

The Weston Voices Oral History Project

Presents

A Conversation with



John W. Troxell

Weston's Chief of Police, 2008 – 2017

Interviewed on June 28, 2017 and September 14, 2017
by Arne de Keijzer & Karin Giannitti

Sponsored by the Weston Historical Society

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*A video of the full interview, its annotated transcript, and introductory
“Short Takes” video are available in the Society’s archives
and its website, WestonHistoricalSociety.org*

*Copies may be found at the Weston Senior Activities
Center and the Weston Public Library as well.*

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Weston Voices

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A Conversation with John W. Troxell

John Troxell knew he was destined to be a policeman since childhood. His favorite TV show was 'Adam 12,' he sometimes dressed as a policeman on Halloween, and the family's neighbor in Walpole, Massachusetts was an officer who would, in John's words, "let us sit in the police car and play with the radio and stuff."

John's parents, Dick and Jackie Troxell, moved to Weston when he was in the eighth grade. Later, in high school, and after classes, John worked part-time on the Weston Schools maintenance team. Says he, "I literally swept floors, emptied garbage cans, and changed light bulbs, and also washed windows. I'm very proud of that."

Then, once he got his driver's license and first car, "well...if you ever saw the movie 'American Graffiti,' it was a lot like that." The result: "I got into learning experiences with the police." But those "experiences" led directly to his future: "The fact that these officers took me under their wing and treated me like somebody that made a mistake versus treating me like I was some kind of a one-man crime wave galvanized the idea that not only did I want to be a police officer, but I wanted to be a Weston Police Officer."

After graduation he found a job at a jewelry manufacturer in Wilton and then, in 1980, at the age of 22 and with very little training, he was hired as a part-time officer with the Weston Police Department. He became a full-time officer in February, 1981. After rising through the ranks, he was selected as Chief of Police in 2008, and served until he retired in 2017.

Here Troxell talks about growing up, his mentors and first years on the Police Department, learning to compartmentalize the tragedies he's witnessed, what it takes to be a good policeman in Weston, dealing with town officials, and much more. In the end, he said, "the best part of the job was seeing that you can actually help somebody."

The interview was done over two sessions. The first took place on June 28, 2017, the second on September 14, 2017, both at his home on Glory Road and both with his dog "Smoochy" by his side. They were conducted by Arne de Keijzer, a Trustee of the Historical Society, and Karin Giannitti, whose deep knowledge of Weston history is reflected in her editorship of 'The Chronicle Quarterly' and her years as a collections manager and volunteer at the Weston Historical Society. Additionally, Karin's husband, Sal, was already on the police force when Troxell first came on and, John says, "he taught me that it's not just about writing tickets; it's about dealing with people on a human level."

Due to the length of these interviews, this transcript has been divided into four parts to match the four-part video record. It has also been edited and annotated for clarity. A five-minute "short takes" video, the full-length video, and a photo gallery can be found on WestonHistoricalSociety.org. The views expressed by the participants are solely their own.

Part 1

Early family life • The “culture shock” of moving to Weston as a teenager • Memories of teachers, classes, and classmates • Working on the crew of the theater company

Karin Giannitti: John, let’s start at the beginning: Please tell us when and where you were born.

John Troxell: I was born in Sharon Hospital in Sharon, Massachusetts. That was way back in the dark ages of 1958.

I have an older sister, Julie, who was born in 1957, and a younger sister, Susan, who was born in 1961. My sister Susan lives in Westport with her husband and her daughter. My sister Julie is in Philadelphia with her husband and four kids, two boys and two girls.

Karin: Wow, that’s nice. When did you and your family move to Weston?

John: A date that will live in infamy in our family: November 9th, 1972. We moved from Walpole, Massachusetts to Weston, Connecticut, and here we’ve been ever since.

Karin: Did you move because of your Dad’s job?

John: Yes. He originally worked with the Kendall Company, which was bought out by Colgate in 1972. They initially moved his office from Walpole to Boston. Then, because they merged and had too many executives there, he decided to look for work elsewhere. [*The Kendall Company, founded in 1903 in Walpole, became one of the nation’s largest manufacturers of textile products for domestic, industrial, and medical use. –ed.*]

He found a new company that was just starting up in New York City at the time, General Re, General Reinsurance. He started with them in New York City, and then, ultimately, they moved to Greenwich and then to Stanford. That’s why they started looking in the Westport-Weston-Fairfield area for a house.

Karin: He had to commute in the beginning?

John: Right.

Karin: Did your mother stay at home and take care of you children, or did she work?

John: My mother has had an interesting working career. She worked as a clerk for the Stoughton District Court in nearby Sharon when we were young and before we moved to Weston. Then, when we moved here, she originally was a stay-at-home mom for the first couple of years and then she got a job working for Weston Woods with Mort Schindel. She worked there for I believe seventeen years before she finally retired. [*Mort Schindel was the founder and creative force behind Weston Woods Studios, known world-wide for its innovations in the world of children’s literature. Mort’s “Weston Voices” oral history is available on WestonHistoricalSociety.org. –ed.*]

Karin: Other than school specifically, what was it like to grow up in Weston when you first came here?

John: It was a kind of a culture shock, because we moved from a town where we had lived on Edgewood Avenue in a small neighborhood where all of our friends were “built in,” so to speak. It was small lots. I think they were quarter-acre lots. The houses were all relatively close together. It was very safe in that little circle where we lived.

When we moved to Weston, the houses were more spread out, because of course most of the zoning at that time, even then, was two acres. We moved to Steep Hill Road. It’s not really what I would consider a neighborhood, *per se*. It’s more like a main thoroughfare through the center of town.

We didn’t have neighbors that were close. We didn’t know anybody when we first moved here in mid-school year in November, 1972. As kids, we didn’t know anybody and my parents didn’t really know anybody. So, as I said, it was a little bit of a culture shock to move from, “Everybody was built into our neighborhood and we knew everybody in the town” -- my parents did -- to “We don’t know anybody here” and we didn’t have any friends. It took a little adjusting.

Karin: You made friends with people at school rather than neighbors.

John: Right.

Karin: What did you do for activities around daily life? Did you go out and play baseball? Did you skate at the pond?

John: Interesting that you mentioned that. When I lived in Massachusetts, the sport there was ice hockey. I was on Pee-Wee ice hockey teams and we could play year-round. There was a place called the Four Seasons Ice Arena that was within a ten minute drive of our house. I was on hockey teams all summer, all winter.

When we moved here, hockey was not the big sport and I was not really interested in any other sports at the time. You probably remember the Boston Bruins back in the ‘60s and ‘70s, with Bobby Orr and Derek Sanderson. Those were all my heroes back then. I didn’t know much about baseball or football or anything like that, and I wasn’t any good at those sports.

When we moved here, we did have a Mrs. Coats who next to a pond across the street from my parents’ house on Steep Hill Road. She would let us skate on that pond when it froze over. Also, we knew some people off of Beaver Brook Road -- the Hickoxes. They lived on a property that was backed up to part of a pond back there as well. We would go ice skating there, too.

That’s what we would do. The first summer we were here we basically stayed within the family. We traveled to the Grand Canyon, our first plane trip as a family. But that summer we still hadn’t really established ourselves, so it was kind of a family-first year.

Karin: Did you have chores around the house?

John: Oh yeah, I always cut the lawn. That was always my job, and doing other little odds and ends.

Karin: You just kept yourself busy then?

John: Oh yeah. Just like retirement. [laughter]

Karin: Your early schooling and elementary school were in Massachusetts, correct?

John: Yes.

Karin: Junior high as well, or were you here in Weston High School?

John: I started junior high in East Junior High in Walpole, and moved here when I was in the eighth grade. I started off in the Weston Middle School. Some of the teachers who I remember were Mr. Stern, my science teacher, and Mr. Rotello, our social science teacher. The thing I really liked about Mr. Rotello was that he was very interested in World War II. Apparently he worked on an aircraft carrier and he had all sorts of pictures of the ship. He would bring things in and talk about them. We had a *Life* magazine picture history of World War II that my Dad and I would look through together when I was growing up, so I remember Mr. Rotello.

Karin: You had mentioned you wore uniforms at your previous school?

John: Actually it wasn't a uniform *per se*, but there was a dress code. Another part of the culture shock moving here was getting used to the idea that there was no dress code in the school here.

We went from nice slacks, penny loafers, and button-down, puffy-sleeve shirts, which were the style at the time and within the parameters of the dress code of the schools in Walpole, which was more of a blue-collar town, to coming to Weston, which was not so much a blue-collar town. More of a white-collar town where there was no dress code.

Actually, when I first walked into the middle school, I thought I was at Woodstock, because everybody was wearing the jeans with the holes in the knees, the frayed edges around the heels, the jean jackets, t-shirts, and all that kind of stuff. [*The famed – or infamous – Woodstock Music & Art Fair, was held August 15-18, 1969 on a dairy farm in rural New York State, attracting an audience of over 400,000. As Wikipedia.com puts it, "It was widely regarded as a pivotal moment in popular music history as well as the definitive nexus for the larger counterculture generation." –ed.*]

I had made the mistake of thinking there was a dress code in every school, so I wore my penny loafers and my slacks and my button-down, puffy-sleeve flowered shirt, and of course, made an impression when I first came to school, which was, "Who is this guy?" [laughter]

Karin: Were there a lot of cliques and things like that in those days?

John: I think you would say that there were the jocks, of course, and then there were the popular kids for whatever reason, and then there were the...I would call them the leftovers. Those people didn't really fit into any certain group. Those are the people I gravitated toward in the beginning because I didn't really have any experience with anybody else at the time.

There are certain people in town whose names you'd probably recognize. I was friends with Russ Hall, and also Craig Fleischer and his family. They were very active in the Boy Scouts, which I joined when I first came to Weston because, back in Walpole, I was a First Class Scout. I got into Troop 88 at the time. I know that Troop 7 and Troop 88 merged into what is Troop 788 now. That was one of the things that helped me meet people too.

Karin: Anything particular courses in school that you liked, or did not like? Did you have favorites?

John: Like any young, pubescent male, when you're in high school, you don't really understand why you're learning half the stuff you're learning, or whether even you're ever going to use it

again in life. I will say that probably my favorite class was a government class taught by Paul Wruble that I took freshman year. He made everything very interesting.

I don't know if you remember the Watergate issue with Richard Nixon, but that whole thing was going down during that time. He set up the class like we were doing an impeachment. He gave everyone different roles, and called us Senator This and Senator That, and we did an impeachment. He was very interested in the McCarthy era, with the hearings about the communists and all of that.

I would say that that was probably the most memorable class I took. I also remember taking Math I, learning basic math, and how to write a check, and use a checkbook. That was the one thing [from those days] I remember very clearly that I still use today.

Karin: I gather that you got into Company, the high school's theater program?

John: Yes. I always had a gravitational pull towards the arts, like performances. My parents always said that I was the performer of the family, always the one cracking jokes at the table, and doing things to make people laugh.

As far as actually auditioning in front of people, I never really had the guts to do it, so I remained behind the scenes. The first play I worked on, I believe, was in the summer of '73, just after I graduated from Junior High. There was a summer stock in the school in those days and my parents urged me to go and get involved with it. They were going to do "Camelot."

We used to build tree houses and stuff like that when I was in Walpole. So my parents said, "Why don't you go see if you can get involved with the set construction?" I went there and they had me work on the sets. I met very interesting people. For example, I met Chris Barreca, who recently won a Tony Award for set construction in the play "Rocky" on Broadway. He was the guy that was pretty much the professional set designer for the schools at that time.

The first play that we did in high school was "The Two Gentlemen of Verona." It's basically a Shakespearean play that's put to music. We build a three-level set on the stage and I really enjoyed doing that. I met a lot of people in Company that I still am in contact with, even today. But somehow I lost interest in it along the way though. Other things happened.

Part 2

Working part-time while in High School • More on family life • Living the “American Graffiti” lifestyle and his “learning experiences” with the local police • Destined to be a policeman since he was six • Pre-police work experience • Joining the Weston Police Department • Moving back into Weston after retiring -- and why into this particular house • What makes serving in a town like Weston different.

Karin: You said you had worked at some part-time jobs during your high school years?

John: Yes. Interesting you’re asking me that now, because my first real employer was Dr. Tom Aquila. He recently passed away. He, for my entire life, was probably my biggest supporter and one of my biggest fans. [*Acquila, who believed that “education is a people-intensive business,” was the highly respected and well-liked Superintendent of Schools from 1961 to 1982. He died in June, 2017. –ed.*]

I was introduced to him by Ron Parento, the janitor in the high school with whom I was friendly. He was always cracking jokes with everybody, and talking to the kids, and everything. I told him that I was interested in part-time work, because I knew some of the kids worked part-time after school. He said, “Let me bring you over. I’ll introduce you to Dr. Aquila, I’ll recommend that you get the job, and you’ll get it.”

He drove me over in his car -- it was an old station wagon -- smoking a cigar on the way over to the Board of Education building. Brought me into Dr. Aquila’s office, introduced me. He goes, “I know you. I remember talking to your father when you guys moved into town. What can I do for you?”

I said, “Well, I’m looking for part-time work after school. I’d like to work with Ron and some of the other crew.” He was like, “OK. We’ll let you do that.” He hired me. It was two dollars an hour. I literally swept floors, emptied garbage cans, and changed light bulbs, and also washed windows. There’s a picture that I’m very proud of in the 1976 yearbook that shows me washing windows. I’m very proud of that. Even with my kids, I always tell them, “You got to start somewhere.”

Karin: Are you still for hire?

John: [laughs] Actually, my wife says, “I want to wash the windows around here.” I knew exactly what kind of formula to get. I knew the brushes to get, the squeegees to get, and everything, so I washed all the windows on the outside around the house, when we first moved in here. She was, “Wow. OK.” Some of these skills you know, it’s like riding a bike. If you can believe it.

Karin: Yes, exactly. Did you work at the schools all summer as well?

John: Yes. It was interesting, because we did a lot of things. We washed windows, we emptied garbage cans, we cut grass. We were given lawnmowers and those types of things. We were given a truck to drive around in, with the equipment in the back.

We also set up for football games and helped line the fields. I worked with Chris Barreca on that. He also was part of that crew for a period of time.

Another person I met in town, who I would say is probably one of my other mentors, was Charlie McCullough. He was basically the crew leader up at the schools. He would assign us to do different things, and give us different responsibilities. Of course, he's a well-known person in town, too.

Karin: Did you take any vacations? Anything that stuck with you about them?

John: We used to go to Maine on some of the vacations when I was a kid in Massachusetts. We also used to go to this other place up in New Hampshire near Lake Winnepesaukee, in Moultonborough, called the Geneva Point Center. It was like a Protestant-type religious retreat, and we would live at this place in a little cabin. [*The Center, founded in 1919, is still there and, according to its website, "honors its ecumenical Christian heritage."* -ed.]

We always picked Cabin 1. We would live in this little cabin, with a little toilet and shower and bathroom, as a family, with bunk beds, for a week or two. My parents would go to religious classes. We would go swimming and do all the different things, basket weaving, all kinds of stuff over there. It was interesting, and we did that for a couple of years. My parents said it got a little bit too political though. I don't know what that means. They tended to want to do something else later.

We took a very nice trip to the Grand Canyon in 1973, which I still remember. We stayed at the Bright Angel Lodge right on the South Rim. We took the mule trip down into the canyon out to the point that overlooked the Colorado River, which from our vantage point on the canyon rim had looked like a stream. I remember that mule trip. One of our guides was this guy named Brett Spendlove, who was a real cowboy. He had a cowboy hat. He had the whole garb and everything. I remember him bringing us down into the canyon. My mule's name was Althea. [laughs] I still remember that.

My sister, Susan, had a mule named Eagle. Eagle was always trying to intimidate her, going over to the edge around the corners and dipping his head down to where he could then look down. She thought she was going to slide down to the canyon. It was a great trip.

Karin: What type of music did you listen to? And what were the movies you used to watch?

John: My Mom's a singer. I think she's an alto. Forgive me, Mom, if I'm wrong. She went to all sorts of voice lessons when she was growing up, so we grew up on musicals, show tunes. When we went to the movies, we went to see musicals for the most part. I remember some of my favorite musicals were "West Side Story," "Music Man," and "South Pacific."

I still have LPs of that kind of music that we still listen to. But back then I listened to it behind closed doors. Around my high school friends I listened to rock and roll music. Jimi Hendrix, the Allman Brothers, Led Zeppelin, the Moody Blues, that type of music.

My parents were always listening to the Sinatras and the Dean Martins and stuff when I was growing up, and now, later in life, I've gotten a new respect for it. I like to listen to that as well. I would call it an eclectic idea of what great music is. It does not include rap unfortunately. [laughs]

Karin: Did you ever have any interaction with the Police Department in those days?

John: After my stint with Company doing plays, in my junior year, I met some guys -- John Palazzo and some other people -- that had cars. '60s vintage muscle cars you would call them.

John Palazzo had a '67 Camaro, which I understand he still owns. That was the car of the town. It had a reputation.

Well, the first car that I actually drove was a '65 Mustang that was owned by my parents. It was a little white Mustang with a red interior, straight six, 200 cubic-inch little six-cylinder engine, automatic. I loved that car. Then I had this love for Mustangs.

My first Mustang I bought was a '68 GT Fastback. If you ever saw the movie "Bullitt," it was the same Mustang. Four-speed, 390 engine in it, a big engine, but it needed lots of work. I bought it for \$450.

It needed more work than I had money for working two dollars an hour for Dr. Aquilla after school. I ended up selling it for \$650. Then I saved my money for another year, and I bought my first really nice car, a 1969 Chevelle Super Sport with a 396/375 horse engine in it with a four-speed. Silver with a blue interior, blue vinyl top. That was my baby for about five years.

I think I had learned a real respect for a car you own versus a car that your parents loan you. Where if it's all on you to change the oil, supply the gas, and to make sure the tires have plenty of tread, then you don't mess around with it as much as you would with somebody else's car that you're not responsible for. It really taught me a lot of responsibility. Getting back to your question about the police...

Karin: [laughs]

John: I'm a young kid with a car with that much power in it, I had some interactions with the police. I met Sal Giannitti. [laughter] He pulled me over. [laughter] [*Sal, Karin's husband, was a constable in the town before Weston established its own police force in 1975. He stayed on to help organize the department and served twelve years as a "special," i.e. part-time officer.*]

Karin: Oh, no.

John: He pulled me over one time.

[cell phone rings]

John: That's probably Sal calling right now! [laughter]

Anyway, so my first interaction with the police, which was about six months before I got my driver's license, was with Sal Giannitti. He was a supernumerary, or special officer with the Weston Police Department. Of course, the first time I met an officer was when I had my Chevelle.

That was interesting, but it was a good experience because I felt that I was treated like a human being and given a break as a young boy doing young boy stuff with a car. Between him and a number of other officers that I met along the way -- Richie Palmiero, Roy Hill, Bruce Turner, and ultimately Joseph McAleenan, who was the first Chief.

Even though I was making mistakes, my mistakes weren't made into something bigger than what they were. It was basically their way of thinking, which was Chief McAleenan's way of thinking. "We're a small town. This is a small town police. We can handle things differently here in Weston."

That was my first experience with the police, which ended up ultimately always being positive. I always learned something from it.

Karin: Is that what gave you your sense of justice and your interest in being in policeman, or did that come later?

John: My first interest in being a policeman, believe it or not, goes back to when I was probably about six or seven years old and the TV show "Adam-12" came out. The characters were so real to me. It was all based on things that actually happened. That was my favorite TV show, so for a couple Halloweens, I dressed as a police officer. I still have the pictures, although I haven't been able to find them. From that point on I started thinking towards, "I want to be a police officer someday." It wasn't my first job, but ultimately that was my first interest.

The fact that these officers took me under their wing and treated me like somebody that made a mistake versus treating me like I was some kind of one-man crime wave galvanized the idea. Not only did I want to be a police officer, but I wanted to be a Weston Police Officer based on that experience.

Arne: Would you have become a police officer if you couldn't have found a job in Weston?

John: Originally I did test around. I took a test in Wilton. I took a test in Westport, Bridgeport, Norwalk, because Weston wasn't hiring when I was looking. So by the time I took the test in Weston I had had some experience taking tests elsewhere. Chief McAleenan knew me, and the officers knew me. There were certain officers that weren't so thrilled that I was going to be an officer and even wanted to be an officer, but the main core of the Police Department at that time, I think, was very supportive of me.

Karin: Did you come on as a special, that is, as a part-time, or fill-in officer?

John: Yes, I came on as a special. I actually still worked with Sal, which was an interesting combination. He taught me a lot. He taught me it's not all about going out and writing tickets. It's about dealing with people on a human level.

Then and now we in Weston have the luxury of time because we're not chasing crime after crime all day long. You can take your time with each individual issue and person within that issue and make an educated and honest decision that's going to be fair. You're not going to jump to conclusions. You're not just going to fire from the hip, which is something I carried through my entire career.

Karin: In addition to role models like Dr. Aquilla and Chief McAleenan is there anybody else in your life that...

John: Well, Sal Giannitti...

Karin: Oh. [laughs] There you go.

John: Early on. I mean, really. I would say definitely. Believe it or not there was some other people that I didn't like so much in the beginning, but later on I saw the worth of what they were trying to teach me.

Steve McNally was a sergeant at the time when I first started. I think that my first couple of experiences with him weren't the greatest, but again, it was handled the same way. He was just one of these get-in-your-face kind of guys, would say it like he saw it, and didn't pull any punches when it came to verbalizing his feelings about something you might have done or what you were acting like at the time. A different style, but ultimately I would say that he was definitely a mentor of mine.

And of course Chief McAleenan. I think that his motto was that you have to know the people that you're working for in your community. I always remembered that. At first I didn't understand. "What are you talking about? I have to know everybody in this town?"

No, not literally, but you have to get a sense of the town if you're going to be a police officer in that town. You have to understand that you're part of that community. These are the people that you're working for. They're not working for you. You're working for them. Even if they're the ones that have made the mistake, you have to remember that you're still working for those people.

That gives you a whole different perspective. Again, he said that because we have the luxury of it, we can take the time to really find out what's going on, rather than just jumping to conclusions and a knee-jerk reaction that this person is going to get arrested. We have a whole litany of things that we can do as a Weston police officer that other departments don't have the latitude for because they don't have the luxury of time that we do.

Karin: What was your first job after you graduated from high school and before you joined the police? We understand that living in this house is related to that.

John: There's an interesting story there because [laughs] when I first graduated from high school, my Dad gave me about a week before he came into my room at the crack of dawn. Pulled the sheets off me on a Monday morning and said, "Get up. Take a shower. Get dressed in your sport coat and a tie, and I'm going to take you out. We're going to go on job interviews."

I'm like, "What are you talking about?"

He goes, "Well, you're not going to be working part-time the rest of your life with the schools. You have to get a career or a job where you're going to make money, because now we're going to be charging you rent to live here. You are going to need to make money to pay your bills, to pay your insurance, to pay for your gas, and to pay for your rent while you're living here. I need to take you out to some place and then you can start developing a full time position and start working, like a real person in this society."

I got up begrudgingly, took my shower, put my sport coat on, my tie on, and he took me to many small companies that were right in Wilton and Westport. We based our original search over on Route 7. I interviewed at four different places. He goes, "You're going to walk in there, you're going to ask for an application. When you're filling out the application, you're going to say that you're available for an interview today."

That's what I did with four different places. One of which was Karlin and Bleicher, a small jewelry manufacturing company located at that time right across from Devon Chevrolet in the southern end of Wilton. I interviewed with Kenny Karlin, who was the owner of the company at the time, Steve Stout, a manager, and a third person, all on the same day.

The next day I got a call that they'd like to start me out if I'm interested, but I'd not only just gotten *that* call, I got a call from two of the other places where I interviewed and who wanted me to come and work for them. I had my choice. "Where do I want to work?" That doesn't even happen today. I said, "I'm going to pick Karlin and Bleicher because I seemed to like the people there."

I was what they called the waxer. It would take a whole other hour of just talking about what I did there for four and a half years. Ultimately though, I ended up working for Steve Stout, who

was the manager of my department, the casting department in the company. I worked for him for about three years, directly reporting to him. It was a good experience.

They had a time-clock; punch in, punch out for lunch for half an hour, punch back in within thirty minutes at the right time. Jack Bairish, a manager, was standing there. If you punched in a minute after 12:30, you were in trouble. You had to make sure you were there, so I learned that. You learn that 8:00 o'clock in the morning, you have to punch your time card and you have to be there on time.

That was a valuable lesson, getting up early in the morning. My father was very nice to me, even though I wasn't the nicest person in the morning as a young person who thinks that they need fourteen hours of sleep every night. [laughter] He'd wake me up by shaking my foot in the morning and always had something ready for me to eat before I went to work. I do appreciate that of course.

Ultimately, Steve Stout was the person I used as a reference when I applied for the job in Weston as a police officer. He wrote me a recommendation and Chief McAleenan then hired me as a part-time cop, and then as a full-time officer on February 25th, 1981.

Karin: How did you go from working in that jewelry company to becoming a cop? Did you have to go back to school?

John: I did. I took night classes in criminal justice at Sacred Heart University, encouraged by my Dad, who said, "Just take one class per semester, just to get started." Which I did, and I liked it. It was the first time I actually went to school and could say to myself, "Now I understand that this is something I can use." It's not like math for writing checks. It was actually something I was going to use for a career move.

I really enjoyed some of the classes. I took a sociology class first, then a criminology class, and then I started branching out and doing more. One of the things I discovered was that I really enjoyed taking English classes and writing classes.

One of the things I didn't mention about growing up is that I was dyslexic. Many weekends my parents would take me to reading classes, which I thought was torture at the time. Once I got into a college setting, I was more interested in the English language than anything, especially writing. I'm still to this day very tough on myself when it comes to writing or speaking. I'll probably watch this video later and like, "I should have said this in a different way." I'm very aware of that.

I say to people, "I didn't get an Ivy League education by going to Harvard or anything like that, but both my parents are Ivy League people. My mother went to Wellesley College and my father went to Harvard Business School. Growing up, I was not allowed to use a word the wrong way. I was corrected all the time.

I tell people I was very fortunate that I was somebody who had their Ivy League education every day of the week around the dinner table, because when you were talking around the dinner table, you had to pronounce words correctly. You had to use words correctly. For example, if I was to say, "Well, I was talking to so-and-so and then she goes, and then he goes..." my father would stop me in mid-sentence and say, "Nobody goes. They say. He said or she said. They didn't go." [laughter] I think that helped me in my career as a police officer and also being able to speak in public.

Arne: Did you think of your parents as being strict?

John: I wouldn't say that they were strict. I think that part of the reason I say that is because when we grew up in our small neighborhood in Massachusetts, all of our friends were in the general vicinity.

In this day and age, I think parents are overprotective of their kids. I was riding bikes without a helmet. As soon as I could get off my training wheels, we were riding bikes without helmets. We were falling and skinning our knees. We'd fall and bump our head, or whatever. It was never "You got to wear a helmet, you got to wear knee pads, I got to know where you are at all times." We would go off and disappear into the woods.

My mother certainly didn't want us in the house because nobody had air-conditioning. It was cooler outside and we had woods all around us. They wanted us to play out in the woods, stay cool, "Get out of here. I don't want to have to deal with you all day. Just come back for dinner."

Talking about strict, the one strict rule that they had was, "You will be home for dinner. Dinner is at 5:00 o'clock. If you're not home for dinner at 5:00 o'clock, then you don't get dinner. And by the way, we don't do any special orders. If you don't like what we're having, you either eat it or don't eat it, but I'm not making you something special because you don't happen to like it."

You can tell I liked everything, so [laughs] there was never that problem. It was funny because in Massachusetts there were all these different parents that at 5:00 o'clock would call their kids. My father was known as the foghorn. He would do this call. "Julie, John, Susan, supper time." That supper time part would travel for miles.

My father had this certain tone that would just cut through all of the woods and everything, and you better come running. Then, don't sit down at the table until you've washed your hands and your face. Then you can sit. You're not allowed to leave the table until you ask to be excused. Most of the time, table time was when we all spoke and talked about our day and what was going on.

My parents always knew what was going on because we had free reign to talk about anything at the dinner table. That still goes for today. We still do that. As far as being strict, well, honestly, I don't think they were strict. They trusted us to go out and do whatever, but we knew to be home at five o'clock.

Karin: The town did not always have a Police Department. Who policed the place before that?

John: We had the State Police. There was a resident State Trooper, but some of the constables ended up becoming full-time police officers. Richie Palmiero was one of them. Joe Stupak was one of them. Your husband apparently was one of the constables initially, right?

Karin: Yes.

John: But the first Police Chief, believe it or not, was not Chief McAleenan. It was Barbara Wagner. Actually, I've got her badge up there that I want to donate to the Historical Society. It was given to me about a year ago by her son, John Wagner. He found it in a box and he wanted it to go to the proper place. [*Barbara Wagner served as First Selectmen from 1973-75. Her election marked the first time in the history of the state of Connecticut that a woman was elected to lead town government as a mayor or first selectman. ed.*]

Before I retired, I was going to set up some kind of presentation. Anyway, she was the first Chief of Police and she was instrumental in organizing the Police Department. It was she who hired Chief McAleenan, who had been a captain in Westport at the time and who could basically bring

all of his knowledge from what he knew in Westport to Weston. Even up until a few years ago we had paperwork where you could still see where Westport was whited out, and somebody had written Weston in there. [laughs] Statement papers, and stuff like that.

I started in 1981, when the Police Department was only about six years old. I still feel that I was part of the initial surge of people coming into the Police Department. I think that's something I can be proud of, that I was one of the originals. I actually worked under Chief McAleenan. To me, he's almost like a legend in police work. I still think about things that he taught me today.

Karin: Did you have any citations or awards over the years?

John: Chief McAleenan was not much for giving citations, nor was I. He had the mindset where the guys know they're doing a good job as long as I'm not yelling at them. They're going to know they're doing a really good job if I come and pat them on the back and say, "Hey, you know what? You did a good job. You handled that really well."

That was his mindset and I think that works well with a small department, because I think what happens with some of these citations like Officer of the Year, which some of these other departments do, is that then you have to do it every year, and you have to pick somebody, but maybe the work just in the line of duty isn't that spectacular. It's nothing that another officer wouldn't have done the same if he had handled the same thing.

I think that a lot of these citations and awards that go out to police officers now, of course, I commend that, but it was not Chief McAleenan's style and it wasn't my style either. The few times that I did put something in writing or give something to somebody it tended to cause more of a negative response from the other people in the department, because they felt that maybe they should have been recognized for something.

For me, the way I learned it, it worked better if you just, number one, know the officers and know that they're doing a good job every day, and just to acknowledge that. To me, that is a lot better than just some ribbon or some piece of paper that they're going to put who knows where.

Karin: Exactly. Did you consider Weston being an idyllic spot to grow up in? Did that attitude change when you became a policeman?

John: I always tell people, our family thanks their lucky stars that we landed in Weston. There couldn't have been a better place for us to land. It was so different from Massachusetts and Walpole, but then again, it was different in so many positive ways in the end. It gave me so many opportunities. My sister Susan works at the Elementary School in the library. She has worked there for over 20 years.

We tend to want to stay here. The fact that I moved back here [from Stratford] -- I'll get to the Steve Stout story later -- but the fact that I want to live here even as a retiree, after working here for 36 years, that says a lot about the Town of Weston. I've always said that I owe a huge debt of gratitude to the people in the town for giving me so many opportunities. I know if it were any other Police Department in any other town, I would not have had the same opportunities.

I don't think even as a teenage boy, with a '69 Chevelle Super Sport, I would have had the same reaction from other local police department as I got from this Police Department. I like to think that all in all it benefited the town as well.

Karin: Do you think people's attitudes toward the Police Department have changed over the years?

John: I think that there were ebbs and flows in the attitude towards police in general, but also toward our local Police Department, almost on a case to case basis. I know that when we first got Tasers, there was a man that was for the first time tasered on Weston Road and some people

witnessed it. Ultimately, the way that was handled was appropriate, but again, it's a small town, so people tend to think, "What is this kind of stuff happening in this small town for? I don't understand. This isn't New York. This isn't Bridgeport. This isn't Milwaukee. This is Weston."

Those things we have to tiptoe lightly on. I think giving people information when they want it and being able to talk about things without getting defensive as a Police Department as a whole is the way to go. We have to remember that we serve these people, so they deserve the answers when they ask the question. I think I've always been open to do that and I think that was something that Chief McAleenan actually was open to do, and for many years, Chief Anthony Land, who was the second Chief of Police I worked under, was also open to that.

We have had some tough times in the recent history of the town of Weston. A lot of different things have happened. Recently, we had the two bodies that were found. That was one of the catalysts for me retiring when I did, because of such a tragedy.

I think we're living in times now where police in general, nationally and worldwide, are under a lot of scrutiny, which is not unusual. But I think it's more of a leveler now, because everybody has this little phone that can record something. No longer can police officers just hide behind, "I swore an oath, and I'm here to be your protector." They have to actually walk the walk, not just talk the talk.

Before I left, I discussed the issue of bodycams with the Police Commission at length and I said, "We all need bodycams." I requested them but the problem was not only the budget but managing that data once we had it. We'd either have to outsource it to a private company or establish our own server and all the complications associated with it. But I always told my officers that you don't need a bodycam because you have to assume that someone has a camera and that you are going to get recorded. I told them, "Just take that into account, every call you go on, and act appropriately, act respectfully to the people, and you're not going to have any problems." And that's worked.

I think it's easier to get that message across to a smaller department versus some of these larger departments where they're departmentalized and compartmentalized. I was fortunate enough that I had a smaller group of people and knew them all. I either worked with them for many years, or I trained them, or I hired them, so I knew who these people were.

Arne: We want to get back to the police work but, first, let's talk a little about your personal life.

John: I married Marjorie Fugett, who was a town resident at the time. Her parents lived over on Grey's Farm Road. I met her when I was on duty, back in 1987, when there was a call because a person had shown up on her front doorstep who obviously had Alzheimer's. He didn't know where he was. He was in pajamas and it was raining out. I responded to the call and Marjorie was there with her parents, talking to this gentleman. The rest is history.

I ended up dating her and we got married in February of '89. Within about a year, we were pregnant with our first child, my daughter Chelsea, and a year after she was born, we had my second daughter, Hailey. Ultimately, we ended up getting divorced in 1996. These things happen. We're still cordial to each other. We still have a relationship with each other and with the kids. I have grandkids now. Both of my daughters are mothers themselves.

Arne: Are they nearby?

John: Yes, my daughter Hailey lives in Stratford and my daughter Chelsea lives in Seymour. They are in the general vicinity and we get to see them and the grandkids. I've got twin granddaughters who are going to be five years old in October, and I've got a grandson who is going to be four in October.

I have been remarried since September 13th, 2008 to Jackie Kohler. She's divorced from her first marriage and has a son Steven, who I think is 23 now.

Again, another Weston love story. I met Jackie when she was working as the assistant for Jo-Ann Keating, the Director of Finance at the Board of Education at the time. I met her going to meetings there and we hit it off, and we ended up getting married. We had a house in Stratford when we first got married, and we sold that house this past year, 2016, and bought this house in Weston. We have very good relationship with all of our kids and grandkids and even with my ex-wife. It's all been good.

Arne. Since you raised it, tell us how you came to live in Weston again and, specifically, why you bought this house.

John: Interesting story, because it seems like everything always comes full circle for me with the town of Weston and the people that I know. One of the things my Dad always told me was, "Whenever you leave a job, don't ever burn a bridge. Always extend your hand and say, 'Thank you for all the opportunities that you gave me.' Shake hands and leave on a high note. Never leave on a low note."

When I left Karlin and Bleicher that's exactly what I did. I thanked Steve Stout that way. I thanked Kenny Karlin. "Thank you for the opportunities you gave me," and left on a high note. They were sorry to see me go. They actually wanted me to stay and train some other people but I couldn't do two things at the same time.

In any case, I knew that Steve Stout lived somewhere in town here. I used him as a reference. He wrote me a letter of recommendation to get hired as a police officer. Time goes by. My mother actually worked with Blanche Stout at Weston Woods for about ten years. I still had that connection. I knew they lived in town. I didn't know where, specifically.

Fast forward into the future. Jackie started working at the probate court down in Westport with Judge Lisa Wexler. [*Probate judge for the Westport/Weston Judicial District elected in 2013. -ed.*] She said, "I don't like this commute back and forth from Stratford. I'm only working part time. I would like to move a little closer to Weston. If we can't afford Weston, maybe we could look in Westport, or in Easton, or some other place closer so my commute's would not be so long." It's a 45-minute commute on a good day to Westport or Weston. I was getting tired of the commute, too, so we started looking in Easton, Redding, Westport.

The funny thing was that we were living in a 1,500-square-foot, small ranch in Stratford on a quarter acre of land. It was white, with black shutters. We had just put a new roof on it. But no garage and no fireplace. Jackie said, "You know what? Why can't we find a place in Weston that's like our house? But I want a two-car garage, and a fireplace and a little bit more acreage. It would be so nice."

We started looking. We had been looking for houses on Realtor.com for at least six months and nothing popped up in Weston. But one night we logged on and saw this very house pop up, this house here on Glory Road, and started looking into it. It was a little bit out of our price range, but we thought, "maybe we should drive by and take a look at the area." We took a ride through

Weston and we came by here. We looked down the driveway. It looked like it needed a lot of work.

She saw an air conditioner hanging out the window. She saw a gravel driveway. She saw the woods were all coming in on the house. She goes, "Nah, next." Then that night she decided to look closer at the house and saw pictures of the inside. Saw there was a fireplace. Noticed that it had a two-car garage.

Then she did a little bit more research. She's very resourceful. She found out, "Oh, these people have lived here 42 years, Steve and Blanche Stout." I'm like, "Wait a minute. Time out. I know Steve Stout." She goes, "No, you don't."

"Yes, I do know Steve Stout. Go back in time. I worked for him at Karlin and Bleicher for how many years? He wrote me a recommendation. I used him as a reference to get the police job. My Mom worked with Mrs. Stout for ten years." I knew they lived in town. I didn't know that this was their house.

Lo and behold, even though we hadn't even put our house on the market yet we talked Vicky Kelly at Camelot Reality here in town who is, of course, friends with my parents. She goes, "Oh, I sold that house two years ago." I'm like, "No, you didn't." She says, "Yeah, I did. Number six, right?" "No, number 10." She's like, "Number 10? Wait a minute." She realized she had sold next door, number six, four years ago and didn't know this one was on the market.

The house had been on the market for a year and it had not sold. The owner had come down on the price a couple of times. She goes, "I don't know why this flew under my radar. You have to see this house." I told her, "Look, I used to work with Steve Stout." She goes, "OK, let's go look at the house first."

We came and looked at it. Of course we fell in love with it, but you don't want to tell the seller that. We knew it needed work, but she said, "We're going to offer a certain amount, but what I want you to do first, before we come to a conclusion on what we're going to pay for the house, I want you to write a letter to Steve and reestablish the relationship."

She said, "You had a good relationship with him?" I said, "Oh yeah, we left on good terms. He recommended me for the police job." She goes, "That's great."

We hadn't put our house on the market yet, so she said, "I want you to reestablish the relationship and ask him for a Hubbard clause, which means that if we come to an agreement on the price he is obligated to hold the house for you for a number of months until you're able to sell your own house." I'm like, "OK." She says, "It's very unusual. Most people in this town don't like to do that. Most people want to just sell and get the hell out."

So I wrote the letter, reminded him of who I was and our relationship and all that, and he responded that he would give us the Hubbard clause and "OK, let's talk price now."

We went back and forth over a weekend and came to an agreement on the price and literally posted our house on Realtor.com on the multiple-listing service a week later. We already had the agreement on this house. He says, "Wow. We were just going to keep giving you extensions. It took us a year to sell this house."

Our house in Stratford sold in two and a half weeks. Literally, the Stouts thought they were going to have more time, and then we're, "No, we want to move in August 1st." "But we haven't packed anything." [laughter]

They had all of their worldly belongings here. For 42 years they had lived here. We gave them an extension. We ended up living at my parents' house for a week in an apartment they have at their house, which was interesting. That's a whole other hour-long story. Living with your parents as Chief of Police and all that stuff. [laughter]

In any case, it worked out. We gave them until August 8th of 2016. That gave them an extra couple of weeks. They were grateful and they were able to clear the house up, we moved in, and the rest is history, but we've done a lot of work.

Again, it's one of these lessons my Dad taught me. And also Chief McAleenan. You have to get to know people. You always leave on a high note. Don't burn bridges. All of these things can come full circle even 40-something years later. Even Dr. Aquilla, one of my mentors, and the one who gave me my first job, was always supportive of me throughout my career as a Chief of Police. For example, by promoting me for getting a permanent position.

Arne: It strikes me that you've kept in touch with a lot of the people in your life. Give us a sense of that.

John: Facebook is remarkable. I thought it was evil when I first heard about my kids being on Facebook. Anybody can get into your Facebook page and you don't know who these people are. But if you approach it as a rational adult, Facebook is very useful. I've reconnected with a lot of the friends from my neighborhood in Walpole, Massachusetts.

One of my best friends, Richard O'Rourke, actually came with his wife to visit us this past January. We had reconnected on Facebook three or four years ago, but before that we hadn't talked since we moved from Walpole in '72. We reconnected. He came to visit. I'm friends with this other guy, David Mills, who was another local kid in the neighborhood back then. Also, high school friends that had for a while disappeared off the face of the earth. Now everybody knows where everybody is.

I graduated high school in 1977 and we had our 40th high school reunion this past weekend on Saturday down at the Black Cat in Georgetown, which is owned and run by my best friend Elio Cavicchia with whom I graduated from high school.

We had the reunion down there, although I had to miss it because I was diagnosed with strep throat last week, which I'm all done with now. I was not in the physical condition to go Saturday night. It's funny because I was getting updates all evening through Facebook or by text messages. Also, from people sending me pictures. Even though I wasn't there, it felt like it.

Since then I've been able to make contact with more people from my class. To me it's the greatest thing, because as you get older and then you retire your world seems to get a little smaller. With Facebook and with the Internet, being able to contact people and be in touch with people, it keeps that world bigger than it normally would be in terms of contact with people.

Arne: I am sure socializing in town or with a bunch of friends isn't always comfortable when you are a policeman.

John: That was one of the problems that I had. While I actually did have a lot of friends who live in town that I had made as police chief, there were also a lot of friends that I had to put on the side burner for awhile because, number one, I didn't have time for them, number two, I'm in just a different world where I'm in this role as a police chief and I've got certain things on my mind constantly. One of the things to be said about that is that technology is a double-edged sword in a lot of ways.

As the Chief of Police, where normally you would be able to get away from work at the end of the day, you have one of these smartphones with your email and stuff on it and you can't get away from your job. People can contact you 24/7 and they expect a response. You're the Chief of Police, and it's not just with the guys. The officers want to be able to contact you at all times because there's always stuff going on. Police work is 24/7.

People ask, "Why is the police budget so big?" Well, the police budget is big because it's a 24/7 operation. It's not like the highway department where you can say, "We're going to work 5 days a week from 7:30 until 3:30 every day, with lunch off. Then, weekends, you're not going to come in unless there's a snowstorm, or unless there's a tree knocked down or something like that." With police work anything can happen any day of the week, any time of the day, which creates a need for the Chief to be contacted, or creates a need to call more people in to cover the road or to handle an investigation.

That's the nature of the beast. When people who may or may not be on the Police Commission have a background in business, say IBM, or have run a restaurant or some other kind of business, they don't always understand how you can't really budget the police overtime budget realistically every year to make it adequate.

You have to explain to them that police work isn't a business. It's a response-oriented organization. You are responding to the needs of the town. The needs of the town may be one thing one year but may be much more the next year. Perfect example of that, hurricane Irene, and then hurricane Sandy. One storm after the other, same time of year, a year apart. But the overtime budget went through the roof because the guys couldn't leave. So they had to be paid the entire time they were at the office, and they were expected to be available for at least a week. Then there were other years where we didn't have that.

The overtime budgets for 2011 and 2012 were out of control but you can't budget for hurricanes every year. You have to budget what you feel as Chief of Police is going to be appropriate enough that, based on ideal conditions, this is what we can expect going forward. We're not going to be budgeting for the ice storm of the century or the hurricane of the century. It's not going to be done.

Arne: John, thank you, but let's stop for now and continue this interview on another day.

John: Sure.

Part 3

Coming into the Police Department • Moving elsewhere in search of more action? • Looking at the world through police-colored glasses • Compartmentalizing tragedy • Rising through the ranks • Thinking nationally, acting locally when it comes to training and equipment • What it's like being an "solitary island" in between your own police force and elected officials.

Arne: It is now September 14, 2017 and Karin Giannitti and I are again sitting down with John Troxell and his ever-present canine companion, "Smoochy."

Chief, you must have had certain expectations about what it would be like to be a police officer in Weston. Were those expectations met in a positive way or were they counter to your expectations?

John: Most of us know about police work maybe from TV shows when we're growing up. As I said earlier, one of my favorite TV shows, when I was growing up, was "Adam-12." When you see a show like that with something exciting going on every time, and during the whole half hour, you get the impression that all police work is like that.

One of the things you learn pretty quickly when you get into actually doing police work is that there's a lot of hurry-up-and-wait. You can approach it in a couple different ways. You can have the most boring career as a police officer if you're just sitting around waiting for things to happen to respond to.

Or, if you go out there and actually interact with the public, which could be in many forms, like going to the town center and getting out and talking to people or going up to the schools and talking to the kids or getting on the teaching staff. Just getting to know people in town and being out there versus just sitting around and waiting for things to happen.

You will have a much more fulfilling career as a police officer, especially in a small town, by getting to know the people in town. And that's what I tried to do. Most people already knew me because my parents were well-established here. What I'm trying to say is there's a lot of quiet and idle time in between excitement and running after the bad guys.

Of course, you never can tell what's going to happen from shift to shift. You can go weeks without having any calls that you have to respond to and you're just doing routine patrol, radar, and pulling cars over for speeding or other moving violations. Then there's other times when you're responding to real big emergencies which could be anywhere from a fatal accident to a suicide call to domestic violence call to a child abuse call.

Probably the misconception that most people may have about Weston is, "It's a quiet town. What do the police do here?" From my experience, and seeing things as a police officer, we call it, "Looking through police colored glasses." I could tell you, from my experience, Weston isn't as quiet as people would think.

We, as police officers in Weston, have the luxury that we don't have the same volume of emergencies that we respond to that some bigger cities or bigger towns do. Weston is almost an enigma when it comes to that. It does have the appearance of being very quiet on the surface, but that is a thin veneer over a lot happening underneath that the police have to work with.

Just like any big city, we have all the same kind of calls. They are just spread out over longer periods of time. In the beginning, when I first started, I was never bored. I was always eager to be out in the community and also to learn from the people that I was working with. A lot of what you learn is from hearing stories about things that those officers have been through, that I had no knowledge of growing up as a teenager.

Arne: It sounds like you never had any second thoughts about joining the Police Department.

John: No, no. I was there 36 years. What I must say about my career as a police officer is that I owe Weston a huge debt of gratitude for giving me the opportunities that were given to me.

I was just 22 when I was hired as a part-time police officer in the fall of 1980. I went through 60 hours of training in a classroom and one day on the range that included a five-hour training session with my sidearm. As soon as I was done with that I went to work. Christmas Day, 1980, was my first work day. I worked with Bruce Turner and Gene Maloney after a simple 60 hours of training, which is unheard of now.

So, even though I got hired full-time I didn't go to the Police Academy until May 18th of 1981. From February 25th, 1981, to May 18th, 1981, I was out on the road, a full-time police officer with no real experience other than the 60 hours of classroom training and one day on the range that I had with my sidearm. I was a full-fledged police officer responding to calls and handling calls in the town of Weston as a 22-year-old kid.

A lot has changed since then. The training requirements are a lot different, but it's something to think about how things have transcended into where we are now as police officers. The amount of training that's required and all of that. We can get into that later, but it was something to think about. Even thinking about it now it almost gives me a chill that I had that much responsibility at age 22 with 60 hours of training.

Karin Giannitti: Was there ever a time when you thought you might not want to do this job?

John: No, but there was a time when I thought I wanted to do the job somewhere else. That was between 1985 and 1987. Like I told you, one of my favorite TV shows growing up was Adam-12. In that sense, I believe that everybody feels that they want to get into a situation where they will get more action as a police officer.

You find out later when you've been in the career for a while that quieter is better, but when you're young, you're in your 20s, you're looking to get into some real police work, as it were. I actually had some friends in Weston who had moved out to Oxnard, California at that time. I went out to visit them.

I went to visit the police station in Oxnard, and they were hiring. So I filled out an application without even thinking about it. About a month later, they contacted me, and they wanted me to come back and take the physical agility test. I went back out there, took the physical agility, didn't think anything about it. I passed it, of course.

About a month later they wanted me to come out and take the written test because I passed the physical agility. I went out and took the written test, hung out with my friends for a few days, passed the written test. It turns out that of 600 applicants, I came out number 23.

They were like, "OK, we want to do a background on you. We want to do an oral board on you and this and that." So I went out and did all those things.

During that time, Chief McAleenan, who was the Chief of Police at that time in Weston wanted to know what the hell's going on. "You're taking all these trips out to California."

I told him what was happening and he said, "I'm not gonna stand in your way, but you have to decide what you want to do with your career. You have a career here, but I understand young guys, they're looking for action, they want to do something bigger. So, I'm not going to stand in your way. Anything you need, if you need time off, whatever, I'll grant that to you and you can go back and forth and test with the Oxnard Police Department."

So I did, and it got to the point where they wanted me to come out and go to the Cadet Academy and start in a few months. But I decided that before making the final decision I would go out there one more time to talk to people.

I had made friends with a couple of the detectives. I can't remember the detective's name but I do remember there was a Sergeant Lewis that I made friends with. I went out and I took some time. I sat and talked with him, telling him I was trying to make this big decision as to stay in Weston or come out to Oxnard and we compared notes on some things.

One of the other detectives that I became friendly with had a withered arm. He said he was on light duty for the last eight years because he went to a domestic and somebody pulled a gun and shot him through the top of the hand and it came out of his elbow. He ended up having to shoot and kill the person who was shooting at him, but he was crippled because of it.

Sergeant Lewis also told me some other stories about the things that he was dealing with there. Oxnard seemed like a quiet place. A farming community for the most part, with a lot of open space. But again, the thin veneer of what the public sees and what goes on beneath it, which is what the police see, are two different things. Basically, Sergeant Lewis and this detective were exchanging stories with me about how things really were as a police officer out in that part of California. Sergeant Lewis told me, "I would change places with you. You can have my sergeant stripes here and I will be a patrolman and take your job any day that you want to do it if that were possible."

That helped me make my decision to stay in the Weston Police Department. From that point on, I never looked back and always looked forward. I never regretted staying in the Weston Police Department.

Arne: One of the people we interviewed for the oral histories was Bob Turner, who came here in 1953. He told us that when he started to volunteer for town government, the place was being run somewhat like a "good old boys club." Given your stories, it seems as if that was also the case with the Police Department at the time. It sounded more like a "club of guys running around" than it did as a more structured "police force." Is that right?

John: Back in the early '80s, and even into the early part of the '90s, the Police Department was a different place to work. A lot of it had to do with the training requirements. As time went forward, there were a lot more training requirements as far as being on the range with your weapon, as far as requirements that you need to hire as a police officer, to have some kind of college under your belt, an associate's degree or something around those lines. When I started out I had college credits but I did not have a degree.

I think that the level of professionalism has also moved forward along with the times. When Chief McAleenan was the Chief of Police, he came from that earlier time, having started in Westport in 1956, I believe. I was born in 1958. He grew up as a Westport police officer in the '50s, into the '60s, and into the early '70s. In 1975, when he was hired as Weston's first police chief

he was bringing his knowledge and experience from the '50s and '60s into the '70s and '80s, but as time progresses, things change. There's more to the police job than there was in the '50s and the '60s.

In the '50s and the 60s--and I'm not speaking from any real knowledge of it but from what I gathered later--is that there were fewer requirements for education, and there was less training on a regular basis.

Those kind of things progressed in different time periods. We carried revolvers at the beginning. I had a 357 revolver, Smith and Wesson. We graduated in the early '90s to the semi-automatic pistols, which was the Beretta nine millimeter.

The first ten or twelve years that I was in the police force I carried a revolver that had six bullets in it. There was a certain way to train with those. Then, we graduated into the semi-automatic pistols. It's a completely different animal. We had to train with those, and there was more of a requirement from the Academy to be on the range a certain amount of hours per year. From that point on, we graduated up to the 40 caliber Glock semi-automatic pistols, and then we acquired rifles. The Remington 223 rifles that are basically assault rifles to respond to that type of an attack.

There's a lot more that's happening in the world that police departments have to graduate up to and try to respond to with their training and their equipment. They didn't have school shootings back in the '60s and the '70s that I have heard about. That tends to be a trend now, which happened most recently, actually. Of course, the Sandy Hook shooting back in 2012.

All these kinds of things you're trying to prepare for. I used to rhetorically ask people. "As Chief of Police, what's your basic function?" The answer: "Well, basically, you think nationally, but act locally."

Karin: I think it's inherent to the job of being a policeman that it is sort of a boys club because you work so many hours. You don't have a lot of extra friends. Your friends are your police officers who understand that you're working midnights so you can't come to this party or you can't go to dinners and things, so I think it tends to be inherent to the job.

John: I'm going to get back around to answering that the long way, but it's important to understand what police are like. And you would know more than most people because you're married to one.

In any case, what I tell people nowadays is that the police department and police officers have to think nationally and act locally. How do we respond to something like a Sandy Hook incident in town? Are we prepared to respond to something like that?

The burden of a police officer -- and I was finding this out early on -- is how you respond to these tragedies. You see real tragedy in real time, and you're supposed to just be the rock that shows up at that situation. Then, you're a human being too, so how do you deal with that?

The only people you can really talk to are your fellow officers. You can't talk to your Mom and Dad about going to a suicide scene. You can't talk to your Mom and Dad about a fatal car accident with the horrendous blood and gore that's involved with some of that. What do you do? You talk to your friends who tend to be the guys you work with. Those are the guys that have seen it before. Whether they were or weren't at that scene, the only way you can try to fully get through it is to really talk about it.

Sometimes when you talk about it, and were the general public to be listening in on you, they would think, "That's disrespectful the way they're talking about it because they're actually making jokes about it." But you have to deal with this tragedy somehow. You can't internalize it. You can't take it personally. You can't get attached to it. You have to somehow joke about it or do something else that helps you at least vent it. If you can't totally vent it, you have to be able to compartmentalize that situation and put it away on a shelf somewhere.

That's when you start understanding how police officers tend to group together. Because they share maybe not the same incident, but they share an experience of dealing with these tragic situations more on a regular basis than probably any other group of people, and that includes firemen and EMTs, I would say. As a policeman you see it before all the other people show up to help.

So, yes, as far as a good old boys or a boys club, I think to a certain extent that is true, but I think that the reasoning behind it is because of the shared experience. Nobody else would understand why you're talking about this suicide or that fatality with a tongue-in-cheek kind of a response, where most people would think, "That's terrible, that's horrible. You're a horrible person for making a joke about that."

You have to be able to vent it, you have to be able to compartmentalize it and put it away. Otherwise, you're in the wrong business if you can't do that.

Karin: Let's shift to talking about rising through the ranks. You didn't actually become Sergeant and then Chief? You just went from patrolman to Chief, correct?

John: No, actually, I was a patrolman for 25 years and had taken at least four promotional exams in that time period. The fourth one was in 2005 when Sergeant Terry Mooney left. I said to myself and I said to my family, "I'm going to take this test one more time and if it doesn't work out, I'm just going to be a patrolman the rest of my career," which I enjoyed.

I took the service exam and I came out number one after everything was said and done. I interviewed with the Police Commission and they gave me the sergeant's job. They knew that I could pretty much hit the ground running because they had gotten to know me as I was concurrently both the PBA president and the union representative.

I had told them that if you give me the sergeant's position, that's going to be the same person you have been sitting across from negotiating a union conflict, and the same person that you knew as PBA president who was out doing public relations in the community.

It's not going to change me. You're still going to be able to talk to that same person even though I have sergeant stripes on and I'm willing to take on the responsibilities related to that, including the responsibility of being a supervisor of the guys that used to be on my same level, but now I'm supposed to be a step above them. Now they have to start working for me and I'm going to be telling them how to do their job, what to do.

They gave me the position and I did hit the ground running. I was a sergeant for about 18 months. During that time it was just me and Sergeant Patrick Daubert who were in-house. The third, Michael Ferullo was away on active duty in the Coast Guard.

But at about that same time, the then-Chief Land ended up leaving for whatever reasons, and they were looking for a replacement for him, at least as an interim. The Police Commission interviewed me, Sergeant Daubert, Sergeant Ferullo, and Detective Carl Filsinger for the position.

I had only been a sergeant for about 18 months, so I was just really doing the interview for the experience. When you go into an interview with that attitude, it's almost like you have nothing to lose. I really enjoyed my job as a sergeant, so I really had everything to gain and nothing to lose. I felt very comfortable going in.

I explained to the Commission the things that I thought were important to be addressed, at least in the interim, such as training issues we were behind in and other things that we had to deal with.

They gave me the interim position, which I was grateful for, and I figured this was going to be a really great thing I could put on my resume. I was a patrol sergeant, and now an interim Chief. When the new guy comes in, I could hopefully hand over the torch to him with a clean desk and help him amalgamate into the Police Department.

As time moved forward, there came a time where there was a deadline for putting in your application for the permanent position. A couple of Police Commissioners caught my ear and said, "Are you gonna be doing that?" I said, "I'm not sure." They said, "You should because you're doing a good job," so I did.

There were 97 applicants for that full-time position, including Detective Filsinger and Mike Ferullo, who I know were my biggest competition because I knew what terrific cops they were.

Lo and behold, after all the interviews and whittling down the pile of applications and everything, they gave the permanent position to me, which to this day, I still owe a huge debt of gratitude to the town of Weston for that opportunity.

Arne: What year was that?

John: It was May, 2007 when they gave me the interim position and January, 2008 when they gave me the permanent position. I wasn't sworn in until I think July as the permanent chief because I was going through contract negotiations with the town.

Arne: How was your relationship with the Police Commission over time? One might think that there would be a natural conflict between the aspirations of a Police Chief and the aspirations of the town.

John: My relationship with the Police Commission worked very well. What I did in the beginning was bring them in on making decisions for the department, which I think was lacking with the two previous administrations.

What I wanted to do is bring them in on making decisions for whatever, either putting a stop sign in some place or greater things like purchasing equipment or the hiring process. I would have them command it but they would help with the physical agility test for hiring people, for example, timing people on their runs. They would be monitoring the other parts of the test as well. I would have the ones available come in and proctor written tests with me.

In sum, I got them more involved with the hands-on of the general operations of the Police Department. I think that worked very well not only for me and for the Commission, but also for the department and for the town, because my philosophy was always to pretty much be an open book as to the things that I wanted to accomplish and the things that I thought were important.

The only way to really accomplish that was to be able to get a team on your side. My team at that point was the Police Commission. I was very successful with at least convincing four out of the

seven of certain things. The makeup of the Police Commission as long as I was involved was always four Republicans and three Democrats. But, they never, from what I can recall, ever made a decision based right down party lines. It was always a mix. The communication was good and we worked well together.

Arne: You mentioned there were a couple of people whom you thought were a little less sympathetic of your work. How would you characterize that? What was that about?

John: I will tell you this: it was a learning experience going from being in the union position even as a sergeant to going into a non-union position as Chief of Police because you've heard the old saying that no man is an island. But chiefs of police are solitary islands. You do not have any real supporters from within the Police Department anymore. You're not the union; you're their boss. As far as the Police Commission goes or anyone in the town government, for the most part, they're politicians.

You're in a position where you're in between the union, with a union contract with the police officers that you have to abide by, so there's only certain things you can do with certain changes you can make. Without negotiating that, if you do these certain things, and someone in the union files a grievance, then the grievance goes in front of the Police Commission and they have to sort it out.

As a police chief, you are in a political position but you are not allowed to have a political opinion of any sort. Basically, you may agree or disagree with people in these political positions, but it cannot be based on your political philosophy, whatever that might be.

I was fortunate growing up. My parents, as much as they are Republicans, always had a middle of the road political position with things. I will say that they never voted for a Democrat for president, but I know that my Dad was the town moderator in Walpole, Massachusetts as a Republican, even though that town, and the state, was highly Democrat-controlled.

Walpole did not have a First Selectman. Instead they had a Board and then among them they voted on a Moderator who would be the one that would run the meetings and looked to as the go-to person. So when my Dad became the Town Moderator he was able to make political appointments. When he made those appointments he didn't put people in positions based on whether they were Republican or Democrat. He was very proud of the fact, and you're probably going to end up talking about this someday, that when he made a political appointment, he would pick the right person for that position, not based on what party they were in.

He said he even ruffled the feathers of a lot of Republicans by appointing Democrats to serve positions in town government knowing they were the best one for the position. But his party was not happy with that because then, they're like, "It's our turn now." His answer would be, "But this is the right guy."

I came from a family that, number one, if I ever had any question about how to handle small town politics in my position I had two people I could go to immediately. It was my Mom and Dad. I had the luxury of having that type of the team behind me, but as a Chief of Police, you have no allies from the Police Department or from the town government. You're an island in between.

The minute you don't please somebody or somebody doesn't agree with something that you do, from either side, you're going to get into arguments from the police union or you're going to get some kind of complaint from somebody in the town government, be that from the Selectmen, be that from the Board of Finance, be that from the Police Commissioners.

I have even experienced it from the school board. People weren't happy with some of the things that I either said or did but, as a police chief, and I know there's been a new one that's going to be swearing on Monday, my suggestion to him would be, understand the fact that you're pretty much on your own as a Chief of Police. You don't have any allies from either side. [Edwin Henion, formerly with the Connecticut State Police, was sworn in as the new Chief on September 18, 2017. -ed.]

That being said, what you need to do is focus on the things that you think are important to the town and to the department, especially to the town. You keep the town safe because that's your job, and push those things that you think are important as hard as you can, especially in your honeymoon period. You have your 18 months where people are going to love you, especially on the political side. Push your agenda as hard as you can. You get those things accomplished and in place because as time goes by you're going to ruffle feathers, because we think things and we see things through police-colored glasses.

I always told people who came into my office and asked, "What is your biggest burden?" I would tell them, "My biggest burden was the school system because, especially after Sandy Hook, you open my window, you can hear the kids playing in the playground." To me, as a Chief of Police, my ground zero is the school. [The Police Department is directly adjacent to the Hurlbutt Elementary School. -ed.]

Again, going back to thinking nationally and acting locally, what's happened nationally? You have school shootings and lots of other things happening in the schools because they're what's known as a soft target. How do I best go about protecting the schools and protecting the officers who may have to respond in one of these tragedies?

You have to outfit them with certain kinds of equipment that, maybe, isn't politically correct -- rifles, heavy-duty types of bulletproof vests, different kinds of equipment to breach doors. All these things that you have to convince, number one, the Police Commission that you need them and why.

Number two, you have to go through the whole rigmarole during the budget process of going before the Board of Selectmen and not having them cut that out of the budget. If they don't cut it out of the budget, then you have to go in front of the Board of Finance and explain why it is that you need assault rifles, or why it is that you need breaching tools to break into doors, why you need battering rams, and why you need Humvees, even if they are free. For somebody who does not think like a police officer, does not look at things through police-colored glasses, that is something that you can't really understand.

My biggest peeve with the town government was that if you put somebody in place and they're your local expert for what is needed for police protection or for the protection of the town as a whole, and he comes to you with the suggestion that you need a certain piece of equipment or certain kind of training, then you should take his word for it.

If it's an issue about how to pay for it, that's something else, but the Chief of Police shouldn't have to explain why Tasers are important to the First Selectman. I, literally, got tasered on video to prove that it didn't cause serious physical injury and I presented that in front of the Selectmen.

Because certain Selectmen didn't like the idea of Tasers in Weston they decided they weren't going to pay for them, but they also said that I could go out and get donations. Immediately, within a week, I had enough donations to buy all the Tasers I needed. [It was another example of why] I said that, as a Chief of Police, you don't have any allies from the Police Department, you don't have any allies from the town government. You're an ally of the community.

It is from the people in the community that you're sworn to protect and serve where you're going to find your allies and that's where I found many of mine. The residents of the town understood why I was trying to accomplish certain things. I always got the most support from people in town.

Arne: I remember the question about the Tasers very well. You presumably wouldn't want to have the political forces in town rubber stamp things because the experts say we need X, and therefore, the town should accept that and pay for X. There are people in town who may feel that the police are weaponized enough as it is. Sure, Weston, like other towns, has problems, including potential violence, but we pride ourselves on being a relatively rural, quiet community so why should we have a Police Department that has big-city type weapons?

John: That's where the problem lies. It's a responsibility of the Chief of Police to be able to vocalize and make the public understand why these things are needed and, of course, you cannot share your feelings of and experiences with the general public like you can with your fellow officers.

I've seen a lot of things in this small town that most people would think could never happen here. And also in cases where our officers have assisted people on other departments and in other towns. Most recently, the Sandy Hook incident where you would never think that could happen in a small town. It's always happening somewhere else, far, far away. It's never going to happen in Weston.

But I think the job of the police chief is to educate the public as to what is needed and why and, again, I think that you can roll it back to, "Hey, this is why, this is my experience, I can educate you the best that I can on why police officers have to be equipped with certain things."

You can look at nationally what happens at these school shootings. Nationally, what happens if police officers aren't properly trained to know what the reactions are to certain situations? Nationally, what happens if police officers don't have the right tools to deal with certain people? They go to the tool that they have, which may be their sidearm versus the Taser versus pepper spray.

I even remember when Chief Land was trying to get the Police Commission to agree that equipping the guys with pepper spray ... and that was way, way before Tasers, that was before rifles. Nobody could understand why Weston needed pepper spray.

If you have fewer lethal options, not to say that they wouldn't be lethal, sometimes things happen even with pepper spray. You spray someone with pepper, somebody falls down and bangs her head and then they die with a concussion. That's happened before. Same thing with Tasers. They don't call them nonlethal, they call them less lethal options that the officers can work with.

What I found, too, was that there is a certain thing called verbal judo that officers get training in, that is, learning how to talk to people. Sometimes I would go to some elementary school classes to do a presentation, telling kids what I carry on my belt and this and that. One child asked me, "What's your favorite weapon that you carry?" I said, "My favorite weapon that I carry is my brain," because as a human being, as an officer, you have to develop your brain to be able to outthink the person you're dealing with. If you can do that, you can deescalate any situation just by using your brain. You don't need all these weapons.

But there are those times when things escalate beyond your control, and then you need to have these other options available. You don't want to go from talking directly to shooting. You want to

thinking, "OK, talking is not working. What do we have? Well, we have my pepper spray. OK, well, that didn't work. Well, let's do the Taser then. OK, that didn't work, you're still coming at me. OK, then, maybe I have to use my sidearm."

This is how we try to educate the public how this works and that's how police officers are trained as well. There is a graph that the officers look at and basically shows how things escalate and how to respond to the escalation appropriately. They're trained on that.

But if you're missing some of the tools in between, where, "OK, it's verbal judo," and then, "Oh, if we had pepper spray we'll use it here, but we don't have that so maybe now I have to go to a billy club and or I have to use my flashlight to try to hit this guy, which could cause serious physical injury.

Or if I don't have a Taser and only have this sidearm, and it escalates to the point where I'm in fear for my own physical well being, or possibly, this person could kill me while I stop him, I don't have that extra tool of a Taser before I move to my sidearm.

Then that's got a tragedy written all over it. Not just a tragedy for the person that gets shot, but for the officer, too, because the officer is a human being too, and he has to deal with the aftermath of that.

Karin Giannitti: Was it a lack of understanding those needs, or not accepting them that caused you to offer your resignation once?

John: It was funny because...well, or maybe not. They sent me to all different kinds of seminars for chiefs of police training. One of the things that I would hear over and over in these seminars is, as a Chief of Police, you have to know the signs when it's time for you to throw in the towel or hand the torch off to somebody else.

When you start running into brick walls, when you're trying to accomplish something and your own boards of police commissioners or the public aren't supporting you to the point where you cannot move forward with accomplishing the things that you need to, it usually means that your time is up.

There were a number of things that were working up to that point, but it wasn't because of any one person in the town government; it wasn't anything like that.

The sign came when I brought back two free Humvees from Fort Drum. All we had to do was sign a piece of paper and they were issued to us under the LESO Program (Law Enforcement Officers Program) from military surplus and we could bring them back. We drove them back and we had to spend about \$300 on diesel fuel to get them back from Fort Drum. This is after I got the approval through emails from the Police Commission to go and pick these things up.

When I brought them back, the First Selectman at the time thought that she was supposed to be the deciding factor of this kind of acquisition and turn it into all these meetings and this and that. [*He is referring to Gayle Weinstein, the First Selectman from 2011-2015. -ed.*] Then the support of the Police Commission started to wane. They were being politicians, like I said.

As long as you're pleasing everybody on that side, they're your friends, but as soon as you ruffle feathers, your support starts to dissolve. I could see that support dissolving. I had to go to a couple of different meetings to explain how the acquisition happened and I exposed the emails from the Commission supporting it.

Literally, I could see at that point that I'm hitting a brick wall in explaining the bringing of these free vehicles back to the town at no cost other than about \$300 worth of diesel fuel, and I can't move forward. Therefore I see that this is the sign that I've learned about at all these seminars that, you know what, it's time to hand the torch to somebody else and let them use their honeymoon period with the town to maybe accomplish some things.

Quite frankly, another thing I learned in some of these seminars was that the average span of life for any Chief of Police is five years. I lasted just under ten years. That's a pretty good run. So I offered my resignation. But then changed my mind.

The deciding factor to stay after that was because the public came to my aid. Bob Gardner and Fran Goldstein, specifically, went out and got people to sign a petition to keep me. I've never counted the amount of signatures but that didn't matter to me anyway. The fact that I stayed was because of those two people who, when they came to see me one Monday morning, they showed me all the signatures they had gotten while standing in the Weston Center on a Sunday afternoon in February. They were out there for five hours and it was cold out.

That's why I stayed because if two people would stay out there in the cold, even if they didn't get any signatures, that's my support system right there. That's my public saying, "It's not time for me to leave yet," so I stayed because of that. I was able to actually accomplish some more things after that, which I was very proud of, but again, my career as a Chief of Police lasted longer than most do in this day and age.

We had a police chief in Wilton recently. He was the assistant chief for three years and then he got the chief's position. He was there for two years before he threw in his towel. Chief Cole in Westport lasted just five years before retiring. Basically, you can see that the life span of the career of many chiefs of police is, like I said, three to five years.

Part 4

Notable cases • Personal reactions to tragedy • Still seeing the “ghosts” of past cases • The satisfaction of helping people • Patterns of crime in town • Retirement and the need for “re-invention” • The legacy

Karin Giannitti: What was the most important case you had to handle? Was it the Navin case?

John: You’re correct that the Navin case is the last major case that I was involved with. That was probably the most disturbing one as well because they were people that I had known personally and also were best friends with my sister and her husband. I also knew their son Kyle Navin because we mentored him a little bit when he was in high school. He wanted to be a police officer and he came to ride along with the Police Department with a lot of the guys. The guys all knew him. *[Kyle Navin was charged with two counts of murder for killing his parents and later hiding their bodies under debris in a friend's yard in Weston in 2015. The case had not yet been brought to trial at the time of this interview. –ed.]*

It was a tragedy on many levels, but again, going back to what I was talking about before, you have to be able to vent with each other and then, hopefully, compartmentalize them and put them on a shelf somewhere so that you don’t have to deal with it.

I always tell people that there is only so much shelf space that a police officer has to be able to put these things on, compartmentalizing them on the shelf before the shelf starts getting over-burdened, and that’s when you know that an officer is starting to burn out. I think my shelf is pretty full and I don’t have any regrets. Like the old song, “Regrets, I’ve had a few, but then again, too few to mention.” I think that I was able to accomplish most of the things I set out to accomplish.

The town of Weston is a very safe place to live. I just moved here from Stratford last year. I wouldn’t want to live anywhere else.

Karin Giannitti: What was your strangest case? Were you here when they tarred and feathered a guy?

John: That happened a couple of years before I started but I do remember hearing about that. [laughter] I remember Bruce Turner used to talk about it. The man owed some money to a loan shark or something.

Karin Giannitti: Exactly, and he disappeared from the hospital once they found he’d been involved with that.

John: He showed up on the front of the Town Hall tarred and feathered. We’ve definitely had some strange things happen here in town.

Arne: Any of these during your time?

John: She says strange, I might say tragic. They’re one and the same in a lot of ways. We’ve had all sorts of tragedies and they all tell their own story. I drive around this town and I see ghosts. I see them all the time, just like in that movie “The Sixth Sense.”

I could drive by any neighborhood, any part of town, and remember where there was a fatal accident, where there was a motorcycle fatality. Where there was a suicide, where there was a

domestic violence situation, where there was any litany of things that were all tragic. One of the reasons we bought this house was because in 36 years I've never had a call here. Strange, tragic, they're all one and the same, for a police officer anyway.

I think, too, there were those instances where you find that you've actually helped somebody. I had a girl come looking for me one time who said, "I wanted to thank you." "Thank me for what?" She's like, "Well, ten years ago you sat there and you read me the riot act and you told me that I was acting like a slut and that I was supposed to be a lady."

"I said that?"

"Yes, but I want to thank you for saying that to me because after I left there I said, 'You know what? He's right,' and I changed." This was ten years later. She was in her mid-20s and she showed up to thank me for reading her the riot act one time.

I had other situations, too. I ran into this gentleman in town who said, "Hey, my son told me to say 'Hi' to you." I'm like, "Why? Who are you?"

"Don't you remember? You called me in the middle of the night to come over to a house where my son was sleeping over with a bunch of other kids. They had run over a bunch of mail boxes and you found his car with the damage. You called me to come there because he wouldn't admit that he did it, and I told you to throw the handcuffs on him in front of his friends and you did." [laughter]

I said, "Oh, yeah, I remember that." He goes, "After you did that, my son changed. Now he's living down in Georgia. He's got his own company, and he said, 'Congratulations to the Chief of Police and if you ever run into him, please tell him I said hi.'"

I'm like, "Wow" for little things like that.

Karin: Was there any pattern to the crime in Weston during your time or was it just random stuff?

John: I think there were trends. When I first started a big trend was burglaries, breaking and entering, so we had a lot of burglaries. It seemed to be the same people that would come into town.

I remember I was working with Bruce Stern one time and we ended up apprehending somebody that we charged with a burglary. When we arrested him he was like, "Where are you guys from?" We're like, "We're from Weston." He goes, "I never did any burglaries in Weston." He thought he was in Westport doing all that. He didn't even know Weston existed. He thought he was in Westport. So we had trends with burglaries.

As far as the fatal accidents or other motor vehicle accidents, those types of things, we have a fatality about every three years. That's been the norm. Sometimes we go a little bit longer. Those are always tragic.

Identity theft is a big deal now because the criminals have figured out they don't have to break into your house to get stuff. They can break into your social media and they can acquire information from you. Then they can go and steal your identity and purchase things, or they can do things with your credit, and get credit cards and stuff like that. They don't have to break into your house to get money anymore. I think that's a big trend now. Police departments are trying to deal with it, and that's a training issue as well.

Karin: Have drugs become a problem in Weston?

John: Drugs have probably always been a problem in this town. There have been different levels of the problem. When I was in high school there was a certain group of people who used to smoke pot. Once in a while they would drop acid, and we'd hear about it. But that was usually just a small group. We used to call them the freaks.

The thing that's happening nowadays is that anybody could be a drug addict. That's the tragedy of it now. There are kids -- and not specifically in Weston, but nationally -- who have been injured on, say, the football field, and they are given painkillers by their doctors. They're overprescribed, and they get addicted to the painkillers. They take the painkillers away, and then they have this addiction. The closest thing to the painkiller that's even cheaper is the heroin and the opioids. We have to educate our doctors as well as to what's caused this opioid epidemic.

We've had overdoses here in town. In 2016 there was somebody who is still in a coma because of it. They have arrested three people that were involved with supplying him with the opioids, who have plead guilty and are doing time.

The opioid epidemic is part of what happened in the Navin case, too. That's a sad thing, that Kyle Navin apparently had become addicted to heroin. The same thing: he had a back injury and was given painkillers. When those were no longer available, he ended up on heroin. The end result of that is a big tragedy.

I have been told by investigators of the State Police that were involved with that case that they've seen this drug situation with the opioids and with the heroin and everything and it's driven people that were absolute normal, wonderful people to this crazed murder and burglaries and thefts and doing things that they would not normally do.

One of the big TV series that's very popular now is called "The Walking Dead." I don't know if you've seen any of it. We're living with that type of a thing. We're living with people who are kind of the walking dead, addicted to these drugs, and they're just like zombies going around and stealing and getting into these situations. It's a sad case.

Karin: Is that what most of the teenage crime is these days, drugs? They don't seem to be breaking into things.

John: There are a whole litany of things that happen. In town we have a forensic computer crime lab that's very, very active with child pornography issues. Social media and these cell phones make it so easy for these kids to take a picture of their girlfriend, naked, and all of a sudden they're sharing it with all their friends. Suddenly it's child porn being distributed.

We have a lot of identity theft crimes and different crimes that have to do with forensic analysis through these computers that we've been taking on here in town, which is a big thing now. You're going to see that crime is going more in that direction, even more so as technology gets a lot more complex.

Arne: You also mentioned domestic disputes. Has there been an increase of that over time? How often does this happen in Weston?

John: What you notice it in Weston, specifically, is when the financial state of people get into a jam. Nationally, you get into a recession. Nationally, you see that there are more domestic situations because a lot of it has to do with financial strife. When things are good and the money's coming in and you can pay all of your bills, people get along better.

When things get financially difficult with people you start seeing the relationship erode. Maybe these people weren't the best of friends to begin with. When the money was coming in, things were good. When the money dries up and there's a recession, you see more domestic violence situations than you normally do. Again, that's a trend too.

We've always had domestics in this town, but those are things that aren't normally reported to the local newspaper. The local newspaper initially wasn't the least bit interested in that. They are more so now.

There are laws that make the police officer the complainant when it comes into those situations, so you no longer have to rely on the victim to make the complaint against the aggressor. If he sees evidence of physical violence, the officer has to make an arrest. One of the problems that we have to deal with is that sometimes you end up making a dual arrest because there's evidence of physical violence on the female, but also on the male. Then they tend to blame each other for who hit whom first. You get into this dual arrest thing.

That's something that the courts are trying to deal with. They're trying to set guidelines to avoid the dual arrest because then the victim gets into the system and doesn't get the assistance that they need because they also are seen as the aggressor.

Arne: Are there hate crimes in Weston?

John: I don't know that we have ever specifically had to deal with any real hate crimes. There have been, over the years, swastikas painted at the schools, that type of stuff, graffiti-type things. As far as a hate crime, somebody being assaulted or something like that for their religious belief or what nationality they are, or something like that, I don't think we've had to deal with too much of that in town that I can recall.

I know that there are things that happened in the area. There was something recently that happened in Westport with the swastikas and stuff like that. A lot of that, although you have to take it seriously, has to do with youths who don't understand history. They think it's funny when they draw swastikas, not really understanding the ramifications of it like the people of our generation do. We've been educated in what that all means. Of course, you have to take it all seriously. Any threat now, you have to take seriously.

Karin: Let's talk about your retirement. Hopefully, the town gave its collective thanks to you for a job well done.

John: I've got some stuff to show you. The most important part of that, I will say, is not that I had a big party or anything because I didn't really want that. The most important thing for me to appreciate is the fact that someone I run into around town from the general public thanks me for my service. That's the real thing that is appreciated.

Karin: It can't get better than that.

John: When I show up at the library to return a book for my wife or something like that, "Oh hello, you're Chief Troxell." I'm like, "No, I'm John Troxell. I used to be the Chief of Police." "Oh,

thank you for your service” or at the Weston Center, people say, “Thank you for your service. Thank you for your service, Chief. I hope you’re enjoying retirement,” which I am.

Karin: You said you hadn’t met the new fellow, but did you give any advice to the Police Commission on what type of officer you thought would be a good replacement?

John: No, I have been totally out of the loop with that. I feel like when you retire, it’s your time to cut the cord. In a lot of ways it’s refreshing to do that because I will say again that as the Chief of Police you don’t have friends, neither from the Police Department or from the top government. You really don’t.

You have people you’ve had to deal with, or you’ve had to work with, or you had worked with on a certain level, but you find that your friends are in the general public. So, severing my relationship with the chief’s office and everything that goes along with it was important to me.

I’m at the point in my life now where I’m trying to re-create myself, re-invent myself. My grandfather, my mother’s father, John Taschl, who came here from Austria when he was only in his early 20s back in 1921, after the first World War, came here by himself. He was stuck on Ellis Island for three weeks because he was sick. They almost sent him back, but he ended up staying. He was able to re-invent himself numerous times in his life. He was always very proud of that.

He used to engineer mechanical parts with Gleason Works in Rochester, New York. When he retired he didn’t want to have anything to do with that ever again. He just wanted to re-invent himself. He became an avid gardener. He would help people that came here from Austria or Germany. He would help them to learn how to speak English, for example.

One of the stories he told me one time was that there was this young girl that had come from Germany and was having a hard time acclimating to the United States. She was having a hard time with the language and said, “You know, I’m going to give up. I wish I could go back to Germany.”

He basically said to her, “Look, you’re in America now. Start thinking like an American. Germany is your past, America is your future. So, forget it, and move forward.” He said from that point on the girl was able to establish herself and start learning the language. She was being held back somehow, but he gave her his little talking to, which was helpful.

I’m looking forward to reinventing myself and there are already opportunities that have come my way that are completely different than what I did. I never want to manage people again. I never want to wear a uniform again. I want to do something totally outside my realm of what I ever thought I was going to be able to do, and I want it to be fun. So far, something has come up recently that I start tomorrow.

A friend of mine has a garage in Wilton that he has been running for 30 years, now with his son. He wants me to come in and work on his Facebook page, get that up to date, and his website. I don’t know anything about auto mechanics. I have office hands which people make fun of, because my hands have no calluses.

It’s actually with a friend of mine that I used to do all that stuff with. He was the one that saw it in me, and said, “I really think that you could be helpful to my business. You could be somebody that could come in here and work on our Facebook page,” because I told him my experience with the Police Department’s Facebook page.

People would write to the website and I would respond immediately on my cell phone. Even people who would write things on Facebook, I would respond, almost in real time. That's what he wants with his social media because he doesn't have anyone who has the time to do that. They're all trying to do auto mechanics and deal with the customers. He offered me a position at least to start off part-time to see if we both like the situation. I think it's going to work out great.

Karin: That sounds wonderful.

John: I'm coming full circle again.

Karin: Exactly.

John: I like being around all that. The smell of oil and all of that stuff, and watching guys wrenching on cars and stuff. I don't want to do it, but I want to watch it. Like the TV shows that I watch now are all on Velocity Television, like "Iron Resurrection," and "Chasing Classic Cars."

Karin: You want to get the calluses, but just by watching? [laughs]

John: Who knows? Something completely different.

Arne: How do you see your legacy to the town of Weston as a police officer and a police chief?

John: I'm trying to think of how to say this. It could be a feel-good movie. The hometown boy who has some problems with the police when he's in his teen years and then suddenly becomes part of that police force at a young age. Then graduates from a patrolman to union president, then becomes a sergeant, then becomes an interim chief, then becomes the Chief of Police for ten years. To me, it almost seems like an unreal Disney movie.

My legacy remains to be seen. I think that people appreciate things after they don't have them anymore. I think that this new chief has some hills to climb coming in.

Arne: Examples?

John: He comes from the State Police, which in itself I think is an interesting choice for the Police Commission, because back in 1975 they decided to move away from the State Police and create their own Police Department. They didn't like the State Police philosophy of sorts and they didn't want the resident state trooper anymore with its constables. They wanted to have their own Police Department with their own control.

The philosophy and the mentality of a small town Police Department is different. I'm not going to say anything negative about it but I just think it's an interesting choice that the Police Commission made, bringing a lieutenant colonel from the Connecticut State Police in as the next chief.

Arne: Let's go back to your legacy for a moment. What are the things that you were able to accomplish that changed policing in Weston?

John: My number one issue and concern was police training, not just with the equipment they had but also going forward being able to acquire more of the equipment that I thought was needed, and also the training related to that. I was always thinking about training. I was the Department Training Officer for three or four years, and was always sending people to advanced training.

A lot of the training that some of the officers went to for these computer forensics, for example, I was actively involved with helping them do that. I got the approval from the Police Commission to send more people to that, which I thought was important in this day and age. To stay ahead of, or at least stay up with, the crime trends that are going on.

I also think that people will remember me as someone who always spoke out for what I felt was important. I never held back. If I felt it was important to hedge certain things or to do certain things, I was always very vocal about it.

I know I ruffled feathers with some politicians in town, rubbed people the wrong way getting assault rifles, getting the Humvees, getting the Tasers, and all of these things. Now it's all accepted. Officers carry these things on a daily basis and I think it makes the town safer. Not only that, it's a direct response to thinking nationally and acting locally. That was also something that I was always doing.

Going back to Columbine, which was in 1999, I was just a patrolman then, but there was concern that if something like that happened here we weren't properly trained to respond. We're a small town and how are we going to respond to something like that? That was always in the back of my mind.

When I became sergeant in 2005, one of the things that was thrown on my lap was this whole issue of how we're dealing with the traffic issues up at the schools. I hooked up with Joanne Keating, who was in charge of security up there at the time, and she had the idea of this "mile of safety" along School Road. It started out basically as a "want" for an officer to be there to run the traffic light and monitor speeding cars, and then it developed into a "need" to the point where the town budgets for it every year.

It's gotten into an even bigger thing. We've made more three-way and four-way stops up there on School Road because of responding to the speeding cars in a 20-mile an hour zone. We have a police presence up there.

The mile of safety was ultimately the hatchling of the School Resources Officer (SRO) because people were getting used to having officers up on the campus. I'm very happy to say that I was the one that appointed the first SRO up at the high school, Joe McGowan.

As you look at what I was able to accomplish over a ten year period, I didn't do it alone. I was able to translate my ideas into plain English to the Police Commission as to why it was important to get what was needed. Being able to translate it into what I guess you could say was a mathematical equation to demonstrate why the town needed to find a way to afford what we have now.

We have a much safer town since I took it over from Chief Land. The town was a lot safer once Chief Land took it over from Chief McAleenan. It was a safer town once Chief McAleenan took it over from the resident state trooper. Again, it's trying to follow the trends in the crimes, keeping up to date with the training, and keeping up with equipment and all of those things.

I believe that this next chief knows something of the philosophy that people have. I know the State Police responded to Sandy Hook. The State Police helped us with our investigation on the Navin case and helped us with an investigation on a recent home invasion.

I'm sure that he's aware of Weston, and I'm sure that he, from his point of view, will be able to bring what he's learned as a state police commander to the small town of Weston and keep moving forward and continue to make the town a safer place.

Arne: You have talked about the need to separate your work from your emotions. As you suggested, these compartments can get full, even spill over. Might you share a little bit about what you learned about yourself -- John Troxell as a person -- from this experience?

John: Retirement is one of those things that happens. It's funny because I was talking to my parents about this. When I first started as a police officer, my father was always telling me, "You must get a job where you have medical benefits and you have a pension that you can start putting money into so you can retire some day when you're in your 60s." You're 22, 23 years old and you're like, "Retire? I'm going to be this age forever. I'm never going to be 60 years old." The whole retirement thing in some ways got a push from things that I had to experience.

The Navin case, for me, I think was one of the things that I had to compartmentalize and put on my shelf that started almost being the straw that broke the camel's back.

Then the home invasion that happened where here we are -- I don't want to sound not politically correct -- where we've got, pretty much, a lily-white town, a lily-white police department. The other police departments that responded to that were all pretty much lily white, and there were three suspects that were all young black men. Everything turned out great. Nobody got hurt, we apprehended the three individuals. The people at the house didn't get hurt, but we really had a real potential here to be either a Cheshire incident [*a home invasion in July, 2007 that resulted in the rape and murder of a mother and two daughters – possibly the most widely publicized crime in Connecticut's history. –ed.*], or a Ferguson incident [*protests and riots that began the day after the fatal shooting of Michael Brown by a white police officer in August, 2014, in Ferguson, Missouri. –ed.*], or a combination of the two in this small town in this day and age.

I think that I can really say that what helped us with that was, number one, the proper equipment and the training that goes along with it, but also having hired the right people to be police officers in this town and the surrounding towns. As I said, from when I started to now there are a lot more hurdles people have to overcome in training.

Fairfield County towns can afford to give their officers higher salaries, so you can attract the best people, compared to some of these other barriers in the nation. I think that what saved us on that was we had the right equipment, the right training, and the best people responding to that call. As a result, it turned out fine. That was another thing that I was able to put on my shelf, but, again, it was like, "Wow, where are we going to find room for this one?"

You just know when it's time to go. I won't go into great details, but my doctor was suggesting for a couple of years that maybe I needed to change what I did for a living, because of elements that I had that have disappeared since I retired. [laughs]

Karin: When it stops being fun is when it's time to go.

John: And it wasn't fun for me anymore. There were other things going on that were other indicators that maybe I should take a hike and hand the torch to somebody else. It was just time.

Again, no regrets. I do still owe the town a huge debt of gratitude. I will always be an advocate for the safety of this town. I will always be an advocate for the police officers and the police department in this town.

Politicians come and go but we have a really good array of police officers that are young and that hopefully will stay here as long as I did, because you want people to stay. You don't want strangers coming in every few years like some of these departments. If that costs money, I'm a taxpayer now. I say, "Spend the money. Keep these people here."

Karin: Anything else we haven't talked about?

John: I touched on this before, but I want to say again that when it comes to it, you have to remember that any police officer, any Chief of Police, or anyone who's in the police profession, are all human beings. Myself included.

You asked about legacy before. I've made mistakes, but I hope that my accomplishments and the things that I've been able to accomplish for the safety of this town will outweigh mistakes that I've made and that's what I'll be remembered for. I'm hoping that.

Again, severing myself completely from the department was important to me. For a little while I felt I was adrift after I retired, but I think I was adrift heading in a direction. I still want to be part of the community. I'm going to be here for the foreseeable future. I love this town. It is the safest town to be living in right now. What's safer than Weston?

I appreciate the people that volunteer to get on these Boards in town. It's a thankless job, and they have a job to do, especially people on the Police Commission. They don't get paid, and they spend a lot of time and effort negotiating contracts, hiring, promoting, helping with the budget. I wouldn't be interested in doing any of that stuff, but I appreciate the people who are.

I appreciate the people that are on the Board of Selectmen. I appreciate the people that are on the Board of Finance. I appreciate the people that are on the Board of Education. I'm just glad I was able to interact with them, and all in a positive way.

The bottom line is we were a team effort. We didn't always agree on everything, but I think ultimately we agreed on the things that made the town and the school system and everything else safer for the people. People ultimately want to move here, hopefully, because of it.

Arne: Thank you, John.

Karin: Thank you very much.

John: I appreciate the opportunity to sit here with you people. Hopefully people watching this thirty years from now will get a better understanding of what it was like in Weston way back in the dark ages of 2017.