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James Redford

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Interviewers: Kathryn Britts, Amanda McGregor, Suban Farah, Ciarah Bennett, Makayla Snyder

Interviewee: James Redford

Disclaimer: *In this transcription the “crunch words were included as well as the more prominent filler words like um, ah, and oh.

Makayla Snyder: Ok well this is MS Snyder. Could you please state your full name and spell it.

James Redford: I’m James Redford. J-A-M-E-S, last name Redford R-E-D-F-O-R-D

MS: Very nice to meet you. Um so I guess we’ll just start off with, what do you like to uh, we have to do consent.

Amanda McGregor: Just reiterate that you give consent to us

JR: I do, I do give consent to do this interview and use it online, whatever you need to do

MS: Ok Thank You. So I guess where are you from and how are you doing today

JR: well I’m doing fine and I am from Crew, Virginia. Which is about twenty miles east of here and I’ve been living in Farmville and the prospect are for the past 8 years.

MS: are you excited about the harvest festival today?

JR: I am, not so much the weather.

MS: Yea ha-ha

JR: But yes

MS: How many people do you expect to come today?

JR: Lord, uh, I don’t know, maybe, maybe close to two hundred

MS: Um, I guess what do you enjoy doing in your free time when you’re not here?

JR: When I’m not at the fire station, I am active in my church and I sing with the gospel quartet well I don’t sing I run the sound system for gospel quartet. And Um hang out with my family, I have two small children and love them dearly

MS: How long have you been a volunteer firefighter?

JR: Sixteen years

MS: and why did you want to be a volunteer firefighter?

JR: It is a lot of fun and number two, I just have a knack for helping people.

MS: do you have any family history in the department?

JR: I do not

MS: What does your family think about you volunteering?

JR: They, they are proud, proud that a lot of people say giving back to the community and um at times they worry as most anybody who has family in emergency services do

MS: What do you do for work like outside of being in the department?

JR: I am a conductor with Norfolk Southern Railroad

MS: That's exciting

JR: Kind of ha-ha

MS: Um. Do you ever have any issues like balancing a normal life with being in the department?

JR: Well, uh, the department is kind of like my normal life so I started when I was sixteen so I kind of grew up in it and anything other than you know besides work anything other than things with the fire service is kind of like trying to balance that with the fire service because I put that not at the top but its comes close to the top.

MS: and this is about being sent out to other counties like how often do you get sent out to other counties on calls?

JR: uh, well, we actually have a county line for Buckingham, its approximately four miles due north so really we go in their county quite often for different calls and I don't mind it's you know the closet department to help the citizens, its why we exist.

Amanda McGregor: What is the relationship like?

JR: Within the county and prince Edward it is actually very well very good pretty close this department and the one to the west of us Pamplin Fire Department is very close, next one to the east of us is Farmville which there is Longwood college uh University, we are fairly close with them too so we have a good working relationship, mutually together, we can get along and handle business and things of that nature fairly well.

MS: Did you do the training for this? Because I know there is some kind of training they have to do to become a volunteer firefighter.

JR: Yes

MS: What was that like?

JR: I've done a lot of training over my years and some is very hard and intense and others is you're in a classroom and listening to somebody give lecture for a while and sometimes it kind of boring but it's all very important and its nothing we take lightly while we train. We train to be ready for any and every emergency. A lot of it is a lot of fun, it is, a lot of fun, I find it fun

MS: Would you mind going into detail about some of the more intense and also the classroom setting training?

JR: ok Um well when you first become a firefighter some of the basic course is that like firefighter go through is called firefighter one and then its firefighter two. Firefighter one you learn the basics, why the fire department exists, what kind of EP or protective equipment or personal protective equipment you'll wear. What the gears for or how to use it, the trucks, what kind of trucks you have, different trucks of course run different calls, things of that nature. There

Is minimum first aide in that course and some of the intense through fire one of course you have to fight fire, you have to fight live fire so we go to a burn facility, it's in a block building that's special for practicing interior firefighting, so sometimes they can the temperature ratings are very hot and when I first started there was no regulation to monitor these temperature ratings inside this buildings so they would reach close to 1000 degrees temperature be in there and you're full turn out gear and it'd be a little warm. Now a days they have monitoring systems in the burn facility and they can, it's all computerized and recorded, all the data is recorded. You usually don't get a room somewhere not even close to 300 now and sometimes that can help and hurt a firefighter cause with the gear that we have now is reflects the heat so well that sometimes you may not realize that you are in such a hot dangerous condition until it's too late. Back in fourteen, fifteen years ago the gear wasn't as strong as it is now so you knew if your ear starting to get a little warm you got to back out or at least ask for more water, so uhm those are some of the intense moments and some of the boring classrooms are well you just sit in a classroom and you listen for listen to the instructing, him might tell ya a lot of his personal stories and some of those aren't as exciting as some of your, if you go through the book, follow the book page by page, the instructor sometimes has to read verbatim within how boring that can be, not so exciting. Some of the personal stories are exciting some of them are very dull.

MS: we know this is a volunteer department, so how do you feel about like the lack of funding and how do you cope with it?

JR: The lack of funding of course that's what we are doing today, a fundraiser, it's very expensive to keep a fire department above water and running and we are very thankful for any donations that we get, of course and you can really tell our department not as fortunate as some other departments but our department is very fortunate than some of the departments, though I look at it both ways always hoping that we get more funding because that means we can buy the latest and greatest equipment to help the community and one thing id, one tool that you may know that exist is a thermal imaging camera, ok with that thermal imaging camera we can go in a smoke filled room where we can't see our hands in front of our face 6 inches away,, take a thermal imaging camera and look fifty feet across the room and see there's maybe a child or another person that you know needs rescuing or something like that, those cameras will range somewhere between 10-15 thousand dollars, a day, a fundraiser like this there will be lucky to raise twelve thousand dollars today. This is our one year fundraiser, so one piece of equipment can take our whole days' worth of fund raising just like that. And other departments aren't so lucky, I mean they fight to just have five or six air packs that we wear as CVAs side of wearing structure. So uhm it is what it is and I feel blessed that we are not as bad as some and can always use.

MS: Do you know about how much annually it takes to keep this place above water?

JR: I really don't know the exact figures, uhm, I would say a normal department its somewhere, I really don't know, I would say, I'd say close to at least 100,000 dollars, something like that, and if you look at the equipment, on them, the fuel and things of that nature and all of the equipment of course is mechanics so there so for you have to have a mechanic work on things.

Suban Farah: How old is some of your equipment you guys use?

JR: I think the oldest, oldest piece we have right now is 1983 truck and newest that we have is actually I think 2012 or 13 model and though, of course those are our, the 83' is our smaller

engine and the newer model is a brand new engine and I think we usually try to get a new engine um close to every fifteen years something like that an uhm to get any further after fifteen years of fire engine in service that you know it's kind of been rode hard before things start breaking on it. And the worst thing, the worst thing you don't want to have is to get on scene and fighting a fire and your truck breaks and then you're left with a yard of equipment in the way

AM: What is your favorite piece of equipment?

JR: uhm here in our company here, I'd say our brand new engine, it's the most versatile piece of equipment that we have here, not only is it it's got 1000 gallons of water, the pump is 1250 gallons per minute pump so it pumps pretty well, the latest and greatest that we have here the air packs are made into the dump seat, we can carry five, five people including the driver four people put on the air packs and when they come off the end they can go right into the house. Uhm it's also has our vehicle extrication equipment so if you run a vehicle motor accident and you cut a car off of somebody and help someone get out of a vehicle then it has those tools, it has some hazardous material containment equipment on it so it's probably the most versatile equipment we have here.

MS: What do you feel has been like the worst call or run?

JR: In my whole fire career or just in this department?

MS: Umm probably career.

JR: The worst that I've run involves children, anything with a child is very tight, its actually happened two blocks down from my house when I lived in Crew, a child on a bicycle rode out in front of a guy coming down the road not knowing that a eight year old boy I think he was eight, seven or eight at the time wasn't looking for the traffic coming down the road and I don't know if the guy was speeding in the pickup truck but uh the child was not wearing a helmet and he hit him and hit the ground and there was heavy head trauma and I was one of the very first ones there. And it was fairly early in my fire service, fire career and though with that you kind of got to learn to cope with that but anything involving children the worst call. The next worse would be involving a loved one, of course I've got a lot of family in this area and back at home so you run a motor vehicle accident and you know it's a loved one or you hear a medical call come out and its severe enough to where they have to be flown to the closet trauma center its, it's pretty bad

MS: Sorry you had to go through that, thank you for sharing. So I guess on top of that what was the best for the lack of a better word the best outcome?

JR: Wow, I would say any house fire that we are called to and we get there and they say, the dispatch gives us limited information of course, they only have the information they are given so they, they'll tell us unknown if anybody is in the house vehicles in the driveway and you know if it's like 10'o'clock at night vehicles in driveway more than likely in the house, later than that they probably sleeping, so when you get to the house and it is on fire, make entry and maybe you're in there just a few minutes and then you get word that everybody is out, they are over at a neighbor's house and everybody is ok, that's a pretty good feeling because then you know you can concentrate on attacking the fire and not so much on search and rescue because it takes a lot and volunteer organizations that's limited on your personnel a lot of times, so if you have two guys that go in they are on search and rescue and the two guys that are fighting fire and it's a lot

of fire than you can pull those two guys off search and rescue and put them on a hose line and you can extinguish the fire even quicker. So I would say that the best call is finding out right on scene or before you even get there that everybody is out of the house and you're not going to have to go through that

JR: [*Loud Screeching*] I apologize for the door closing

MS: No worries. Is there a member that you feel is the most memorable or the one has made the biggest impact on you in this department?

JR: In this department, last year we lost a great member, his name was Pete Campbell and he, when I first got on he was one of the first that I met, I actually ran a couple calls with this department prior to joining and being an active member in Prospect, he was one of the first ones I met and he was a jack of all trades he could drive the engines, anchor the trucks, he could pump them very well, you knew if he was on the pump handle you didn't have anything to worry about if you were on the nozzle, you could rely on him to always have you water and where you can get in the house and loosing water pressure cause that's a bad feeling and uh always taking bestly with new guys and gals and leading them and showing them kind of what's what around the county and the department and things of that nature.

MS: Do you have a certain way or how many different ways do you have to try to attract new members, since its all-volunteer?

JR: I believe in, I started young when I was sixteen, I actually grew up three blocks down from the fire station and you could hear the alarm when it would activate the siren and so growing up I would see the fire engines go so I had some interest then. And then I had older friends at one point and they told me how much fun it was and things of that nature. So to attract new members I say start young start you know fourteen to fifteen years old right before they can kind of drive legally and things of that nature. Show them how fun it is and what it means to be of service to people and to help people. To me there is no greater feeling than knowing that you've helped somebody, even if you see an elderly lady getting a bag of dog food at the grocery store and can't really lift it, go and lift it and put it in her cart and maybe help her get it in her car if you're out in the parking lot and things of that nature. And so when I recruit folks I let them know how fun it is, what good times we have here and I try to target the young because once you kind of get established, you know when you're in college and things like that you can establish your hobbies already, and uhm so when they get older and get out of college then they are probably going to be settling down and then you already have your hobbies laid out and it's going to be harder and harder as people get older to get a new hobby such as serving the fire department. We do have older members come in and we are very grateful, they like to drive the engines, its less work ya know, they might not be able to run a line into a house fire or drag it into the woods on a brush fire or throw a ladder against the house and make entry on the second floor but they can drive and they can bring you to things, any older member that we see might just been retired or something like that but they are still in good health, we try to get them, show them how much help they can be also. Some people look at it as a younger folks get on and say hey I'm on the fire department and kind of stick their chest out type of thing. We kind of die away from that cause that can get hurt, really not in it for the right reasons of relay. I hope that answers the question

MS: Yes.

JR: Kind of got off on a sad note there

MS: No you're fine

SF: If I may, at sixteen what were you allowed to do at that time?

JR: At sixteen the laws were different then they are now, I was allowed by my fire department to put out brush fires or grass fires or something like that. I was allowed to be on the hose line, grab a rake and rake back the soil so there was a fire line. I was allowed to help with vehicle extraction. I was not allowed at that age but still I had training to take interior on a live house fire initial attack, after the initial attack and the fire got knocked down I was allowed to go in and what's called overhaul, to go in and find extension, maybe a fire got into a wall and is between the sheet rock and the wall so I was able to go in with a tool and pull some of that sheet rock down and find that fire and find the extension. Once I was able to take the firefighter 1 class that I told you about earlier, I was then certified and at seventeen years old I had that certification therefore I was able to make entry and do those types of things, now like I say at that department the law/rules were different there and the laws were different than they were then they are now, now you can't take entry and take firefighter 1 well you can take fire fighter 1 if you are under 18 with your parents signing off, then your parents didn't need to sign anything. And now the law says you must be eighteen to make entry into a burning building, go in do some overhaul, and other things of that nature. Uhm, really I was pretty much able to do anything that the law allowed me to do.

MS: Obviously this area has been through some rough times when it comes to like diversifying. How do you feel about the department becoming more diverse and are you noticing it getting more diverse, like is it changing or kind of staying the same?

JR: I think diversity wise, here in Prospect we do fairly well, I know Farmville does fairly well, I mean we have some female firefighters but not all female firefighters are meant to be firefighters and not all females in general are meant to be firefighters. It is a tough job, it's very laboring and intense at times, at times it's not and I think we do have fairly decent job at that. In the county here I would say that most of the departments are pretty dangum diverse and we have folks in prospect that come from all different walks of nature and welcome anybody here that wants to help out and I think we do a fairly good job of that actually, better than what I think it used to be and I think we do a fairly well job here

MS: And then coming off of that, what is the biggest change positive or negative that you've noticed in the department since you've been here, or both?

JR: Negative wise, uhm, I don't see a whole lot of negative happening, move the negative way in the fire service sometimes we get hurt and killed in the line of duty and we really don't want that ever so we always try to look at how to make progress and as long as we steer towards that of course your positive will outweigh the negatives and we do take a few negative step backs, probably most of them financially. Sometimes we last, uh, before I got on here we invested in a fire apparatus Chasee they sent it to the business and the business went bankrupt and closed their doors so we lost a lot of money, somewhere in the neighborhood of 70,000 and that hurts, it hurts a lot, actually I think it might have been more than that but the positives here are outweighing the negatives by far. Are you looking for something uh?

MS: Yea you can give an example of a positive change you've seen

JR: Well take our new engine for essence, I've kind of already hit on, we did not have vehicle extrication equipment here, the department, till about a year and a half ago maybe 2 years ago, if we had a motor vehicle accident and there was somebody trapped in the vehicle we had to wait on a neighboring department that had those tools, the rescue squad would come from town, Farmville, up here and that's approximately ten miles or somewhere around that nature maybe not quite that far and the neighboring department up here, Pamplin, they have extrication tools so it's an every second counts type of thing while running a call so once we saw an opportunity where we could get people extrication equipment, we hoped on it. And the Appomattox fire department up the road to the west, actually donated those to us and we are very grateful for it so when we would inspecting our new engine equipment we were able to make a spot on that engine for the extrication equipment, since then we've taken extrication to the next level, we have actually two full compartments dedicated to vehicle extrication and we have upped the tools substantially since I've been here and therefore we are able to have a quicker response on helping those in need in a vehicle accident. That's one of the biggest positives changes, the other one I'd say is training level of some of the members here. It's been, when I joined it was very slack and since then we've been able to encourage each other to take more training classes. You can never train enough in the fire service, never train enough and if you think you have all the training you need than its time for you to step back and not be a frontrunner in the fire service because you're not going to keep up with the times, as college students ya'll know how quickly the technology changes, iPhone has new phone every week, in the fire service we have to keep up with the vehicle makers, they are coming out with all electric vehicles now where it used to be vehicles had a battery in the front and once we disconnected the battery there was no electric charge on the vehicle now the fully electric vehicles have multiple batteries in multiple areas and if you cut the wrong are you're going to hurt yourself and hurt people that are near that car, so in training we have to keep up, house manufacturers and building materials look different, burn quicker, they are holding up less. You walk into a burning house and the old floors could hold up to 45 minutes or so, these floors now are holding up to about 30 minutes so you're losing time on your stability so training wise our department has exceeded at that as well, that's another positive note and I'm glad to see that

MS: Definitely, definitely, uhm, what is a memory about the department that you know you want people to know say in like one hundred years, like that you don't want to be forgotten?

JR- Wow. That's a good question. Um I would say the hard work and dedication. Ah this fire department is very blessed to have an excellent fire chief, Kyle Mason. He is the hardest working man in fire department that I have ever seen in my life! Ah of course in the fire service in the last sixteen years I've visited a lot of fire companies. Um I've, I've been out to Montana and fought a wild fire out there and those guys working for the forestry don't do as much work as our chief does here volunteering. He has a lot of meeting to attend. Um and he does a lot for this department. And I would say the hard work and dedication of that man and um the members that have passed, passed on that have helped this department um I don't want them being forgotten. Because this department ah was created I think fifty-five years ago and um id like, I would like for them to remember the founding fathers, the people who have worked hard and dedicated time to build it what it is today.

MS- That's great thank you! And um as the closing question; do you have any advice for the future generations of volunteer fire fighters?

JR- Um train, train and train some more and never stop learning. Like I said earlier, if you think you know everything in the fire service you're going to know and learn then you need to step back, get out of it. You're going to get hurt, you're going to get everyone else hurt. Keep learning, times are changing train and have fun! If you can't have fun doing it, you need to step out too cause it is a lot of fun. Ah it's a lot of comradery around here, the brotherhood that is unlike any other. I would say ah be smart and train, train, train.

MS- Great! Thank you very much! Do you guys have any questions or are we good to stop?

Ciarah Bennett- Do you guys have the Jaws of Life?

JR- Ok. The Jaws of Life yes. The vehicle extraction equipment I was talking about earlier, the Jaws of Life is actually made by a company called Hurst. So it's kind of like NIKE or Reebok tennis shoes that say we have a Reebok here. We have um well, we do have Hurst tools so technically yes we do have the Jaws of Life but um that is a, that is a brand of extrication equipment. Um the cutters, spreaders, things of that nature. So yeah we do have extrication equipment here. So um, y'all understand what I mean when I say...

All Interviewers- Yeah

JR- The Jaws of Life people is just think one thing. But yeah we uh, we do have cutters and spreaders um things of that nature to cut a vehicle into many pieces.

MS- Cool

SF- I actually have a question. With your other job aside from this, has it apart of the fire department ever interfered...

JR- Absolutely!

SF-...Like did you not make it to a call

JR- Yes ma'am. I don't make it to several calls because of my job and um as a fire fighter the worst feeling is hearing a call come out and knowing that you can't respond and be there to help and um in my railroad career, there was times that I didn't know when I was going to work, I didn't know when I was coming home. Because train schedules, there is no train schedule for a freight train schedule. Now a passenger train schedule is a different thing but I'm a freight train handler. There are times I have missed a lot of calls. There is also times I have taken off work, such as today, to be here for the fundraiser. I've taken off work to attend training classes. So look at those days I've taken off personally to do, to train for the fire squad service or to be here for the department um that's the time taken off work, that's going to be money lost um to provide for my family and I. But yeah that has come into play a lot. Um and uh it's a, it can be a tricky thing to balance but you got to learn that the fire service here as a volunteer doesn't pay the bills at home so therefore, you got to work um and get your priorities straight. And I had to struggle with that at first but I grew up *Laughing* I figured out I had to work first and fire fight second.

SF- Have you ever left work to go to a job because it is too serious?

JR- Um have I ever left my career job to come to a fire? Not to run, not to run a fire here no. Um if it has, it has been when I was already getting off duty on the railroad and ah I was able to come respond. But I have never left work to run a fire call no. There are some jobs when you can. Um there's jobs where I think some of the town of Farmville employees can leave their town of Farmville job and go run a fire and come on back. Um there are jobs that you ca do that but I have not. Uh I'd like to *Laughing* but my job is thirty miles to the east so it kind of makes it hard.

MS- That's a little distance.

JR- Right! Exactly

SF- Have you ever considered becoming a career fire fighter?

JR- Absolutely. Yes I have. Um well twice I have applied to career fire departments. First time I was going through the career fire department was the same time I was going through my railroad career hire and even in the fire service paid departments, once you um, once they invite you to do the test and once you go for an interview, you still have to go through their rookie school and pass that and then you would get a job. There is probably an eight month period in between there, really not guaranteed a job. So while I was going through that hire process, I was also going through the railroad process. Um and I'm fifth generation railroad so I kind of knew I was pretty much going to be guaranteed a job with the railroad when I went for my interview. The two interviews were scheduled on the same day. I called the fire department and told them I had another job interview and um if that didn't work out I'd reapply and they said absolutely. So I went to the railroad and I've been working for the railroad for eleven years. Yeah so good question.

MS- Ok well thank you very much.

JR- Ok and thank you!