

*Some Like it Hot: Tales from the Firehouse*  
*Interview with William Davis*

**SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

firefighter, firefighting, work, firehouse, job, run, jeffersonville, kids, clean, station, career, long, fire, started, railroad, shows, talk, day, family, fire trucks

**Jen Weidner 00:03** Today is July 26 2023. I'm Jen Weidner with the Jeffersonville Township Public Library conducting interviews for Some Like It Hot: Tales from the Firehouse. I'm here today with retired firefighter William Davis of the Jeffersonville Fire Department. Thanks for being here today.

**William Davis 00:15** Your welcome.

**Jen Weidner 00:16** So I want to just give everyone that wants to talk to me a chance to tell their stories about being a firefighter. So how long were you with the department?

**William Davis 00:24** I was there for 40 years.

**Jen Weidner 00:26** Oh my gosh, you saw a lot of changes.

**William Davis 00:28** Yes I did.

**Jen Weidner 00:28** So when did you start?

**William Davis 00:30** February 3, 1976.

**Jen Weidner 00:33** And when did you retire?

**William Davis 00:34** February 3, 2016.

**Jen Weidner 00:37** So Right, exactly.

**William Davis 00:38** 40 years to the day.

**Jen Weidner 00:40** That's awesome. What made you want to become a firefighter?

**William Davis 00:45** Just always, you know, where I grew up, up in Rolling Fields, there was a big field out behind the subdivision. Every summer several times it would catch fire. So the fire trucks will be racing through the neighborhood trying to get back in this field and stuff and, you know, young boy, that time that you know, I'm running down the street chasing the fire trucks

and I want to go see the big red lights and big trucks and and you know, I just, that's what I want to do. That's what I've decided.

**Jen Weidner 01:17** So, if you weren't a firefighter, What do you think you would have done?

**William Davis 01:20** I think I probably would have liked to have worked on the railroad. I have a grandfather who worked for the Penn Central Railroad. And with him being an older gentleman at the time when I was a boy and I didn't get to talk to him much about his experiences with the railroad but, you know what I drew here and there was just something that caught my eye too, say I had a preference.

**Jen Weidner 01:57** So what were some of the challenges of your job?

**William Davis 02:02** There's a lot of physical challenges, a lot of mental challenges. You know, you don't you have to get in a different mindset, you know, because, you know, when that buzzer goes off, you know, somebody's property, or material things or where to go or even their life is in your hands and you know, you've got to control that and be able to take care of that. So the stress was really something.

**Jen Weidner 02:34** So how long does it take to get used to working those 24 hour shifts?

**William Davis 02:42** I'm not sure you really ever get used to them because you only start first started out there. It's a different work schedule. And then as you grow older, other things come into play: your family and what have you, and being away in this and things and so, you know, I don't really think it ever really get used to it. You just adapt to it.

**Jen Weidner 03:09** And that's that's your job, So were you married when you started on the fire department?

**William Davis 03:11** Exactly, yes I was I'd been married about a year yes.

**Jen Weidner 03:12**, So she kind of just went along with it and didn't know any different?

**William Davis 03:23** Not trying to be nasty but she really didn't have much choice you know, that's that's set my mind that that's what I want my career. And she supported wholeheartedly. So

**Jen Weidner 03:37** How many kids did you have while you're on the department?

**William Davis 03:39** Ended up having three, daughter two daughters and a son . The son is on the department with me. Luckily, I got to work about oh, three, four years with him.

**Jen Weidner 03:53** So you all at the same house.

**William Davis** 03:55 Never stationed regularly same house but we did get through overtime and transfers and so we did get to work a couple of times together. We were working together my last day. He got to make the last run with me.

**Jen Weidner** 04:10 How was that like when you got to work with him? Are you like overprotective father?

**William Davis** 04:16 I worried a lot and (stopping to gather himself) I realized what I put my parents through probably.

**Jen Weidner** 04:37 He got to take you home on your last run?

**William Davis** 04:38 Yes he did, yes he did!

**Jen Weidner** 04:41 And did you get to take the fire truck home?

**William Davis** 04:44 Actually, I didn't ride the firetruck home but they gave me a parade home.

**Jen Weidner** 04:48 Oh, yeah. Well after 40 years, I hope so.

**William Davis** 04:51 Yeah, yeah!

**Jen Weidner** 04:52 Has anybody been on longer than that?

**William Davis** 04:55 I think there may have been some of the older guys that maybe work a little bit longer than that, but I can't say for certain

**Jen Weidner** 05:04 I mean 40 years is long as any career but in firefighting. Yes, you've seen it come a long way.

**William Davis** 05:10 Really physically, it was really too long. I should have gone earlier. But I could still do it at that time. And I love doing it everyday I was there. Love everyday I've been gone.

**Jen Weidner** 05:25 Right? Right. No, more getting woken up in the middle of the night. What were some of the best parts of your job?

**William Davis** 05:36 Best parts were working with kids. You know, there was especially during the school year. There's lots and lots and lots of tours come by the firehouse. Lots of lots of kids and interacting with the kids. Was I think probably one of the more enjoyable things. Myself and Mike Smith and the other guys we on line, we had a program where we went to the different schools and showed them the equipment and Mike and I would actually put a ladder up in the gymnasium area and hook a rope up and climb up the ladder repelled down because the kids just love

**Jen Weidner** 06:26 The kids absolutely love that kind of stuff. Yeah.

**William Davis** 06:29 We enjoyed doing it too. I was showing the kids a different stuff and that was really

**Jen Weidner** 06:36 Good to go out in the community. Yeah, talk to kids and let them know that you know, we come to your house. It might be scary, but we're here and yeah, that's awesome. Were some of the worst parts of the job.

**William Davis** 06:51 Probably my worst day was brought up in an article that was in the paper at the time, you know, made a run to an accident. Lady was trapped in a vehicle and into being a girll went to school and was friends with my wife. And I knew she was hurt but I couldn't tell how bad it was or anything. And we're trying to get her out, and she, she kept saying, you know, call my mom, call my mom and I'm thinking you know, I'm not sure what her injuries are. There's a possibility of internal injuries, there's possibility she may not survive. What am I going to tell her mom? So that was really the hardest thing on me, day I ever worked. But she ended up surviving and still see her occasionally to this day. So it was it was hard, but it worked out. Well. It turned out to be pretty good. So

**Jen Weidner** 07:56 Living in a small town in Jeffersonville chances are you're going to know people when you roll up on the scenes and if it's a fire accident, whatever.

**William Davis** 08:03 Right? That happened a lot of time a lot of a lot of times.

**Jen Weidner** 08:08 Especially if you're born and raised here.

**William Davis** 08:09 Well sure, sure.

**Jen Weidner** 08:12 I know there's no like, typical day in a firehouse but let's say what would you your routine be when you would go in in the morning?

**William Davis** 8:20 Well after 40 years it changed a lot. When I first started it was a lot more structured from the old days to where it came in and some changed. Some didn't you know you came in and check the truck and then you had breakfast and you did a lot of clean up. Clean the firehouse everyday and then there was some training usually done and then there was certain other cleaning them I mean, basically clean everyday but then on other days it was, Wednesday it was stove and refrigerator, cleaning those and Fridays were windows and cut the grass in the summertime. So you know I mean, it was just like kind of like being at home except a lot bigger. You know, there was six or eight of us there and smaller houses, three or four of us which is really more enjoyable. You can be more of a family that way. So that typically was just just like being at home except with a little more responsibility.

**Jen Weidner** 9:37 And what station were you at the majority of your career. I know in 40 years the city and Jeff has grown exponentially

**William Davis 09:46** Say most of my career was stationed at station one, Wall Street and Eighth Street. That was probably the bulk of my career there.

**Jen Weidner 10:04** Because at the beginning of your career, that was the only station right?

**William Davis 10:07** Actually when I first started out there was that station and one on Crestview Ct. that was the station two. There was only two stations at that time. I say it's up to five now.

**Jen Weidner 10:18** Yep and growing. Besides the call you talked about a minute ago, was there any other call that really stands out to you for whatever reason?

**William Davis 10:30** I mean there was always a lot of times there was, there was something that would go on and it hadn't a lot of times different runs you know you would make you feel good or feel bad you know they feel good obviously will help them or feel bad because I did get my best. Make a medical run and they were in bad condition and there's nothing you can do. So it's just part of the job, part of the job.

**Jen Weidner 11:17** Do you remember any funny or humorous calls?

**William Davis 11:24** Not, not really funny or humorous calls. Most of that was done back at the station on off time because you didn't. I mean, there was a lot of downtown so you've got a lot of antics that went on. The little spray for the dishes had one on the sink of course, it was black and they taped it open with black electrical tape. So soon as I should have noticed something but since I wanted to turn the water on and start washing dishes, you know it just drenched me from me and they're all back there hee hawing, I started laughing to because it's man it's

**Jen Weidner 12:25** Just water.

**William Davis 12:26** You better get used to it because you know we're gonna play joke's on you,

**Jen Weidner 12:29** And you kind of have to have that for all the bad stuff you do if you have to have a way to vet that and release that and that's I mean, that's a tame way far as I'm concerned. It's just funny.

**William Davis 12:39** We had we had a snowball fight inside the building one

**Jen Weidner 12:45** Nice

**William Davis 12:47** We trapped one guy in the locker room, one way in and one way out. We just pelted him. We had about six inches of snow on the floor from the amount of snowballs and you know, just stuff like that. No, nobody got hurt and we cleaned up and you know, let off some steam. So it was good. It was good.

**Jen Weidner 13:03** Right we don't get a lot of snow around here. So there's a lot of firefighting shows on TV these days. What are some of the misconceptions of those shows?

**William Davis 13:14** Well, first misconception is if they go in a fire they are going to be able to see.

**Jen Weidner 13:20** That's what every single firefighter I've interviewed has said.

**William Davis 13:23** You can not see. You know, talking about you can see your hand in front of your face. That is the truth. There's just no way no way. You're feeling everything and that's we got your hose line so you've got a way out if you have to. To just try to get in there and move around as best you can because you cannot see it all

**Jen Weidner 13:52** Yes, all those shows it's just clear as day and then I'm just like, I don't think that's really how I've never been in a fire but I'm just thinking smoke. So I know a lot of firefighters have jobs besides firefighting. Did you have another job?

**William Davis 14:08** I had several other jobs I was I helped a guy do electrical work for a while. I helped landscape landscape lighting for a while, worked at Kmart for a while in the outdoor department. You know, did a little heating and air conditioning so I mean it's just an I never had one job that I stuck with. It's just, you know, a work of this got done and went on to something else.

**Jen Weidner 14:47** So how did firefighting affect your home life?

**William Davis 14:58** I think I was probably one of the lucky ones. I was able to leave it at the firehouse. Not so much now with my son on there. But when I was there I never I don't ever remember carrying it home if I did it was didn't last very long. So that's that's how I got through. My wife. My wife is wonderful. She listened to me all the time. You know, I tell stories and tell her about this and tell her about that. She was always there for me and able to help.

**Jen Weidner 15:47** That's so important to have somebody you can talk to about, about what you've gone through because you all see the worst of the worst. What advice would you give anyone wanting to become a firefighter?

**William Davis 16:05** I would say it would be to do it because you have a passion for it. Don't do it because it's a job. Because all the guys that I saw that work there got hired on that just wanted it for a job were miserable. But the guys that had a passion for it. That's what they wanted to do in their life. We're always a lot happier at the job. So you know don't don't do it because it's a job because you want to do it.

**Jen Weidner 16:40** These guys well and girls become your family.

**William Davis 16:46** Yeah. We have a tradition in our family started out Monday nights and then Thursday, I think Wednesday, Wednesday night dinner. We're having a tonight where the kids all come over, bring their kids now we have dinner that evening, well. Of course when I'm

working I couldn't go. But as it progressed, later on, I got more seniority and more rank. I was able to as long as it was close by as bring the truck home. So I'd bring two or three other guys or girls and that was another example of how much of a family firefighting actually is because I was bringing them to my home and they were sitting on my table and you can just like my kids or just like the rest of my family was, so.

**Jen Weidner** 17:48 That's so important to have that connection with the job you all have to do. Yeah.

**William Davis** 17:53 But there were, there were a couple of times where you have to go make a run.

**Jen Weidner** 17:57 Of course!

**William Davis** 17:58 That never ends. It never ends. Doesn't matter there so yeah.

**Jen Weidner** 18:02 Whether you were at the firehouse or not. You still have to be Yeah, exactly. Right, right. Do you have anything else you'd like to share with us?

**William Davis** 18:18 How proud I am of the fire service. I know. I've got I can't say I came from a firefighting family because I was the first one there but I've got a lot of my brother was a firefighter in Northern Illinois. He got hired after I did. And he retired with 31 years service. My son is on Jeff with me. My brother's son. He was a firefighter in the Marine Corps and now he works in Baltimore National Airport as a firefighter there. And then on my wife's side, we've got another nephew that's a firefighter in Las Vegas, Clark County. So I'm not bragging or anything like that, but you know, they, they saw what it was like for me, and so they followed in the footsteps in their areas. So that makes me extremely, extremely proud.

**Jen Weidner** 19:20 Absolutely.

**William Davis** 19:21 A legacy.

**Jen Weidner** 19:22 Yeah. So yeah. Well, thank you so much for being here.

**William Davis** 19:27 Thank you for having me. I appreciate it very much.