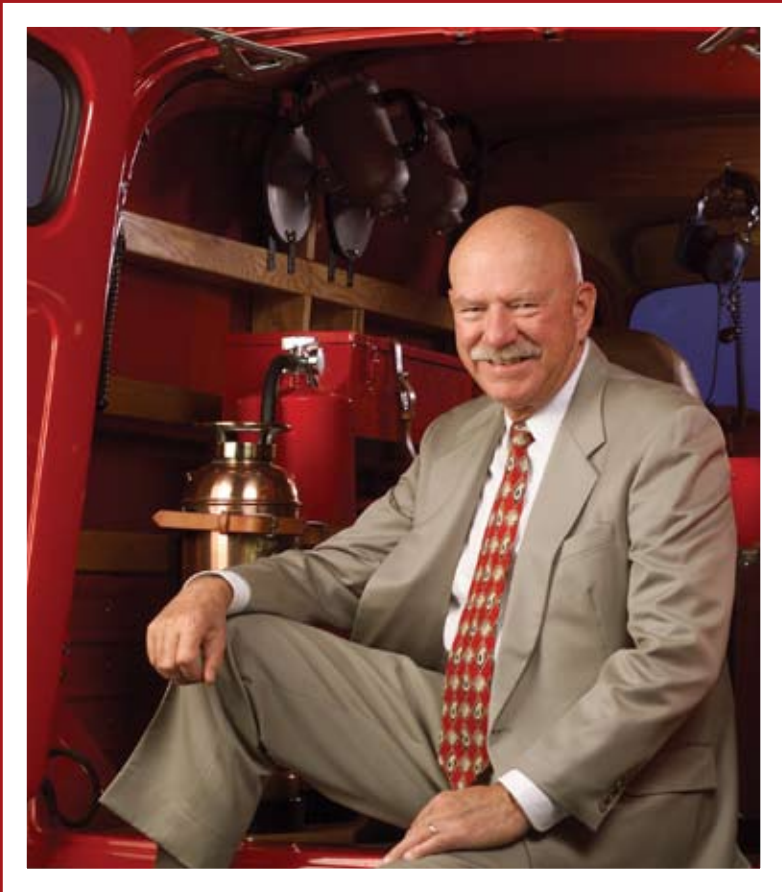


James O. Page



In His

Own Words

Chapter One

IMPATIENT YOUTH

I was born in Los Angeles and went to high school in the suburban town of Alhambra. By age 15, I was bored with school and couldn't get a job till I had a driver's license. That year, my Mom arranged for me to live with and work for a farm family near her hometown of Nickerson, Kansas. For me, it was a wonderful change. I enjoyed the work and the pay (\$5 a day plus room and board), and farm kids could get drivers licenses at age 15. Every Saturday night, I'd drive my boss' old pick-up into town and I'd regale the other kids with stories about all the movie stars that I'd seen in Hollywood.

I finished high school in California but then returned to Kansas, mostly because of a girl who lived there. I arrived in Kansas with about \$250 and rented a room in the home of a great aunt. Within a day or two, I heard that Rudy Young, who operated the Mobilgas station and a repair garage in Nickerson, was going to close the gas station because it was too much trouble. I talked him into subleasing the station to me for \$200. I was in business at age 18 and it was great fun till winter arrived and people stopped driving (and buying gas).

My original career goal was to be a traveling salesman. By age 19 I had a job with an auto parts supply company, selling tires, batteries, accessories, auto wax, oil additives, license plate frames, etc. in a territory that covered the southwest one-fourth of Kansas and part of northern Oklahoma. I was on the road all week and then back home to see my girlfriend on weekends. Then came another winter. Sales slumped and my girlfriend's parents decided that I would never amount to much. They wanted her to go to college, not to California with a traveling salesman.

By age 20 I was broke and back in California. My Dad was a supervisor for a trucking company in Los Angeles. He got me a job driving a furniture delivery truck. Oftentimes, the helper assigned to my truck would be one of the off-duty firefighters that Dad hired as part-timers. They would tell me about their jobs with the fire department and I became fascinated. I started taking civil service exams and passed them all but I wasn't old enough (the minimum hiring age was 21). But one department agreed to hold open a spot till my 21st birthday. Meanwhile, I took a job with a private ambulance company while waiting for the opportunity to become a firefighter.



Christmas Day 1957. New firefighter Jim Page was either leaving home for the fire station or coming home from a duty shift when this photo was taken.

James O. Page passed away suddenly on September 4, 2001. After his death, it was discovered that he had started on his autobiography. What follows are chapters that he wrote and approved for posting online. The photographs were all supplied by him.

No part of this booklet may be reprinted or copied without the express permission of the publisher. Please contact the James O. Page Foundation for more information: 760.632-8280

Book design courtesy of JEMS/Elsevier Public Safety.
Copyright © 1998, James O. Page

August 7, 1957, I reported for duty at Fire Station 2 at 2001 South Garfield in Monterey Park. Captain Richie Lawrence was to be my boss and provide my on-the-job training. Richie had been an Army Infantry Captain in the South Pacific during World War II. The first lesson of the day: Wash your own coffee cup when you're finished with it ("Your mother's not going to be here to clean up after you"). Lesson #2: how to make a bed (military style). Lesson #3: how to loop and connect to a fire hydrant ("If we get a fire, you loop the hydrant, charge the supply line, and then ask for further orders").

From that very first day, I knew I had found my calling, and I knew that I was working for a leader I could be proud of. Richie Lawrence brought to the job the necessary degree of discipline and order but he participated in the camaraderie as well. The atmosphere at Station 2 was very much like the atmosphere at Station 51 on "Emergency!" To the extent that I participated in selecting Michael Norell for the role of Captain Stanley, and to the extent that I coached him on the nuances of the role, I was seeking to recreate the atmosphere that I experienced while working for Richie Lawrence and that I tried to maintain when I was a Captain.

Incidentally, on the 40th anniversary of my first day at Station 2, I was invited to join the on-duty crew for lunch. We had a great time (even though none of them, including Capt. Chris Donovan, were even alive when I started my career there). A few weeks later (in September 1997) I visited with Richie Lawrence at the California State Firefighters Convention. In his eighties and retired about 25 years, he still had a quick smile and a grip like a steel vise. As always, he enjoyed telling everybody that he taught me everything I know. In a remote way, he did. During my first month on the job, he convinced me that my career ambitions would never be met without a college education. He urged me to sign up for night classes at a nearby community college. Thirteen years later, I graduated from law school.



Chapter Two

JOINING THE VARSITY

Within a few days of starting my fire service career, I learned that not all fire departments are alike. The department I had joined served only about 30,000 people in an area of only 8 square miles. Not much happened there. Entire shifts would go by without receiving an alarm for any kind of emergency.

As mentioned, before starting with the fire department I worked for a private ambulance company in East LA. It was a sleazy outfit. They paid a dollar an hour with deductions for mealtime and sleeping. About half the time, the paychecks bounced. The boss gave me six months to read the Red Cross Basic First Aid book and pass the test. Meanwhile, he put me in the back of the ambulance with patients (because he didn't trust me to drive).

In spite of all the negatives, we got a lot of calls and every one of them was a learning experience for me. The fatal Kansas farm accident I wrote about in "Dalmatian Tales" (www.jems.com) was still fresh in my memory and I was somehow determined to overcome the apprehension of seeing broken bodies. I conquered the compulsion to throw up when confronted by blood or smelly excretions. I learned how to splint broken limbs and lift patients without hurting them or me. The boss taught me how to immobilize violent patients. But still, there was so much we could NOT do.

In 1957, new firefighters were paid \$361 per month. To make a little extra money, I worked at the ambulance company two or three days a month. The boss even let me drive an ambulance on occasion.

I passed my probation under Captain Lawrence and the chief transferred me to station 1 (headquarters) so I could work on the rescue truck. He was aware of my ambulance experience. The rescue truck got more calls than station 2 did but the Monterey Park Fire Department wasn't challenging enough to satisfy my needs. So I applied for the Los Angeles County Fire Department, which had nearly 100 stations in all kinds of environments. Then and now, among fire departments in California, LA County was considered the varsity (and I wanted to play on the varsity team).

In '59, I was hired by the County and went through the ten-week recruit training academy. Since Monterey Park used County training manuals, there were few surprises for me in recruit training. I was so proud to be part of that organization. In addition to increased pay (\$489 per month), the Captains and Chiefs in the County Fire Department seemed supremely confident and cool. Also, it was clear that many opportunities for challenge and advancement would be available to me.

When we got our station assignments, I was sent to station 11 in Altadena. By this time, I had an Advanced First Aid card and I was a Red Cross first aid instructor. For these reasons, Captain Sam Hancock at station 11 assigned me to the rescue truck.

In August '59, I bought my first home (for \$11,000) in the suburbs about 20 miles east of L.A. Later that year, after a romance of six months, I married Pat, a divorced single mother (she had a two-year old boy). So, at age 23, I had a good start on my career, I was working on my education, and had a ready-made family.

Career Moves

In '61, an inspector vacancy occurred in the Fire Prevention Bureau in East Los Angeles. That is a major industrial area and it seemed to me an opportunity to learn a lot about fire codes, building construction, fire cause investigation, chemical processes, etc. Even though it meant working 8-hour days, 40 hours a week (rather than the 24-hour shift schedule), I applied and was accepted. It became a wonderful experience that greatly broadened my knowledge and prepared me for promotional exams. Also in '61, my son Tom was born and we moved to (\$16,000).

In '63, I competed in a promotional exam process for the position of Firefighter Specialist (Fire Apparatus Engineer). I came out #1 on the list and was assigned to Truck 8 in West Hollywood, the station that was used in the World Premiere of "Emergency!". It was another great learning experience - being responsible for the ladder truck in a densely populated area of high-rise buildings.

After a year, I decided I wanted some brush fire experience so I transferred to station 82 in LaCanada. There, serving as Engineer for Captain Jim Enright, a savvy brush fire tactician, I drove and pumped my way through two fire seasons. We responded to brush fires all over the county (our longest response was 56 miles, one-way). The lessons learned from Jim served me well in later assignments.

While I was assigned to 82's, my son Andy was born. Also, during this time, I finished my undergraduate education and entered law school (attending night classes and trading time with others to get off duty for school). In August '65, while I was taking my final exam in criminal law, the Watts Riots started. As soon as I arrived home, I was recalled to duty and spent the next 40 hours as the engineer on Engine 282, running from fire to fire throughout south LA.

Both stations 8 and 82 were big houses, with multiple rigs (engines and trucks) and 10 to 12 people on duty. Thus, there was always a lot of activity and plenty of fun and games. To the extent that I could influence the "feeling" of station 51's environment and personal interactions (in my early advice to and consultations with producer Bob Cinader and writers and directors of "Emergency!"), I tried to transfer the experience I had had at stations 8, 82, and others.

The Topanga Chapter

In 1965, the promotional process for Fire Captain was announced. I applied but, because of the demands of law school, I had no time to study for the test. When the list came



Firefighter Jim Page with Rescue 11 in 1959.



Engine 82, a 1963 Crown, was one of the first four-door closed cab rigs used by LA County Fire, and it was the first of the department's engines to be equipped with an automatic transmission.

out, I was #2. All the various experiences, and the discipline, reading comprehension, and logical reasoning that is part of college and graduate education made the difference for me. The following April (at age 29), I was appointed Fire Captain and assigned to station 69 in Topanga Canyon.

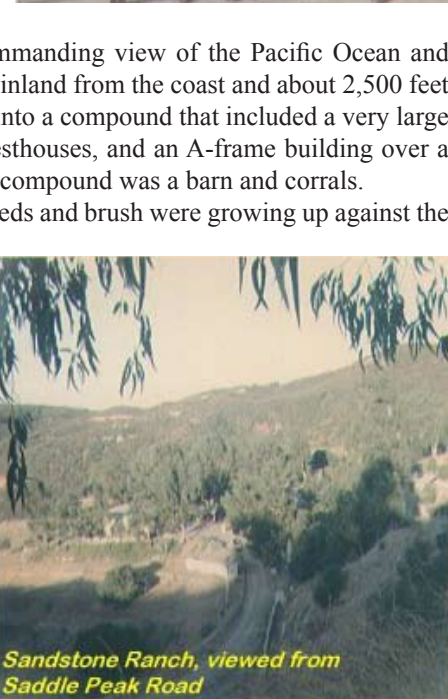
At first I was disappointed. I had hoped for an assignment to a busy station in South LA. It was a 42-mile drive from West Covina to Topanga. But then it occurred to me that 69's would be an ideal place to work while finishing law school. Except for an occasional vehicle crash on serpentine Topanga Canyon Blvd., there wasn't much action after 6:00pm most nights. I figured I could get a lot of studying done while on duty.

In the mountainous areas of LA County, Fire Captains are expected to patrol their districts and know the terrain well enough to predict the course and behavior of brush fires in varying wind conditions. Also, while on patrol, they are expected to issue citations for illegal burning or smoking in closed areas, and to encourage residents to clear brush and other combustibles away from their buildings. In order to do all this most of the stations have a patrol pick-up truck in addition to a pumper. Station 69 had two patrol trucks, one for the Captain (Patrol 69) to use and the other for the firefighter/patrolman (Patrol 269).

A few weeks after I was promoted, I was patrolling the area and stumbled onto the Sandstone Ranch. It was about a half mile off the paved road (Saddle Peak Road) and had a commanding view of the Pacific Ocean and Catalina Island. The ranch was about two miles inland from the coast and about 2,500 feet altitude. As I drove down the dirt drive, I came into a compound that included a very large ranch house with panoramic windows, two guesthouses, and an A-frame building over a 20' x 40' swimming pool. On the hill above the compound was a barn and corrals.

An old Volkswagen was in the carport. Weeds and brush were growing up against the buildings. Eucalyptus leaves were a foot thick in some spots. The place would be impossible to save if a brush fire came through. I knocked on all the doors and could not find anything more than a couple of lazy cats. So I drove back to the station, looked up the property records, and learned that the Sandstone Ranch was in a trusteeship being administered by Security Pacific Bank. I called the trust officer in charge.

The man apologized profusely for the condition of the ranch. "We've had a hard time finding a responsible caretaker for the place," he said. "We can only offer free rent and \$200 a month." He went on to explain



Sandstone Ranch, viewed from Saddle Peak Road

that they were evicting the guy whose VW was in the carport. I asked if he would consider hiring a local Fire Captain as caretaker. He jumped at the chance.

My wife had been pretty much alone raising the kids. Between my career and school and studying, I wasn't around much (physically or emotionally). I thought she would be thrilled by the opportunity to live on a ranch in the mountains near Malibu. At least I would be commuting three miles to work rather than 42. She went along with it, but then was confronted by the reality of rattlesnakes sunning themselves on the driveway, the loneliness of having no nearby neighbors, the isolation of being ten miles from the nearest store, and the howling of coyotes in the night.

The kids, on the other hand, loved it - and so did I. I set up one of the guesthouses as my study. I would take breaks in my studies during the summer months and go swimming with the kids. We let a lady keep her horses in the barn and she would let the boys ride them. We got a Great Dane puppy, and she grew into a beautiful animal that could run free on the 73-acre ranch. I found a farmer who needed a place to park his tractors and implements. In exchange, he let me use them to keep the weeds and brush under control on the ranch (as often as not, I had one of the boys on my lap while I drove a tractor).

The ranch was for sale the whole time we lived there, and we had sold our home in West Covina. The boys knew that we might have to move when the place sold but we had no place to move to. On one occasion, a realtor called to tell me he'd be bringing a potential buyer to see the place. He asked if I'd keep the kids away from his client. When I asked why, he revealed that my boys frequently would offer to help show the property and then would entertain the visitors with stories about rattlesnakes, overflowing septic tanks, coyotes eating our cats, and the potential for brushfires.

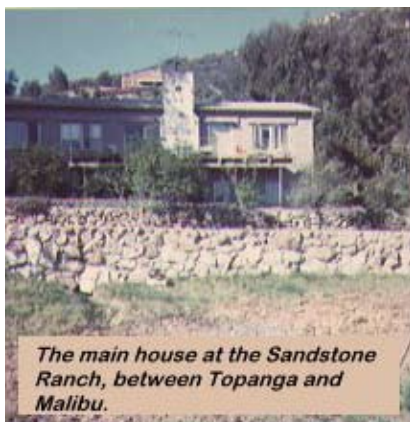
Some of the Topanga experience snuck into my script for Drivers - the public education scene in "Tonapah Canyon" and the kid stuck in a tree at the "Powderhorn Ranch." All good things must come to an end, and the Sandstone Ranch sold after we'd been there about 2-1/2 years. The couple who bought it gave us 30 days to vacate the premises. I offered to move my family into one of the guesthouses and to continue taking care of the place for free. They wanted us gone as soon as possible. Later, we found out why. They intended to turn it into a "resort for swingers" and they didn't want any kids around. Within 30 days, we had purchased a home in Hacienda Heights and vacated the Sandstone Ranch.

During the 70's, the Sandstone became famous (or infamous) and was referred to in Gay Talese's book, "Thy Neighbor's Wife." I'm always careful to point out that we lived there BEFORE it became famous (or infamous). Nonetheless, it was a great experience and the boys - now

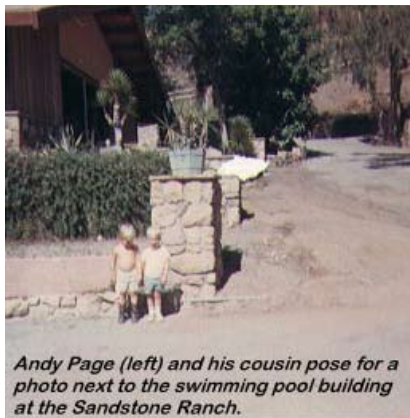
married with families of their own - periodically mention something about "when we lived on the ranch."

Because I was in law school, and the fire department leadership knew it, they transferred to me at station 69 a succession of people with severe problems (alcoholism, psychosis, etc.). Chief "Red" Meagher, the operations chief, told me he felt I would be able to build a case that could survive a civil service commission hearing. It was another learning experience, and I tried to salvage people before discharging them. Finally, I asked that I not be used as the department's executioner. It was not fair to the rest of my crew and it was making it difficult to concentrate on my studies. In a couple of cases, it was downright dangerous.

Chief Meagher agreed, and the next vacancy that occurred on my crew was filled with a recruit from the training tower. His name was Bob McCullough and he later became one of the most frequently employed technical advisors on the "Emergency!" series. In 1968, we had another vacancy and it "went out to bid" (which means it was made available for anyone with transfer rights to bid on). The successful bidder was a handsome young firefighter named Mike Stoker.



The main house at the Sandstone Ranch, between Topanga and Malibu.



Andy Page (left) and his cousin pose for a photo next to the swimming pool building at the Sandstone Ranch.

MORE ABOUT TOPANGA

Of course, Mike had movie-star good looks. At the time, he was collecting royalties from an underarm deodorant commercial he had appeared in (I believe the royalties were two or three times his fire department salary that year). He was single and living in an apartment building near LAX. The building was occupied mostly by female flight attendants.

Being young and a little impetuous, Mike would come to work and talk about his off-duty romantic adventures. We worked with a couple of grumpy old men who listened intently to Mike's stories but badmouthed him behind his back. It was clear to me that they were just jealous. What I cared about was how well he did his job, and he did his job very well.

Mike always looked sharp; he kept his uniforms clean and neat and his grooming was impeccable. He was very diligent about his patrol duties. Even on very hot days he would spend most of the day on patrol. He kept good records and worked well with property owners (especially the ladies) to clean up fire hazards.

Mike and I also shared an interest in cars. At one point while we worked together, he bought a chopped and channeled, fenderless '34 Ford coupe. Later, he drove an Italian deTomaso Pantera coupe. My interest in cars had taken a back seat to education and I was driving a beat-up '57 VW, but I looked forward to the day when I could get behind the wheel of something special. Mike Stoker and I forged a friendship that survives to this day, and I've always been pleased to see him attain and enjoy extraordinary personal and financial success.

I could write a whole book about my experiences in Topanga Canyon (including catching Mama Cass swimming in the nude at Barry McGuire's house (you don't want to hear about it), rescuing Tisha Sterling's horse (she's Ann Sothern's daughter), and giving a ticket to Bob Denver (Gilligan) for vandalism). Some of the most vivid memories, however, involve rescues and brushfires. Topanga Canyon Boulevard twists and turns through 12 miles between the San Fernando Valley and the Pacific Ocean. In the summer, tens of thousands of cars traverse the two-lane road going to and returning from the beach. Lots of them crash and/or leave the road and careen to the bottom of the canyon. Our job was to extricate people from those crashes (before there was a "Jaws of Life") and package them for transport in an ambulance.

Fire station 69 was the only government facility in Topanga that was staffed 24 hours a day. People would come there for first aid (bees stings, skinned knees, broken toes, etc.), for advice on property purchases ("When was the last time a fire burned through that area?"), and family matters (everything from a frustrated mother wanting us to scold her delinquent son to a squabbling newlywed couple who wanted us to settle their argument). In a serious medical emergency, we were all that stood between life and death in many cases -- and we were terribly limited in what we could do. The following story was written a few years ago but never published. It may offer some perspective on how things were and

why the advent of paramedics was so important.

"I was the Captain at Fire Station 69, and we got a call reporting a woman with breathing difficulty. A young firefighter and I jumped into a patrol pickup truck - along with a Lyt-Port resuscitator and a first aid kit - and raced up the canyon to the narrow, winding road where the woman and her family lived. After parking our rig, we scrambled up the 50 to 60 steps from the roadway to the little house perched on the side of the canyon.

"The woman was in her thirties, she had a history of asthma, and she was struggling valiantly to breathe when we got there. As my partner set up the oxygen, I stepped to the phone and called our dispatcher. It was a 20-minute response for the ambulance and I wanted to make sure it was rolling.

"The woman's name was Marjorie. At first, the oxygen seemed to help. But then she lost consciousness, and her breaths became sporadic. My partner and I were among the first people on the West Coast trained in CPR, but we were both praying we wouldn't have to use it on Marjorie. Over the sound of the oxygen flowing, and the sound of her husband trying to calm their two little girls, we strained our ears for the sound of an ambulance siren coming up the canyon.

"In those days, we weren't allowed to carry stethoscopes or blood pressure cuffs. But our CPR training had taught us to check the carotid pulse. When Marjorie's skin color began to change, I felt for a pulse and it wasn't there. We started CPR about the time we heard the ambulance coming up the canyon.

"The next several minutes were a blur. There was no chance of getting the gurney up those steps, or continuing CPR while going down the steps. In a frantic scramble of arms and legs, we picked up Marjorie and raced down the stairs with her to the ambulance. It was almost a free fall, and every muscle of our bodies was fighting to get down those stairs as fast as possible without falling or dropping our patient. I don't remember doing it, but somewhere during that downhill sprint, I twisted my ankle so badly that I spent the next two weeks on crutches.

"In the ambulance, we resumed CPR. Already, my lips felt swollen, and my partner was sweating profusely as he did chest compressions and shouted out a breathless cadence.

"The ambulance was an International Travel-All with a V-8 engine and automatic transmission. The driver had left the lights on and the engine running - but the engine had died. I remember the interior overhead lights dimming as the driver engaged the starter. I remember the sickening sound of the engine turning a slow revolution-and-a-half before it pulled the lights down even dimmer.

"'One-and-two-and-three-and-four-and...', my partner was counting as the driver engaged the starter again. Same result. About that time, I got my first taste of another person's stomach secretions. We stopped CPR momentarily, turned the patient on her side, and tried to scoop the vomit out of her mouth. I remember shouting to the ambulance crew that we had jumper cables in our truck.

"I remember how I felt as I breathed into the woman's mouth again. A wave of nausea surged from the pit of my stomach to the tip of my head. I fought it back by concentrating on the fact that we were all that stood between life and death for a young wife and mother. The young firefighter offered to switch positions. I turned him down, and then caught myself wishing I hadn't.

"Because of the narrow road, the ambulance guys had to drive the patrol truck up the road to a wide spot, turn it around, and bring it back nose-to-nose with the ambulance. We

continued CPR, and it seemed an eternity before the driver got back in and engaged the starter again. Same result. I guessed that the problem was the starter, not the battery.

“You can probably understand why I remember that awful night 25 years ago. Another ambulance was dispatched - arrival time: 45 minutes. A Deputy Sheriff arrived at the scene and sized it up pretty quickly. He knew a physician who lived in the canyon. He went to his home and then delivered the doctor to our location, where he pronounced Marjorie dead. For the fifteen minutes or so before the doctor pronounced her, we felt her skin temperature turn from warm to cool to clammy.

“About five years after that terrible night in Topanga Canyon, I found myself in a classroom at Harbor General Hospital in L.A. I was a chief officer by then, and some of my firefighters were learning about wonderful new tools and procedures and medications, and we were all learning how to use them. As I held a defibrillator in my hands for the first time, I thought about Marjorie. As I learned all about endotracheal tubes and esophageal obturators, I thought about Marjorie’s desperate and losing battle to breathe. As I learned about bronchodilators and other medications, I realized that with the advances of those five years, we could have given that young woman the opportunity to watch her daughters grow up.

“Marjorie’s death changed my life, and it shaped my career. I will never be able to rest as long as people can die in North America for the lack of quality emergency medical services.”

The book about my experiences in Topanga, if it ever gets written, also will try to paint a word picture of the phenomenon of California brush fires. There were lots of little ones and a few big ones while I was stationed at Topanga. On one occasion, I misjudged a situation and nearly lost my entire crew. In 1994, I wrote about that incident in my “Command Post” column for Rescue Magazine. It was called “Surfing with the Devil”:

“Watching TV reports of the recent fires in Southern California produced a flood of memories for me. Especially when a fire jumped a ridge on the edge of the San Fernando Valley and raced through Topanga Canyon toward the ocean.

“Twenty-four years earlier, I was the fire captain on duty at Station 69 in Topanga Canyon. The Santa Anas were blowing, and the air was pungent with the fragrance of native vegetation as it protects itself against the hot, dry winds. Our fire company consisted of five people, a pumper and two small patrol trucks.

“We all knew the weather conditions were ripe for a fire, so early in the day we deployed both patrol units. We roamed the public roads throughout our 100-square mile area, making ourselves visible, scaring off would-be arsonists and watching for smoke.

“I was in Patrol 69 around noon when we received an alarm:

‘Brush fire reported in Woodland Hills north of Topanga Canyon Boulevard.’

“Looking in that direction, I saw the header, flipped on the lights and siren, and



Captain Page directs an air tanker in Old Topanga Canyon as it drops retardant on a brush fire (which is off-camera).

headed toward it. Engine 69 was responding from the station and Patrol 269 was en-route from Old Topanga Canyon.

“As I wrestled the small truck through the road’s twists and turns, I was thinking of the advice of old-timers who had fought a half-dozen fires in the same terrain. The only way to keep a fire out of Topanga is to stop it at the ridge that separates Woodland Hills from the canyon, they had said. But nobody had ever been able to stop a wind-driven fire at the ridge. I wanted to be the first.

“Every year, fire department bulldozers clear a fuel break along the ridge, and a dirt fire road passes through the middle of the cleared area. I pulled the patrol truck onto the fire road and drove a quarter-mile to a saddle where I could look down on the fire. The wind had died down, and the smoke was rising straight up.

“A few minutes later, Engine 69 arrived on scene. ‘We’ve got a chance of stopping this thing here at the ridge,’ I explained to the crew. ‘If the wind doesn’t pick up.’

“My plan was to backfire from the ridge toward the fire. That way, when the fire made its run to the top, it would run out of fuel before gaining the momentum necessary to cross the fuel break.

“We spaced ourselves about a hundred yards apart and began lighting backfires. The brush burned eagerly and the backfires began to grow together.

“Just then, the hot wind picked up and started to blow in gusts of 50 mph or more. About the same time, the heat from the main fire and our backfires merged to produce a kind of flashover.

“Spontaneously, we started running for our vehicles -- but we couldn’t run fast enough. I had the sensation of being inside the curl of a giant ocean wave. But the substance of that curl was hot beyond description and filled with biting smoke and red-hot embers.

“It was like surfing in hell.

“As we ran, it was impossible to see or breathe. The embers were like a swarm of angry bees, finding their way into gloves, boots, collars and pant legs. By the time we arrived at our pumper, which had an open cab, the engine had died for lack of oxygen. We all rushed to the patrol truck and crowded into the cab. Before I could close the vent-wing, a thousand hot embers blew in after us.

“In two or three minutes, the worst was over, and we reemerged into the smoke and embers to extinguish fires that had started in the pumper’s upholstery, hosebed and storage bins. At the same time, I reported to incoming units that the fire had slopped over the ridge and was heading into Topanga Canyon.

“Two days later, the fire was contained -- after the weather changed and moist ocean air replaced the Santa Anas. During those two days, my thoughts were dominated by remorse. In the quest for personal achievement, I had placed my crew in a position of unacceptable risk.

“In the years following that fire, the brush grew back, as it has for tens of thousands of years. And now it has burned again, as it must in order to propagate.

“The most to be gained from that frightening episode is a lesson I am compelled to share with others who are entrusted with the lives and welfare of emergency services personnel.

“In pursuit of a personal challenge, I placed my crew in jeopardy. They survived and forgave me, but I have never forgiven myself. The brush grew back, but dead firefighters and rescuers cannot be replaced. Regardless of our emergency service environment, let that be a lesson to all of us.”

Hello Hollywood

In 1969, after moving my family off the ranch, I started getting the itch for some “flatland experience” (in LA County FD, that refers to a station that is not in “the stumps”, the hilly or mountainous areas where brush fires occur). I put in a bid for Station 7 in West Hollywood. The transfer occurred in January, 1970. Thus began a series of events that would drastically change my life and career.

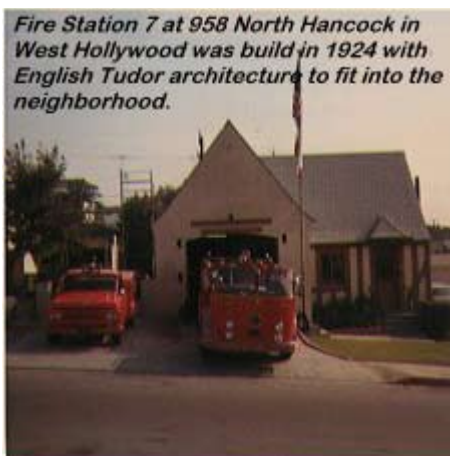
Then and now, Station 7 was the oldest building used by the County Fire Department as a fire station (It was built in 1924, which may not seem old in other parts of the country. But, in Southern California, that meant the non-reinforced masonry construction of the building had survived numerous earthquakes. All other fire stations from that era had been replaced with more modern, earthquake-resistant structures). Station 7’s architecture was English Tudor and it was intended to blend in with the neighboring residences on Hancock Street. I loved the place and it will always be my favorite fire station.

Station 7 housed an engine and a rescue squad (Engine and Squad 7) with a six-person crew. The rescue squad was still operating at the first-aid level. That included the administration of oxygen, splinting, and bandaging, but no cardiac defibrillation, no taking EKGs or administering drugs, and no insertion of adjunctive airways. We were not allowed to carry stethoscopes and only about half of our people had been trained in the new technique of CPR.

What’s a “Paramedic”?

About that time, we had heard about and read about (in department memos and “Straight Streams,” the monthly magazine published by the Firefighters’ Benefit and Welfare Assn.) the “Rescue Heart Unit” that was being implemented in Battalion 7. Previously, we had read about a new program in the Miami Fire Department wherein a number of firefighters had been trained to be “paramedics.” In that Florida program, according to an article in Fire Engineering Magazine, the specially trained firefighters could do some sophisticated medical procedures that previously only physicians were allowed to do.

When I first read the article about the Miami “paramedic” program, I was fascinated by it. It caused me to think of all the people whose lives had slipped through my fingers over the years. There was so little we could do for them. The new concept of “paramedics”



was promising but I doubted that our department would take such a bold step. Then I heard about the “Rescue Heart Unit” program.

The Miami program actually had been inspired by the work of Dr. J. Frank Pantridge of Belfast, Northern Ireland. He had created a mobile coronary care unit at the Royal Victoria Hospital and, over a period of a year or two, demonstrated that lives could be saved by taking emergency coronary care to the patient, rather than waiting for the patient to arrive at the hospital. He was invited to the U.S. to report on his project at a meeting of the American College of Cardiology (ACC).

Attending the ACC meeting were Dr. Eugene Nagel of Miami, Dr. William Grace of New York, Dr. Leonard Cobb of Seattle, Dr. James Warren of Columbus, Ohio, and Drs. Walter Graf (of Daniel Freeman Hospital) and J. Michael Criley (of Harbor General Hospital) from Los Angeles, among others. Shortly thereafter, all of these cardiologists were putting together programs in their respective cities to try to achieve what Dr. Pantridge had in Belfast. Dr. Nagel, in Miami, was first to get his program up and running. In the Los Angeles area, Drs. Graf and Criley actually were constructing competing models. It was Criley’s project that would hit the streets of L.A. first.

At the fire station level, we knew little of this background, except for the limited information that was reported in fire service and departmental publications. At about the time I transferred to Station 7, the first six L.A. County firefighter/paramedics were completing their didactic training and clinical rotations at Harbor General. Those six were Bob Belliveau, Dale Cauble, Gerry Nolls, Gary Davis, Bob Ramstead, and Roscoe (“Rocky”) Doke, as I recall. It was time for them to take their skills to the street, but then someone pointed out that there was no law that would permit them to operate in the field without direct supervision.

DISPATCHING AND OTHER TECHNOLOGY

One of the things I looked forward to in transferring back to the flatland was working with a more professional dispatch system. In the Malibu region (which included Topanga), dispatches occurred over County-owned “land lines,” telephone wires to each of the stations from the Malibu dispatch center located at Fire Station 65.

The system could be unreliable (we often suspected that a bird landing on a wire between Stations 65 and 69 could short-circuit our link with the outside world). Even worse in my view, most of the dispatchers at Malibu had no standard format for obtaining information from callers or reporting alarm information to the stations.

Many times, we would waste time interrogating the dispatcher, trying to get information about the location or nature of an emergency we were being dispatched to. As often as not, the dispatcher had gotten excited while talking to the reporting party and failed to ask important questions. In other cases, he would jot notes while taking information from a caller and then be unable to decipher his own notes while dispatching us. The system has since been shut down and merged with the LA dispatch, but at the time it was a frustrating symbol of the old “country fire department” that LA County Fire Department had emerged from.

Station 7 was part of the selective calling unit (SCU) network. Prior to 1956, the LA County Fire Department had linked all of its stations with leased telephone lines (each one of which was owned and maintained by Pacific Bell Telephone Co. and priced on a per-mile-per-month basis). Because of the far-flung nature of the department, its annual phone bill was reported to be the second highest for any user west of the Mississippi River. Furthermore, the system was subject to failure in the event of storms or earthquakes.

The alternative was to create a system that would dispatch by radio. To make it selective - so that individual stations could be alarmed without all stations being notified or disrupted - the selective calling units were developed. By transmitting individual sets of two consecutive tones to receivers that were tuned to activate only upon receiving their respective two-tone signal, the system could eliminate the need for expensive phone wires between the dispatch center and each of the stations.

The receivers were on and awake 24 hours a day, but they would not activate the lights and audible warning devices at a station until that particular station’s two tones sounded. A tone consisted of two or more “frequencies,” meaning audible or inaudible vibrations at given frequencies, or cycles per second. The cycles-per-second are measured as a Hertz (named after the guy who first discovered the concept). Thus, a 60-Hertz signal will sound or measure different than a 90-Hertz signal. A radio broadcasting at 154 Megahertz (referred to as VHF, or “very high frequency”) or 465 Megahertz (referred to as UHF, or “ultra high frequency”) will be inaudible to the human ear unless it is modulated.

Many of the stations on the LA dispatch network shared the same sound for the first

of the two tones. When that first tone would be sounded, numerous receivers would perk up their electronic ears, so to speak, waiting for the second tone. If the second tone did not contain the peculiar set of frequencies that were programmed into a receiver, it would lapse back into its waiting mode. It wouldn’t trigger the lights and claxon at its station unless and until it heard its own set of second tones.

This explains why the buzzer (claxon) would sound at station 51 almost immediately after the second tone would sound. It took only an instant for the station’s receiver to recognize the tone, even though it continued to broadcast for another second or two. In multiple-station dispatches, additional two-tone signals would be heard, but we would hear the entirety of the second tone for each of those units or stations. Actually, at the physical sites of those stations, the lights would go on and a claxon or other audible warning device would sound instantly upon hearing its second tone. However, since we were hearing the actual radio broadcast of those tones from a distance, we would hear the entire duration of both tones for the other stations, even after their lights and devices were triggered.

A switch on the side of the SCU console allowed the unit to “monitor” (meaning listen to everything that was happening throughout the LA dispatch area), or to “stand-by” (meaning that other alarm activity and radio traffic could be muted until the specific SCU was triggered). It would then remain on “monitor” until re-set for “stand-by.” Most stations remained on “monitor” during daytime and early evening hours but switched to “stand-by” after members started to “sack out” (go to bed).

The only way the dispatch center could know that its alarm had been received was for someone at the station to verbally acknowledge over the air. Since each station was a fixed broadcast site, they each required a license issued by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Whenever the FCC licenses a fixed broadcast site, it assigns call letters to it. Usually, they consist of three letters and three numerals (for example, KMA941 or KMG365).

FCC regulations require that broadcasters identify their station with their call letters at least once per hour if they are broadcasting continuously, or upon each use if broadcasting intermittently. Thus, when Captain Stanley received an alarm at Station 51, he would acknowledge to the dispatch center (“Station 51”) and comply with FCC regulations (“KMG three six five”).

In recent years, technology has improved and selective calling units have been developed with single-frequency tones. But when the LA County system was developed, the relative sensitivity of receivers required that multiple-frequency tones be used. This made the signals sound much like a child playing at the keys of an out-of-tune organ. In October 1971, Jack Webb asked musician/conductor Billy May to come to LA County Fire Station 8, where filming of some World Premiere scenes would occur.

While at Station 8, Billy May heard the sounds of the SCU system. To a firefighter, it was just background noise, but to a musical genius it was the foundation for a musical theme. Thus, the original theme music for “Emergency!” performed by Nelson Riddle and orchestra.

Anyway, back to the original point, I was glad to be working in the LA dispatch system, especially when Sam Lanier was on duty. As mentioned in “The Emergency! Companion,” Sam always maintained his professional composure, never confused his role, frequently thought “around corners” to assist field commanders, and did it all with a cool baritone voice that never wavered so much as a quarter-octave. All these attributes won him his role as the voice of “Emergency!”

All the LA dispatchers were busy; thus most of them were almost unflappable. Most important was the fact that we usually got all the information we needed with the original broadcast. Most often, it was clear and concise and we could be “out of the barn” (leaving the station en-route to an emergency) in a minute or less.

Midnight at the Playboy Club

During the first half of 1970, I was studying for the final exams for my last three law school classes, and I was continuing to work on my fire company supervision textbook. Since my home was filled with all the disruptions of noisy little boys, most of my off-duty studying occurred at the LA County Law Library or at my parents’ home in Monterey Park. The studying had become intense, in anticipation of the bar exam. I looked forward to coming to work, continuing the pre-fire planning, fire prevention inspections and training.

Amidst it all, we had a lot of fun; I remember going off duty at the end of numerous shifts with my stomach muscles hurting from laughing so much in the prior 24 hours.

Everybody knew that the Battalion Chief eligibility list was about to expire (they were only valid for two years). Thus, a promotional process would be held sometime during 1970. It was in the back of my mind, but I knew I wouldn’t be able to study for it till after the bar exam.

At that time, promotional exam processes for Captains and Battalion Chiefs consisted of three parts: a written exam, an oral interview, and an “appraisal of promotability” (or “AP”). The AP was derived from a very subjective process. All of the department’s chief officers would gather at the training center auditorium. One-by-one, the names of candidates for promotion would be posted at the front of the room.

Usually, a candidate’s current chief officer would propose a score for him (between 70 and 100). In some cases, there would be no comment and the original AP score would stand. In other cases, if a candidate had somehow created a bad impression with a chief officer, that chief would offer his negative impression. Strongly held views would surface and peoples’ reputations would be ravaged -- with no opportunity for them to defend themselves.

Even though the process was supposed to be secret, leaks would occur. For example, a chief officer shared with me a comment that was made when my name came up during the Captain’s exam AP meeting. Reportedly, a particular chief officer issued a warning to the assembled group: “This guy someday will be the chief of the entire department, but he’ll get there over the dead bodies of everybody who works for him.” I never learned who had made that remark and, to this day, I’m not sure what inspired it. Whatever the intent or motivation, it didn’t have a negative effect. My AP score for that exam was 100.

I suspected that several of the ranking chief officers in the department were intimidated by my education. They and others, I suspected, were beginning to view me as a threat to their own career plans. I wondered how that would affect my score if I were to compete for the Battalion Chief position.

Destiny intervened on the early morning of June 3, 1970. At Station 7, we had had a busy day, with lots of alarms for more-or-less routine events (trash fire, car fire, an elderly lady having difficulty breathing, a couple of false alarms, and two or three cancelled responses into Station 8’s district). About 11:30pm, I went to bed. The next morning, I was scheduled to drive my wife and kids to Palm Springs for a swim meet, so I had arranged for the on-coming Captain to arrive early.

At 12:05am, the alarm rang. I had just lapsed into deep sleep. Before the bell stopped

ringing, I was on my feet, getting into my turnouts, but I had trouble clearing my head. Before I could get to the SCU console on the apparatus floor, the dispatcher broadcast the message. My mind was still fuzzy and I wasn’t sure what I had heard. I picked up the microphone and asked for a repeat of the dispatch information.

“Fire at the Playboy Club, Sunset and Alta Loma. Numerous calls. Station Seven, Station Eight, Engine Thirty-eight, Engine Fifty-eight, LA City Engine Forty-one, and Battalion one responding.” That got my attention. As I climbed aboard Engine 7, Engineer Danny Deaver punched the throttle on our “Toyopet Crown” and we started up the Hancock Street hill.

The “Toyopet” label was a term of derision for the 30 or so cut-rate pumpers that had been purchased by the County in the late 1950’s. Division Chief Byron Robinson had cut a deal with the Crown Coach Corporation to build the pumpers for about 15 percent less than the standard 1,250 gallon-per-minute Firecoach. The lower priced vehicles would be rated at 1,000 gallons per minute, and they would be powered by a 580 cubic inch Waukesha six-cylinder engine, rather than the standard 935 cubic inch Hall-Scott.

About the time the first of these new pumpers were being delivered, the Japanese Toyota Motor Company was trying to introduce its cars to the American market. The top-of-the-line Toyota was labeled the “Toyopet Crown.” It was an ugly car and not well made. In a highly publicized marketing campaign, the president of Toyota was to drive a Toyopet Crown sedan from the East Coast of America to the West Coast. The journey was never completed. The car broke down almost daily and each mechanical mishap was reported in the media.

LA County Fire Department personnel were accustomed to fire apparatus powered by the big Hall-Scoots. They had a deep, throaty sound, a fairly wide power range, and plenty of low-RPM torque for going up hills. The Waukesha-powered pumpers, by contrast, had a tinny pitch to their exhaust sound, and they operated at higher RPMs, which made them sound like they were straining (which they were). When confronted by a hill, they would quickly slow to a crawl.

It wasn’t long before some LA County firefighter put two-and-two together and matched the reports about the unreliable Toyopet Crown limping across the U.S. to the underpowered Crown fire engines that were being delivered to his fire department. The “Toyopet” label stuck to all of Chief Robinson’s discount fire engines until all of them eventually were re-powered with diesel engines. Chief Robinson detested the label and would become almost apoplectic whenever he heard someone utter it.

Unfortunately, in 1970, Engine 7 was a Toyopet and, as it crawled up the Hancock Street hill, I could see a big glow in the sky in the direction of the Playboy Club. I picked up the microphone and instructed the dispatcher to notify all responding units that we had fire and smoke showing. At LA Headquarters, Ed Gussman broadcast the notification with the calm, cool manner of an experienced, professional dispatcher.

When we reached the top of Hancock Street and turned right on Holloway, the engine picked up speed and the glow in the sky got brighter. I pulled the pre-plan file from its place under the pumper’s dashboard, but I never really needed it. We were very familiar with the building (which was non-sprinklered) and our water resources (which were almost limitless).

We turned from Holloway onto Alta Loma and started up another hill. The Toyopet again slowed to a crawl as Danny dropped back to a lower gear and the little Waukesha powerplant sounded as though it might jump from its motor mounts. A short distance after

we started up the hill, the fire came into view.

The Playboy Club was a ten-story building that was perched on the side of a hill. The front of the building faced Sunset Boulevard and that level of the building was the second floor. The backside of the building, which we were approaching, was mostly glass -- to accommodate a view that stretched all the way to the Palos Verdes Peninsula and the ocean.

The building essentially was a series of vertical concrete columns and horizontal lightweight concrete slabs, wrapped with aluminum frames that held 4' x 8' panes of tinted 1/4" glass in place. The Playboy Club occupied floors 1 through 3. Floors 4 through 9 were divided in the middle by a central hallway constructed of one-hour fire-rated wallboard and fireproof doors. These floors were rented to musician Vic Damone, Ross Bagdasarian (aka "David Seville," creator of "Alvin the Chipmunk"), and other tenants, most of whom were associated with the entertainment industry. The tenth floor was Hugh Hefner's penthouse (prior to his purchase of the Playboy Mansion).

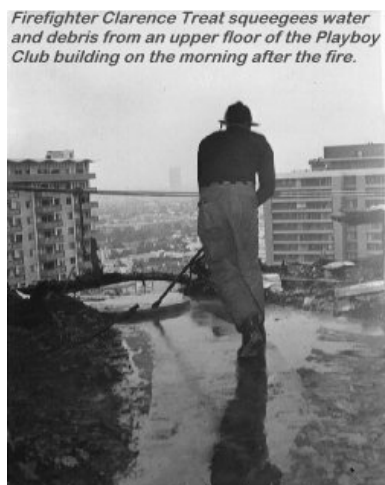
As we approached the fire, we could see that floors 3 and 4 were fully involved, with flames from those floors reaching up the backside of the building toward the upper floors. I told Danny to take Engine 7 to the front door of the building on Sunset. That would be our command post. As we continued to crawl up the hill, just as we passed the backside of the building on our way to the front door, the entire expanse of fifth-floor windows on the back side fell from their frames and crashed to the roof of the parking structure 50 feet below. With that, the fire entered all of the offices on the backside of that floor.

I knew that this would be one of the biggest challenges of my career. I had long preached that command of a fire was an acting performance of sorts. The people on scene, those who monitored the radio transmissions during the emergency, and those who later listened to the radio tapes (during a post-incident critique) would become harsh judges of the incident commander's performance. Not so coincidentally, however, the best performances of incident command inevitably produced the best outcomes on the fireground.

The LA County Fire Department had never before experienced a major high-rise building fire. Normally, an event of that magnitude quickly would fall under the command of a chief officer. But West Hollywood was a geopolitical island, surrounded by the cities of Los Angeles and Beverly Hills, each of which maintained their own fire departments. Our fire department had assigned the West Hollywood and Universal City islands to Battalion 1, which was headquartered at Station 38, a 30-minute drive from



The morning after the Playboy Club Fire in Engine 7's district on Sunset Blvd. Well-placed streams from ladder-pipe and snorkel units halted the fire's exterior "lapping" from floor to floor. Aggressive interior attack from the rear completed extinguishment. Photo courtesy James O. Page.



Firefighter Clarence Treat squeezes water and debris from an upper floor of the Playboy Club building on the morning after the fire.

the Playboy Club - even with lights and siren.

Our Battalion Chief was "Whitey" Ardinger and I heard him on the air, acknowledging my initial on-scene report. I knew that he was a very competent fireground commander and I looked forward to his arrival on scene, but my competitive instincts were telling me to get the fire knocked down before the chief arrived - without hurting anyone.

We stopped the upward progression of the Playboy Fire at the 8th floor. The full report on the event could be book-length. There were some superb performances by a lot of people, and there was a lot of luck involved. Twenty-nine minutes after we received the alarm, I reported to LA Dispatch that the fire was knocked down (just as Chief Ardinger arrived at scene).

Less than a month later, I graduated from law school. A few days after that, I gave a report on the Playboy Fire at a meeting of all the department's chief officers. Afterwards, several chief officers told me I was a little too polished, that I had made some of the older chiefs a little uncomfortable.

The California Bar Exam

At the time, I was almost totally immersed in a bar review course; the bar exam was scheduled for August. Thus, I was relieved to learn that the fire department's Battalion Chief exam, also set for August, would not include a written test. It would consist only of an oral interview and the Appraisal of Promotability.

The bar exam was three days of sheer torment. Since I was a typist, I was assigned to join 300 or so other examinees with typewriters at the Glendale Civic Auditorium. The sound of that many typewriters, all furiously hammering out answers to the essay-type questions, was distracting at first. After awhile, however, the background noise became barely noticeable as every one of my available brain cells was focused on the exam. At the end of the third day, when it was finally over, I was physically and emotionally depleted. In the parking lot, I got into my Ford station wagon and immediately drove over a curb.

In the weeks after the bar exam, for the first time in thirteen years, I was able to give all my attention to my family and my fire department job. It was difficult to adjust, and my nervous energy continued unabated. For a lot of reasons, my wife and I had lost the ability to communicate well with each other. We both needed some time to wind down and get reacquainted but I had used up all my vacation time and holidays to finish school and study for the bar exam.

The boys were 13, 9 and 6, they were typically rowdy and rambunctious, and involved in competitive age-group swimming, so there was no real quiet time at home. Instead of working on my relationship with my wife and family, I retreated to my office at home and finished writing my fire company supervision textbook.

The bar exam results came in November, as I recall. I was home when they arrived in the mail. My hands shook as I opened the envelope. "We regret to inform you.....," the letter said. I was devastated. Within an hour or two after getting the bad news, I was ana-



Tom and Andy Page swam with the Hacienda Heights Swim Club and competed in events throughout Southern California.

lyzing why I had failed. It was no mystery, really. A law professor once told me, “the law is a jealous mistress.” I had cheated on that jealous mistress.

The Playboy Fire and its aftermath, my preoccupation with the Battalion Chief exam process, and trying to write a book while studying for the bar were, in essence, arrogant disregard for solid advice. I had believed I was different. I’d been skating through exams my whole adult life, and I thought I’d skate through the bar exam. I had nobody to blame but myself. Within 24 hours, I was plotting a study program that would prepare me for the next exam, to be held in March 1971.

Chapter Five

THE BAR EXAM, REVISITED

The Fall and Winter of 1970-71 was like a blur. I took two bar review courses and studied day and night. At work, I tried not to let my study schedule interfere with the needs of the department and my crew. But almost every other waking minute was committed to studying. Every day off, including weekends, I could be found at the LA County Law Library.

Almost daily, while studying, a succession of legal concepts or the logical bases of appellate court rulings would emerge like bright lights from the fog of esoteric language and boring details that I was immersed in. Frequently, I’d say to myself, “How could I have not understood that prior to now?” Or, “No wonder I flunked the exam!” I was satisfying that jealous mistress (the law) and she was rewarding me.

At the same time, my family was not getting the time and attention they deserved. My wife increasingly was frustrated with bearing the responsibility for the boys all by herself. At the time, it seemed to me that she was saving up complaints and crises to dump on me when I came home to sleep, shower and change clothes. I’m sure it seemed to her that she’d been playing second fiddle to the law and the fire department for a long, long time.

Tom and Andy were doing average work in school but my stepson had always suffered from a learning deficit and retarded social skills. These problems seemed to magnify in junior high school and high school. Often, while studying for the bar exam, thoughts of my family and the responsibilities I was avoiding would crowd in on me, and my head and face would feel a hot rush of anxiety. But then, forcing myself to concentrate on that single-minded goal, I would sweep all else from my mind.

I don’t even remember taking the oral interview for the Battalion Chief exam. It happened sometime in the latter half of 1970 and I have a record that says I scored a “100” on that part of the process. The Appraisal of Promotability score was a “90.” For a day or two, I probably worried about why I didn’t get a higher score on the AP, but I couldn’t let it distract me. When the eligibility list came out I was number 5. That was the lowest position I’d ever held on a promotional list, but it also meant I would become a Battalion Chief sometime in 1971, fourteen years after Captain Richie Lawrence first taught me how to loop a hydrant.

Finally, as the day of the bar exam approached, I decided to stay in a motel near Glendale the night before the exam, and the nights of the first two days of the exam. We couldn’t afford it, and my wife was angered that I would choose to stay away from my family. But I knew that the crisis atmosphere at home would distract me from the exam.

Law professor Beverly Rubins presented one of the bar review courses I had taken. She had analyzed bar exam questions over a period of many years and would concentrate her bar review courses on those questions or issues that were most likely to appear on the next exam. By the end of the first day of my second exam, I looked up to the Spanish-style balconies surrounding the big testing room in the Glendale Civic Auditorium. I expected to

see Beverly Rubins on one of those balconies, taking a bow. Her predictions were uncanny and I was feeling confident.

At the end of the third day, walking to the parking lot, I encountered one of my fellow graduates from Southwestern University. "How did you do?" he asked. "I aced it!" I replied, surprising both of us with my confidence and candor (that supposedly can become a jinx). I had actually enjoyed the exam -- because I was so well prepared. Something inside me was shouting that I had become a lawyer, that the biggest intellectual challenge of my life was behind me, and that I could now start picking up the pieces of my life. I felt as though I had been freed from captivity. On the way home, I rolled down the car windows, turned the radio up loud, and sang along with the music.

In the next several weeks, I discovered a syndrome familiar to generations of military personnel. When you return from a long war, you learn that the people you left at home have adjusted to your absence. In fact, in some respects, they enjoy their self-sufficiency. The returning warrior wants to get things back in shape right away. His family probably won't welcome many of the changes he wants to impose.

At work, in the evenings between calls, I watched TV and played cards with the crew. I helped a couple of younger members design study programs for future promotional exams, and I finished the manuscript for my fire company supervision textbook which, by this time, had been titled, "Effective Company Command."

As Luck Would Have It

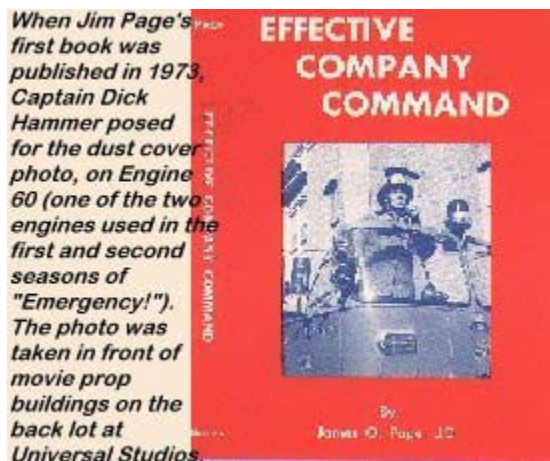
In late April, I sent the manuscript to Dick Friend, who was our department's public information officer. At the time, the department had a rule (probably unconstitutional) that required members to get approval before submitting any materials for publication. I was inclined to challenge the rule but then thought it better to comply.

On May 11, 1971, I was on duty at Station 7. Unbeknownst to me, TV producer Jack Webb met that day with executives from NBC.

Webb was proposing a new television series based on rescue. NBC agreed to purchase a two-hour special that could possibly spin off a weekly series. Within an hour, Webb was meeting with Robert A. Cinader, one of his executive producers. With orders to research the concept, Cinader walked from Webb's office to his own, across the lot at Universal studios. He was thinking, "Who does rescue?"

It occurred to Bob Cinader that fire departments are the primary providers of rescue services. As he walked into his office, he told Jane Kent, his secretary, to get the fire department on the phone. She called the information operator. Most likely, considering the location of Universal Studios, the operator gave her the number for the Los Angeles City Fire Department.

There are two versions of what happened next. One version, told to me by a retired LA City Fire Department chief officer, contends that Jane Kent got a bureaucratic run-



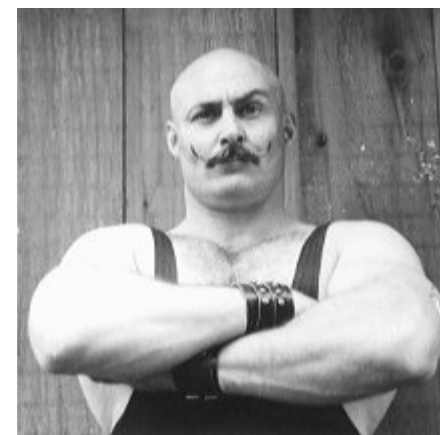
around when she called the City department. Supposedly, she somehow knew enough to try another fire department and got in contact with the County Fire Department. The other version of the story has the information operator giving Jane the "wrong" number (the County's) in the first place.

Regardless how it happened, the call went to Dick Friend. Bob Cinader told Dick that he needed someone to do some research and writing for a proposed TV special. My book manuscript was sitting on Dick Friend's desk. There may have been others he could have recommended, but Dick told Mr. Cinader that I was a writer with extensive experience in rescue, and that I was on duty at a fire station in West Hollywood. Then Dick called Station 7 to let me know I might be hearing from someone in the Jack Webb organization.

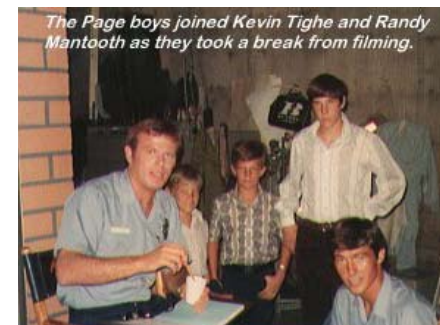
What happened next is detailed in the "Emergency! Companion." Again, a benevolent bolt of lightning had struck me. I shared the news with my wife and kids. The kids were excited about Dad's new connection with Hollywood, even though none of us knew where it might lead. My wife, on the other hand, was not very happy about it. I think she saw this as another competitor for my time and attention.

In June 1971, I received word that I had passed the bar exam. In the several weeks before getting the exam results, my confidence had wavered a little. I caught myself wondering what I would do if I failed again. I doubted that I had the resolve to endure another marathon of studying. I worried about the stress it would bring to my marriage and family. I knew that I would have to abandon my work with Bob Cinader on the TV special if I studied for the next bar exam. With the letter of congratulations from the State Bar, all those anxious concerns faded away.

Within a five-day period in July 1971, I was promoted to Battalion Chief and formally admitted to the California Bar. In another stroke of good luck, I was assigned to Battalion 7 on the "B" platoon. Battalion 7 was a giant area -- about 60 square miles stretching from South LA to the southerly tip of the Palos Verdes Peninsula. At the time, the battalion consisted of 13 fire stations housing 13 engine (pumper) and two truck (ladder) companies. Within the area were several major refineries



The late Bert Elliot was one of the interesting characters who served at Fire Station 7. Bert is mentioned on page 17 of "The Emergency Companion."



The Page boys joined Kevin Tighe and Randy Mantooth as they took a break from filming.



New Battalion Chief Jim Page conducts a drill for the troops at Fire Station 36, Battalion 7 headquarters.

and chemical plants, hundreds of large warehouse and manufacturing facilities, thousands of small businesses, and about a half-million people. Battalion 7 always had been the site of lots of action, and a Battalion Chief assignment there was prestigious.

Of special interest to me was the fact that Battalion 7 was the center of our paramedic program -- which had evolved from the so-called "Rescue Heart Unit." I saw this new program as the key to our department's future and I wanted to learn as much about it as possible.

At the time, every Battalion Chief on a field assignment in our fire department had a chief's aide (driver). From the start of my assignment, every time an extra paramedic was on duty, I would assign him as my aide. My goal was to learn as much as I could from them. At one time or another each of the original six LA County paramedics worked at least one shift with me. They seemed pleased to have a chief who was interested in them.

The pioneer paramedics all told me that they felt their program was in jeopardy. There was no single person in the fire department that had responsibility and authority for the growth and expansion of the program. In fact, Richard Houts, the chief of the department, openly referred to the program as "temporary" or "an experiment." Other chiefs, taking their cue from the top boss, treated the paramedic program as a temporary stepchild.

In the absence of assertive leadership from the fire department, County Supervisor Hahn arranged for the appointment of a retired Army Lieutenant Colonel as the administrator of the program. By the time I arrived in Battalion 7, "the kernel," as the paramedics called him, had already made some tactical errors. Initially treating the firefighter-paramedics as though they were enlisted foot soldiers had produced a rebellious response. I perceived the need to step in the breach and serve as a buffer between the warring parties.

Other problems included supply and maintenance. The County's mechanical repair shops were notoriously slow and inefficient. Replacement of front brake linings on a rescue truck could take four to five weeks -- and then the truck might be returned to service with defective repairs. Reserve rescue trucks were in short supply and it was not uncommon for stations 59 or 36 (the two stations with paramedics in Battalion 7) to be using a reserve sedan or station wagon as a rescue vehicle.

Because the program was so new, conflicts between the paramedics and nurses and physicians -- both on the street and in hospitals -- was almost a daily occurrence. Most medical personnel simply had not heard of paramedics, knew nothing of their training or capabilities and, as often as not, were shocked to see firefighters taking blood pressures, starting IVs, hooking up patients to cardiac monitors, and carrying portable defibrillators.

Conflict with fire department Captains and Battalion Chiefs also occurred on a regular basis. Some of the more senior fire department officers didn't adjust easily to the new program. Especially difficult for them was accepting that a young firefighter/paramedic at a medical emergency scene could have superior authority over patient care.

In order to keep their units stocked and re-stocked, and in order to take advantage of continuing education opportunities at their base hospital, the paramedics needed the liberty to leave their stations and function for long periods without the direct supervision of



Shortly after being assigned to Battalion 7, Chief Page commanded the scene of an oil tank explosion. Here he was interviewed by a television reporter at the scene.

a company officer. This was a dramatic break with tradition and many officers, up to and including the department's second-highest ranking chief, complained continuously that the paramedics were "out of control."

The third group of trainees was about mid-way through the paramedic course when I arrived in Battalion 7. They were to be assigned on Squad 209 at Station 9 in the Florence-Graham area, in another battalion. But numerous important details were awaiting decisions or action from the fire department's headquarters. For example, ordering patient care equipment for the rescue squad vehicle, developing a contract between the department and St. Francis Hospital (which was to be the base for Squad 209), and arranging for radio linkages that would allow contact between the squad and the hospital.

Before long, I was free-lancing, operating outside the boundaries of my job description, and trying to cure all the problems that had come to my attention. Almost daily, I was stepping into situations without permission, breaching the chain of command to make things happen. For a probationary Battalion Chief, it was high-risk behavior, but I was compelled to be an advocate for the paramedics. I was driven to make sure my fire department didn't lose or reject the key to its future.

My direct boss was Division Assistant Chief Paul Schneider, a tall thin man about 15 years my senior. Chief Schneider was soft-spoken and seemed uncomfortable in interpersonal situations. He was also enthusiastic about the paramedic program, but his intense loyalty to the fire department and a sense of protocol and decorum that was reflective of his generation prevented him from forcing issues and embarrassing the higher-ups.

I knew I was making Chief Schneider uncomfortable with my advocacy for the paramedic program. Also, I knew he was catching flack from on high about my failure or refusal to stay within the chain of command. The department's deputy chief, in particular, was complaining to others about me, often stating that "Chief Page is out of control." But he didn't have the guts to say anything to my face, to put his complaints in writing, or to instruct Chief Schneider to reel me in.

Many years later, I still felt badly about the distress I caused Chief Schneider. He was a fine gentleman with great integrity. He was a very capable firefighter, as was his father before him. Almost single-handed, Paul Schneider guided the incorporation of the City of Carson (which kept that highly industrialized community as a part of the County fire protection system and out of the financial grips of the cities of Los Angeles or Long Beach). Every day in 1971-72, I wrestled with the need to make the paramedic program work versus the desire to please my boss.

My research work for the Jack Webb organization was completed and I was waiting for further word on whether the proposed TV special would materialize. As soon as I was admitted to the bar, I received an invitation from a friend to work as a part-time associate in his law firm in Covina, a suburb about 20 miles east of Los Angeles and about 10 miles from my home in Hacienda Heights. To get me started, he turned over several of his cases to me. Also, I began to receive calls from firefighters who needed a lawyer for one reason or another.

Within a few weeks, it was clear to my wife that her dream of greater balance -- between work, marriage, family and leisure -- was not to be. If I wasn't on duty at the fire department, I was coordinating the paramedic program off duty, or I was at the law office. To me, all my career dreams were being realized but I was nagged by a combination of guilt and anger at home.

For the first time in years, we had some extra money. I bought a Champion motorhome

and we took a vacation trip in it to Clear Lake in Northern California. It was great fun with the kids, fishing and swimming and boating, campfires and roasting marshmallows, watching shooting stars in the night sky.

Within days of that family vacation, Bob Cinader received the okay to proceed with the television special, which was to be named “Emergency!” Thus began another drain on my time and energy. However, I didn’t see it that way. On top of my job (which I loved), and my law practice (which I enjoyed), I was to have an influential role in shaping a television special which could share our paramedic program with the world. I recognized that as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Once again, my involvement in planning and creating the World Premiere special and the subsequent television series is detailed in “The Emergency! Companion.” Not mentioned in that account is the continuing stress that my multiple activities imposed on my marriage.

Another event not mentioned in the “Companion” was Jerry Stanley’s heart attack. Jerome Stanley was a 51-year old executive of the NBC broadcast standards department. In other words, he was a censor. Firefighter Don Pierpont was my aide and, on a day in early 1972, we drove the Battalion 7 car to Universal to view the “dailies.” At the time, the projection rooms were in a building on the Universal lot. Since we were on call for emergencies, Don parked the fire department sedan next to the projection building.

There were six to eight rows of upholstered seats in each projection room. In the center was a console with a telephone and a small light. The producer, director and editor usually would sit in the seats around the console. When the dailies for “Emergency!” were projected, Bob Cinader was always next to the console and clearly in charge. He seldom had anything good to say about the footage he was viewing and, depending on his mood, he could be downright abusive to those around him. On the day in question, he was in a bad mood.

All of a sudden, the rear door of the projection room opened, allowing daylight to hit the screen. “Close the goddam door!” Mr. Cinader bellowed. In response, a man’s voice timidly asked if there was a “fireman” in the room. Upon hearing that, Don Pierpont and I jumped to our feet and headed to the door. When he saw us, the man said someone was having a heart attack in the projection room next door.

When we arrived in the next-door projection room, a middle-aged man was indeed exhibiting all the signs of a myocardial infarction. He had gray hair and was wearing a



Andy Page fishes from the dock as his brothers arrive in a boat at Cache Creek, Labor Day Weekend, 1971.



The Page family departing on their first vacation after Jim finished law school and passed the bar exam. Later the motorhome was rented to Universal Studios as a retreat for Randy Mantooh and Kevin Tighe when they were filming on location.

white dress shirt with a tie, which had been loosened at the neck. He was grimacing with pain and sweating profusely. He complained of feeling very weak. A studio nurse had arrived before we did and she was trying to hook up her portable oxygen equipment (which she was unfamiliar with).

Don was not yet a paramedic but he had worked with the paramedics on many heart attack incidents and he knew what to do. As he unbuttoned Mr. Stanley’s shirt and lay him down on the floor, I picked up the phone and asked the studio operator to connect me with the County fire department’s emergency number (9-1-1 had not yet been adopted). As Don grabbed the oxygen equipment away from the studio nurse and started to assemble it, I asked the dispatcher to respond Squad 7 (recently upgraded to paramedic capability) to the projection building at Universal Studios. I checked my watch. It would be a long response for Squad 7 and I wanted to keep track of the time.

As the studio nurse heard me call for the paramedics, she objected. “An ambulance has already been called,” she said. We knew it would be a private ambulance with marginally trained personnel. “That’s alright,” I told her. “Our paramedics will help them when they get here.” Meanwhile, Don was administering a steady flow of oxygen to our patient and his color was improving.

We were in a race against time. If our patient slipped into ventricular fibrillation before the paramedics got there, we would immediately start CPR. But we knew that the chances of survival would drop off rapidly with each minute after he lapsed into V-fib - if that were to happen. It occurred to me that the paramedics would need to make base hospital contact before starting any advanced procedures. That’s the way things were in the early days. It occurred to me that their radio would never reach their base hospital from inside a projection booth at Universal Studios.

I picked up the phone again and waited for the studio operator to come on the line. As I waited, I looked around the room. Several people were watching the event unfold, including Bob Cinader. His composure and disposition had changed completely. He was quiet and studious, absorbing all the nuances of a real emergency. Everybody in the room, including Mr. Cinader, seemed to realize that Jerry Stanley’s life was on the line.

The studio operator came on the line. I told her that I wanted the line protected until further notice, and that we were attending to a serious medical emergency. I explained that paramedics would be using the line to transmit an electrocardiogram to a hospital, and that she was not to allow anyone to break into the line. Next I asked her to connect me with the emergency department at UCLA medical center.

While I was waiting for the connection, Don Pierpont told the private ambulance guys that we were going to keep the patient in his position until the paramedics arrived. The ambulance personnel were young and seemed overwhelmed by their surroundings. They nodded in unison as Don told them the plan. The studio nurse, however, was still flustered and visibly distressed by our take-over of her rescue attempt. She said she thought the patient should be taken to the hospital immediately. I picked up my portable radio and asked Squad 7 for an ETA (estimated time of arrival). “Less than five minutes,” was the reply.

Finally, a nurse in the emergency room at UCLA came on the phone line. I tried to explain to her the situation. She didn’t understand. UCLA had been a paramedic base hospital only a few weeks and not everyone there was familiar with paramedics and what they could do. Again, I tried to explain the situation, going a little slower and providing more details the second time. She said she wanted to ask someone what to do. “Don’t hang up and don’t put me on ‘hold,’” I said abruptly before she left the phone.

Don continued to administer oxygen to the patient and the ambulance guys were standing nearby, watching. To give them something to do, he told them his supply was running low and asked them to bring theirs in. They looked relieved that there was something they could do and the ambulance guys disappeared outside. Meanwhile, Squad 7 arrived and two blue-shirted paramedics came into the projection room carrying their array of equipment and supplies. The feeling of relief in the room was palpable.

About the time the paramedics arrived I was able to get a knowledgeable person on the phone at UCLA. She understood what I wanted and agreed to stand by for the paramedics to come on the line.

Jerry Stanley finally was moved to the ambulance, with an IV running and morphine sulfate on board to quell the severe chest pain. As soon as he was placed in the ambulance, he lapsed into V-fib. The paramedics defibrillated and a normal sinus rhythm was restored. One paramedic went with the patient in the ambulance to St. Joseph's Hospital in Burbank. The other paramedic drove the Squad 7 truck behind the ambulance.

It was necessary to defibrillate the patient twice again during the ride to the hospital. Throughout that night, the coronary care unit staff defibrillated Mr. Stanley several times before they could stabilize his heart rhythm. The next day, he underwent open-heart surgery for bypass grafts. In 1972, that procedure still was fairly rare and very risky. However, Jerry Stanley survived and went back to work as an NBC censor.

I had seen and heard enough about Hollywood to know that there were some big risks. Then and now, the entertainment business can be ruthless, especially to those who depend on it. I resolved that I would not sell out my fire department or my career to all the powerful enticements of Universal Studios, Jack Webb or Bob Cinader. I knew that I would have clout only as long as they needed something that I could deliver. I planned to enjoy my status as the fire department's technical consultant as long as it lasted and then walk away from it all on my own terms.

It was pretty clear why I was valuable to Bob Cinader and the series. From the beginning, working with Dick Friend, I was able to arrange for large numbers of fire apparatus and equipment for filming the World Premiere and subsequent one-hour episodes. I was able to convince on-duty crews to perform multi-company "drills" that were filmed and used as stock footage or in specific episodes. Whenever Mr. Cinader called me for access to some fire department equipment or facilities, I did my best to open doors for him (sometimes walking the very thin line between appropriate and inappropriate).

Generous access to the fire department and its personnel gave the series a rich quality of realism. That wouldn't have been possible if the studio had been renting the fire engines and paying actors to play the roles of firefighters. Even though Dick Friend and I skirted

the boundaries of propriety to achieve this result, we rationalized it on the basis of public education. From the start, we felt that public exposure of our paramedic program through entertainment television would have a powerful influence on emergency services throughout the country. We sometimes talked about how many lives could be saved if "Emergency!" caused communities from coast to coast to train their rescuers as paramedics.

Usually, when making special arrangements to use fire department resources for filming of "Emergency!" I would just do it and then wait for the repercussions. Technically, all such arrangements should have gone through channels. But there were three levels of management between the fire chief and me. Requests for anything out-of-the-ordinary could take months to resolve. Furthermore, the deputy chief was openly hostile to our relationship with the TV series. I knew that he would just sit on formal requests till it was too late. At least once a week for nearly two years, I was scolded for not following the chain of command.

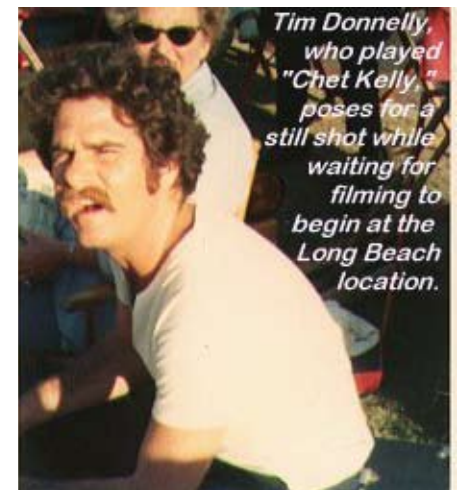
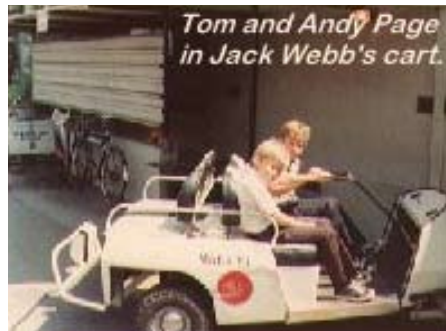
Though I don't remember the date, I'll always consider a particular incident to be the peak of my influence. Don Pierpont and I were at the studio, watching the final version of one of the weekly shows. For some reason, I had not seen the dailies for this episode, so I was viewing much of the footage for the first time. The final scene occurred in the kitchen of Station 51. An attractive young woman was preparing to leave through the side door. As the camera scanned the crew and did brief close-ups, each of them was leering at the girl as if undressing her with their eyes. I felt that the scene reflected badly on our department and on firefighters generally, and I demanded that it be re-shot (an extremely expensive process).

The next day, cast and crew were reassembled and the scene was re-shot.

For awhile, my status included social engagements, such as dinner with Bob and Jean Cinader, and Steve Downing (Michael Donovan) and his wife. Also, there was a "wrap party" at Universal after the World Premiere was finished, and the 1971 Christmas party -- also at the studio. I took my wife to those parties and she was visibly unhappy at both events. I believe she saw my commitments to the development of "Emergency!" as another jealous mistress, so to speak.

At the Christmas party, my wife had some harsh words for Mrs. Lew Wasserman, wife of the president of MCA Universal. They were spoken loud enough for Mrs. Wasserman to hear. The outburst was uncalled for. I should have recognized the source of the problem and fixed it. But Hollywood had me in its grasp. My reputation at the studio had

Squad 51 parked at the curb in Long Beach as the film crew prepares to shoot a fire scene in the previously burned house at right. Later, the special effects were too realistic. The fire cracked windows in the apartment house next door, the elderly residents were evacuated while real firefighters were called to control the fire, and studio representatives started writing checks and getting signed releases.



become more important to me than my family. In the following 14 months, my marriage unraveled and we finally separated.

As reported in "The Emergency! Companion," Dick Hammer played the role of 51's Captain through the ninth episode of the series. But the long hours of filming a regular weekly series soon interfered with his family life and career obligations, so he resigned from the show. An actor with the stage name of John Smith was selected to replace him. Smith was an experienced actor, having played in one or more long running Western adventure series. But it seemed that he owed money to almost everybody in Hollywood. As soon as he was hired for the "Emergency!" series, bill collectors and process servers descended on Bob Cinader's office, each trying to get first dibs on John Smith's paycheck. Cinader solved the problem by firing Smith.

By coincidence, I was at the studio viewing "dailies" on the day this occurred. Cinader went into one of his tirades (this time Dick Hammer and John Smith were the subjects). "I need somebody I can depend on," he shouted. Then, quite suddenly, he turned to me and asked, "Do you want to be the fire captain on this show?" In that instant, a million details flashed before me. In what was probably less than two seconds, I processed all my other time commitments, family and professional obligations, and the probable reaction of my wife and the fire chief if I were to become a professional actor. "No, thanks," I said, knowing that I would spend the rest of my life asking myself, "What if..."

Shortly thereafter, Bob Cinader began to develop a close personal relationship with fire chief Dick Houts. Eventually, this friendship included invitations for Dick and Audrey Houts to join Bob and Jean Cinader for weekend sailing on their 32-foot Catalina. The two couples also traveled on foreign cruises together. As the relationship between these two powerful men got stronger, I could feel my clout diminish.

During early 1972 I continued to coordinate the paramedic program from my position in Battalion 7. The program was reaching a crisis point. The original money that had been appropriated for training paramedics and purchasing their equipment was running out. The number of lives saved was growing each month but the fire chief continued to make pessimistic comments about the future of the program. It was clear that he would not take any political risks to seek continued funding.

Again, it was Kenny Hahn who came to the rescue. County government supposedly was in financial distress, but Hahn and his fellow Supervisors came up with \$672,000 to continue the paramedic program. About the same time, my name showed up on a transfer list. I was being transferred to LA Headquarters (Klinger Center), to be in charge of the Communications and Automotive division.

I knew what was behind it. The deputy chief was tired of me breaching the chain of command on behalf of the paramedic program. I was serving on numerous committees --

with the LA County Heart Association, the LA County Medical Association, and the County's Emergency Medical Care Committee -- in connection with the evolving emergency medical services (EMS) system. I was giving several speeches each week to civic groups, medical societies and service clubs throughout the county, all to explain what paramedics were and how the system worked.

The deputy chief didn't like my high profile and he let me know it. He wanted to clip my wings. The office job at LA Headquarters would keep me under control -- theoretically. The job of coordinating the paramedic program was given to Battalion Chief Jack Hinton in the Operations Division, located across the hall from my new office at Headquarters.

Jack Hinton was a firefighter's firefighter and a genuinely nice guy, but he was the first to admit he didn't even know how to spell "paramedic." From the first day of my new assignment, Jack was beating a path across the hallway to my office, seeking help. The new money was used to create a second paramedic training center. Starting as soon as possible, and continuing for as long as three years, the department was to convert two additional rescue units to paramedic status every five weeks. It was an ominous task under the best of conditions; it would be impossible without a full-time administrative commitment.

Before long, Hinton was complaining to his boss, Division Chief Ben Matthews. "This is crazy," he would say. "I don't know what the hell I'm doing, and Page is doing his job and mine." Matthews finally went over the head of the deputy chief and explained the situation to Fire Chief Houts. Within days, Hinton was transferred to a field battalion and I was transferred to his job in Operations.

Finally, by July 1972, I was fully authorized to do the job I loved -- building a County-wide paramedic rescue system -- without having to operate outside the chain of command and continually ask for forgiveness. Somewhere in the middle of all the turmoil, I passed my probation as a Battalion Chief.

The headquarters assignment was an eight-to-five job, theoretically. Based on that theory, I tried to continue my law practice during evening hours and on Saturdays. It was a struggle because there were so many nighttime meetings related to the paramedic program. Also, the "Emergency!" World Premiere had evolved into the weekly series and I was scheduling technical assistants, reviewing scripts, and viewing "dailies" (unedited footage from the previous day's filming) and the final version of each episode (before it was sent to the network). My workdays often were 18 hours long.

My mother's family (the Hamiltons) had scheduled a reunion at Howard Prairie Lake, near Medford, Oregon for the summer of '72. We took the motorhome and camped near the shore of the lake. The boys had lots of fun with their cousins, and went fishing with their grandfather (my Dad). We didn't know it at the time, but it would be our last vacation as an intact family.



CONFLICT AND CONTROVERSY

As soon as “Emergency!” began to appear as a weekly series, the LA County Fire Department started receiving phone calls and visitors from all over the country. We hosted fire chiefs and city managers, medical doctors, public health directors, volunteer ambulance attendants and citizen activists. Most of them wanted to know if the TV series accurately portrayed our fire department and its rescue service. After they saw that it was for real, many of the visitors wanted to know how they could construct such a system in their towns.

During 1972 and ‘73, much of my on-duty time was spent hosting visitors and answering inquisitive letters and phone calls. As I went about the business of coordinating the paramedic program and its expansion, I really had no time to be a tour guide. So I took the out-of-town visitors with me almost everywhere I went. At meetings with hospital administrators, or noontime presentations to service clubs, or medical-legal lectures for paramedic trainees, or viewing “dailies” at Universal Studios, I would often have from one to three guests. They saw it all and heard it all, including some of the conflict and discord that goes along with making things happen fast in government.

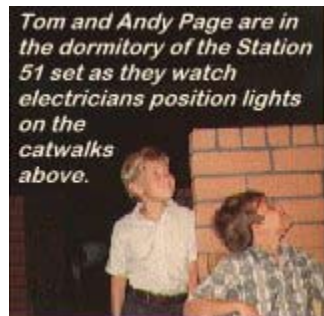
Clearly, the favorite activity for my tag-along guests was a trip to see “Emergency!” being filmed, either on location or in a soundstage at Universal. Twenty-five years later, I still encounter people - in places like Rochester, Phoenix, and Kalamazoo -- who remind me of the day they visited us in Los Angeles and I took them with me to the studio.

One of the biggest questions in the minds of many of our visitors was whether the firefighters in their towns would be willing or able to be trained as paramedics. It seemed that in some parts of the country firefighters resisted any responsibility for medical calls. “We hired on to fight fires, not handle sick calls,” was a commonly heard excuse in some areas. I had little patience for that kind of attitude and sent some of my visitors home with a challenge to their local fire departments.

Also, during 1972, I wrote my first article for a fire service magazine. The article was



The Page boys joined their Dad at Universal Studios to visit the set of the “Emergency!” TV series in 1972. Here they are outside the sound stage containing the Station 51 set.



Tom and Andy Page are in the dormitory of the Station 51 set as they watch electricians position lights on the catwalks above.

titled, “Why Firefighters?” I submitted it to Dick Friend’s office before sending it to the magazine. Dick sent it up through channels. Sixty days later, I had heard nothing from the fire chief’s office so I mailed the article to Fire Command magazine at the National Fire Protection Association. It was promptly published.

Through “Emergency!” I had seen and felt the power of the television medium. The article in Fire Command magazine introduced me to the power of the printed word. The topic of EMS in the fire service was controversial at that time and my article was unequivocal. Throughout the country, those who agreed with me used the article as a tool of persuading others. Those who disagreed with me saw the article as dangerous heresy. Without intending to, I had become one of the more controversial figures in the American fire service. I wore the mantle with pride, because I knew that the lives of countless human beings were at stake.

In February 1973, I moved into an apartment next door to my law office in Covina. On weekends, I would try to do something with my boys. Meanwhile, I had purchased a second motorhome, a Condor, which I rented to Universal Studios. It was used by Randy and Kevin when they were on location. When the second season of “Emergency!” ended in the summer of ‘73, there was a hiatus. I bought dirt bikes for Tom and Andy and we took a vacation to Washington State in the Champion motorhome (with the bikes trailed behind it).

We traveled to a lake in Eastern Washington where my family vacationed when I was 12. That was where I first swam in a lake, operated an outboard motor, went fishing, camped out under the stars. I had some powerful memories of that place and I was trying to share them with my sons. It is said that one can never repeat such an experience. Supposedly, it all looks different through adult eyes, and that time distorts or magnifies the memories. That wasn’t true in the summer of 1973. The lake was just as I remembered it, and we had a wonderful time.

Out of Clout

Back in LA after the vacation, I went to a dinner meeting of the Chief Officers Club. That’s an organization of all chief officers in the LA County Fire Department. Three or four times a year, they have an event consisting of golf during the day, and dinner and drinks in the evening. I didn’t have time to play golf but I usually attended the dinner. As I recall, the dinner was held at a big restaurant in the suburban community of Downey. After dinner, most everybody gathered in the bar for drinks. One by one, they left for home until the last two remaining chiefs were Fire Chief Richard Houts and me.

Several weeks earlier, I had objected to a scene in one of the “Emergency!” scripts. I thought it reflected poorly on our personnel. My objections were ignored. Then, I objected again after the scene had been filmed. Again, I was ignored. I knew my clout was gone. I



wrote a memo to Chief Houts, thanking him for the opportunity to represent the department in creation of the series and resigning from my position as chief technical consultant. He ignored the memo, sending word back to me through Dick Friend that he had never appointed me to the position in the first place. That hurt.

At the Chief Officers Club dinner, Dick Houts had a driver to get him home safely and he was imbibing more than usual. It was close to midnight and, as we sat alone at the bar, I took advantage of his condition and asked him why he seemed so hostile to me. He told me that for a long time, almost every problem that arrived in his office had my name on it. "Your name is mud," he said, "and you shouldn't bother to take any more promotional exams." That really hurt.

Sixteen years after Richie Lawrence first showed me how to loop a hydrant, I had become my fire chief's biggest problem. I had thumbed my nose at organizational politics and the chain of command, and I had driven my career into a brick wall. For the next several weeks, I recalled thousands of situations where I'd been faced with the dilemma: "Should I do what I know must be done and ask forgiveness later, or should I ask for permission and then make excuses while waiting for the higher-ups to make a decision." Finally, I decided I would not have done things differently.

About that time, I was given an opportunity to travel to Asheville, North Carolina, and speak at the annual convention of that state's Association of Rescue Squads. I'd never been east of the Mississippi River, so I arranged to drive a rental car from Asheville up the East Coast to Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York and Boston after the convention.

My hosts in Asheville treated me royally. Everybody was interested in the "Emergency!" series and the LA County Fire Department. I spoke at several workshops and then gave the banquet speech at the Oak Park Inn. Afterwards, a representative of the Governor's office approached me. "We have new legislation and funding to create a statewide emergency medical services program in all one hundred counties of North Carolina," he advised. "We're looking for someone who can put it all together for us. Would you be interested?"

Obviously I was flattered, especially after being told by my chief in LA that I was his biggest problem. But the thought of leaving my fire department and moving to the East Coast seemed completely out of the question. The man persisted. He asked me to spend a day in Raleigh on my way to Washington. I did, and was intrigued by the opportunity and grateful for the offer, but declined it.

Back in LA, the daily and nightly grind continued. I found that my trip back east had changed me. Most important, I had learned that several other locales had been educated and inspired by "Emergency!" and were making some major strides to improve EMS. In Illinois, North Carolina and Maryland, there was a commitment from the Governors' offices. Necessary laws had been passed and money had been appropriated. I caught myself wondering what it would be like to build a program without the need to sidestep dinosaurs or battle with resistant bureaucracies.

The week of October 7th was typically hectic. I worked a 24-hour overtime shift in Battalion 5 (Malibu) on Sunday. Monday the 8th was Columbus Day, an official holiday at fire department headquarters, but I spent eight hours there catching up with paperwork. The rest of the week was full of meetings, answering phone messages, writing memos, and reading reports. On the 9th, I gave a lecture at St. Mary's Hospital in Long Beach. On the 10th, I met with Heart Association officials to plan a public education campaign. On the

11th, I attended an organizational meeting of a new association for paramedics. On Friday, the 12th, I spoke at a paramedic graduation ceremony at Harbor General Hospital. On Tuesday and Thursday nights that week, I met with clients in my law office.

Saturday and Sunday had been reserved for my step-son. He was 16 and socially immature. He was active in the swim club but had no close friends. Then he took an interest in rock climbing and joined an Explorer Post that specialized in it. There were only about ten kids in the Post, and they ranged in age from 13 to 17. They wanted to climb rocks at the Joshua Tree National Monument and I offered to take them there in the Condor motorhome.

The Condor was bigger and more comfortable than the Champion motorhome. I had the interior refurnished and carpeted and Randy Mantooth arranged to have an eight-track sound system installed in it (that was the state-of-the-art in 1973). When the Condor wasn't being used by the studio, I loaned it to friends and family (and used it myself when I had the time).

A Fateful Event

At 5:00am on the morning of October 13, 1973, we left Hacienda Heights with six Explorers – three boys and three girls - aboard the Condor, and the fathers of two of the kids following us in a station wagon. After about an hour, we stopped to buy some groceries. I planned to fix breakfast after we got to our destination. Also, I lit the water heater so we would have hot water when we arrived.

The next hour was uneventful. The sun was rising from the east and we were driving into it but the desert air was crystal clear. At about 7:30, the kids were all in the back of the motorhome. Some were on the rear bunks and others were sitting on couches. As we approached our destination, I yelled, "Here it is, you guys." With that, all the kids ran to the front of the motorhome to look through the windshield. An instant later, we were enveloped by the pressure of an explosion.

As the adrenalin rushed through my body, my senses sharpened and events seemed to occur in slow motion. I recall seeing a network of cracks appear in the windshield and then the windshield disappeared, blown outward by the force of the explosion. In that same instant, I felt a rush of air and debris fly forward past my right ear. Instinctively, I was bringing the vehicle to a halt before I could turn to look over my shoulder. The air was filled with dust and toward the rear of the motorhome I could see daylight.

Before I could get it to a complete stop, kids were jumping out of the vehicle, through the front door. I was trying to count them, expecting that we would be in the middle of a fireball in the next second. Finally, with the rig stopped, I rose from the driver's seat and turned to look for injured kids. The air was still full of dust but I could see all the way back to where the rear of the body had blown off. I couldn't see any kids so I jumped out the door to get a head count.

At that point, I saw a sight that I will never forget. The fathers who had been following us had seen the full dimensions of the explosion. They knew not the fates of their children as they abandoned their car and ran toward us. Their faces were contorted with fear and anguish. Thirty seconds later, we all knew that we had somehow escaped a disaster. A 40-pound back-pack that had been on one of the bunks was found 300 feet away from the motorhome. If the explosion had occurred while the kids congregated in the back of the vehicle, several surely would have died.

As it turned out, the only physical injury was a small scrape on the ankle of one of

the girls. The cause of the explosion was found to be two simultaneous defects. The thermostat on the water heater failed to shut off the flame when it reached 140 degrees F. It continued to heat the water till it reached the boiling point (212 degrees). At that point, a pop-off valve on the top of the hot water tank should have released the steam but it failed too. As a result, the water tank became a steam pressure vessel. When water turns to steam in a sealed container, it expands about 1,100 to one, creating enough power to move a locomotive – or demolish a motorhome.

After making arrangements to get all the kids home, and having the motorhome removed to a wrecking yard in Yucca Valley, I had the rest of the weekend to think. I thought about the tragedy that almost happened. I thought about the way I'd been spending my life. I thought about all the bridges I had burned and the anger (in myself and others) that I was confronting every day. I realized that I was very unhappy and that I probably wouldn't be able to make things better in my current situation.

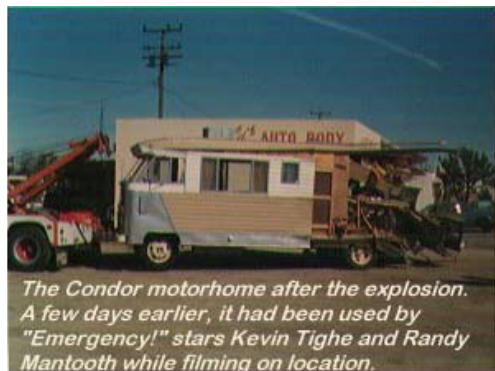
On Monday the 15th, I called North Carolina and told them I'd like to talk some more about the State EMS Chief's job. They arranged for me to fly to Charlotte later in the month for an interview by state government officials. At the interview, I urged them to contact Chief Houts and his deputy chief. "They'll tell you that I've got the energy of three men, that I drive people crazy with new ideas, that I'm impossible to control, that I can't take 'no' for an answer, and they'd be glad to see me go." State Senator F. O'Neil Jones replied, "We have already talked to them, that's exactly what they said, and we've decided you're exactly the kind of guy we need."

November 30th was my last day with the LA County Fire Department. On December 10th, I headed east in my Shelby GT-350 Mustang and arrived in Raleigh on the 16th. The boys stayed in California with their Mom. We saw each other six to eight times a year, including summer vacations. My stepson's problems multiplied when he discovered marijuana. He went to live with his father in Florida and served time there for burglary. When his mother last saw him more than ten years ago, he was an IV drug user. We haven't seen or heard from him since then and we presume he's dead.

Tom and Andy both have done well. After high school, each of them moved in with me. Tom graduated from Ithaca College in New York with degrees in photography and cinematography. He has been a commercial photographer in San Diego County for about ten years. He is married with two children and lives in Vista, California. Andy is a firefighter/paramedic in Poway (San Diego area) and is working on his bachelors degree and study-



The Hacienda Heights Explorers, a few hours after the motorhome in which they were riding in exploded.



The Condor motorhome after the explosion. A few days earlier, it had been used by "Emergency!" stars Kevin Tighe and Randy Mantooth while filming on location.

ing for the Captain's exam on his days off. He is married with two kids and lives in Temecula, California. Tom and Andy are both good husbands and fathers – better than their Dad was – and I'm very proud of them. Their mother (Pat) remarried and has a lovely 22-year-old daughter who is attending UC Santa Barbara. We include them in all our family get-togethers.

My career took me to Basking Ridge, New Jersey in 1976, as executive director of the non-profit ACT (Advanced Coronary Treatment) Foundation. Funded by several pharmaceutical companies, my job was to promote CPR training nationwide and to provide technical assistance to communities in upgrading their EMS to the paramedic level. It was the best job I will ever have but our success – in promoting CPR and upgrading EMS – ultimately would bring an end to the Foundation. In anticipation of that event we created *JEMS* (Journal of Emergency Medical Services) in 1980.

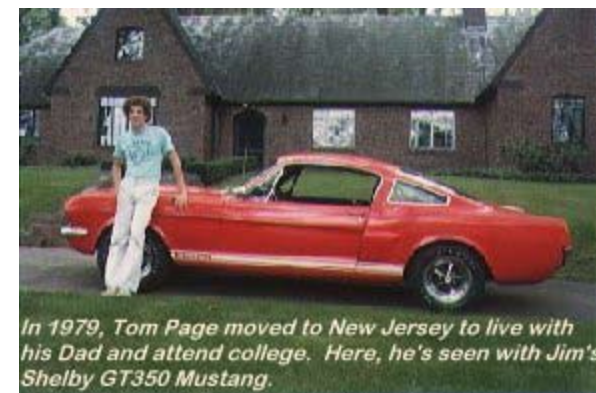
During those years, I didn't have much contact with Bob Cinader. He became a member of the LA County Paramedic Commission and the newly-formed (but now defunct) LA County Fire Commission. Occasionally, he would call me out of the blue and he'd complain at great length about something that was bugging him. He subscribed to *JEMS* and he'd sometimes call in response to something I'd written in my monthly column, "The Publisher's Page."

Then I heard that Bob had died. In the January '83 edition of *JEMS*, I published the following column, titled "One of the Boys":

"It was May 11, 1971, when my path first crossed that of Robert A. Cinader. We met at Fire Station 7 in West Hollywood. He offered me a job, researching potential story material for a proposed television series. It was a turning point in my life, with both good and bad consequences.

"Bob Cinader presented himself in a kind of stoop-shouldered indifference to physical appearances. More often than not, his facial expressions were a mix of frowns and scowls. In meeting or greeting him, one could expect a report on numerous ills, pains and inconveniences.

"I never knew very much about his childhood or adolescence in New York. I presume he was a kid who couldn't master stickball but made up for it with his mastery of the written word. Bob Cinader was brilliant, one of the greatest minds I have ever encountered. Still, there were many hints that he would rather have been good at stickball.



In 1979, Tom Page moved to New Jersey to live with his Dad and attend college. Here, he's seen with Jim's Shelby GT350 Mustang.

While serving as executive director of the ACT Foundation, Jim Page traveled throughout North America, promoting CPR training and advising communities as they upgraded their EMS resources.



“Bob died of cancer last November. Probably, in his final days, he thought about his life, its high points and lows. Certainly, his long marriage to a lovely lady must have ranked high in his life achievements. But I would guess that the Summer of ’71 also would be classed as one of the man’s fondest memories. It was during the time that Bob Cinader (possibly for the first time) became ‘one of the boys.’

“Our early research had resulted in selling the concept of ‘Emergency!’ to NBC. Bob’s task was to develop a script for a World Premiere TV movie, although producer Jack Webb would get most of the credit for it. Already, there was talk of a weekly series spinning off from the World Premiere. Bob Cinader would be executive producer of the one-hour shows and he had just a few weeks to get acquainted with the world of firefighters and paramedics.

“By that time, I was a battalion chief in a 60 sq. mi. region of South LA. For several weeks, Bob Cinader accompanied me on my tours of duty. At first, in deference to a film producer in their midst, the firefighters and paramedics were still and polite. But after a few days they reverted to form. I remember the first time Cinader got ‘stuck in the tank’ (forced to wash dishes) after losing a hand of firehouse poker. He complained, and scowled, but I think he loved being treated as one of the boys.

“As we traveled throughout Battalion 7, visiting fire stations and hospitals, rolling on fires and emergency calls, he became less an attraction. The real people would greet him with a ‘Hi, Bob.’ In the back seat of my red sedan, he would talk endlessly between puffs on his foul smelling cigarillos. My driver and I heard more than we ever wanted to know about the Los Angeles Police Department and ‘Adam 12’ (which he had produced). But as the days passed, his devotion to paramedics and EMS became a passion that would have no rival in his remaining years.

“As we all know, Bob Cinader’s ‘Emergency!’ series became a huge success. More than 120 one-hour segments were produced over a six-year period. Some of those segments have been re-run as many as nine times in the U.S. The show would have gone on even longer if the principal actors hadn’t tired of their ‘Johnnie and Roy’ roles.

“Bob Cinader’s passion for EMS got him appointed to LA County’s Paramedic Commission. He tended to immerse himself in the turbulent politics of LA County’s EMS system. His strong opinions and his dominating style produced for him as many enemies as friends. There are those who suggested that he was ill-prepared to design or govern a health care system.

“Prepared or not, there have been few people who have had more influence on any aspect of health care. In his docu-drama approach to presenting ‘Emergency!’ Bob Cinader elevated America’s (indeed, the world’s) expectations. No new concept in health care has spread as rapidly as prehospital ALS (paramedic) services. One reason is the public education that was accomplished through an unusual prime-time TV series.

“He may never have been good at stickball. But his mind, his talents, and his dogged persistence produced a message that has profoundly affected cities and towns throughout North America. Without Bob Cinader’s TV show, paramedics might have become a brief experiment in a few locations. Instead, countless lives have been saved.

“I wish I had known he was dying. I would have tried to let him know the importance of his contribution. In the process, I would have let him know that I liked him best with suds up to his elbows – stuck in the tank as one of the boys.”

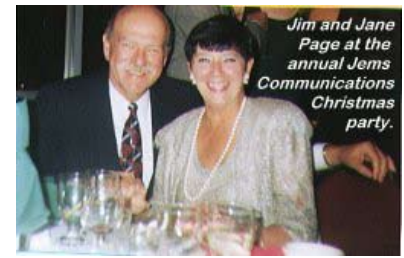
When I went to work for the ACT Foundation my secretary was an attractive divorcee named Jane Seymour. She had two daughters about the same ages as my sons. Jane and I became good friends and worked well together, although we resisted the temptation to get romantically involved – until 1980, that is. By 1983, the ACT Foundation was winding down

and *JEMS* was growing. We moved our offices and our collective brood of kids to the San Diego area. We were married in 1984.

Most days since then, I have said, “Life just doesn’t get any better than this.” For five years between ’84 and ’89, I returned to the fire service, completing that career as the fire chief in Monterey Park (where I started as a firefighter). Our home is in Carlsbad, on a hill, with a view that stretches from Dana Point to La Jolla. The only legal work I do these days is pro bono (free) representation of paramedics who are being disciplined. In ’93, we sold *Jems Communications* to Mosby, a division of Times Mirror. I have continued as publisher of both *JEMS* and *Fire-Rescue Magazine*, a job that I love.

Our merged family is very tight-knit. One of the girls, Deborah, is a lawyer in nearby Vista. She and her husband have two sons. Daughter Susan is an advertising sales manager in Seattle where she also trains horses and her husband practices law. When the whole bunch gets together – four kids and their spouses, and the six grandkids – it is great fun.

Thanks for this opportunity to share my story with “Emergency!” fans. It’s been fun going back over all those memories, even though some of them were pretty painful. In the end, I don’t believe I will ever again have the opportunity to participate in anything that will have such a positive impact on so many people.



Jim and Jane Page at the annual *Jems Communications* Christmas party.



Rescue 11, restored and re-powered, and used as the official vehicle of *Fire-Rescue Magazine*.



Jim and Jane’s six grandchildren.



In November 1995, Universal Studios and the LA County Fire Department jointly dedicated the new fire station on the studio grounds as “Station 51.” Attending the event were (left to right) Jim Page, Robert Fuller, and Captain Roy Burlison, who once served as a paramedic technical advisor.



Jim Page posed for a photo with Squad 51 at the dedication of the new Fire Station 51 at Universal Studio in 1995.