh, we could take our prisoners down to east Alton and they would assist us in housing somebody until they could be seen by a judge. Um, we, uh, like I said, we, we sat down, uh, and helped design the new police department so it was convenient for the investigation, the detectives, to be able to have access to the jail, so the detectives' offices were right across the hall from the jail. So, and then in the new jail we, uh, there was, lot, you had lots of new cells and then we had a, a, we finally had a, well we always had a separate division for the females but they had their own little wing and, uh, and then they had the, the males' wing. So, and they were never, not in, they were never intertwined but it was just a much better, more secure jail. And, uh … we, uh … what else? Um, well, we were able to, uh, help design the command center, um, and then where the supervisors would sit as, and where the dispatcher would do all the radio traffic. And then they had the, the, we had a very nice, uh, area for the traffic division and the records girls had, there were, there were like four cubicles at the old station and we were able to give them more room, much needed space for all the records that were being stored. And, uh, so it was, it was really, uh, I know that there was a big price tag on it and, uh, you know, a lot of people thought that it was way over the top but when you're really there and doing the job and, and seeing that there really wasn't any wasted space, I think it was, it was really, uh, needed and like I said, it was, I never thought I'd see that in my day but it was, uh, it was one of my special things about, you know, of my career is getting to go to that new station now. I was actually the last one, as we were closing the, uh, old station down, uh, I hung around the old station because it was a point in time, time where we were actually leaving the old station and transitioning into the new station but, so, uh, I was actually the last,

last shift commander, um, at the old station and, you know, after everything got moved, uh, I packed up and I was the first, uh, shift commander at the new station. It all happened in the same day, so that was kind of cool.

MeM: That is very cool. What were some of the other roles that you had at the Alton Police Department? I know that you, uh, partook in a Special Olympics? Am I right about that?

MM: Yes, that was, uh, kind of when I was, uh, in support services role. Uh, the chief was very community oriented. Um, and that's one of the things, you know, when I first hired on we didn't really, we didn't do much with the community at all. We just did police work. We'd go on our calls, we'd do self initiated police activity, and then we found, you know, that, um, public relations, uh, there was a mistrust. Uh, it was, you know, people didn't always trust the police even though, you know, we were just doing our jobs. Uh, so we started reaching out with community, uh, outreach stuff. Uh, and Special Olympics was one way in which the community got to see us in a different light. Uh, we raised money, uh, for Special Olympics and, uh, that's, that's kind of like the police, uh, uh, charity. And, uh, and I was big into that. Um, so once they put me in charge of that I, I just, I started trying to figure out different ways to make money for Special Olympics and you were rewarded, uh, every year. Special Olympics did a, a law enforcement torch run t-shirt and when there was, and, uh, police officers would all run in the, in the torch run. Uh, you know, it was like a five mile run and then several cops that would want to do it would run every year but the whole thing for the torch run was to raise money for Special Olympics. So, I, uh, we did a couple things where the, the cops would go in and, uh, do celebrity waiter things and, and work for tips basically. We weren't trying to take tips away from the staff, this was just like if you wanted to make a donation, we would help them, you know, fill the sodas and, and, uh, you know, take people napkins or silverware and just ask for a small donation. Of course we didn't put pressure on them. We just left an envelope on the table and if they chose to do it, they did. We did that at Applebee's and Red Lobster and, uh, but we didn't make that much money. And then, uh, I, I noticed that on the, the back of the shirt, uh, there was awarded the top, um, police departments, so you got your name, uh, on the back of the t-shirt and it was, uh, by rank and, uh, you had to raise more than $15,000. But once you got to the $15,000 mark, uh, you could get on the back of the, you could get your, uh, police department's name on the back of the shirt and I was like, "That would be really cool to have our name on the shirt." So that was my goal, is to raise $15,000 and it wasn't gonna, it was gonna have to be more than these two celebrity waiter things. So I, I started finding, uh, I, I decided to, to put together a golf tournament. And, uh, I did that golf tournament, first year I, I made over $10,000, um, or right at close to 10,000. And with the other, uh, functions we had done, it, it put us on the t-shirt for the first time. And, so I continued to do the golf tournament, uh, until the time that I left that position and, uh, I was able to get on the shirt, uh, I think at least three or four consecutive years before I, um, was, uh … before that, uh, they, before we stopped doing the fundraising so much. So, um, I did the tally and, uh, in the eight years of doing that I was able to raise over $100,000 for Special Olympics. And, uh, like I said, we also did a lot of other, we started getting more involved with the community, with, uh, National Nights Out. Uh, and that's the night that everybody, they have a big block party and, uh, well you know, so we're mingling with all the, uh, citizens in, in the community. And, uh, we also did, uh, we started a basketball, uh, league. Not a league but, uh, where we, uh, we'd play, uh, the kids. You know, a bunch of the officers on their off duty time would go out and play these kids in basketball and we just tried to really, uh, tried to present ourselves as just humans. We're, we're not robots. Uh, we do have a human side and I think it was really important for people to see that, uh, 'cause most of the time, you know, when you're dealing with somebody, uh, unless

it's just a, a, a fender bender, it, it's a negative light for, uh, the person you're dealing with along with the family and or the kids that are seeing what's happening and especially if there was any resisting of arrest or anything, uh, and what could happen, you know, and, and the traumatic experiences some of these kids had witnessed when their parents might have been arrested for whatever they had done, you know. Um, I was also, uh, getting on to some of my other, uh, my other-

MeM: Can I ask a question?

MM: Sure.

MeM: Um, wasn't there something around Christmas time where you could, like, shop with a cop for Christmas or something?

MM: Oh yeah. You're right, I kind of forgot about that. Um, yeah, through our, um, Police Benevolent and Protective Association, unit 14, which I was also, uh, very heavily involved with. Uh, I was a executive board member, uh, for that organization but yeah, I worked, uh, I was, uh, treasurer for four years and I was vice president for four years. But we started the Shop with a Cop program as also part of our community outreach where we'd, uh, well, it started out we only, uh, we were taking 10 kids and spending $100 apiece on them. And basically, we got, uh, we asked for, um, churches and organizations, for the people that were needy and, and maybe the parents couldn't provide Christmas for the, for the, for them. So we'd take these underprivileged kids and take them to Target and basically let them shop. You know, they could shop for themselves or they could, they could buy gifts for their parents. Uh, you know, occasionally you'd have a kid, you know, buy some, buy himself something but, or her, herself something, we took boys and girls, uh, but the majority of these kids really just wanted to, uh, buy all their brothers and sisters and, uh, their parents. So, that was, uh, they've, uh, since expanded that program. Uh, now they, they take, I think they take, I don't know, about 30 kids out at Christmas time. We also started doing food baskets, uh, around Thanksgiving. We, we would put together about a, 100 food baskets and the policemen, um, and, well, uh, in the olden days we used to, to hand deliver them ourselves to people and then I think they got such a big thing to do that we started giving them to, giving them directly to the organizations that, uh, that help people out. So we'd, instead of doing 50 different deliveries, we'd, we'd take them down and just dump 50, uh, at the food bank. So…

MeM: Wasn't there a major, uh, murder case squad that you also a part of?

MM: Yes. Uh, I was, uh, in detectives, after you had two years, uh, two years experience as a detective, uh, you could become a member of the major case squad and you had to go through training. But it's the Major Case Squad of Greater Saint Louis and that was, uh, kind of a highlight of my career. Um, I was only able to work a couple cases because of my time in detectives and getting switched in and out of patrol because, um, you were only allowed to, to be in the major case squad if you were in an investigation bureau. So, uh, I, I was able to work a couple of high profile murder cases. I mean you don't get called out but the, the major case squad didn't get called out unless it's a, a murder with very little to go on, very little leads. Uh, so I, I remember, uh, I worked on a murder case over in Belleville and they, and they, and they still, uh, even though we're all training together from Missouri and Illinois, they always kept the agencies, uh, you know, if, uh, if it happened in Illinois we used all Illinois major case squad members. If it, if the case happened over in Missouri, they'd use all Missouri, uh, detectives. Uh, you, you

had a, a separate badge for your major case squad and, uh, and, you know, it was a very good experience and you met some of the top notch, uh, you know, top notch detectives in the area, you know. And you, you know, you could always learn from whatever. Even though we were all pretty, all the Alton guys were pretty good. We never called in the major case squad, uh, like they do now. We always, uh, we were proud to, to work our own murder cases and very successful. We had, uh, Alton has a higher, well, before I retired Alton had a higher percentage clearance rate than the major case squad. And we were very successful, uh, at solving murders. Um, there were a couple, uh, during my career that, you know, kind of still haunt me. Uh, there's, um, one of the first ones that really, uh, was shocking was somebody around my age. Uh, she was murdered up on Bell Street. I believe it was Bell. I was a brand new rookie cop at the time and it was the Julianne Gottlob case and to my knowledge, I've been, you know, out of town for the last couple of years, for the most part I, I try to stay up on Alton news, uh, that case is still unsolved. Uh, and then one case that I was, uh, actually worked as a detective, I was actually, uh, one of the crime scene guys, it was Felicia Rexford who was stabbed on a November day in, um, out in front of Target. And, uh, she had, uh, can't really recall. I think she had one or two stab wounds and she didn't, uh, survive and there was just, that was one that kind of really still shakes me because, uh, we weren't able to, we weren't able to solve that case. And then, and to my knowledge I think it's still unsolved today. Um, one of the other cases that, it was very haunting to me is, um, when the two firefighters were killed. Uh, I was in detectives, a fairly new detective. Uh, firefighter Tim Lewis and Captain Gary Porter … I knew Gary. I didn't knew Tim, he was a young, a young man but, uh, I knew Gary pretty well 'cause his wife was our police dispatcher. And, uh, they had died fighting a house fire up on Highland Avenue and when they initially called me, uh, they said, "We had two firefighters killed last night." Uh, it was early in the morning when I got called out. I, uh, I immediately asked who it was because I, I had two real good friends on the fire department. I, I was hoping it wasn't, well you never, you hope it doesn't happen to anybody but I immediately asked who it was and it wasn't two of my high school friends that had, uh, I was very close with. But I did know Gary Porter real well. And, uh, it was a two story structure fire and, uh, one of the walls, uh, had fallen on these two firemen and they weren't able to get them out of there, uh, with, without them perishing in the fire. We, uh, that was another big case that, uh, we had, uh, ATF come in, Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. Uh, we work closely with, uh, one of their agents on a lot of the, a lot of the drug cases and a trigger lock is where you have drugs and a weapon but, uh, we were able to utilize some of their equipment 'cause they had better, better, uh, recording equipment. And we finally developed a good witness, not, not only a witness but the guy who had actually set the fire, uh, confessed to doing it. And, uh, what we really wanted was the landlord that, uh, that set him up to it because, uh, it was a vacant structure and he tried to burn it down once unsuccessfully. This time it was successful and it cost firemen, uh, two firemen their lives. But, uh, we sent the, the guy who set the fire was doing it for a landlord and the landlord, I guess, was upside down and wanted this thing just to burn. And so we were able to send him over there with a wire on and get, uh, get the guy. His name was, uh, I think it was Greg Franklin, and, uh, we were able to get him to confess and we were successful in his prosecution. And, uh, I think he was sentenced to 25 years in prison for setting that, uh, setting that whole thing up. So that was one of the cases I was proud to be a part of.

MeM: Are there any other memorable cases in your career?

MM: Well, yeah. There was a murder case that we'd worked, uh, up in Belle Manor. I believe, uh, there was a, the victim's name, I believe if, um, if I can recollect, it was Troy Slack. And he was, he was shot by unknown persons down in Belle Manor and, but we knew he had been shot with a sawed off shotgun.

And we absolutely had no leads and, and which was very unusual in Alton, at least back in my day. Uh, we don't get a whole lot of cooperation usually from the community 'cause people are afraid to talk, but usually in Alton somebody would always call in even if it was anonymously and tell us who did the murder. This wasn't the case in this. Uh, it, it had been going, it was getting kind of stale. We'd interviewed everybody we could and, and had no leads at all to follow up and it was, it was, the case was starting to get old which is never good because usually you need to solve your murder within about the first 48 hours or else, you, your, things aren't going well. 'Cause if, if the murder's solvable, usually within the first 24 to 48 hours you'll pretty much be knowing which direction to go and we had nothing on this case. And so I get a call one day. I'm, I'm in an investigation and I get a call from a cop over in Ferguson. And he happened to, he was interviewing some witness in, uh, on another incident unrelated to anything and he said, "Did you guys," he said, "I got a witness, said something about an armed robbery using a sawed off shotgun." And I said, "Well, no, we didn't have, we didn't kind of have any, any armed robbery," I said, "but we did have a murder here just recently with, where a sawed off shotgun was used," 'cause we knew by the wound, um, that it was a, that, from the spray it was a sawed off shotgun. So I was like bingo, light went off. I'm like, "We need to go over there and talk to this witness. She knows something and we might be on to our guys." And, uh, sure enough, we went over there and interviewed her. It was, uh, three guys from Missouri who had no ties to Alton. It was just a senseless murder. This guy, uh, I don't know if, uh, if they were trying to, if they were, just did it for meanness. I don't know if we ever found out the real reason but, uh, or if it was, you know, a drug deal that went bad. But anyway, we were able to, uh, get these three guys to, uh, in and talk to them and interview and they all three confessed and we were successful in the prosecution of that case. And, uh, that was one of the bigger cases just because we were clueless and I didn't think we were gonna be able to solve that case. And, and any time we had a murder, um, in town, I don't know what they're doing now because they call out the major case squad so they don't, Alton really doesn't work their own murders anymore, at least recently they haven't under this current administration, but we always did. Because if you turn them over to the major case squad, you lose, you lose command, uh, of that case and we always took pride in keeping the case under the Alton, Alton guys. And what we do is everybody just stopped what you were doing. If you were working on somebody's burglary case, you no long, you had to put that aside for a while until we, and then all, all the entire investigation bureau would work a murder case and we'd all go out and start calling leads. And, uh, there are just numerous people usually to interview and it requires tons of man hours. And we'd all work, you know, probably close to 16 to 20 hours a day, go home and sleep for four hours and then get back up and, and do another 16 to 20 hour day until we solved our cases and that's why I think we were so successful. Plus we, we knew everybody in town. Uh, you know, most of the guys I worked with, uh, were very well known in the community whether it be the black or white community. Mainly, usually the black community were probably more known. Um, and we got along with, you know, for the better part with most people and a lot of times if you had some good relationships out there, you would get information. Uh, and I think that's another reason we were so successful, 'cause when you're bringing a major case squad in, you're sending a detective that nobody has ever seen before out to try to, you know, get, get clues and, uh, get information. Well, there's no trust there because they didn't know the guy, so, um, and as long as you treated people, uh, with respect even though, even though you had to arrest them if they had committed a crime, as long as you treated them with respect, uh, they'd cooperate with you on situations. Uh, so, uh, I think it was, that was another reason we were always so good at solving our own murder cases. Uh…

MeM: Did you have a lot of… what would you say is the majority of your crime in Alton? And, and the way that crime kind of evolved?

MM: Drugs. It's always been drugs. Drugs, drugs fuel everything really. They fuel the, uh, the burglaries 'cause people are trying to burglarize stuff whether it be a vehicle burglary or a residential burglary. They're going in to steal things to fence to the pawn shops or to other people in order to get money, and what is it normally for? Drugs. You know, uh, we saw the crack cocaine epidemic come in, um, you know, late 80s I think is when the first time we saw it and it just, it exploded in Alton. Um, we'd never seen crack cocaine and, and that's when the city, the city used to close down about one o'clock in the morning and it was pretty quiet for the most part. You might have an occasional, uh, domestic disturbance or something like that but then they started opening the bars til three in the, three in the morning, and then once crack cocaine hit, we were busy running calls all night, you know. And, uh, now, you know, I guess the drug of choice, uh, are all these opioids and heroin which, you know, people weren't dying on crack cocaine but they, it would ruin their lives. Uh, they'd basically, uh, lose everything that they have if they did have anything. A lot of times it was just, uh, people with not much education and, and, and no money to begin with but it, you know, it, uh, it definitely took its toll. And I, uh, nothing like today with these people dying, um, of, uh, opioid abuse, you know. Uh, these big pharmaceutical companies got everybody hooked on, uh, Vicodin and Oxycodone and then when they can't get that anymore they turn to heroin and, uh, the fact that they're putting Fentanyl in heroin now is, is what's causing these people to die left and right. And, uh, so I'd say, you know, drugs is a big problem, uh, in the community, you know, and not just our community, it's across the United States. Um, you know, but, uh, it, it creates, uh, homeless people and, uh, you know, and you see a lot of homelessness now. Not so much, uh, even in, well, just anywhere I go just about you can always see that there's a big problem with homeless. Uh, yeah, there was another part of my career. Uh, when we did start having such a drug problem, um, we had never really, other than, you know, we never did any proactive stuff towards drugs and drug dealers and then we formed a, a drug unit at, uh, as part of our investigation unit. And, uh, there-

MeM: Was that the Weed and Seed?

MM: No, this was different. I can go into that though too, uh, because this whole drug problem, prostitution problem is what, uh, prompted us to, but I'll address that here, uh, uh, but we started, uh, once we started the narcotics unit which we, we, we all learned it's like, you know, if we can control our drug problem maybe we can, it'll help control the crime problem. So once we formed this unit, uh, we'd begin, you know, other than, you know, just a, a police officer on the street making an arrest for drugs is about the only time we did anything about drugs. If you'd catch somebody with some marijuana or some cocaine, uh, of course they'd go to jail, uh, but we'd never done anything proactive. Once we formed this drug unit, uh, they were very successful in developing con, confidential informants, usually somebody that had a small amount of something on them. Uh, you'd want to know where they were getting it from and most of the time they were more than willing to tell you if you'd, you know, uh, speak to the state's attorney's office and, and tell them that he's a cooperative confidential informant, he's promising to take down three, three mid level drug dealers. So, um, we ended up, uh, once we started, uh, doing this, uh, once you'd made a couple of undercover buys out of somebody's house, that gave you probable cause to go to, uh, the state's attorney's office and, uh, get a search warrant drafted and then we could take it before a judge and then it, basically he'd sign it, you know, if there's probable cause signed off on by the state's attorney's office, um, they would issue a search warrant. So then we'd go, uh, you know, do the search

warrants. Well, we didn't really, we didn't, we were using sledgehammers back in the early days to break people's doors down and, uh, so we finally formed a, a SWAT team for Alton. Basically, they call it the Tactical Response Team. I was one of the, uh, mem, first members of that because, let's face it, a sledgehammer just didn't work very well, you know, when you swung it at the door and it sticks in the wood door and, so we got, and we were never dressed in uniform. We, we were always, you know, uh, might have had a black jacket on that said police on it but that was about it. So we, uh, once we formed this Tactical Response Team, we were definitely more professional. We got a shield, we got a battering ram and we were all dressed as police officers. You knew, because we'd had, once search warrant we did back early on while I was still in patrol, I wasn't a part of this search warrant but it was a MEGSI, uh, which is the Metropolitan Enforcement Group of Southern Illinois. They were like the first county drug unit. Um, we were assisting them on a search warrant and one of the occupants inside the house started firing rounds from his bedroom out the front door as we were breaching the door. Luckily, uh, no one was, no one was shot. I think one of the guys had a bullet go through his jacket but, uh, I, I had happened to be in uniform on the backside of the house so I didn't know what was going on, I was told to stay put over on my side in case they tried to come out the rear door or rear window, but I could hear it sounded like a war zone with all these gunshots going off and I, I, I didn't know if all my buddies were, were dead on the other side of the house or, or what. Um, luckily, uh, everybody was okay including the bad guy, uh, but that, that taught us a lot, uh, 'cause he tried to say he thought that we were other drug dealers coming in to rob him, which, you know, I don't think he really thought that but it was a good defense so we had to start, that's why you see these guys, they look like they're, they're, you know, ready for, uh, war or whatever. There's a reason for that, you know. It's a, it's, well they wear Kevlar helmets in case there's rounds fired and, um, you know, they do almost, they're, it, it's a little intimidating for some people but there's a reason that these guys, you know, they all want to go home at the end of the day. And, uh, you know, we're not there to, to shoot these people but we're certainly not there to take a bullet either.

MeM: Did you ever have to shoot anyone in your career?

MM: I never did. Um … you know, I never, we were always, uh, told, uh, and taught you, you don't draw that weapon unless you really plan on using it. So there wasn't too many cases. I mean, there were several cases where we had to pull a gun. Luckily, I was lucky enough to work 27 years and never have to fire my weapon. Uh, one of the closest times I ever came to firing my weapon was, uh, was in my last month of my career. Uh, a guy was, um, well, I don't know if, I guess he was suicidal. He was, uh, really hopped up on drugs and we get over there and he's in the back of his, his wife had called us. I guess he was threatening her and the family and his daughter's inside the house, I think she was like 10. And he had a, a pistol in one hand and a big knife in the other and by the time I got there he was up in the back of his, standing in the back of his pickup truck and my officer was already out. When I pulled up behind him, he was out of the car and had him at gunpoint and we had about a 40 minute standoff with that guy, uh, before we were able to get a detective up there that he knew who he trusted and talked him, uh, throwing the, throwing the weapons down. Luckily, you know, I, he kept pointing the gun at us and, uh, we could have easily shot him and been justified but neither one of us pulled the trigger and, uh, I'm glad we didn't because it ended up being just a starter pistol. And, uh, you know, but we could have easily shot him because he kept pointing the gun at us and we kept telling him, "Don't point that gun at us." We both were in a position to cover, uh, but really my officer didn't have much cover other than the car door. But, um, so that was probably one of my closest, and then, uh, that's when I, I figured, you know, I've been lucky 27 years, uh, I think I'm gonna take my retirement [laughs], uh, when I turn 50 years old. It's, it's

definitely a young man's job. And, uh, I just thought, well, you know, I think it might be time for me to, to, uh, let one of these younger guys have my lieutenant's bars and they always love it when a lieutenant leaves because the sergeant makes lieutenant and the guy on the sergeant's, top guy on the sergeant's list gets to make sergeant, which is a, you know, a pay grade kind of, um, pay grade higher. So, yeah, anyway, I retired, uh, six years ago in, uh, May at the age of 50. And, uh, I was very, uh, very happy and proud of my career. Uh, it provided, you know, a very, very good, uh, living for my family. I was able to raise four children. Um, I lived in Alton almost my whole life. I did move out to Godfrey when they lifted the residency requirements, uh, but mainly Alton. And then, uh, you know, I was very still tied to Alton. I, I, I had a lot of, uh, uh, investment properties that, uh, during my course in my career I, I started thinking about investing in rental properties so I was, I was, I bought, oh, I was up to 75 doors at one time and, uh, but I've since sold most of my rental properties off and I am, uh, retired and I've only got, I've still got, uh, three homes and a duplex here in Alton that I'll probably hold on to for a while but, uh … But, uh, two years ago I sold, um, two years ago I sold my house and, uh, decided to move to, uh, we were wintering down in Vero Beach, Florida. [inaudible], you know, that was our, always my wife and I's goal is to be in Florida for the winter but then we found it was getting a little expensive to keep two places so we decided just to move down there full time and, uh, we love, we love it in Vero Beach. It's very small and, uh, we're like 10 miles from the ocean and it's beautiful and the winters are fantastic but, uh, I was getting a little homesick and, uh, decided to convert one of these, uh, the downstairs unit of my duplex. Um, it's a one bedroom. I decided I wanted a place back here for coming home to see my kids and my mom and, uh, holidays and stuff and it felt like the last few times I'd been home it was, you know, Meghan always lets me sleep on her couch or my mom will let me sleep on her couch but everybody, I just thought it'd be nice to have our own space again, so that's why I'm home now, right now, uh, putting this little apartment together and getting it ready for Christmas.

MeM: So having been an Alton resident for about 55 years, how have you kind of seen Alton evolve over the years?

MM: Uh … well, I'll tell you, you know, Alton used to be a big blue collar town. Um, back when I was a kid, my aunt and uncle, I remember them graduating high school and they were a blue, immediately leave high school, go down and get a job at the glassworks which was, uh, uh, Illinois glass or, I can't even remember the name of the plant, it's been closed so long now. Owens-Illinois, Owens-Illinois was the name of the plant, but they were, they were able to get a good enough job to move out of their parents' home at 18 years old. And we, you know, we had the, Alton Box Board was a big paper company and they employed thousands of people. And Laclede Steel, even though they're open again under, uh, Alton Steel, Laclede had, I don't know, maybe four or 5,000 employees. And between, between the steel mill, the paper company, the Alton Box Board, and Owens-Illinois, you probably had 10 or 12,000, uh, 10 or 12,000 jobs down there. And those, most of them are all, I mean the Box Board's gone, uh, the glass company went under. That was when we used to have returnable milk bottles and returnable soda bottles. Well, those days, um, are gone and, and we've lost a lot of jobs. And, uh, they had a mold plant out in Godfrey which is in Madison County, uh, that's no longer open. And then, uh, well, Olin, Olin Brass was a huge employer of this area and, and they're at a fraction of what they used to be, so I think … Alton, mean population, I was looking at a chart, uh, they gained population until 1970. And at, and at that time it, it was really close to, I think, 40,000 people. And, uh, since that time, we've done nothing, uh, Alton has declined in population and I, I attribute a lot of it to, um, the closing of all those good blue collar jobs that are just not there anymore and, uh, I think a lot of people that were, uh, you know, they were living,

uh, modest lives in, you know, in, uh, small little homes that are, and that's why Alton's become such a big rental town because I think a lot of these people, uh, weren't able to get a job here so they had to leave to go other, other places. But, uh, I think what I saw was Alton as a population now, we're, it's around 26, 27,000, and that's the same population it was like in 1925. So we've lost, um, we've lost a lot of residents, um, since 1970. And they even, the figure I saw is that, they don't really have any actual figures but they're thinking that, uh, we've lost another, at least another thousand people since, um, the census of 2010. Uh, so you, I don't know. I, I do see some, uh, positive things happening. You know, there's some, some new businesses popping up and this, uh, uh, this business revolution, um, has, has been inspiring, you know, helping some small businesses to keep their doors open or, or, uh, you know, offering them advice on, uh, how to make their businesses better. So I, you know, I, I do see, uh, some progress here. I think it's got a long way to go to get back to where it was when I was a, a kid and I don't know if it ever will. Uh, because this is a thriving little community with all those factories and, uh, like I said, my dad was [laughs], was employed and, uh, while we weren't rich, uh, we got by. We always had food on the table. We took one vacation every year, we went down to Lake of the Ozarks, the same place every year. Uh, but my mom and dad didn't, you know, spend a lot of money. We, we, they were very, uh … they were savers, you know. That's what people did back then 'cause there really wasn't credit cards. You didn't have, if you didn't have the money, you didn't buy it, uh, and that was the old school thing that my mom and dad, that's how they were raised and, uh, but it, yeah. I think, uh, I don't know. I still like Alton. I like it a lot. Um, and like I said, I, I'm coming back here just to have a place to stay for what, however many weeks and, uh, I'm hoping to have a grandbaby some day and that'll get me back here a little more often.

MeM: Would you say that there are more rental homes than there are owned homes now? Like…

MM: I think, I think the estimates are, like, 60% rentals.

MeM: Wow.

MM: Yeah. I think that's what, uh, the current administration has figured, you know, and I think that's why there's cracking down. While I don't think every landlord needs to be cracked down 'cause a lot of people do have nice homes and, and are responsible landlords and take care of their property but there are some slumlords, or not near as many as there used to be but there are still some slumlords in town, uh, that don't do things like they should, don't take very good care of their places. Uh … but, um, definitely more rentals, I think, than, than home, uh, ownership.

MeM: Any good rental stories?

MM: Oh, I could prob-

MeM: I'm sure you probably have some. [laughs]

MM: … I could probably write a book on rental stories but, uh … well, uh, yeah, I can tell you. Um, I've had, I've had my fair share of, uh, well I've inherited a, a couple of my problems. Um, I had this, I'm not gonna mention any names but, uh, she, I think she was a, a paranoid schizophrenic. And, uh, I bought the, I bought a place and, uh, she happened to be in one of my units and, uh, she would actually said she'd, you know, see, see ghosts and, uh, she believed it. And, uh … she called her ghost, uh, Double O Seven.

And, uh … finally I, you know, she was threatening me a lot. She'd call up and threaten to kill me and I finally just had enough of it. I, I wasn't really threatened by her but I, I was also a little, didn't know what she might be capable of so I, I told her I really wanted her to find a new place to live. And, uh, finally I was able to get rid of her. [laughs] She said, "I'm ready to move," and I was like [inaudible]. She goes, "I don't have any way to move," and I said, "I'll, I'll be over there with a few trucks and we'll help you get out of that apartment." So, uh, yeah, uh … she was a, she was a real hoot.

MeM: [laughs]

MM: [laughs] And then I had another guy that, another one where I inherited, I'd bought a place down in Christian Hill and, uh, the guy was obviously a, a paranoid schizophrenic that wasn't taking his medication. So he called me up one day and told me how he was graffiti-ing up my walls and, and breaking the glass and, uh, so he was a [laughs], he was another one I had to get rid of. Um, you know, and I sure enough went over there and he'd busted every plane, pane of glass out in the apartment and, uh, threw his phone through my oven door, it had a little glass door. And, uh, [inaudible] first, uh, window he knocked out, I, I just boarded up and said, "No more glass," you know, "for you." [laughs] And, uh, he was scaring the neighbor kids and stuff, telling them that the bricks were red because they were made of blood and, uh, yeah, he, he had to go, you know. It was a nice area and, uh, I've got people calling me up saying, "Your renters are scaring my kids," and, uh, so … he had to go.

MeM: [laughs]

MM: [laughs]

MeM: All right. Well it looks like we are running out of time. Um, is there anything else that you'd like to mention?

MM: Um, well I, I never did touch on that Weed and Seed. Um-

MeM: Yeah.

MM: … you know, with all the crime problems we were having, um, mainly in the middle part of town there was a lot of drug dealing going on, a lot of open prostitution. So somehow, um, I don't know how we were ever able to pull it off, we were able to become part of the Weed and Seed revitalization. Basically that was weeding out the bad and trying to seed it with good, you know. So we started trying to address these problems, uh, as a community and, uh, it was, it was funded a lot by, uh, with government money and, uh, we were able to do, uh, hot spot patrols that were paid for. You know, that was with two officers dealing in these high crime areas where some of this, the real problems in Alton were going on. And, and, you know, it helped us really, uh … uh, form a community target team against, uh, issues instead of just being a police problem. You know, and we actually invited the residents in and heard from them what, what they're dealing with, you know. It's like, "Yeah, you know, um, I've got a prostitute walking by my house, you know, all the time. You guys, how come nobody's doing anything about it?" So, uh, I was a big part of the Weed and Seed, uh, and out of that we formed the Nuisance Abatement Task Force and, uh, that's where we all start really, uh, we'd always target, like, our top 10 problem properties. Um, you know, suspected drug dealing, um, whatever it may be, normally that's what it was but, uh, you know, and then a lot of times they were rental houses and some landlord maybe wasn't what,

doing everything he could to keep bad people out and good, you know, trying to find good people and, uh, but no, uh, they're still doing the Nuisance Abatement Task Force today and really they've even kicked it up another notch with this new, uh, code enforcement. So they're really targeting landlords I think more than homeowners, uh, with this new, uh, new little team that they've formed. So…

MeM: Anything else?

MM: I can't think of anything else to add. I've pretty much given you-

MeM: [laughs]

MM: …my entire life story.

MeM: All right, well thank you for talking with me today.

MM: All right, you're welcome.