

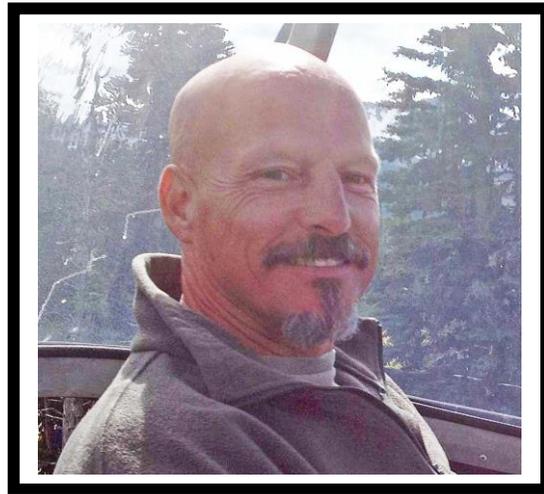
Transcript of Saint Paul Police Department Oral History Interview with

Sergeant

Joseph Michael Strong



1984



2012

Interviewed on

August 8, 2012

By Kate Cavett of Hand in Hand Productions

Hand in Hand's Office in Saint Paul, Minnesota

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2012

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All pictures are from the Saint Paul Police Department collections and the personal files of Joe Strong.

ORAL HISTORY

Oral History is the spoken word in print.

Oral histories are personal memories shared from the perspective of the narrator. By means of recorded interviews, oral history documents collect spoken memories and personal commentaries of historical significance. These interviews are transcribed verbatim and minimally edited for accessibility. Greatest appreciation is gained when one can listen to an oral history aloud.

Oral histories don't follow the standard language usage of the written word. Transcribed interviews are not edited to meet traditional writing standards, they are edited only for clarity and understanding. The hope of oral history is to capture the flavor of the narrator's speech and convey the narrator's feelings through the timbre and tempo of speech patterns.

An oral history is more than a family tree with names of ancestors and their birth and death dates. Oral history is recorded personal memory, and that is its value. What it offers complements other forms of historical text, and does not always require historical corroboration. Oral history recognizes that memories often become polished as they sift through time, taking on new meanings and potentially reshaping the events they relate.

Memories shared in oral histories create a picture of the narrator's life – the culture, food, eccentricities, opinions, thoughts, idiosyncrasies, joys, sorrows, passions - the rich substance that gives color and texture to this individual life.

Kate Cavett

Oral Historian HAND in HAND Productions
Saint Paul, Minnesota

Joseph Michael Strong was appointed police officer on January 30, 1984
Promoted to sergeant on April 21, 2001
and retired May 28, 2010.

He received letters of recognition:

July 1985, November 1990, December 1993, March 1994, October 1995,
October 1996. January 2000, August 2000,
and a Medal of Commendation, September 2008

KC: Kate Cavett

JS: Joseph Strong

JS: I'm Joe Strong.

KC: And when did you come on the Saint Paul Police Department?

JS: January of 1984.

KC: What was your exposure to police before you decided you wanted to come on Saint Paul's?

JS: I did four years of military Air Force under Security Police and with the Canine Unit there.

KC: As a child, did you have any interest in police or was it just in the military?

JS: No, as a child I knew I was going to be a police officer, probably by the age of six or seven.

KC: Why?

JS: Just from being around the local neighborhood and the local police officers there. You always admired them.

KC: Where did you grow up?

JS: It's the Merriam Park area, Midway area—Selby and Prior, Saint Paul

KC: So did you know some of the Saint Paul officers then?

JS: When I was a teenager, I knew Dude O'Brien,¹ who was eventually killed in a car accident, and his partner. We called him "Big Red" because he had red hair back then. He was Keith Mortenson.² I also knew one other officer fairly well, Bill Langevin³. He worked about ten years on the Police Department and then transferred over to the Fire Department. In May 2010, he was the jogger who witnessed Maplewood Officer Joe Bergeron murdered. He immediately went to him, grabbed the squad's radio handset, and called in "Officer down. Needs assistance." And he was able to provide a description of the suspects.

KC: So were you in the military in 1981 when Dude O'Brien was killed in a traffic accident?

JS: No, I went military from 1976 to '80, so in '81, I was working part time and going to college full time.

KC: So you knew this officer well. He's killed. Does that diminish your dreams at all?

JS: No, and you know, I didn't know him well. I worked at a local fast food restaurant where they came in, and you have small talk with them. And then just

¹ John J. "Dude" O'Brien was appointed patrolman October 26, 1971, and fatally injured when his patrol car was struck by a vehicle that had fled another patrol car April 16, 1981.

² Keith Mortenson was appointed patrolman January 23, 1971; promoted to sergeant February 1, 1984; and retired January 30, 1998.

³ William J. Langevin was appointed Patrolman on May 22, 1972, resigned to join the Saint Paul Fire Department July 20, 1976.

traveling throughout the neighborhood, whether I'm driving or whatever, you know, you seem them every now and then and you wave at them. So I didn't really have a personal relationship with them, just he was our neighborhood police officer—him and Keith—so I was able to see him quite often.

KC: And other stories I've heard about him is that he was very personable. He was a good guy?

JS: Both him and Keith very nice, very approachable, even back then—I was fifteen or fourteen—and still very approachable and would take the time out to talk to you.

KC: Was there any reaction as a teenager that he's killed? This happens in this profession?

JS: Not really. It really didn't sink in until I met his brother, Mike O'Brien,⁴ and at that time, he was running a pool hall on Marshall Avenue, again in my neighborhood. And even through Mike—he only did it for like a year—that was my association with Dude O'Brien and Mike O'Brien. And it really didn't kick in until I got out of the service and came back and started trying to apply in other jobs, and then knowing the full effects of that.

Once I got onto Saint Paul Police Department, seeing Dude's partner at the time—he got messed up pretty good, but stayed on with the Police Department—watching him to and from work and getting around, that all affected me then. But right when it happened to Dude, I don't know if I heard about it right away or found out later on, but it didn't change my way of thinking to be a police officer at all.

⁴ Michael J O'Brien was appointed police officer July 11, 1977; promoted to sergeant November 15, 1997; retired May 31, 2007.

KC: And teenagers are really good at, “Well, that doesn’t affect me” or “That wouldn’t apply to me.” That’s one of the gifts of being a teenager and being able to take those risks.

JS: It wouldn’t sway me one way or the other. What did sway a little bit—Keith was on the police basketball team, and I played basketball for Merriam Park Community Center, and we would set up games between police and us, kind of a promotion deal or a Community-Ed deal. I’m pretty sure Dude was on the team, too. I really can’t associate but, all of the sudden, now I’m playing against Keith and his team and Dude isn’t there. You kind of feel bad for everybody when you have what little relationship I had with them, and then he’s gone. You always have that in the back of your head.

KC: Where did you graduate from high school?

JS: Central High School.

KC: And then immediately went into the military?

JS: Yeah, within a year.

KC: What drew you into the military?

JS: It was probably military or living on bad times, so I just had to make a hard decision. Things just weren’t going right and you’re feeling sorry for yourself and it was time for a change. I knew if I had to be successful, I needed to get into the military, out of old neighborhood, learn new ways, learn how to do things on my own.

KC: As a kid, were you a good kid focused on “I want to be a police officer,” or were you a kid that maybe got into some trouble?

JS: Never got in trouble on paper, but yeah, we did our stuff in the neighborhood. Everybody knew that. I wasn't really focused on anything growing up. My main focus was sports, like every kid in the neighborhood, and never really did well in school. I wouldn't say I didn't like school, but it just didn't appeal to me. I didn't catch onto things right away and it took me a while to learn, but, after a while, you learn and graduate—I got my degree or certificate, so I know I did that—and it was just a choice I had to make.

KC: You just did one tour in the military and then you came home and went to college to get your law enforcement?

JS: Yep. I made my focus going to the military to have an edge up when I got out, get on the Saint Paul Police Department, and then the year I got out, 1980, is when they started doing the POST⁵ credits, and I didn't have any. To find this out—kind of shocking after you go to your first interview and they're looking for your POST certificate and I didn't know what that was, and all of the sudden I got to do two years of junior college, community college. I did that full time, worked part time, and just hunkered down. I knew what I wanted and the first job that was offered to me was Deputy Sherriff of Ramsey County—Charlie Zacharias⁶ gave me a job—and I spent the year-and-a-half there, POST certified and all that. Even in the interviews with them, I wasn't going to be staying there too long, and as soon as the next test at Saint Paul was offered, I took it, passed, and then got on.

⁵ The Minnesota legislature created the Minnesota Peace Officer Training Board (MPOTB) in 1967 to regulate the practice of law enforcement. In 1977, several legislative amendments were added to create Minnesota Board of Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST Board) and the first law enforcement occupational licensing system in the USA. This system established law enforcement licensing and training requirements and set standards for law enforcement agencies and officers. Minnesota officers are required to have a two year degree and 48 CEU—continuing education credits every three years.

⁶ Charles Zacharias, Ramsey County Sheriff, 1979-1993.

KC: I think back then, a Deputy Sherriff was only assigned to the jail?

JS: Yep, that's all it was.

KC: What was your academy like? Anything that stands out in your academy?

JS: I mean, it was stressful for sure, something I was never used to. Again, I'm getting back to schooling, so I really had to focus, and because I wanted the job really bad, I did focus. I don't think I was the brightest, I don't think I was the worst. You know, they break you down, so to speak, and teach you the military ways, which I already was accustomed to, and so with that, I fell right in place. Jeez, all my existing friends now are from my academy. I still have neighborhood friends, but my good friends are still out of this academy. So I met a lot of good people.

KC: Are you married when you're going through this?

JS: Yep. Yep.

KC: So you're married during the military, you come back.

JS: Yep. I had two kids: one while I was in the military and then one after.

KC: So the whole going to school is a challenge. It's difficult having to support a family and going to school?

JS: Yeah, it was a big challenge. Thank goodness for the G.I. bill or else I never would've been able to afford to. A good friend of mine, Terry Reidy, hired me at a grocery store in Minneapolis, so I worked part time there and could adjust my hours. He took good care of me, too.

KC: What about FTO? Anything that stands out for you in FTO [Field Training]?

JS: No, not really. I mean, Larry Johns⁷ was my initial FTO and he's now retired. Tom Bergren,⁸ he was a FTO of mine. FTO was just kind of quick for me, so much to learn and going through the manual.

KC: Initially, you're on Patrol like everybody else. How did you like that? You're finally doing what your dream was, is it what you expected?

JS: Oh ,yeah, a lot more. The freedom that you had was fun. Like I said, they give you a vehicle and a gun, and you go out and enforce laws. You're always trying to get the felony arrest of the day, and that was a big deal. And you always had to let them know you're going downtown with one felon or one burglary suspect or whatever, and that was your little high point for the day or the week, and then every time you meet your buddies, you're swapping stories and who you knew.

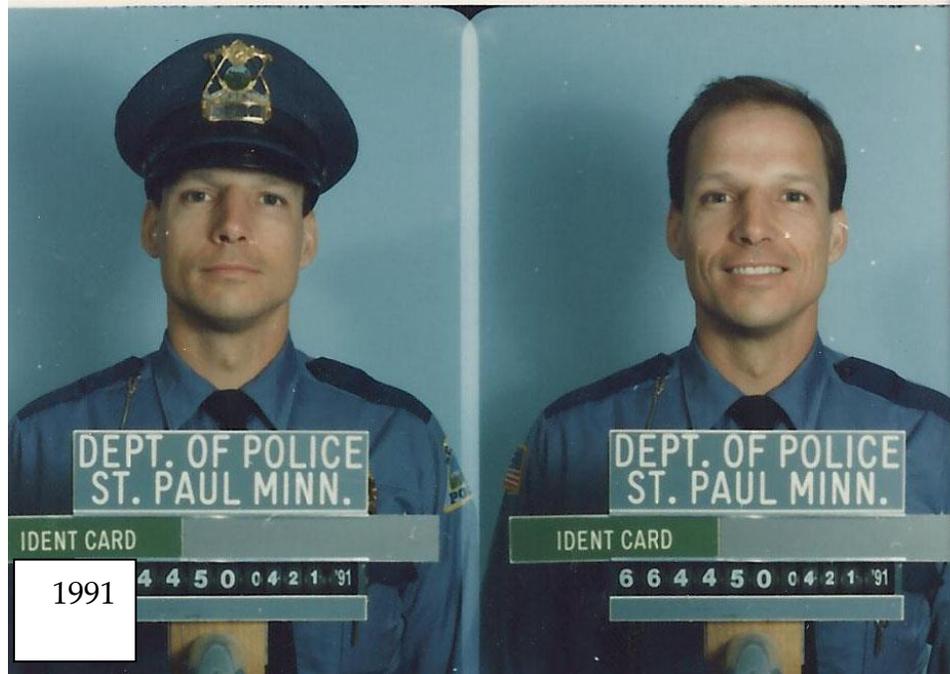
I worked East Side, so I didn't know anybody—I didn't know any of the bad guys. A couple of the guys that grew up on the East Side knew them all. They grew up with them, so they had a little edge on me. You know, just driving around, trying to do your thing, trying to get a stolen [car]—you know that rolling stolen [auto theft] was a big deal—and just trying to make a good arrest for the day was a big deal in the Police Department early on.

KC: I have the illusion that you were a “cowboy⁹”?

⁷ Lawrence Author Johns was appointed patrolman April 1, 1968; and retired October 29, 1999.

⁸ Thomas Lawrence Bergren was appointed police officer October 1, 1979; promoted to sergeant May 22, 1999; and retired March 23, 2012.

⁹ Cowboy—aggressive cop, looking for the hot call, wants to be the center of the action, adrenaline junkie.



JS: Yeah

KC: Who influenced you in those early years? Who brought out the cowboy in you? Who maybe taught you some other ways?

JS: The cowboy in me I think was just there—just a little high strung, Type A-Personality,¹⁰ a competitor. I'm sure there are a couple of guys I learned from. The couple of names you always heard were Joe Flaherty,¹¹ Pat Scott¹²—you always heard about them making arrests. Just right now, I can't think of anybody that influenced me on the East Side as far as patrol work.

KC: Any arrests that you particularly remember from those early years?

¹⁰ Type A Personality: impatient, competitive, driven, perfectionist, dependent on external rewards such as wealth, status, or power, likes the rush—compared to the more laid back Type B Personality.

¹¹ Joseph Brian Flaherty appointed patrolman November 1, 1980; promoted to sergeant May 14, 1996; and retired May 31, 2008.

¹² Patrick Donald Scott was appointed police officer February 23, 1980; and retired May 19, 2010.

JS: Nothing that stands out right now.

KC: You spent a lot of your twenty-six-year career in special units or investigations? At least when I look at the different assignments you've had.

JS: It may be split in half. But I consider Canine and then Eastern District—I didn't get into the special units until I was Traffic Unit for a really short time before I got in Narcotics. And then after that, it was all specialty units. The best time I ever had was on the Canine Unit.

KC: Tell me some stories about being on Canine. Who was your partner?

JS: Robey. When I first got introduced to him—I don't know if they were pimping me or whatever—but this dog was a real badass dog. What he was was just kennel aggressive, so every time you walked up to him when he was in a kennel, he'd bark at you, show his teeth. He'd charge the fence, but once you opened up the gate, then he was right by your side and you're petting him.

KC: What was his history?

JS: He was a family dog—a local family on the Lake Elmo—and he, when I talked to his owner, kind of had the run of the household. The owner was a little bit afraid of him, which showed, so every time he tried to tell Robey “No” or correct him or whatever, Robey would snarl at him. And he became scared, so he'd be running the house. He went after the mailman a couple times, and I think that's when they decided to give him to the Canine Unit. We had a program at that time where we'd get all of our dogs for free throughout the neighborhood, and we'd go out looking and searching or put out an advertisement saying, “Hey, we need dogs,” so this guy put him in. Robey is bigger than normal, he was probably ninety pounds.

The best training I ever had was in the Canine Unit and how you built a relationship with your dog and how you had to correct your dog and let him know who's number one, who's number two. Jim¹³ [Long] Longball was excellent at that. Dave Boll¹⁴ was really good at that. We just had very good trainers. They told me, "You're going to have to get on this dog every day. You're going to have to jerk him by the collar and let him know who's boss."

Every morning, we'd do our walks and, if a dog isn't paying attention when you make your turn, you got to jerk him. He said, "Anything that he does wrong, you got to get on him," because of his mentality at that time. After about two or three weeks, we're on our walk and I jerk, and Longball says, "You don't have to do that anymore. You and your dog are a one." We ended up just getting along so well. He was a family member. Old cliché, family member. He knew when he was working, and he knew when he was at home playing around.

KC: Did your kids like him?

JS: Kids loved him. Whenever he was free, anybody could pet him. We did plenty of demos at schools—kids wrapping their arms around his neck and pulling his tail or whatever—not one reaction out of him. But, put him in a squad car [and he was working]. He's a good dog, did really well for me.

KC: What were some of the situations the two of you got in?

JS: Well, it's always hunting burglars—tracking them and then finding them, either the apprehension or just finding them. We've done that numerous times. What I liked out of that is, after the police arrive on the scene of a burglary or they have a chase and they contain the person and set up perimeters and then they're

¹³ James Brooks Long was appointed patrolman January 23, 1971; and retired August 14, 1998.

¹⁴ David James Boll was appointed police officer October 1, 1979; and retired December 29, 2006.

calling you up to go for a search, that was glory for me. And what was even better was when you showed up and they'd look at you and go, "Boy, I'm glad you're here." That shows you're working, you've got a good dog, you've got a good reputation.

Apprehensions are nice, but when, all of the sudden, the search is going on too long and we got calls building up, so they [patrol officers] have to go back to do a routine patrol. Every canine has done this, you just go off for another fifteen minutes and end up finding the guy. You just believe in your dog and believe in yourself, and you're thinking if the guy's hunkered down somewhere and if he just stays still, he'll get away, but we make the extra effort to stay out there and grab him. That's happened two, three times with me. The other cops are amazed that you did that and, again, that's building up your reputation as a good worker and your dog has a great reputation. So anything like that. We did our normal tracks and burglaries, stolen vehicles—they flee from there. It was just a treat to do it. It was more of an honor to get out there, you and your dog, and having the other cops waiting for you and anticipating everything. And most of the time, we brought out guy out for them. We were a good team.

KC: How long were you in Canine?

JS: Five years.

KC: Were you in Canine in 1994?

JS: '94 to '99.

KC: Were you involved in the search after Ron Ryan¹⁵ was killed?

¹⁵ Ronald Michael Ryan, Jr. was appointed police officer January 23, 1993; fatally injured by gunfire while responding to a "slumper" call August 26, 1994.

JS: Oh, yeah. Actually that's a good story. It was my day off. I had my kids.

KC: And this was August 26?

JS: 26th, yeah. I heard it on the news, started making phone calls. And I had my kids, I think they were like ten or old enough to be alone, as far as I was concerned. You just grabbed your dog and your car and—I don't even know if I was in uniform—but belt on, like everybody else did. We were searching for him—the suspect. And this was probably three or four hours after Ron was killed. Tim Jones, Nipper,¹⁶ was already out there and he was ahead of us. We made a line of dogs and Longball [Jim Long] was out there, Dave Boll. It seems like everybody was out there. I was one of the couple that just had his dog at the ready. A couple of the guys just left their dogs either in the car or at home, and I brought mine. We're going through and then you hear the shots, and that's when Nip [Tim Jones] and Laser [Jones' canine] got shot. We were positioned up on a hill and the fishing shack was below us, and there was like two escape routes that he could possibly take, that we knew of. And I happened to be on the left side with my dog, and Longball is telling me, "Hey, this has got to be his area over here." Boy, they opened fire on this ice house after dragging Nipper's [Tim Jones] body back. I don't really know which two cops did, but they dragged him all the way up to the hill where we were. So they opened fire and then nothing, so then we ended up moving really slow because you had to—clearing that area. We were just clearing where the guy ran up another hill. We were just clearing that. I mean we were across the street, I think. That's when Pat Lyttle¹⁷ and

¹⁶ Timothy J. Jones was appointed police officer October 31, 1978; fatally injured by gunfire while searching for the suspect of Officer Ron Ryan's murder August 26, 1994.

¹⁷ Patrick Gerald Lyttle, police officer October 1, 1979; and retired July 9, 1999.

somebody else found him under some stuff and caught him there. My point about it being a good story is that—you know, my kids were watching the news and all they hear is, “Canine being shot,” and I didn’t have any communication with them.

KC: Is this before cell phones?

JS: Oh, yeah, and if there were, then they were that big [indicating with hands]. But I just thought, “Oh, boy, I wonder what they’re going through right now,” so I had to make sure I got a hold of them and everything was all right, and let my parents know, and whoever I knew, that it wasn’t all right, but it wasn’t me. I’m still here.

The call to duty on that was like nothing. Like I said, I had my kids for the weekend, and I thought I was only going to be gone for a couple of hours. And again, they were fine—we were just sitting around at home—but it ended up being a pretty long day. I don’t know whoever picked them up, but eventually somebody got them out of my house and got them back. But after thinking about everything, I’m going, “Oh, Jesus Christ. What the hell?” But it ended up working out for them.

KC: It sounds like, as has to happen often times, that cop trumped father on that day? Responsibilities as an officer had to trump responsibilities as a father?

JS: Yeah, on that day it had to. It was a deal where you made a phone call, and it’s like calling everybody in, so you go. I think that was my first and probably only time I got called in. Yeah, it trumped it. Like I said, I thought this was going to be a couple hours, go back and hang out with your kids, but it wasn’t.

KC: You’re in the Canine Unit, you lost one of your own. What’s it like when you’re out there in the field that another officer, second Saint Paul officer, has been

killed? Obviously you knew Nipper [Tim Jones] fairly well if you were in the same unit.

JS: Certainly a lot of emotion. Originally, I thought it was Jim Long that got shot and killed, and then I didn't know it was Nipper [Tim Jones] until well after probably an hour later. I got a hold of Frank Verdeja,¹⁸ who's in the Canine Unit—very good friend of mine to this day—and told him, I said, "I think Longball got shot and killed." And Longball was an idol there. He was an icon in the Canine Unit. He was number one guy, very knowledgeable in everything and trained numerous dogs and got trained by Gene¹⁹ and Tom Burke.²⁰ He got trained by them guys who were icons in their day, too. So when initially I thought it was Longball and I told Frank, we were all upset, a lot of emotion, and then Frank had to come back to me and say, "No, it was Nipper."



Officer Tim Jones

Nipper was—Tim Jones was Tim Jones. There was nobody else like him. He said what he said and would stick by it, right or wrong, harsh or soft. That's who he was and he didn't change for anybody, which is why everybody loved him.

¹⁸ Frank Steven Verdeja was appointed police officer July 11, 1977; and retired February 27, 2009.

¹⁹ Eugene Michael Burke was appointed police officer September 18, 1975; promoted to sergeant May 22, 1994; Lieutenant December 4, 1994; title changed to commander January 1, 2000; and retired June 29, 2002.

²⁰ Thomas Michael Burke was appointed patrolman March 2, 1965; promoted to sergeant February 17, 1973; and retired August 6, 1993.

He didn't back down. If he said something offensive, it was, "Well, that's what I meant. I'm not going to sugar it." But he did it to everybody equally, which is why he was, again, a good guy. In this time and era, you won't have a Tim Jones anymore. It just won't happen anymore. But in that part, he was respected by a lot of people—always a hard worker, always giving his best and extra. I mean, you couldn't ask for a better guy to have around.

Don Pazdermik ²¹was our lieutenant at the time, and, after we were done searching and clearing and it's after dinner and everybody met at the kennel, we went into prayer. Don Pazdermik—I think he might've thought about going into priesthood or something, but anyhow, went into prayer and everybody knelt down and we cried and said our prayer, and then we had to go our own way.



Ron Ryan Jr

Then the funerals follow. I mean, it was just a bad week.

When Ron Ryan got shot—we'd already scheduled a fishing trip, him and I. We were going to ride up together and meet ten other guys. So, you know, I interacted with both of them. It wasn't very good.

KC: What's it like standing in formation for a friend, someone in the [police] family?

JS: Well the only reason you're there is because there's a death, so standing in formation

²¹ Donald Edward Pazdermik was appointed patrolman March 23, 1970; promoted to sergeant November 20, 1976; lieutenant July 5, 1989; and retired December 31, 1998.

is not good, to me. Standing by Ron Senior²²—you're always there for support and Roxy [Jones—Tim's wife]—I mean that's a different thing. But when you're standing in formation because you're taking an officer to be buried, that's not a good thing, to me. I don't want to be there.

KC: Do you cry? Do tears come up? Do you just get into a state of military state, "This what I have to do?"

JS: No, cried. Been a crier all my life. So yeah, we did, at the funeral, at the shootings, at the kennel, even a couple weeks later when you're talking with other people, whether you're having a beer or whatever. Yeah, it comes out, it has to come out.

KC: It's the only way you're going to be healthy.

JS: Well, it's what it is for me. It's better now, obviously, but at the time, because this never happened in Saint Paul, ever, [two officers killed the same day], it was an eye opener for a lot of things. You just can't assume anymore and you can't be complacent. It was a big eye-opener as far as safety for the police department.

KC: And it had been since Dude O'Brien. We hadn't lost anyone since O'Brien [in 1981], so it had been a long time.

JS: Yeah, then you lose two in a day.

KC: The city was in shock.

JS: That's what I mean. We're not small town-ish, but compared to other towns, yes we are and, "Never going to happen here," and it did.

²² Ronald Michael Ryan, Sr. was appointed patrolman June 26, 1968; promoted to sergeant May 8, 1972; lieutenant March 30, 1990; title change to commander January 1, 2000; and retired April 29, 2005. Ramsey County Sheriff June 1, 2005 – October 11, 2008 in positions of lieutenant, special projects and commander.

The following year was a pretty unique training session for us. I think they switched up their search tactics and actually had patrol get involved in it. I wasn't in training, but all I know is we were better prepared for searching, and for six months, it was probably a little uneasy at any traffic stop or anybody walking up to you as you're writing a report, or whatever you're doing in your car, doesn't matter what time it is. So it might've been a little uneasy for a citizen to come up and then you're anticipating whatever, so you might offend somebody. You have a tendency to offend people more, because you're going to be more stoic and more aware, and a lot of people are coming up to be friendly and you're not thinking friendly. You can't think friendly, you've got to think worse case and then develop friendship.

KC: What was it like for your kids?
Because there had to have been those moments when Dad, or somebody just like Dad, we know that he's been killed. Did they have any recovery time? Did they hang on Dad anymore?

JS: Nope. I mean, my daughter, maybe. She must've met Tim a couple times just being around Canine, but she was a little bit younger then, I don't know if she really grasped what was going on. I didn't get to see them that

Officer Ronald Ryan was shot and killed at 0700 hours after approaching a car with a man sleeping in it. As Officer Ryan was returning to his patrol car to check the suspect's identification, he was shot from behind. The suspect then took Officer Ryan's gun and shot him several more times. He succumbed to his wounds in surgery later that day. The suspect later ambushed and killed Officer Tim Jones and his canine, Laser. The suspect pled guilty to murdering both Officer Ryan and Officer Jones and was sentenced to life without parole.

much—every other weekend and a day—so I don't know if I brought it up or if I brought something up, but I don't think they were traumatized by it. I think they remember it. I had them around a lot of police officers when I would go out with them, but I don't remember that they really mentioned it to me.

KC: You're divorced. Did being a police officer contribute to challenges in a marriage?

JS: Well, let's just say it brought me into different avenues where it was a challenge to be married. You know, your uniform and meeting different people, and all the sudden you're having a little bit more fun, and you wish you could do this more or do that more, but—different dreams for me compared to my wife at that time. That's when my dreams were completely different than hers, and my expectations. Like I said, you got a lot of freedom, and you meet a lot of people, and people look up to you and admire you. With my mind at the time, you're soaking this all up and you want to go out and, "Who are you?" "Well, I'm a Saint Paul cop and blah, blah, blah," and Mr. Whatever I Was, or probably wasn't at the time. So, the uniform itself. I'm not saying the Saint Paul Police Department, but the police in general in itself did, and then it was my mind that took over that.

KC: You describe it well and I respect your honesty in seeing how that affected you. Not everybody is willing to look at that.

JS: It was a long time ago now.

KC: Was that a phase that you moved in and then out of—having those freedoms, appreciating the acknowledgement of who you were as a cop, having the power as a cop?

JS: I always knew what I was as a cop. Every time you go to work, you're different than you are without it. I didn't go around bragging off duty, wherever I went, but, when you get that uniform on, like anybody—I mean even a mailman—you get a uniform on and that's an authoritative figure, a government figure. So that's what I was. I don't know if I went into phases with that. I always knew who I was when I was on the job. Off the job maybe I didn't know who I was most of the time.

KC: Was there a point that you went off the job, you were in touch with Joe Strong, you were in touch with your soul?

JS: Always in touch with my soul, always was. I know every right and wrong I ever did. It's in touch with my brain that I couldn't help. [chuckles] Sometimes my brain didn't guide me in the right direction. My brain overrode my soul a lot of times, and it took a while to figure that one out.

KC: That's the human adventure!

JS: Yep, that's exactly what it was!

KC: How come you left Canine? You were having a great time.

JS: Great time! I was at the peak of my Canine career. My dog was seven, we were the number two team in the nation the year before. Sergeant at the time, Paul Rhodes,²³ and I didn't get along too well. He didn't like my style of working, I didn't like his style of working—big clash. I didn't back down. I bucked the

²³ Paul Douglas Rhodes appointed police officer November 1, 1980; promoted to sergeant May 31, 1997.

system a little bit, and it was an agreement between Rhodes, [Tim] Leslie²⁴—who was our lieutenant at the time—and [Chief] Finney²⁵ to transfer me.

The first two or three years, I was pretty aggressive with the dog, pretty aggressive. That's cowboy stuff again, you want to make the arrest. Sometimes the cowboy stuff worked for me. Like an hour later, after everybody is gone, and now you find the guy—works for me. Well, sometimes it didn't work—a little too quick to let go. Probably not using my brain. You know, when my soul was wrong, my brain took over, but you still needed to get [a certain number of] apprehensions in a week. You wanted to get this down.

The main reason was that I had more dog bites per person, per caller, per event, than anybody else. Apparently, I wasn't documenting finding a wallet on a search, or finding a gun, or finding a person with no bite. There's supposed to be this documentation. I don't know if it was made clear or not—not making excuses—but they got my *bite ratio* to *find ratio*. Bites were a lot higher, finds were down there. I was documenting things that I thought were important, apprehensions. Finds at that point didn't get documented. Again, the label came out that I was *quicker* with the dog than other people, which I still say is wrong, it's not right. And I would've gladly gone through all my notes and whatever I

²⁴ Timothy John Leslie appointed police officer November 1, 1980; promoted to sergeant December 3, 1986; lieutenant July 14, 1995; title changed to commander January 1, 2000; and retired July 11, 2008.

²⁵ William "Corky" Kelso Finney appointed January 4, 1971; promoted to sergeant April 1 1978; the first Black male promoted to lieutenant March 8, 1982; captain February 23, 1987; and Saint Paul's first Black chief July 17, 1992; and retired June 30, 2004.

had and all my finds to change that, but they elected to get rid of me and Cathy Jansen²⁶—at the time, Pavlack now—after five years.

KC: That had to have been hard?

JS: It was devastating. I still say it's personality. That's my opinion. I'm sure everybody else has theirs. I just found out who a couple people were, and careful who you're calling a friend, because they're really not a friend. I thought I could have an opinion in a small group and you can't. It was still run by rough and tough, tumble old guys that knew more than everybody else, and you couldn't add any new information, because they already knew it and whatever you said isn't going to work.

KC: It's an interesting culture.

JS: And you know what? I got to keep my dog. So I accepted it. I didn't like it. Didn't scratch or scream or kick or cry. They said that was IT so, all right, that's it. And that's when I went to East team.

KC: So you're a street boss?

JS: Nope, Patrol on East afternoons. I'm not a sergeant, yet.

East Afternoons—it was good. I started on East Afternoons and I was very comfortable there. I felt pretty bad for the first month or so when I'm putting my uniform on and the dog thinks he's coming with me and he's not, especially because, as I said, he's at his prime, but I got along. I think I just rode solo, and I still liked going out and catching bad guys. Who didn't?

²⁶ Catherine "Cathy" Clare Jenson Pavlak was appointed police officer January 30, 1984; acting sergeant November 14, 1993; return police officer March 6, 1994; out of title sergeant June 14, 2008; return police officer October 11, 2008; out of title sergeant October 25, 2008; return police officer August 29, 2009; out of title sergeant March 20, 2010; promoted sergeant June 5, 2011.

KC: A lot of those on the East Side?

JS: Yeah, when I wasn't distracted by that. A lot of people could've said, "Screw it. I'm just going to collect my check," and I never said that. I always did something.

KC: How long were you assigned to the East Side then?

JS: For about a year, and then I was put in for a Traffic Unit—originally, I was going to go into motors [Motorcycle Unit]—and it was winter time, so you just rode in

the traffic car until summer. And then that's when SIU [Special Investigative Unit] was offered, the Street Asian Gang Unit was offered, so I took that. Me and Mark Reding²⁷ worked there. I worked for Brock Ness.²⁸

KC: What year was this?

JS: 2000.

KC: So just before you became a sergeant?

JS: Yep. I probably got maybe eight months.



2000

²⁷ Mark Thomas Reding was appointed police officer September 8, 1998; promoted to sergeant November 10, 2007.

²⁸ Vern Brock Ness was appointed police officer May 22, 1972; promoted to sergeant April 1, 1978; and retired May 30, 2003.

KC: I was doing a gang research project at the time with Sergeant Harrington.²⁹
Asian gangs were a big deal around here then.

JS: They were peaking around that time. I actually had fun there and that was a little bit different, getting to know mostly Asian kids. Bangers [gang bangers] are bangers. We went down a little bit with the age group and tried to work with them. Boy, if a certain crime happened in a certain area, you knew who did it. At the time, Mark knew who did it, because he got know all the bangers more. I was still getting into it. We did pretty good there, we had fun. Brock was one of the better bosses I've ever had, and he kind of let us work a case and bring it to him, and he'd sign off on it. We put a couple people in jail and worked some gang rapes. We covered a lot of guns. The Asian New Year—that was always—and the soccer tournament—

KC: Asian New Year—weekend after thanksgiving. Soccer—Fourth of July weekend?

JS: Yep. That was always a big deal and a lot of good contacts there. I enjoyed myself there. It was different.

KC: And there's usually, I think, a lot of freedom, because you have to be responsive to what's going on with the gang. So no tight schedules—

JS: No, not at all. We'd get in and had to go through all the reports—anything that's Asian—and figure out who's doing what, bring it back to Brock, and fill out an intel package [intelligence report], and let the Patrols know where everything is at—trying to make contacts, trying to make some information contacts, and

²⁹ John Mark Harrington was appointed police officer July 11, 1977; promoted to sergeant September 7, 1983; acting lieutenant January 4, 1997; lieutenant November 1, 1997; title changed to commander January 1, 2000; senior commander July 1, 2000 ; assistant chief May 8, 2004; chief July 1, 2004; and retired June 14, 2010. Elected to the Minnesota State Senate from Saint Paul 2010-2012. Appointed Chief of the Metro Transit Commission September 4, 2012.

trying to stay on top of it. We had one or two, I don't know if they're snitches, but people that knew a lot of information that we referred to a lot.

KC: I know the model that Sergeant Bill Snyder³⁰ developed was very much about communication and community, and spending a lot of time just getting to know the kids.

JS: Yep. Bill did a really good job, especially when he went to the Sherriff's Department. He kind of fine-tuned everything. Brock made so many good contacts and he was just kind of a no-nonsense guy — tells it like it is — but somehow the parents of everybody would look at him, and they would be more than happy to assist him in any way they could. Brock just had a good understanding with the Asian community, too. And Mark had a really good understanding with younger kids. He's a football coach, he's got that mentality. And I've got to be ten, fifteen, I don't know how many years older than him, so I wasn't as good.

KC: And if you're only there eight months, that's barely enough time to really get settled into the culture.

JS: Yep, and between Rick Straka³¹ and Mark Reding — I mean, them guys were on top of their game all the time, so most of the time I was just kind of a follower and a helper, which I was fine with.

³⁰ William Arthur Snyder was appointed police officer September 8, 1975; promoted to sergeant April 8, 1988; resigned January 8, 1999. Appointed Ramsey County deputy sheriff January 11, 1999; deputy sergeant July 2002; and retired January 1, 2010.

³¹ Richard William Straka was appointed police officer February 16, 1993; promoted sergeant March 17, 2001.

KC: From that eight months and that experience, which is a different type of policing, what skills did you take out of that that you would use the rest of your years? Or philosophy changes in how you police?

JS: Well, what you should know is that when you're out of uniform, people are a little bit more on your level when you're talking to them. When you're in uniform, they don't—so in that respect, you've got to—they're a little bit more relaxed around you. They know you're an Asian Gang Investigator, and that doesn't intimidate them at all. You were there because you could sit down and talk with them.

A lot of times, you were helping them out because, if sister, brother, mother, or father got shot, you're in charge of following up, getting information and helping them out. You help them out today, but you're arresting them the next day when they retaliate, so it's a big game that we play. And we kind of let them know, "Hey, you're a Crip³² and Bloods³³ did this to you. We're going to help you out in solving whoever shot your whoever, but then in two days we're going to be chasing you." We let them know that. They wouldn't say yay or nay but we just let them know where they were. I think being more honest with them in the investigation, because you had more time to sit down one-on-one with them when you're not reading the rights, you end up with, not a friendship, but certainly when you went up on a call and there's a bunch of uniforms, they'd

³² The **Crips** are gang founded in Los Angeles, California, in 1969 as a Black-American Gang. After the Vietnam War, when Asians immigrated to California, they took on the characteristics and name of this gang, forming their own sets/sub-groups, and not affiliating with the Black sets. Crips are publicly known to have an intense and bitter rivalry with the Blood Gang.

³³ The **Bloods** Gang were formed as a Black-American street gang in Los Angeles, California. After the Vietnam War, when Asians immigrated to California, they took on the characteristics and name of this gang, forming their own sets/subgroups, and not affiliating with the Black sets. The gang is widely known for its intense rivalry with the Crips Gang.

come up and go, “There’s Reding. I’m going to talk to Reding.” And then we’re able to get information related to the uniforms who are coming on a scene a little tight, they are the first to arrive. It’s funny how they won’t even talk to them, but all the sudden we show up, and then they would, just because of that week prior conversation—or a month, whatever it was—when we helped out in something. So we were doing more help than we were putting guys in jail. We were helping families cope and talking about Crips, Bloods, whatever they were at the time.

That’s a little different aspect as far as gaining information or having someone be more comfortable around you. In uniform, it’s just the facts—“Step back, give me the facts,” — and here it’s a broad range, when you’re in there.

KC: Having worked with Bill Snyder for about a year, when he was with the Sherriff’s Department he was working runaways—gang runaway kids, and I had a house doing an afterschool program for Hmong girl gang members. The kids did trust the officers assigned to the Asian Gang Unit and did see these officers as their friend, but they knew that if they stepped over the line, the officer wasn’t going to give them a break.

JS: First and foremost, that’s what we told them. We’d tell them straight up, “I know you’re a victim today, but you’re going to be a shooter tomorrow.”

“Oh, no, I won’t.”

“Well, we’re not going to argue that, but yes, you are. You’re going to know something of what happened in two days, so you’re going to be a suspect then.”

So they knew that. Everybody we talked to knew that.

KC: More clarity sometimes than other relationships I think police have?

JS: Well, again, I think we’re more sympathetic to them one day, because they are victims, but then we’re going to say, “Now, you’ve got to come down because

somebody saw you running through the yard, and we know it was you that fired shots. Let's go." So I think they see both and, as long as we're fair about it with each gang—we didn't care who. I mean the Purple Brothers' Gang, whoever they were. I mean the Purple Brothers, at the time, were probably the worst gang out there, but if they got shot, we're like, "Hey, you know you're in the wrong business," and they're like, "Yeah, yeah." We'd still take care of them and we'd still investigate, but we'd always tell them that "We know that you guys are going to be doing retaliation. We'll see in about a week." So they weren't bullshitting us and we weren't bullshitting them is what it came down to. And I think that's when you get a little bit of respect, if any, out of them.

KC: Where'd you go after the gang unit?

JS: I got promoted, went to the ACOP [A Community Outreach Program] office. We were stationed out of McDonough [Housing Project].³⁴ ACOP was real interesting. I originally went in there to run it and then something happened where they didn't want me to run it and they put in Loretz,³⁵ so Jon Loretz was the unit commander and I was the afternoon boss. I'm kind of miffed by that. I don't know what happened. It was up to Chief Finney whether I could handle it or not. I thought I was doing a good job and then you get bumped, and then I ended up running it again. When I was running it again, strictly as an administrator, I had a good bunch of guys working for me. You could trust them. You'd give them assignments and they'd go out and get it done. Then you'd have to work with the housing people, and their views and my views are

³⁴ McDonough Housing Project was built in 1950 – 1952 between Wheelock Parkway, Arlington Avenue, Jackson Street and L'Orient Street. This public low-income family housing project is run by the Public Housing Agency of the City of Saint Paul.

³⁵ Jon Joseph Loretz was appointed police officer November 13, 1995; promoted to sergeant July 3, 1999.

completely different. I'm probably a moderate conservative and I don't necessarily agree with a lot of programs, but I understood what they believed in and was able to adapt.

KC: If we were to label, they were more "social work, liberal" types?

JS: Yes. I understood their job and what they had to do, and I laid my personal opinions away, because I knew I was running ACOP and I knew that's how ACOP runs. So I got to meet a lot of good people, just not necessarily agreed with their views. I learned a lot, because I worked with so many different people and helped out in their programs, even though I'm not a big believer in them. Coaching and athletics, I think that builds up rapport, and so I kind of got into that.

There is National Night Out in early August. They didn't have a National Night Out, and I'm like, "Oh, this is perfect, I'll get kudos here," so I started a National Night Out. It started off with the first year, I don't think we got fifty people there, but second and third year I'm having everybody stopping by: the mayor, the chief, the horse [mounted patrol], the motorcycles. I'm in heaven here, because the people from Housing think I'm a slice of bread with a piece of cheese on it. I knew that's their thing, to get people together. And I'm all for Night Out and I was surprised that nobody else did it at ACOP, because that's what ACOP's focus is. You've got to get the Community Outreach Program. I mean, that's what it is. So I go in there—it's not the best job in the world, it was the first choice I wanted. I adapted to it, I understood the concept, I applied it, and I think I did a very good job. I think I was on double secret probation for half of my career there.

[Senior Commander] Harrington was my boss at the time and he didn't believe in me, Chief Finney didn't believe in me, because I didn't get along with

Jon Loretz when he showed up. He showed up pretty much being a general and I was a private. We had our differences, trust me, and I had to go up to the office a couple of times, because him and I disagreed. I don't know why that brought us up to the office, but we disagreed. And then, back when Finney was there, if Finney said something's wrong, it's wrong. So my commander—I forget who it was—had to write up some program for me that I had to adapt, which I did. I played their game. I didn't think it was right, but I knew the game. I was on probation. I played the game, made everybody happy by fooling them, which really just boggled my mind. I fooled everybody. They thought they were guiding me.

KC: They were going to change you?

JS: They were going to change me to be a better sergeant. I'm thinking, "No, I'm already a good sergeant. I know what I'm doing," but I had to follow their rules so I did. And I got off double secret probation. Harrington started liking me a little bit, and then that's when they gave me all of ACOP. Somebody went on a limb and it probably was Dennis Jensen³⁶—at the time he was assistant chief, and him and I were old partners from the East Side. I'm sure he stuck up for me numerous times.

KC: Is this under [Chief] Harrington or under [Chief] Finney?

JS: Harrington was the senior commander out Western District, and West oversaw ACOP. Finney was chief.

³⁶ Dennis Lynn Jensen was appointed police officer April 3, 1983; promoted to sergeant March 30, 1990; lieutenant January 18, 1997; commander June 26, 1999; assistant chief June 12, 2004; and retired September 29, 2006.

After all this other smoke got done and—I didn't have to prove anything to anybody, but I did my job out there. Like I said, that National Night Out, boy, I got two or three other programs going on in there. I made sure anytime a manager had a problem, I took care of it immediately, got somebody in there, just what he wanted. John Harrington did not get a phone call from anybody for a year, because they were happy. So then I could tell he was more relaxed with me and I could be more relaxed with him. I learned a lot from ACOP just by being exposed to the social worker, a little more democratic way of thinking.

KC: How would you verbalize what you learned from being there?

JS: Well, I educated myself. Here's my job: I'm an ACOP sergeant, a unit commander. I have to appease public housing personnel. Their problems are my problems, they're not John Harrington's problems, they're my problems. I'm running the show. So I learned how to run the show. And, again, once all the smoke was blown over, whoever had any issues with me at all, I went right over their heads and took care of it. I felt good about it, because I overcame adversity, and I thought there was a lot there. My guys liked working with me and I liked working with my guys, and anytime there was an ACOP issue, the managers and even the director of Public Housing—I forget his name. I mean we were on first name basis and he's probably second or third highest level in the city. He liked what I was doing. Everybody liked what I was doing. I knew we had issues in Housing, so I educated myself.

KC: And you felt that you made some strides in helping to resolve them?

JS: Absolutely. I actually cared when I was there about what went on in Public Housing. I didn't just sit around and do admin stuff or pretend I was somebody I wasn't. Again, I was just being myself, and I grew up a little bit here, being a sergeant. I ended up doing a good job. I was there for four years—and then when

you're out of there, you get to pick where you want to go, and, when you're able to do that, that's when you know you did a good job. And that's what's true with Harrington.

KC: So then, from there, is it Narcotics that you went to?

JS: I went to Vice. That's when I wanted to work with Jerry [Vick³⁷]. I wanted to do something again getting back to the SIU, Special Investigative Unit Asian gang, so I thought Vice would be—what is it? Not a fear, but uncomfortable with the role of the Vice officer. It's not natural for me to pretend and act and all that. So it was a hurdle I wanted to get over.

KC: So you knew you had some real barriers, and you opted to go there and address them?

JS: Yeah. I mean there's nothing fun about driving up on a street corner and having a girl come in there and having a conversation with her, and then going through a certain series of sentences to make sure you're doing the right thing. And then trying to act and have the girl say the right thing, so you can arrest them. Plus, you've got "nasty" all over you. It's just not a good thing. So that was a barrier for me. I knew I could do it, and with Jerry Vick teaching, it was pretty simple.

KC: One of your first times out, what was it like? How did you stumble through playacting this?

JS: Oh, man, I don't even know the first time out. Now we're in old headquarters, Todd Axtel³⁸ is our commander. I also oversee the liquor enforcement. So I had to

³⁷ Gerald Dennis Vick appointed police officer September 18, 1989, promoted to sergeant July 31, 1999; fatally injured by gunfire May 6, 2005. Receive the Medal of Valor 1991, 1997, and 2005.

³⁸ Todd Douglas Axtell police officer September 18, 1989; promoted sergeant March 14, 1998; commander January 24, 2003; senior commander July 24, 2010.

get a younger gal to try buy booze from a liquor store. I had to do that twice a year and that was a complete mess. Them poor guys [in the liquor stores], you send in a girl that looks probably twenty-five and they don't ask for ID, and then you're charging them with a gross misdemeanor and they've got to go to court. Not a very good job.

KC: Very different philosophy than the Asian gangs?

JS: Yeah, yeah, because you're hitting good people, good storeowners. They make one mistake, and it was a misdemeanor or something, but when you show up—it's more trickery than anything. We had our problem liquor stores and I didn't mind going after them—the habitual guys that would never check and you'd have moms and dads calling you up saying, "Hey, they served my fifteen year old" or "They were able to buy there." Then following up on that is not an issue, but you've got to hit every liquor store in the city, twice a year.

KC: Oh, wow!

JS: Needless to say, we wrote a lot of tags, and it's not a good thing.

When we were first out, most of the time we met somewhere where they were going to do a sting. You've got to get all your uniforms ready, you've got to get all the guys from each team area you're working at, so it was kind of a more controlled ordeal with that first part. A lot of times we would send out a female police officer and then that was a little bit easier, because she had squad cars converging, getting a John. Then you just take him off to the side, write him his ticket, and then be gone and then do it again. So that was all radio hook-up, kind of slow work.

It was when we got in the call girls,³⁹ and then Jerry was also getting into trafficking,⁴⁰ that's when I think he really figured out something ain't right here with the age of the girls. So they'd set up an apartment, have it wired, start calling these girls and checking out who they were and—our main focus was to get under-eighteen girls—and then getting them into that program on University.

KC: Breaking Free?

JS: Breaking Free.⁴¹ Okay. That was his main focus and that sounded good to me. The other ones were just illegally using papers and what-not, selling their services—issue a citation, “You can go,” after we figure out who they really are and if anybody actually showed up with them. We got a lot of information, a lot of good names. I think we might've got one or two that were what we were looking for and that was the under eighteen. “How'd you get involved?” And then it just ended up skyrocketing from there, the trafficking part.

KC: So realizing how much trafficking was really going on in the city?

JS: Yeah—ten, twenty times more that what we were even aware of at the time. That's where Jerry's focus changed. That was his baby. He worked on all of that and then I had my other areas, but whenever we were focused on working, that's

³⁹ A **call girl** or female escort is a sex worker who (unlike a street walker) is not visible to the general public; nor does she usually work in an institution like a brothel, although she may be employed by an escort agency.¹ The client must make an appointment, usually by calling a telephone number.

⁴⁰ Human **trafficking** is the illegal trade of human beings for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation or forced labor.

⁴¹ Breaking Free is a program to educate and provide services to women and girls who have been victims of abuse and commercial sexual exploitation (prostitution/sex trafficking) and need assistance escaping the violence in their lives.

what we would do. We would use this apartment and fake IDs and just try to get a lot of information. We didn't care about the gal that showed up. We'd always make sure that the guy drove them there and we would get his information.

Then that normally led to an arrest right there, because there's always something illegal in the car, or he had a warrant—a lot of good information and then Jerry would follow up on all that.

KC: So you were arresting the people, but you were really looking for who were behind these people?

JS: Absolutely. We made it very clear. We were issuing citations to the gals, and if they didn't want to say anything, that's fine. We understand. But anytime they were with somebody, we'd definitely go in there. We were looking for the main guy, always trying to get bigger names. And a lot of times, Jerry did. He had a really good style in talking to these gals. Again, "We don't feel sorry for you," but you need to have a way of saying, "You're in the wrong field here. We want to know who got you here, and how old were you when you got in here?" How did this develop? How did that develop? Just getting information, more information, on how everything panned out for this one girl. We'd sit and he'd probably talk to her for thirty, forty minutes if she was solo and, if not, we'd make sure that we got the guy outside where we wanted him. He'd just soak this all up and every gal, unless it was attitude right away, then you kind of know well, "We can't help you." But some of the girls that'd come in, Jerry would talk to them, and all the sudden, they'd be crying and telling stuff, and then he'd follow up on it. And that's how we got a lot of good arrests out of that. He showed compassion, caring, and—

KC: And good arrests with the pimps?

JS: Yeah, even though the obvious goal was the trafficking part. He knew exactly where he was going, and that's what they're working on now when they broke up that Chicago ring. I don't know for a fact, but I'm almost sure that Chicago ring started with Jerry and one of the gals that he interviewed. He got that going. One of the connects here.

KC: Now, you were with Jerry on May 6, 2005?

JS: Yeah, we had heard word that—the bar changed over now, I forget the name of it, on Rice Street—the pull tab person, guy or gal—don't even know yet—was selling drugs out of the pull tabs. And because it was pull tabs, Dave Sohm⁴² was the investigator, because he worked for licensing—he was our liaison officer there. From there, Jerry and I were going to go try to pick up some hooks—hookers at bars, so we went to this place, and all three of us tried to go up there. We got pull tabs and, “Hey, blah blah blah.” No hits. We were probably there for an hour, hung out, Dave went home.

Then Jerry and I just started hitting the regular bars out there to see if any women, or eye contact—that's what it was normally. Boy, we worked hard! We thought we had two set up and it ended up—we were at Eric's Bar at East Seventh and Forest. They were going to meet us there, and we thought, for sure, it was going to be a transaction taking place, and it ended up being this one girl who just happened to be dumped by her boyfriend. We're sitting there playing pool and she's telling us her life story, and we're like, “Oh, my God.” We'd put like five hours of work into this deal, and we said, “Well, we've got to go.”

And that's when we were leaving the bar—it was just right around closing or before closing—and we're going out and Evans and the other guy were being

⁴² David Atlee Sohm was appointed police officer April 2, 1990; and retired April 19, 2011.

loud. They're drunk, obvious drunk—swaying back and forth—got into it with some people, we're telling them to be quiet, confrontation at the car. We said, "Get out of here before you go to jail," so, right away, they know.

KC: They know you're cops?

JS: Yeah, right away.

KC: Do you show badges or is it just that they're criminals, they know?

JS: I think so. Maybe Jerry flashed a badge—we probably had them tucked inside our belt—but it was made quite clear that they'd go to jail if they continued. And it was, "F— you," and "Okay, f— you back," and even the girls were there. We had people all around. So all right, it's one o'clock or whatever and we're done. Kind of dejected a little bit. Jerry gets in his car, I get in my car. I have to go back down Seventh, he's going to go over to Woodbury.

Then, sure enough, the two guys are in front of my car, slamming on it. "Jerry, they're in front of the car. They're slamming." "All right, be right there." Jerry's probably down three, four blocks. He gets up real quick. He ends up pulling up on the sidewalk, and then I come over, and again, "Get the fuck out of here." "Fuck you." We said, "We're going to call a squad." And then, again, these guys are walking away, "F you" this and that. Turning, staring at us. So Jerry makes a move at them. You know, running. [using hands to make a running sound] And Jerry's probably forty feet in front of me, and he's just trying to shag these guys—you know, you chase after them and you just want to scare them and go.

And that's when Evans pulls out a gun and starts shooting. A lot of shots going. And then Jerry went down. And then the guys ran. And then I shot at them. I could tell Jerry was hurt. He said, "Yeah, they got me good." I could tell.

So I think I have to dial my phone 911, and I say over the phone to get them there.

Amanda Heu⁴³ was the first one to show up, poor girl. So we're working on Jerry. She ended up getting the mouth end and I'm pumping. And she comes up and I can see her taking a breath, she had blood on her, and I'm like, "Oh, boy." Just working, working, working, and then you get everybody — a good response. Boy, within a minute of Amanda getting there, we had thirty cops around there!

KC: Who takes charge to put a perimeter up?

JS: Well, first it was the officers. Billy Beaudette⁴⁴ was there for sure—he's a SWAT guy—and I don't know who exactly was coordinating everything, because we were still working on Jerry. It took a couple of minutes for the medics to get there. By that time—Johnny Wright was there, got everything just cornered off. We even thought we were short, so they extended, which thank God, we did. Wright was the midnight boss for the East Side, and he was there for a couple years. He liked that. So more cops in, more cops in, a lot of SWAT guys were there. I think SWAT might even have been carrying their gear in their cars, too, which was probably not a bad idea at the time. They went off and just did searches, and the search took way too long.

KC: Now are you hanging out?

JS: I'm hanging out. Dennis Jensen shows up.

⁴³ Amanda Kaonouchi Heu was appointed Community Liaison Officer January 7, 2002; police officer February 21, 2004.

⁴⁴ William Charles Beaudette was appointed police officer April 5, 1993.

KC: Dennis was an assistant chief?

JS: Yep. So he gets the call and he's there within thirty minutes, I bet.

Bobby Jerue,⁴⁵ he was there hanging out with me a little bit, Billy Beaudette. There were a ton of guys. Anyhow, Dennis hung out with me. I'm just sitting back watching these guys search. It probably went on for—God, I've got to think an hour, which is a really long time. They hunkered down and I think even some neighbors might've called in to say, "I hear something. Not really sure what it is." They ended up finding him after an hour, and then they ended up finding the gun, and then after that, it was just a long night of interviews.

KC: Are you at Headquarters or do you go to the hospital?

JS: No, I went right to Headquarters. At that point, procedure—I'm kind of isolated, get my Federation⁴⁶ guy there. It probably was Dave Titus.⁴⁷

KC: Who interviews you? Who does your debriefing?

JS: It had to be somebody from Homicide— Frazer! Steve Frazer.⁴⁸ He ended up doing a great job. I think Jane originally was starting it, but—

KC: Jane Lawrence?⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Robert Lawrence Jerue was appointed police officer September 8, 1998.

⁴⁶ Saint Paul Police Federation is a labor union, the organization of officers who have banded together, often for the purpose of getting better working conditions or pay.

⁴⁷ David Allen Titus was appointed police officer May 2, 1994. President of the Saint Paul Police Federation, September 2001-present.

⁴⁸ Steven Joseph Frazer was appointed police officer October 7, 1996; promoted to sergeant September 9, 2000; commander August 27, 2011.

⁴⁹ Jane Laurence was appointed police officer March 20, 1989; promoted acting sergeant January 18, 1997; sergeant May 17, 1997; acting commander April 15, 2006; returned to sergeant December 2, 2006; and retired September 30, 2010. Received a Medal of Merit in 1996.

JS: Jane Lawrence, yep. Somehow Lawrence and Frazer clashed over this. Steve Frazer ended up interviewing me, and I'm sure somebody else there did a great job. I probably didn't get home until six in the morning, and then got the okay to be gone.

KC: At what point do they tell you that Jerry didn't make it? Or did you know before he went into the ambulance?

JS: Oh, I knew. He died when we were pumping him, ain't no doubt about it. There was something official that came to me, but you could tell right there that he was—he took everything to the chest.

KC: You guys don't wear vests at all when you're doing undercover?

JS: Nope. I mean you can, but—

KC: Compromised in a different way?

JS: Yep. You had to look the part, you had to be the part. So you had to have the beer in front of you, you had to drink it, and you had to act stupid—act, act, act! Not that we acted stupid at that point.

You know, getting back to complacency and assuming. We were done for the night. We let our guard down, no doubt about it. We assumed we're dealing with a couple of drunks. We weren't. It was EOT [End of Tour]. We want to get home, we were done, we let our guard down, both of us. And we suffered for it.

And again, for another six months to a year, the whole Police Department was on edge and may have not made many friends and probably didn't please a lot of citizens. Because now, again, we're, "What are you doing? Stay there. Stop! Get your hands out of your pockets!"

"But I'm the neighbor—"

“Get your fucking hands out of your pockets!”

“What? Jesus Christ!”

Okay, so that’s what you’ve got to be. Everybody said, “You’ve got to start scared,” and then you can work up to that level of, “Okay, now I know who you are. Now we can talk.” We ended up here, when we should’ve still been scared. We should’ve been scared still, should’ve used a little more precaution. Shoulda, coulda, woulda, you know?

KC: Do you go through that when you get home? You debriefed with the Department—did you say “I let my guard down”?

JS: Oh, absolutely. I knew it right away. It’s a common mistake.

KC: You’re human.

JS: Well, we do it all the time. Whenever you get hurt on the job, you’re letting your guard down. Every time, guaranteed. If you get hurt on the job, you made an error, a tactical error that you should’ve overseen.

I like the process of the Police Department, but sometimes a guy will have so many complaints, because he’s scared and doesn’t come up to that level that the person he’s talking to likes. He makes a complaint, now we’ve got to write it down. I mean it’s—

KC: How do you get the balance?

JS: You don’t get the balance, but a guy’s got to stick to his guns and be scared. Then the education part is for the citizen to say, “Look, cops get hurt all the time. Sorry I offended you, but now I can help you out.” And we have a really hard time doing that.

Cops go into situations friend on friend, or cop on drunk when drunk has gun in belt, and we let our guard down, because we think we're just dealing with a drunk, and we're not. We should come in scared and scarer, come in defensive. But again, we're worried about offending people. It happened all the time when I was a sergeant in Central.

KC: Do you go out and see the Vick family?

JS: I see Connie Vick every now and then on events.

KC: But during those days after?

JS: Well, no. I really had a hard time doing that. As soon as I got the okey dokey to take a couple days off, me and my brother,⁵⁰ Mike Simmons,⁵¹ I think Gromeck,⁵² Rehak,⁵³ a couple of other guys, went up to the cabin.

KC: So you had a support network that was willing to stand around you?

JS: Oh, yeah. Well, and I picked them. There's more people that probably wanted to come up, but I knew who understands me. I knew who gets it. Call Rehak a felon, but he's still a buddy, and back then, I still say he was one of our better cops that we had before he got convicted. He was a good cop, he had a good street sense.

⁵⁰ Paul Robert Strong was appointed police officer January 25, 1988; promoted to sergeant December 2, 1995.

⁵¹ Michael Robert Simmons was appointed police officer May 20, 1984; promoted to sergeant March 27, 1999.

⁵² Craig Joseph Gromek was appointed police officer September 18, 1989; promoted to sergeant October 23, 1999.

⁵³ Timothy Conrad Rehak was appointed police officer June 30, 1986; resigned February 7, 2007.

But I'm going to surround myself with guys that—we're going to go and talk about it. They're not going to feel sorry for me. I just happen to be the guy there. We feel sorry for Jerry and his family. Yeah, we debriefed up there.

KC: Did you come back down for the funeral?

JS: Oh, yeah, I was there for that.

I had a really hard time meeting [Jerry's wife] Connie after this, because I didn't know how she was going to react. I didn't know how I was going to react. You don't go to the family of your partner when they died when you were with them. Especially when I'm feeling like, "Oh, my God. We totally screwed this up by being so complacent." We did the first major thing wrong. You have to be on guard all the time and we let our guard down.

But it worked out. They had a get together with tons of people there, and Connie and I talked a little bit. It worked out. Then now I see her at events, and there's a lot of people that still hang out with her. I really didn't know her that well until after Jerry's death. That's when we started hanging out.

KC: Jerry wasn't in your group of people that you hung out with? You only worked together.

JS: Yep. Him and Matt,⁵⁴ actually, they had their own, totally different friends, too. I mean, I went to his Christmas party, there we talked a little bit. We know who each other's are, we can have a conversation, but we never really hung out.

KC: When did you cry?

JS: Well, I was crying that whole night.

⁵⁴ Matthew Louis Toupal was appointed police officer September 18, 1989; promoted to sergeant February 12, 2000; commander January 15, 2011.

KC: So for you it's okay to be a cop and cry in front of other cops?

JS: Oh, yeah. I do all the time.

KC: That's wonderful.

JS: Well, it's not wonderful, because I don't want to cry about things. Things happen. I don't want to cry.

KC: But if you can release emotions that way, it keeps you healthier.

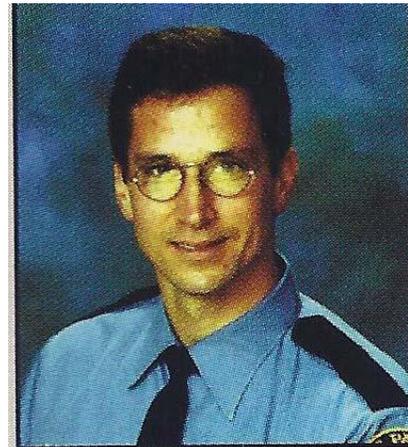
JS: Yep. I think our whole family is like that. I can watch a particular movie and cry at the end. Not ball, but tear. I'm just emotional.

KC: Now your brother is on the Department.
How many years younger is he to you?

JS: Paul is seven years younger than me.

KC: So how'd you feel when he wanted to join the
Police Department?

JS: I kind of knew that was his step. He made an
early choice, also. I was so separated from my
brothers and sisters—from the military and
then schooling and then working with police.



Paul Strong

When I was getting on Saint Paul, he was still in high school. So we really didn't have a relationship then other than he was my brother. Even coming on the job, I was five years into it. And again, I went military direction and then two years of school, and he just went to school and got in. So he got in a lot quicker than I did. So it took for him to be ten years on the Department and me to get my fifteen before we ended up hooking up, and then hanging out and having conversations.

You know, you're different eras, he was in his era and I was in mine. And I think, even at that time, I must have been in the Canine Unit or close to it and he was on midnights. He's working his area, I'm working mine, and we're probably opposite days off, so I never saw him, hardly ever talked to him. He was getting his family going so—not saying we didn't have time for each other, but he had his thing going, I had my thing going. But now, him and I are tight as tight can be. He's doing really well, respected on the job. He should've taken the Commanders Test again, I thought, but he had a taste of that, just processed that he went through. It kind of knocked him down a little bit.

KC: He's a sergeant?

JS: He's a sergeant. He's very happy. He's in the Gun Unit. He's very happy there.

KC: Sometimes you stay someplace you're happy as long as you can.

JS: Yep, and that's what he got. He was working for the mayor. He was doing some software program for finance. He got kind of recruited for that, and he did that for about three years and wasn't very happy there.

KC: Most cops work off duty. Is that part of your career as well?

JS: Yeah, for like ten years. The pocket money was awesome, but then that just meant you spent more, and you almost relied on it. Thank God, I weaned off it a little bit. A couple of jobs that I had were at Mount Zion Temple.⁵⁵ I was security there, ran that.

KC: That's an unusual off duty. How did you get into that one?

⁵⁵ Mount Zion Temple at 1300 Summit Avenue is their fourth building, occupied in 1954. Mount Zion Hebrew Congregation, the first Jewish congregation in the Minnesota Territory, was founded in 1856 with eight Jewish pioneers (fur traders, liquor and clothing merchants)—two years after policing formalized in Saint Paul and two years before Minnesota became a state.

JS: That was Harold Breyer.⁵⁶ I don't know if you know Harold Breyer—long retired copper now. I don't know how he developed into that, but he contacted or they contacted him and he started security there. That's when all the anti-Israeli stuff was going on, and they just didn't feel right that anybody could go into their Temple. So Harold started working there for years and years, and then I got to meet Harold. Harold was doing Officer Friendly—I don't know how I made the connection, but I got in the security for Mount Zion, because on the High Holy Days they needed four or five guys, so I got in on that. And then I just developed a relationship with Jane Steinman, the director there, and then a couple of the other folks, just through conversation and having fun with them. Then Harold ended up retiring and recommending me for the head of security part, so we just had a great time. They liked me and I liked them, and I got to hear some interesting stories.

KC: Like what?

JS: Oh, just as far as, "I'm glad you're here, but I don't want you to be here" type of thing. It's all small talk conversation, but they see a familiar face every year. They come in—they have like four services a day—and so they see a familiar face with a uniform and they're more relieved, and they tell you how much they're relieved to have us there and then they'll talk about, "Do you know that? Do you know that? Do you know who he is?" I mean, it's just all small talk, and you just get comfortable with them. A couple of them are actually my friends over the years.

KC: A couple of members at Mount Zion?

⁵⁶ Harold Charles Breyer was appointed patrolman March 2, 1964, and retired November 30, 1994.

JS: Yeah, absolutely. I got to know a lot of them. Once, I ran in. I'm in a sport coat, but, boy, they know you right away. "Joe, how are you doing?" It was just amazing how the threat level for them is all the time, and just having us around eliminates that threat level. Its good, rewarding work—it's not like sitting in a Walmart where you're—I'm not going to say an intimidating figure but-- if a bad guy walks in, he's going to walk out. We're not like that. Obviously, we're a distraction to some, but we always said, "Hey, if they're going to overrun this temple, nobody's going to make it, because it's going to be really bad people."

KC: So you were, in a way, just there for looks? You knew that, if there was a plan, there wasn't a lot you were going to be able to do to stop it?

JS: Exactly. If someone actually wanted to—you know how Jewish temples are. But again, you have to be on guard. We may have offended a couple of people at times, but, thank God, Jane was there to back us up. Because we didn't know a couple of people, they didn't have the right credentials or passes. It could've gone either way, but it worked out good and the guys that I brought in, everybody likes them and they're very personable. You put your best guys at the front door.

KC: Who'd you turn it over to when you retired?

JS: John Conney.⁵⁷ Yeah he's an ACOP worker, he might be a sergeant now. And then Matt Toupal, I got him involved right away. He was my main door guy. If there's anybody that can make you feel at home and greet you, it's Matt Toupal. I should've gave it to him, but Jon was with me right from the get-go. When I

⁵⁷ Jon Gregory Conney was appointed police officer April 5, 1999.

started taking it over, I had Jon Conney in there with him. And then Fillowich,⁵⁸ Quast⁵⁹—them guys were there—Whisler.⁶⁰ Just a good bunch of talkers.

KC: Similar culture like A-Cop.

JS: Exactly. I don't necessarily believe in all their beliefs, but understand completely, sympathetic to it. I did a training program for them for free, because they were nervous. Anytime something happened overseas, they would call me and say, "Anything you hear?" so I'd have to call our guys and say, "Anything to be worried about?" Just simple, little "if you think it ain't right, it ain't" kind of things and call 911—very basic stuff.

KC: 2010, twenty-six years—you decide it's time to retire. Why retire at that point? You're in your prime!

JS: No, I'm not in my prime, actually. I'm working for Nancy, which I love doing.

KC: So you're Assistant Chief DiPerna's⁶¹ XO—Executive Officer?

JS: Yes. And it's not even an XO, she did all the work. She didn't like to XO anything. Everything was on her desk that needed to be on her desk.

KC: So she didn't delegate very much?

⁵⁸ Shawn James Fillowich was appointed police officer October 7, 1996.

⁵⁹ David Andrew Quast was appointed police officer October 7, 1996.

⁶⁰ Michael Daniel Whisler was appointed police officer May 14, 2001; promoted to sergeant January 4, 2012.

⁶¹ Nancy Elizabeth DiPerna was appointed police officer October 31, 1980; promoted to sergeant March 9, 1986; lieutenant May 1, 1990; commander October 4, 1997; senior commander January 1, 2000; assistant chief June 26, 2004; returned to senior commander July 3, 2010; and retired November 30, 2010.

JS: No, hardly at all. Maybe once a week, and then I'd get it done within an hour and I'd be free. Not a very rewarding job. I thought it was going to be a little different. I thought maybe I'd have a little more say in what goes on, but—

KC: You were recruited, you were sent, you opted to go there?

JS: I opted. I was working Central, actually very happy on the afternoon crew — Patrol Sergeant with Senior Commander Vomastek,⁶² who is now retired. You know, I was doing really well—I had a good crew, took care of my guys. Ended up where the only way you could reward them was, “Whose last night is it? Okay, take off early,” because you couldn't give them a vacation day, you couldn't give them a holiday. All the sudden, my role calls are two people. Two people I have at my roll call, and one of those has to go sit at the library, because we had problems up there with kids. They couldn't hire off-duty — the mayor deemed it so important that we sent an officer up there. I was just flabbergasted by this, and I'd go to my commander and say, “This is entirely wrong and I'm not sending him up there.” And he goes, “Yeah, you are” and I was like, “No, I'm not.” And he says, “This is coming directly from the mayor. It's not even from the chief.” Well, I said, “Somebody's got to go stand up and do the right thing here.”

“Nope. I like my job, I like where I'm at.”

“Really? So I'm going to have one officer on patrol and I have to hold over the day crew?”

⁶² John Edward Vomastek was appointed police officer March 13, 1978; promoted to sergeant June 1, 1988; acting lieutenant August 2, 1990; return to sergeant November 4, 1990; acting lieutenant August 14, 1994; return to sergeant September 29, 1994; title change to inspector sergeant January 8, 1995; return to sergeant July 13, 1995; lieutenant July 14, 1995; title change to commander January 1, 2000; title change to senior commander April 28, 2001; return to commander June 29, 2002; title change to senior commander June 12, 2004; and retired August 31, 2011.

“That’s what you got to do until your late start [officers coming in later].”

And I’m thinking, “This is so wrong.” Then we had to supply an officer for another—it was on the West Side—so I had to supply two officers, and I can’t put anybody on the street. I was just amazed by how everybody was so comfortable where they were and didn’t want to say anything, including Chief Harrington himself. Because they didn’t want to get transferred or moved, just to fight a wrong here.

Well, the library don’t have a budget to do off duty, so now it’s up to us. We’re going to have to take care of them, because they’re another outreach program that we have to take care of.

Okay, so if one of my cops goes to a domestic and hollers for help, what happens? I couldn’t get an answer. I was fed up with that, but I didn’t yell and scream. I didn’t buck. I kind of realized that the old saying, and it goes to this day, “I’m not going to cause any waves. I’m happy where I’m at.” Man, that’s not a good boss to me. Again, the best I could do for my guys, I couldn’t. And they would come to me with this frustration, and I’m like, “You’re absolutely correct.”

KC: If there’s not enough guys on the street—guys meaning female or male—it’s a safety issue.

JS: Yep, and I’d have to go back to them and say, “Sorry, fellas. I can’t do nothing for you. Whose last day is it? Okay, you can take off an hour early or two hours early. Other than that, I can’t help you guys out.” And because I can’t help them out, I don’t want to be there. I don’t want to be working for the commanders I got. My guys are coming to me with stuff, and I’m filtering it this way, and it’s stopping right there, because they’re comfortable where they’re at. Well, I’m not

comfortable where I'm at then. So I made this move. My brother Paul was there and he got transitioned to this other software job. So I went up there to the assistant chief's office, and that was it for me. I was crunching numbers on PERA — Public Employees Retirement Association. I had my year-and-a-half with the county plus twenty-six, twenty-seven-and-a-half — fifty three. Ching! Numbers were right, did it right.

KC: Any regrets?

JS: I haven't looked back.

KC: You retired and you moved up to Northern Minnesota?

JS: Never looked back.

KC: Are you fully retired or are you working up there?

JS: Fully retired. I did my first year working at a golf course — nice golf course, wasn't run very well — then I find myself getting scheduled at two o'clock in the afternoon on a Saturday when it's eighty-five degrees out, and my gal and my buddies are on my pontoon partying, while I'm stuck making eight bucks an hour. I'm like, "Nah, this ain't happening anymore."

KC: [Laughs] What were you doing in the golf course? Security?

JS: No, just checking people in, working the pros shop. I got free golf, free cart, and a wage. Beautiful course. Everybody that worked there seemed to be retired or was a teacher and needed summer work, so nobody wanted to work Saturday or Sunday, including myself. Hey, I got to have Saturday off. I can work Friday evening, Sunday evening, I've got to have Saturday off. And that didn't work out. I had fun when I was there. I just found out it wasn't managed correctly — the owner was a micromanager. It just wasn't right. So the last two years, I've been just hanging out, getting my projects done.

KC: Projects around your cabin?

JS: Yeah. I built another garage. There's always something to do up there.

KC: What's your legacy with Saint Paul PD?

JS: I don't think I have one.

KC: What contributions did you make?

JS: Other than any other cop showing up to work—it could be a hit or miss any day. I think I did a fair job. I wasn't the best at anything. I enjoyed my Canine—I thought I was pretty good at that. I wasn't the best. I was just an average cop and I took whatever I learned from my bosses—Charlie Anderson,⁶³ for one, who treats you fair, and I tried to treat everybody fair, I tried to listen to everybody. The old school about, "Don't talk to me, kid"—I'd talk to anybody that approached me. And I don't care gender, religion, whatever their feelings were—I got along with the majority of the people, and I think I just treated them fair. I knew that's one way to survive on the Police Department—speaking fair to everybody, not just certain people, even though I have certain people that I probably did give a little more to. But I always rewarded the work and not my friends, because even some of my friends who I admire a lot, they have their level and other people have their level, and I reward that level.

KC: You're showing with your hands that there's a lower level and a higher level?

JS: Absolutely. There's a whole bunch of levels on the Police Department. There's guys that eat, drink, and sleep policing, catching bad guys, all the time, and they can retain stuff, and they're in the right place at the right time, and they read up

⁶³ Charles Anderson was appointed police officer February 17, 2007; promoted to sergeant December 17, 2011.

on stuff—they really believe in what they're doing. And I reward that, because I was never like that. I'm, like I said, a mediocre guy at best, but I'll listen to anybody that comes in and needs to talk. I've talked to a lot of people.

KC: How did being a police officer change your personality? How did you grow—how did your soul grow through the years and your experiences, what you saw, what you had to do?

JS: Well, in the beginning I certainly had an edge to me, no doubt about it. Probably took fifteen years just to calm down, to relax and live the day, not push myself. It's hard to do, because you're competing all the time. It's a status thing when you arrest a big bad guy—it's a status thing and how many you do. Especially being a street boss, just trying to get the guys in the right frame of mind. When they come in angry, they're going to leave angry, because I've done it. I've come in angry and pissed off at either the world or the administration or whatever situation, and you can't leave roll call like that. I tried to recognize that and if people are down in the dumps—I've been down in the dumps before—try to get them out of the dumps, because that's always leading to bad things. Especially when you're on the street and you have one guy talk to you the wrong way and then you snap, or that day you make a bad decision in one second and then your career could be ended.

You try to guide, try to lead, and there's not many people I guided or led, but the people I did are doing okay now, I think. You know who listens to you and who doesn't, and when they listen and when they don't. The biggest thing I could do was help my guys out and let them know I'm helping them out—actually, letting them figure out I'm helping them out in the long run. Those are the guys that are my friends forever and they know it, and they still say, "Hi,

Sarge” to me. It’s not, “Hi, Joe,” it’s “Hi, Sarge” —so they still respect who I was, I’m sure, when I was their supervisor.

Legacy, I don’t think—I mean I had a good time, looking at it. I had a great time, exactly what I wanted to do. But as far as retirement, there’s a lot of politics involved. You see guys making their way up to assistant chiefs and chiefs. You know it’s kind of the same and I’m sure its got to be that way. It’s just the way it is. But I was done.

KC: And you’re enjoying retirement?

JS: Oh, yeah. It’s not lonely—bored every now and then, but that’s just because I get lazy. There’s plenty of things to do. I can keep myself active.

KC: Why make the decision to move out of the city, three hours north, and live a rural life?

JS: Me and a buddy of mine, Dave Englund, for eighteen months, every weekend, we built that place—worked our asses off. I got a lot of sweat up there. So I built my home. He was a brain, but I helped him with brawn, and I put that place together. That’s my home. I had nothing keeping me here. I put a lot of equity up there and I got a good chunk of land, good lake, good people. I have a friend still coming up every weekend or even during the week.

KC: So it wasn’t about getting out of the city or getting away from the city?

JS: Nope. I accomplished a lot up there. It was a lot of dedication on my part, a lot of devotion, and I hauled every piece of lumber up there. I just put a lot of work out there and I’m happy about it. I’m enjoying it.

KC: That’s what you deserve after all the years.

JS: Well, I mean that's what you work for. And it was another dream, another goal of mine, was to own a lake cabin. This happened to be a lake home—fifteen acres on a lake—and I did a good job on it, so I'm very happy up there.

KC: Joe, thank you. It's been an honor.