

Some Like it Hot: Tales from the Firehouse
Interview with Jason Wiesnauer

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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Jen Weidner 0:04 Today is April 27 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 Captain Jason Wiesnauer of the Jeffersonville Fire Department. Thank you for being here today. So everyone has a story to tell and I wanted to give Jeffersonville firefighters the chance to tell their story because everyone has a unique perspective on their job. So how long have you been with the department?

Jason Wiesnauer 0:33 16 years

Jen Weidner 0:35 So what made you want to become a firefighter?

Jason Wiesnauer 0:37 I think like most firefighters, it goes back to being a kid I remember in elementary school waving at the fire trucks and the police officers. That was a big deal with my parents is that you respect and look up to them and so I would wave to them when they visit the school and when they drive through the neighborhood. And it just stuck with me. I went to college to be a police officer. And then through several interviews with the police department after college, I realized kind of the fire department might be more my style.

Jen Weidner 1:14 So if you weren't a firefighter, what do you think you'd be doing?

Jason Wiesnauer 1:17 I'd be an electrician.

Jen Weidner 1:18 Okay!

Jason Wiesnauer 1:19 I was, I was halfway through my electricians apprenticeship when I received the call that I was going to be hired by Jeffersonville. So the electricians apprenticeship was a five year program and I would have been a union Journeyman Electrician, and I think we're all pretty happy that I've made the switch to being a firefighter, a much safer career.

Jen Weidner 1:46 Well so to speak (laughing)So what are some challenges of your job?

Jason Wiesnauer 1:53 Being away from family for 24 hours at a time. It's not just me that seems to be the biggest hurdle for most when you've got young children at home, and you're missing sporting events, or you're having to find childcare because your wife also works 24 hour shifts. It can be very tricky, but that's the toughest thing. Most of us come into the job thinking we're going to be working fires all day,

and motor vehicle accidents, just real heroic stuff. But we ended up spending a lot of time in the firehouse with our friends knowing that at the same time our families are growing up at home without us. And it's tough. It would almost be easier if we were working all day and getting that sense of fulfillment and making a difference so that it's worth it to be away from the family at that time. So I'd say that seems to be the hardest part of the job is being away from family. And it's interesting when one of the reasons I wanted to get hired in a small town fire department like Jeffersonville is I imagined my kids playing baseball and taking the fire truck to watch and play baseball and stuff like that. And if that happens, but not near as much as I had hoped it would happen just for all the guys. We've got 92 guys that have families at home and their kids are growing up and it's so busy, people are so busy. It's hard to get time for like, for me to meet the other guys' families and have like family picnics and stuff like that. And when that happens when the families get together and the wives can talk about how tough it is to have. It's really nice, and it's really wonderful and it's almost a shame that we're too busy to see that happen.

Jen Weidner 3:52 How long does it take to get used to work in those 24 hour shifts?

Jason Wiesnauer 3:58 I don't think it takes very long at all, because when most of us try for years to get hired. I tried for six years to get hired. I've heard guys try for 11 and 12 years to get hired. There's a lot of excitement when you actually make it on the fire department. It's, it's not like your typical job application. It's something people strive to do and probably have for most of their life. So when you get hired, you want to be there you're like and you want that tone to go off and it's very exciting. So it almost front loads like that excitement makes it you're ready to be there 24 hours. If they call you for overtime, you're ready to be there another 24 hours. And much to our wives chagrin, they're like no, we kind of want you home too. So not only are you excited to be there, but they pay you to do it. It's, it's the best job in town. And we're very fortunate to have the job.

Jen Weidner 4:55 Every firefighter I've ever talked to has said it's the best job.

Jason Wiesnauer 4:58 It is, I think professional baseball player, might, might entice guys away, but that's about it.

Jen Weidner 5:08 So you work 24 hours on and then 48 hours off or?

Jason Wiesnauer 5:11 Our schedule is one of the stranger ones. It's a Kelly shift. So like this week, I'll work Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday. And then I get four days off.

Jen Weidner 5:25 Okay

Jason Wiesnauer 5:26 So they're 24 hour shifts, and then you get 24 hours in between those shifts. And after three of them you get four days off. That four days is big!

Jen Weidner 5:37 That's like vacation

Jason Wiesenaus 5:37 For recovery and reset. Yeah. Yeah. So if you take the first day off, or the last day off, on vacation, you get a really long you get a week off. It's not just one day, you actually that gives you six, six or seven.

Jen Weidner 5:50 I mean, obviously you guys need that.

Jason Wiesenaus 5:51 If we do we do like I'm an older firefighter, if I have to work a structure fire at night, then it takes me two or three days to recover from that not just physically but kind of the mental fog of it. There's a lot that goes into it's very difficult and that time off is very important.

Jen Weidner 6:10 So I've always wondered, like okay, when you first start like, are you lying awake at night waiting, waiting to hear that bell go off?

Jason Wiesenaus 6:19 For about two months I didn't sleep? Yeah, no and

Jen Weidner 6:23 It's the anticipation.

Jason Wiesenaus 6:23 And I have my socks on which is something I never do in bed. Yes, for it took me about two months to kind of actually get some decent sleep. And when, when the tone goes off, you're racing to the fire truck. I worked Captain Doug's Sneed most of my career. I served under him. He taught me to be a firefighter. He taught me most things I know about being a firefighter. And he worked with the fire department I think for nearly 40 years. And every time the alarm went off, no matter what time of night, he was the first one on the fire engine, and that ,that's a big deal to think like that he could maintain that discipline. Because the older we get, we're like, Oh, it's another alarm and we're dragging out and we're not always the fastest to the fire like a young firefighter.

Jen Weidner 7:15 You kinda lose that excitement.

Jason Wiesenaus 7:16 But it was his discipline that those seconds make a difference to the person he's going to help.

Jen Weidner 7:24 Absolutely.

Jason Wiesenaus 7:25 He never lost that. And I admire that to this day. And aspire to that and hope to teach that as well. Doug Sneed made a big difference in my life. And a lot of firefighters like him were a big, big part of Jeffersonville fire.

Jen Weidner 7:39 Has he retired?

Jason Wiesenaus 7:40 He is retired. Yep, I'm just trying to get you to. I'm gonna try and get him in here to talk.

Jen Weidner 7:44 Absolutely. Yes. So what is a typical day like? I mean, I know like you can't say like each call is going to be this or that. But like, let's say you go in at what 7am what happens from there?

Jason Wiesenauer 7:56 So I get there at 6:30 am. So, I do that, because if a run comes in at 10 till 7 and then that guy that's on duty may have to be on a structure fire for another hour or two, while his kids are waiting for him to take them to school or while there's something going on. So we try to get there early to relieve our buddies. We don't get paid to show up early. But I have a professional duty and I think showing up early is part of that professional duty and I have a personal responsibility to my friend who I'm relieving to get him home to his family if I can. So I get there at 6:30 make sure there's coffee made. It's a big

Jen Weidner 8:41 The important thing.

Jason Wiesenauer 8:42 Yes, it's a big part of the first couple hours at the fire department. Then put my gear on the truck, meet with the person I'm relieving. That would be the captain from the day before. And we'll talk about anything important that happened or I made a run to this house and there's six children in this house and keep in mind that there's a run to that house. So we pass on any important information. Then there's going to be a good half hour 45 minutes of catching up with our friends that work the day before with the guys that are coming in. We start to do truck checks. We make sure every piece of equipment on the truck is ready for the day and working. And then one guy is starting breakfast and the other guys start thinking about chores around the firehouse. We have a list of chores

Jen Weidner 9:33 You guys don't just sit around between calls. I think that's a misconception.

Jason Wiesenauer 9:36 Yes, that may be because later in the day when there's some sitting around. But the first several hours at the firehouse are spoken for. We're going to get breakfast, we're going to get the house in shape and ready and clean. And so that we can then begin our day. At about 9:30 I do training every day at the firehouse and training lasts at least an hour. I have a training calendar. That's an annual training calendar so that we're checking off all the appropriate boxes so that every firefighter on my crew is in on Plan A for whatever emergency might come up and that we are prepared to do the minimum professional standards

Jen Weidner 10:18 And how many firefighters do you oversee?

Jason Wiesenauer 10:20 So currently, I see I have five guys in my house. And typically four of them will be there every day one of them transfers out for to cover for sick people.

Jen Weidner 10:32 Ok, And you're up at station four now?

Jason Wiesenauer 10:35 I moved to station four a month ago. It's closer to my home. It's a it's a newer station is really nice and it's a huge district. I've got a lot to learn to kind of catch up because it's much different than district one, where I spent most of my time.

Jen Weidner 10:48 Because you were downtown before.

Jason Wiesenaus 10:50 I've been downtown for most of my career. I've worked in every firehouse for at least six to eight months. But downtown is kind of where I keep finding my way back to. It was always the most challenging district that make the most runs they've got the river the hospital the interstate

Jen Weidner 11:09 The library .

Jason Wiesenaus 11:10 The library, which is always a pain in the side.

Jen Weidner 11:15 He says that jokingly,haha (laughing)

Jason Wiesenaus 11:18 But yeah, so I'm a district four now. And I mean we, cover we cover areas in Charlestown State Park. It's crazy how big our district is. We could be at the boat ramp of Charlestown State Park, and then we could be in a brand new neighborhood with lightweight construction.

Jen Weidner 11:37 That's like all of the stuff that was recently annexed.

Jason Wiesenaus 11:40 Yea, yes a very big area and we need more fire houses out there. Probably two more, but we're hoping to get one more in River Ridge.

Jen Weidner 11:48 Yeah, I had heard talk of at least one more up that way.

Jason Wiesenaus 11:51 We have been fighting to get a firehouse in River Ridge. And there's,there's you know, budget, economy, we had COVID.

Jen Weidner 12:03 River Ridge has a bunch of money they should help you out.

Jason Wiesenaus 12:06 That's right, and that gets into state politics right with with

Jen Weidner 12:11 But I always wonder as I pass by like Amazon and all those giant buildings like yeah, I'm sure they have a sprinkler system but they can only do so much.

Jason Wiesenaus 12:22 That's right. The sprinkler systems could be overwhelmed in a hurry. You got tons of just tons of flammable material in there. And there's only so much a sprinkler system can do in a big box like that. So it is, it's intimidating. But it's also kind of exciting. It's a brand new challenge. And River Ridge has offered to donate land for a fire department. But the fire department's big expense is salaries.

Jen Weidner 12:49 Oh absolutely. Because you'd have to get what probably

Jason Wiesenaus 12:52 I think it's about \$100,000 a year per firefighter. It's something like that. I'm not the numbers guy

Jen Weidner 12:58 how many firefighters would you need to staff that?

Jason Wiesenauer 12:59 At least three? That's per shift. So at least nine total for the fire department. And then I think the land they want to give us is not in the ideal location. There's a lot that goes into it. And I'm understanding of every party. It is an expensive thing, but it's an insurance policy.

Jen Weidner 13:07 And the citizens need to know that they're safe that live up that way, those workers need to know that they're safe if something happened, you got their back. I mean...

Jason Wiesenauer 13:24 We're gonna do our best but we could show you some help.

Jen Weidner 13:31 But I had no idea because well I got to Charlestown State Park because I'm there often.

Jason Wiesenauer 13:35 Yeah, there are certain parts of the park. It's not the entire park that's our coverage. But it's, it's more the boat ramp as I understand it, and then just certain districts that are actually closed off to the public. They've got gates and fences around, but that doesn't mean someone's not going to get in there and maybe could get hurt or a wildland fire.

Jen Weidner 13:53 Oh, absolutely. Yeah, yeah. I learned something new today: Charlestown State Park is protected. So what are some of the best and worst parts of your job?

Jason Wiesenauer 14:05

The best part I would say is the people that I get to work with. They're pretty incredible. We all seem to be on the same page and doesn't mean we all get along. But when push comes to shove, we, we love each other. You hear a lot of brother and sister and family

Jen Weidner 14:23 And just like a real biological family, you're gonna have your issues. I mean, that's just part of being human.

Jason Wiesenauer 14:29 Yeah. And that can be difficult, but that's easily overcome the tough days when we have little arguments, because we do, we do care about each other. So I'd say the best part is the family and the appreciation that we get. People will thank us and people have bought us breakfast when we are out and it's, it's difficult for us because we see ourselves, that we are getting paid to do a job that we love. We feel very fortunate. It's almost like we're kind of embarrassed when people thank us for doing it because we're very fortunate to get to do it.

Jen Weidner 15:09 But I think we truly are thankful to have such an incredible fire department.

Jason Wiesenauer 15:16 The fire department in America is really has an abundance of appreciation that we're thankful for. And we're very proud. And I think most of us, if not all of us, strive to live up to that expectation. There's a bit of a burden, not not a burden. There's a bit of a responsibility to that. And we all hold that in kind of the front of our mind that we're always representing the fire department. So we try very hard to do that. But it's still kind of embarrassed, embarrassed isn't the word. It's uncomfortable sometimes when people thank us for service.

Jen Weidner 15:54 Cuz you're like, it's just my job.

Jason Wiesenauer 15:55 Yeah, I'm doing my job. And not just that, but I feel very fortunate to get to do it. I didn't do anything, I should be thanking the city for paying me to get to do this. So it's interesting, but it's ,it's wonderful. Like, people will make us cookies at Christmas. It's wonderful. Like it really is. It's a it's a joy. We're very thankful and we try to give back.

Jen Weidner 16:21 You all are big into the Crusade for Children.

Jason Wiesenauer 16:24 Sure, and one of my things, I'm a Christmas guy. I love Christmas. And so I feel it's important to decorate the firehouse for Christmas. A lot of these grumpy old guys have to decorate their homes. They don't want to come in and decorate the firehouse. So like leave me alone Wiesenauer.

Jen Weidner 16:39 Stop with the Christmas!

Jason Wiesenauer 16:41 It's incredible like, kids will drive by and see the firehouse lit up, it means something, that is our home for a third of the year and I treat it that way.

Jen Weidner 16:56 Do you put up a Christmas tree?

Jason Wiesenauer 16:57 We do, we will put up a Christmas tree, it's not always the best, the ornaments aren't always the best. Cause like I said it's a bunch of grumpy old dudes, but hmm it's meaningful, it's important.

Jen Weidner 17:09 It's just like any other family, your are going to have the grumpy people are like well, I don't want to do this. And I'm that way too but like in the end, every Christmas I'm like, I don't want to do that, then I do. I'm like oh it is nice to sit and look at those lights it's calming, it's peaceful.

Jason Wiesenauer 17:22 Kind of a side story. Like, I'm not the only one that does this. But there's times at night when the firehouse is quiet and the lights are out. I'll walk around in the bay and look at these fire trucks and be like, it's incredible that I get to do this for a living. And it's the same with the Christmas tree. Like when a guy walks through there and the Christmas trees lit up ,we like it. Yeah, I think so.

Jen Weidner 17:46 Because I mean you guys do have to work holidays. We do like the fire department isn't closed for Christmas or Thanksgiving or Fourth of July. So I mean people need to remember that like you guys are there. 24/7 /365 somebody's there.

Jason Wiesenauer 17:59 Yeah. And it seems like there's always a few guys that no matter what they get stuck working every Christmas. I don't know how it works. But you know their shift will get Christmas or when the other shift gets it he gets transferred to that shift. So it's, it's crazy but a good friend of mine has worked for most Christmases for his career, and that's , that would be about 12 years for him. And he's got three kids at home. And they've just gotten used to doing Christmas on Christmas Eve or the day after they get used to it and they love it and support it. But you know it is disruptive, as part, as part of our life.

Is that we were away from our family for some of those times. So I think that the best part is that we have each other and the worst part. Man, we see some awful, awful stuff. And then we take that home to our family. I can be pretty grouchy sometimes, my wife's a saint for dealing with me. And she knows like, okay, he needs to go take a nap. That's tough. You never know what's going to bother you. And then sometimes it's just because you didn't sleep at night, and then you come home and you still have to do the chores or get the kids here or for me there's horses

Jen Weidner 19:16 I was going to say you have horses to take care of.

Jason Wiesenauer 19:19 A fence that needs to be rebuilt because a horse is torn down and I haven't slept all night.

Jen Weidner 19:24 Or you're chasing miniature horses down the street.

Jason Wiesenauer 19:26 Yeah, that has happened many times. One of JPD's favorite calls is that there's horses loose on Charlestown Pike. And the guys love it. And you know, my wife will come out and help at three in the morning to get these horses back. And she's apologizing to the police and they're like, this is the best run I've made all my career.

Jen Weidner 19:45 Yes!

Jason Wiesenauer 19:45 You know just chasing miniature horses. So I have been called at the firehouse on the red phone by dispatch saying, Jason, there's horses loose. Can you wake your wife up?

Jen Weidner 19:56 Oh my gosh!

Jason Wiesenauer 19:58 This happened. So everyone knows I'm the horse firefighter, I guess.

Jen Weidner 20:03 Well, I interviewed Jason's wife last week and those horses are pretty darn cute.

Jason Wiesenauer 20:08 They're incredible.

Jen Weidner 20:09 I mean, those little ones I can see are stinkers.

Jason Wiesenauer 20:12 Absolutely!

Jen Weidner 20:13

Is there one call that stands out to you more than all the others?

Jason Wiesenauer 20:18 There are several but I kind of anticipated this question. There is. It's referred to as the Howard Avenue fire. There, there's some apartments on Howard Avenue. This particular one had a fatality. That guy died later in the hospital. But it stands out to me for a couple reasons. One personally I had to call a mayday at the fire. I was a younger sergeant, and my officer was unconscious. I didn't realize it. Another guy, another crew came in to assist us fighting the fire inside and hollered at me that my

officer was down. We came back and he was unresponsive. In my mind, he had had a heart attack. That's not what happened, thank goodness, but I thought he was dying right there. And so I have to compose myself enough to speak clearly on the radio to get him the help he needs. When I'm like I don't know what I'm doing. So it was very difficult. And that that affected me in more ways than one professionally it affected me just because of the danger of it. And this is a guy I care a lot about that could be in a life threatening situation.

Jen Weidner 21:32 This is your family.

Jason Wiesenauer 21:33 Yes. Yeah. And it's very difficult to hear each other on the radio. So you need to speak very clearly. I was fortunate that I practiced my Mayday calls regularly. Because there's a certain order you're supposed to do it and to get it you want it to be muscle memory. Because I was not thinking clearly at the time. In my recall of the event, I remember him not even wearing a mask or helmet and that's not he was wearing his mask and helmet but because I care so much about him and I was in fear for his life like I was picturing him as I see him every day. Does that make sense? And I remember there was tunnel vision I couldn't. In speaking about the event later, I could not describe what was going on around me because I was hyper focused on what was in front of me. So there is a ton of adrenaline. There were chemical reasons why everything happened that way. But we were able to get him out, move him out. And he, what happened is he was knocked unconscious by falling debris. And we determined that later. Everybody's response was fantastic. EMS police he was police escorted to UofL hospital. He was actually conscious in the ambulance so we knew he was going to be okay.

Jen Weidner 22:54 It's still scary!

Jason Wiesenauer 22:55 Very scary. But at that fire there are many more reasons why this fire stands out. That fire changed the way Jeffersonville Fire Department fights fires because of the flow path of heat. We were, there was trouble communicating where the fire was, because we had several different people saying it was on the first floor. But it was actually in a subfloor. But, so communication was difficult. And then there was a window that was open to rescue people. And that's where the heat and fire went. And it had a great flow path that actually trapped firefighters. And so they had to evacuate the building. And we had difficulty ventilating the building. So many many different things happened at this one particular fire that kind of skyrocketed us into the new century of firefighting. So a very interesting fire and we still talk about it to this day. I have, the have the audio of the fire and I'll still listen to it sometimes. It was just an incredible fire in my career. And I think a few other people feel the same way. My current lieutenant was also on that fire and he was caught in the flow path. So that fire stands out to him as well.

Jen Weidner 24:21 That probably changes you when you're caught, when you're, you're so highly trained and then something happens and you're stuck.

Jason Wiesenauer 24:29 Yeah

Jen Weidner 24:30 Yeah

Jason Wiesenauer 24:30 It was a situation so we were responding to multiple rescues in this building. And so when there are rescues, that's what we are, that's why we're here. Like today. Like I'm thinking if there's a rescue that's why we're firefighters is ultimately it's so that the whole city doesn't burn down. Ultimately that's why we have a fire department. Specifically it's to keep certain buildings from burning down. And more importantly, is life. That's the one we we're here to save a life and we will go to extraordinary extremes to do that. So we had calls from multiple rescues people trapped in apartments, certain apartments. And we were trying to make our way to those apartments when there was a flashover underneath us So the temperature immediately skyrocketed. We had to evacuate for our own safety. And then, but we still believe there were people in there. So that's why we went back here on the lower floor where the debris was falling, and actually ended up knocking one of us unconscious. And it was intimidating. It was tough. So there was, there was fear. There was extraordinary circumstances that I'd never experienced before. It was a big time fire in a small town fire department.

Jen Weidner 25:50 Because you can't train for every single

Jason Wiesenauer 25:53 You can't!

Jen Weidner 25:53 Scenario because I mean there's just

Jason Wiesenauer 25:55 Right.

Jen Weidner 25:56 This is the real world. Anything can happen.

Jason Wiesenauer 25:59 We didn't, as a department certain, certain firefighters understood the science of it. The very smart people that I work with very experienced firefighters were on that scene. There was one door that was open to the apartment where people were being rescued. That door remained open, which caused most of the problems in this fire. Had that door been shut it would have protected, would have changed the flow path and cut off some of that ventilation and protected the building as a whole. And we know that now and we didn't know that as a practice at the time that when you open the door you shut the door and that confines the fire to certain areas. So it's not, it's not a condemnation of our department before that fire. We were very skilled, very experienced firefighters. But the science behind it. We're learning things so rapidly in today's world.

Jen Weidner 25:59 Oh, absolutely.

Jason Wiesenauer 25:59 Now as an entire department that has become a practice is shutting those doors and controlling that flow path. So that's why I think that fire in particular was such a huge, one person did die. It was a man who lived in the apartment where the fire started. He was alive when we responded. He's on the front porch speaking to people but he had, he had inhaled and burned so much of his respiratory system that he didn't make it. And there have certainly been fires that have been more deadly that day in Jeffersonville. Which is, is terrible. And I'm those fires stand out to people because so many changes happened at the Howard after the Howard Avenue fire. That's the one that stands out to me. I've certainly had a lot of other calls that are terrible or funny, or stand out but that one was the big one for me in my career I think.

Jen Weidner 26:01 So for those people that don't know where is Howard Avenue in Jeffersonville?

Jason Wiesenauer 26:28 District one off of it between 8th and 8th Street and 10th Street is kind of the Howard Avenue is big where there are several apartments.

Jen Weidner 28:09 Okay, is it like a cross from the cemetery?

Jason Wiesenauer 28:12 Yes near French and Pratt. And I was coming from station five, which is out on Allison lane. And I came with a three man crew on my engine and I was driving. So as they were trying to rescue people I was throwing my pack on in a hurry which you don't want to do, you want to stay calm and steady. So it was very easy for us all to get our heart rates up and the adrenaline flowing because we were rushing. The fire had a little bit of a jump on us and it the fire at Howard Avenue continued to get worse as we were on scene and that, that's not supposed to happen. It should get better. But everybody was focusing on rescue. And that's another thing that has changed in our department is truck companies focus on rescue and then the engine company, the initial engine company worked very hard to put that fire out. So before that it had always been if there's a rescue, everything goes to that rescue. I'm overgeneralizing it, but that was basically the thought process. If you see someone in a window

Jen Weidner 29:23 That's your first instinct to save them?

Jason Wiesenauer 29:24 Yeah, sure. But now we know we have certain people that are going to save those people. But if you put the fire out, you save everything. So there, there, there's an again, that's an overgeneralization. But that's our plan A is that the initial attack engine goes to the fire while the truck company or reserve engine or or a later coming engine can help assist with rescue.

Jen Weidner 29:51 So tell us the difference between an engine and a truck.

Jason Wiesenauer 29:54 Sure, the truck, our trucks have aerial ladders on it.

Jen Weidner 29:58 Okay.

Jason Wiesenauer 29:59 They're very easy to see. Engine carries hose and water and fights the fire. The truck companies carry personnel, men and tools and they bust doors in they tear ceilings and walls down. They searched the building for victims that have gone unconscious or hiding or locked in a room and they do rescue, the engines you think of our taking a hose and water to a fire and putting that fire. Now in a smaller town department like we have 92 firefighters. Everyone can do everything. So I'm currently an engine captain. Last year I was the truck captain. I can do maybe not as well as some of these firefighters. I can do any job in the department. I have done all the jobs.

Jen Weidner 30:50 You can drive all the trucks?

Jason Wiesenauer 30:51 All trucks I enjoy driving the truck. The the sergeant's job is driving the trucks and it's a really wonderful job. And it's difficult because, because you have to get them to the fire safely. And there's an amazing amount of injuries and fatalities to firefighters happen on route to fires in wrecks. So the sergeant job is very difficult. But people love that job. You know driving it. You're pumping the water. A lot revolves around you doing your job correctly. And I'll tell you, it's one of the better jobs because you're avoiding some of the cancer and the carcinogens of being a firefighter. So as far as health goes, the sergeant job is a pretty enviable job.

Jen Weidner 31:43 So what does the captain do?

Jason Wiesenauer 31:46 The captain is in so the first captain on scene is in charge of that scene until a battalion chief shows up until a command vehicle shows up. So you're technically for several minutes you are guiding

Jen Weidner 32:02 Everything.

Jason Wiesenauer 32:03 Everything that's happening but you are also participating in it. It's tricky for a few minutes. So as a captain your main job number one is protecting the firefighter behind you. He's going to be a lot less experienced and have a lot fewer years on than you and he's looking to you for guidance. So you're going to take him in on a hand line to the fire as an engine captain. So you'll be behind him. He's doing a lot of the muscle work. He's carrying a charged hand line and which can be very difficult and you're coming in behind him you're hauling hose in behind him, you're looking at the situation to protect him during a fire and all that firefighter is focused on is fighting the fire and putting water on that fire. While you were checking the temperature of the fire. You're looking for victims around you. You're seeing through the smoke because you usually can't see anything at all

Jen Weidner 32:58 Right

Jason Wiesenauer 32:59 And you have a thermal and the captain will have the imager to check the temperature and conditions as you're progressing towards the fire. So that's what an engine captain would do on a fire. What an engine, what a truck captain would do is participate in the primary search. So you're inside going to the fire, looking for victims at the fire and then falling back through living spaces like bedrooms, living rooms, kitchens to find possible victims of carbon monoxide inhalation or the heat can be overwhelming and you want to get those out.

Jen Weidner 33:36 These fires they, most burn pretty hot, right?

Jason Wiesenauer 33:39 Very hot up to 1200 degrees I believe until we can get it ventilated, and then that's on a thermal layer. So at the ceiling, you're gonna find those higher temperatures. And then down at the ground you can find anywhere from 200 to 600. In flashover conditions or in full burn conditions, the entire space can be skyrocketing and heat. Our gear protects us to extreme temperatures for a wonderful amount of time. But you don't want to spend too you much, you can't, people can't survive

Jen Weidner 33:50 No even with the best gear, there's no way.

Jason Wiesenauer 34:13 That's right. So very hot. Carbon monoxide I believe is what gets most people first is the smoke. That's why we say sleep with your bedroom door shut because a bedroom with a child in it can survive for a long period of time at very survivable conditions in a fire as long as that doors shut. So that's big time in protecting yourself from a residential structure fire.

Jen Weidner 34:42 So can you tell us about a humorous call without you know like disclosing too much, you know, details?

Jason Wiesenauer 34:49 Yeah, so most of the terrible calls end up being humorous. The gallows humor it's a part of protecting our mental health in a very private firehouse condition. I'm not going to deny that we laugh at some awful things and it's to protect us.

Jen Weidner 35:06 It's how most of us cope with stuff.

Jason Wiesenauer 35:08 Yeah, there's no disrespect intended. But humanity can be terrible. It can be funny, it can be wonderful. And we deal with all of that. I'm trying to think of some humorous calls is, without being

Jen Weidner 35:23 Like do you get like maybe some little old ladies who call you all for everything because they just like firefighters?

Jason Wiesenauer 35:30 Yeah, so the I didn't go on this call, but it happened while I was on duty. A lady called my, my lieutenant to come she, her, her oven was malfunctioning. And it was at 420 degrees and the temperature kept going up. And my lieutenant and his engine company showed up and they were looking at the oven and it wasn't hot And as they were there it went up to 421 degrees and then 422 degrees. And I think you can see where this is going.

Jen Weidner 36:04 Yes. Yes. (laughing)

Jason Wiesenauer 36:05 They, they told the lady that her clock was functioning appropriately. And it was currently 4:22 in the afternoon. And she was embarrassed. Of course she was embarrassed. But everyone had a great laugh.

Jen Weidner 36:19 Well I mean, better safe than sorry. What if it was not working it was a gas stove and it was malfunctioning.

Jason Wiesenauer 36:24 Yeah. But you're absolutely right.

Jen Weidner 36:26 Those are the calls. You're like, it's funny, everybody's safe.

Jason Wiesenauer 36:30 It was hilarious as it dawned on everyone like how are we going to explain this

Jen Weidner 36:34 You want to you because you want to be respectful, obviously.

Jason Wiesenauer 36:37 We were so fortunate especially with sweet little old ladies. They think we're all their sons and daughters.

Jen Weidner 36:44 Absolutely, yes

Jason Wiesenauer 36:44 So you know, she got a hug. She got an arm around her and they're like, man, your clock is your clock It's gonna be great. She was so embarrassed and we thanked her for letting us come.

Jen Weidner 36:56 You got to get out of the firehouse. So do you all still get calls for "my cats in the tree"?

Jason Wiesenauer 37:01 We do. And that's a that's kind of a controversial subject in the fire department. I will respond always to a cat in the tree. I'll set the ladders up. I'll get the cat down. There are certain officers that will not do that. Because the cats come down. They do, I think it's a wonderful training. Everyone in the neighborhood comes out to see the fire truck out there. We get to chat with the neighbors and have a great laugh. I can send my young firefighter up a ladder. Perfectly safe for us to climb a ladder. That's what we do. We do it in training all the time.

Jen Weidner 37:36 That's what you're trained to do.

Jason Wiesenauer 37:37 So it's, it's a if nothing else, it's just a great public relations tool.

Jen Weidner 37:43 Yeah, it's your community building thing.

Jason Wiesenauer 37:45 I will say there are firefighters. You know, Captain Josh Kempf, responded, I believe to a bird in a tree. It happened. "My bird is stuck in the tree". It was a house bird they had gotten out and they, they responded. They didn't get the bird.

Jen Weidner 38:02 I mean,

Jason Wiesenauer 38:03 She flew away.

Jen Weidner 38:04 It's a bird.

Jason Wiesenauer 38:05 Right.

Jen Weidner 38:08 I mean, but I could see people panic.

Jason Wiesenauer 38:09 Yeah, the standard. You don't see many cat skeletons in a tree.

Jen Weidner 38:14 That's what I've heard. Yeah, like you don't see cat skeletons.

Jason Wiesenaus 38:16 But I think it's ,I love to get out. I love to set the truck up. I think it's really cool. And so to the kids and if you bring that cat down, it's a wonderful feeling. I will say I responded to Henryville after the tornado.

Jen Weidner 38:29 Oh gosh, yeah.

Jason Wiesenaus 38:31 And there was a veteran who came up to us younger than I was ,veteran. And he, he said my house was destroyed. He was standing right where his house had been. He said, All I have left is that cat in that tree right there. It was his kitten was a tree that had no leaves no.

Jen Weidner 38:48 Oh my gosh!

Jason Wiesenaus 38:51 Cat and I'm trying not to cry. I

Jen Weidner 38:53 I mean, right?

Jason Wiesenaus 38:54 This tough, young veteran has

Jen Weidner 38:57 Lost everything.

Jason Wiesenaus 38:59 I'll do everything to get that cat. My good friend, Captain Mike Terry. He climbed up there and brought that cat. He's a marine himself.

Jen Weidner 39:07 That's the things that you do though.

Jason Wiesenaus 39:11 That was very human and wonderful.

Jen Weidner 39:15 Heck I'd have climbed up that tree somehow someway. But yeah,

Jason Wiesenaus 39:18 That's, that's what I would say, get the cat out of the tree. Yeah, it means a lot.

Jen Weidner 39:23 Well I mean, I know you guys hate to hear this. But you know, it's our we could just see our tax money at work. You know, we get to see those trucks. People don't realize they can come to the fire station and ask Yeah, especially at headquarters. They love to give tours. They have a super old fire truck there.

Jason Wiesenaus 39:37 We're very proud of our fire equipment.

Jen Weidner 39:39 Yeah!

Jason Wiesenaus 39:40 Yeah!

Jen Weidner 39:40 Yeah. I loved it, when I got my tour. It was awesome. I got to ask questions. And yeah, it's fun. So what are some misconceptions about firefighting? There's countless TV shows, and I know I sit there and watch them. And roll my eyes going. I don't think that really happened. Don't know that. That definitely doesn't happen.

Jason Wiesenauer 40:00 I would say probably, people may underestimate the heat of a fire. It's It's It's otherworldly. And when there's a fire, you won't see this on TV. You can't see anything. You can't see your hand in front of your face. It is black out conditions you never see smoke on the fires that you see in the movies. Backdraft, its smoke is what is there and it makes it very difficult to do your job. So those scientists are technologically or scientifically that's the big misconception that you see on TV. And then the other thing that you see on TV is the drama. There's very little drama in the firehouse from day to day, other than who ate my ham sandwich that I brought in for lunch.

Jen Weidner 40:48 Right !

Jason Wiesenauer 40:48 That's the drama you're gonna see in the firehouse. So I would say those are the easy ones to point out. And then we have, we have just as many problems as everyone else. We have in our fire department we have people who struggle with substance abuse. We have people who struggle with mental health or physical challenges, or they struggle in ,in their married life at home. And we deal that deal with that just the same way that anyone else may deal with it.

Jen Weidner 41:23 At the end of the day you all are human.

Jason Wiesenauer 41:25 We are humans. Yeah,

Jen Weidner 41:26 You just run into fires I mean you don't just run into fires. But you know, I'm saying like.

Jason Wiesenauer 41:31 Yeah no, we're but you find that we're all the same type of person. That, that will that ,doesn't see that as a problem at all. It ,It astounds my wife that we would do that. But if that is nothing, I don't think that's a big deal. I don't want to say anything. That doesn't seem to be as big a deal like that's who is drawn to the fire department.

Jen Weidner 41:59 Adrenaline junkies a little bit?

Jason Wiesenauer 42:02 That probably an overgeneralization but yeah, we certainly have our fair share of adrenaline junkies but we've got just as many that will that want to the most exciting thing they want to do is get on their lawn mower and their riding lawn mower at home. Yeah, I think it's fair to say you're gonna find more guys that will go skydiving in our profession and then another maybe, but that's not who we are. We're not all Nitro Circus adrenaline junkies. type people that are very average. In most ways. You're going to find the whole spectrum of type of people, open minded, close minded, fast drivers, slow drivers. I drive like an old fogie, so.

Jen Weidner 42:51 Because you have to like speed when you're in a fire truck, so.

Jason Wiesnauer 42:55 That may be another thing. We don't go over the speed limit in most circumstances. But because traffic moves out of our way, we are able to get places fast.

Jen Weidner 43:07 Yeah, that's an important reminder people who are listening to this please please move over for emergency vehicles

Jason Wiesnauer 43:12 Move to the right.

Jen Weidner 43:13 Yeah, just just move over. Let them get to where they're going, because what if it's your loved one they're trying to get to.

Jason Wiesnauer 43:17 to but we have to stop at stop signs. We have to slow down dramatically at intersections. Because we cannot get in a wreck because our vehicles weigh over 60,000 pounds. And they don't stop on a dime. And they do tremendous damage. And if we get in a wreck and we can't get to the emergency we're trying to get to

Jen Weidner 43:26 Right

Jason Wiesnauer 43:39 So a Sergeant his most important job is getting us there safely. So we, we're not quite as able as the police department to respond as quickly.

Jen Weidner 43:50 Yeah, I've been in a police car speeding down 10th Street and yeah, it was crazy.

Jason Wiesnauer 43:54 We shoot to get to every emergency in seven minutes.

Jen Weidner 43:57 Okay

Jason Wiesnauer 43:58 In District four where I work, that's physically not possible.

Jen Weidner 44:01 I was gonna say if you have to go all the way up

Jason Wiesnauer 44:03 It's so large

Jen Weidner 44:04 to Charlestown State Park to the boat ramp. I know where that fire house is.

Jason Wiesnauer 44:08 Yeah

Jen Weidner 44:09 That's that's quite a way.

Jason Wiesnauer 44:10 Even some of our further neighborhoods. We just can't get there that quickly. Because the roads are still too small for big fire trucks to get through.

Jen Weidner 44:21 Yeah, fire trucks are getting bigger, roads are getting smaller. It seems so.

Jason Wiesenauer 44:26 Yeah.

Jen Weidner 44:27 So I try to do a little research about whoever I'm going to interview just because I like to know what I'm walking into. And I saw that you participated in the World Police and Fire Games. What was that like?

Jason Wiesenauer 44:38 It was incredible. I got to go with my good friend Josh Stith. He's a lieutenant here at the fire department. And he's an incredible wrestler and grappler mixed martial artist. And we, we bonded early on in the fire service because our beliefs and physical fitness and professionalism that are kind of in tune. And we saw the word Police and Fire Games as a great opportunity to represent Jeffersonville to the world. He's, Josh is an incredible athlete and he,he, he's full board ahead and very proud to be a Jeffersonville firefighter as I am. And we ,we found it important to work very hard at our events, so that our city could be represented appropriately. And so the World Police and Fire Games was a fantastic experience. We went to New York City. And he sacrificed a lot because his daughter had just been born and he had a brand new baby at home. And yet we're going to New York City to represent Jeffersonville. While I was there, I was going to compete in a triathlon which I'd never done before, but I thought it would be a great experience and hurricane came in

Jen Weidner 44:38 Oh gosh!

Jason Wiesenauer 44:50 And my event was canceled. I trained for two years to get there.

Jen Weidner 45:58 Oh, man!

Jason Wiesenauer 46:00 They canceled my event. So I immediately switched into I'm now Josh's corner man and I'm going to get him wrestling at peak condition. And Josh did a fantastic job and we had a great experience. And Josh won a gold medal.

Jen Weidner 46:15 Oh, that's fantastic!

Jason Wiesenauer 46:16 Incredible. And so we had been to a couple more games since then. And we tried to bring people with us. And it was always a wonderful experience. And I think Josh has competed for three World Games and one Canadian American Games and always does very well. He's a, he's a great guy.

Jen Weidner 46:34 He's representing us well.

Jason Wiesenauer 46:36 And he, he means it when he says he's representing his city ,he is. That's big to him because he went to high school here. He grew up here, Jeffersonville is his city and he carries that is a burden to he, he can't stop because he believes people believe in him and they do.

Jen Weidner 46:54 We need that ,we need people like that. Yeah,

Jason Wiesenauer 46:56 Absolutely.

Jen Weidner 46:57 So I know a lot of firefighters have jobs besides firefighting. Do you have another job?

Jason Wiesenauer 47:03 I do. I get to I cut cut stuff up with my chainsaw. I cut trees and do small landscaping jobs and brush cutting. I mowed grass with another firefighter for years. And then that got to be too much with my summer. My summer was all spent on the lawn mower and we already spend enough time away from our family. So I found a job that I could do smaller two or three hour jobs and be finished with them. And then I get to be at the farm for the rest of the time. So I kind of designed that on purpose so that I can wrap my side work up and just a couple hours a week. Our career on the fire department has we have very good salaries we can live very well in town. And so I don't, most of us don't need a second job. But the type of people that are drawn to the fire department, I think are also drawn to staying busy.

Jen Weidner 47:57 You're not just gonna sit around.

Jason Wiesenauer 47:59 I think that does ring true is that most of us are finding something to do as side work just to stay busy.

Jason Wiesenauer 48:06 Right,Yeah.

Jen Weidner 48:08 And I know in October you have another little job that you do around the farm right? You portray it a certain a certain horror villain, right?

Jason Wiesenauer 48:18 Yeah, that's every October me and the guys at the firehouse we bring out the old horror movies like it's so that that 10 days that we work in October are spent watching, my favorite is Halloween, Friday the 13th and we're always on the lookout for new horror movies to watch in October. But I for the longest time I wanted to buy the Michael Myers costume and I have and I believe Michael Myers will be coming to the library this October.

Jen Weidner 48:48 I think he might be. Yeah, we've

Jason Wiesenauer 48:52 He's developed an interest in, in reading. Yeah. So yeah, he Michael Myers wandered around the farm and my poor wife, who is a little jumpy to begin with. Now she's got Michael Myers, chasing her around the farm.

Jen Weidner 49:07 She did a great job taking pictures of Jason this past October and that's kind of how I got interested in meeting these crazy people. Because I was like, Oh, that's really funny. And then one day Jason just happened to come to the library, like hey, wait, wait, you're Michael.

Jason Wiesenauer 49:23 Yeah, you got me.

Jen Weidner 49:25 yes. So our firefighters do have a sense of humor.

Jason Wiesenauer 49:28 Oh my gosh, the practical jokes you see around the firehouse.

Jen Weidner 49:31 You kind of have to do with the line of work you're and you have to. Yep. So what advice would you give anyone that wants to become a firefighter?

Jason Wiesenauer 49:41 I think the step one is to meet a local firefighter or just go talk with a local firefighter and try and make that personal connection to someone that can guide you. Physical Fitness is huge. It's very taxing to fight a fire. It's very taxing to stay alert and interested for a 20 or 30 year career. As I'm approaching 50 It's much harder for me to keep up with a 22 year old firefighter who's excited to be fighting a fire. So yeah, physical fitness is huge. And that's you don't need to be a muscle bound monster. What, what I would request from any new firefighter is that they're dedicated to a regular fitness regime, whether it's yoga, bicycling, running, walking, weightlifting, it's something that's going to keep you healthy, over a 20 or 30 year career.

Jen Weidner 50:41 Absolutely!

Jason Wiesenauer 50:41 Healthy and able to carry 60 to 100 extra pounds while, while fighting a fire, so that's big. I would say definitely discuss it with family, because there's going to be a third of your life now spent with a whole different family.

Jen Weidner 50:58 Yep.

Jason Wiesenauer 50:58 And then there's going to you're typically a firefighter will bear the weight of some of the things they see. So I would ask that you are mentally, emotionally and spiritually fit and prepared to see some of the worst in life, some of the best in life and then the truth of humanity over an extended period of time because you get very in touch with your city whether that's homelessness, homelessness, mental health issues.

Jen Weidner 51:30 Addiction

Jason Wiesenauer 51:31 Addiction, low income, high income there you're going to be very in tune to the pulse of the city you work in. So it's a big ask. It's not it's not all fun and games and riding around in a big red wonderful fire engine. And so that's what I would say. That's what I would recommend to someone who wants to be a firefighter is begin talking to some firefighters.

Jen Weidner 51:58 Is there anything else you want to tell us?

Jason Wiesenauer 52:04 Nothing comes to mind. I appreciate ,I appreciate you taking the time this is ,this is really wonderful.

Jen Weidner 52:09 No thank you. I've gotten to ask some questions that I've wanted to know about firefighting. So thank you very much.

Jason Wiesenauer 52:15 You're welcome.