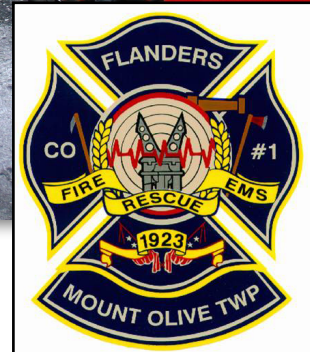


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## DOCUMENTED LEGACY LLC



## Project Summary

### Let's Go Up

#### A Memoir Project of A Brother Firefighter

(Oral History Project - Approximately 30,000 words transcribed; compiled with 100 photos)

Prepared by: Mary V. Danielsen, Personal Historian

Documented Legacy LLC

2011 - PRIVATE PRINTING



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## DOCUMENTED LEGACY LLC

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the spring of 2011, the Flanders Fire & Rescue No. 1 in Mount Olive, New Jersey suffered its first line of duty death in 88 years when firefighter Thomas Shields died after responding to an emergency call at a school. He was a married 42-year-old father of two young boys.

Devastated by his loss, the department decided that the best way to heal together as a community was to develop a way to preserve his memory. This project was born of a desire to preserve as many memories as possible about Tom and his influence on other emergency response professionals and the community. The project had two goals: to capture a moment in time in the history of the fire department, and to present a gift to the family, particularly for his sons who may one day have questions about the life their father lived.

It meant quickly capturing stories that may have been lost in the minds of friends over time. The most difficult challenge during a time of great grieving, was to help people open up about their love and admiration for a brother firefighter.

A series of oral history interviews were conducted that included some biographical information on each participant. The interviews delved into how people came to the fire and rescue service, how they became involved in the service with Tom, how he influenced their life, and wishes they would like to pass along to his sons.

Firefighters talked about how Tom strived to learn. He was a student of life, a wealth of knowledge. When it came to training, however, he never stood above another member. He never made anyone feel inferior or intimidated. He had a knack for seeking new knowledge and presenting all the facts of a situation to members and saying, "Let's go up. Here are the facts. How do we go up from here?" It was his quiet influence that had the largest volume in the hearts and minds of others.

These audio interviews were transcribed and packaged with photos of each participant, photos of department equipment to date, public relations information, press releases from the funeral, and photographs from the funeral. The finished project was packaged into archival-grade binder boxes, including digital backups, and presented to the fire department and the family.

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# DOCUMENTED LEGACY LLC

## Objective

To capture a moment in time in the history of the Flanders Fire & Rescue Company No. 1 and to present a very personal gift of storytelling to the family.

## Goals

To record as many interviews of department members and connected friends as possible.

## Project Outline

- Assisted the Flanders Fire Department in a public relations capacity on the day of the funeral; managed media relations and shot photographs throughout the day.
- Developed project idea; presented to the department.
- Worked with a department spokesperson who coordinated two days of interviews with members about two months after the funeral.
- Developed a customized set of interview questions for members to review
- Wrote a introductory letter from the Fire Chief, a sort of legacy letter for the family
- Wrote a foreword for the transcription project
- Interviewed 18 members of the fire department in 30 to 45 minute sessions
- Collected photos from members of Tom working with the fire department and on social occasions; used with permission.
- Created layouts of equipment with photos provided by the Director of Public Information and photos from the funeral
- Compiled media kit information, including historical information about the department.
- Transcribed all audio interviews, some 15 to 45 minutes in length.
- Developed project title based on responses from audio interviews
- Presented finished project as transcribed oral history in archival-grade binder boxes

## Sample Chapter

(Approved for release as a marketing sample)

### FOREWORD

Our legacy is the story of how we lived our lives, the lessons we learned and how we shared that journey with others. It can be about a whole life or a part of our lives.

Tom Shields' friendship and influence on the people he worked with in the fire department and rescue squad will have a ripple affect on the residents of Mount Olive Township for generations. He was not the only person in the department who believed in change. He was one of many members. He helped others to grow, however. That is the common thread that weaves through each of these stories like a lifeline.

He has been described as a student of life, a motivator, an innovator, a smoker, a joker, a leader, a trainer, Inspector Gadget, an S.O.B, a security expert, and a firefighter. He loved his coffee - light, sweet and decaffeinated after noon.

He had a special way of motivating people to think in new directions. If there was a class, expo, workshop, training drill or a convention that was worth attending, he wanted others to know why they would benefit from it, as well. In the privacy of their friendship with Tom, he made people question themselves, asking, "What more can I do?"

He took care of the people he touched.

Most importantly, Tom was described as a tremendous husband and proud father. He often told newer members that family comes first. He and Nicole lived by that rule.

A fire family is accustomed to responding to the call of duty: the crisis of others. It is harder to respond to our own crisis. This project came about as a desire to preserve the memory of Tom Shields, the firefighter and friend, and to capture a moment of time in the history of Flanders Fire & Rescue Company No.1.

Here we offer you a brief picture of a man, a community and a fire family. We interviewed a sampling of members with the Flanders Fire & Rescue Company, Budd Lake Fire Company, West Paterson Fire Department, and a former member. We recorded each participant's firefighting history, why they joined the department and what it means to be in this



community. We talked about Tom, recording their memories of training and working with him in the department. If they could tell all the residents and business owners in the township about this man, what would they want them to know.

Finally, for his wife Nicole and their sons, Gregory and Brandon, we recorded our personal thoughts for you. Tom gave the best of himself to each of us. We carry that love and honor with us everyday. Thank you.

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### ***Quotes - compiled from oral history transcriptions***

#### **R.S.**

"I believe to become a volunteer is a gift. When you have free time, any job that you can volunteer for that will help the community in any way, you should volunteer. When I became a volunteer fire fighter it was to help my community, my neighbor and people in need. Being a part of the fire department goes in your blood. You either love it or hate it. People who stay do this volunteer job as a career, because they love it. When there is a call it's an emergency. A firefighter does not think twice about going there in the middle of the night, cold, rain, snow, or all kinds of weather. You go there and try to help them."

#### **D.F.**

"Tom had a different way of looking at things. He would have studied the issue and believed that his way was the right way. Eventually you probably came to agree with him or resigned yourself to agree with him. Usually he was right.

"When you trained with Tom his enthusiasm and his passion were contagious. When he suggested that you do something - he decided that it was right for you - he not only convinced you of it, but he then supported you 100 percent."

"He had a way of teaching that made things seem clear and gave you a lot of self confidence. At the same time you saw his passion and the depth of his understanding of it. Sometimes he could assimilate that."

“The other thing about Tom is that in the fire service there are different types of commanders: there are screamers and there are competent people. There are people who just give you encouragement and confidence. I knew Tom when he was a lieutenant and going into the building with us to when he was a fire chief and in command of an incident. No matter what was happening he remained calm. He could be persistent and urgent, however, if something needed to be done. You knew to do it now. He was calm. He did not scream. He commanded the same way he taught: I need this to happen now. So, go do this.”

**M.W.**

“If he was in a building and saw something that he needed to bring to someone’s attention from a safety standpoint then he brought it to the right person’s attention. He did not bring it up to everyone. He brought it up to the person who was responsible for fixing it.”

**F.D.**

“There are two types of people in the fire service. One that will do whatever you ask to do. If you tell them to go through a wall, they’ll go through a wall. Tom was the type that would not only go through that wall, but would figure out a better way to get around that wall.”

“He was very professional, even to the residents he came in contact with, as someone who stood out. You felt an ease as Tom was explaining something to you. Very knowledgeable. If he did not know the answer give him five minutes and a computer and he will come back to you. He would not just accept an answer. He had to know why, which was unique. He had to break down and understand the reason behind the answer. I think that makes a very good teacher. You could have someone stand in front of you all day and recite answers, but to get a background of why you come up with this answer helps the younger firefighters.”

**M.G.**

“One of the things to know about this department is that we were always training and always trying to advance our skills. Tom was a big part of that. I only know the fire house with Tom in it. I don’t know it without Tom in it. He made sure he trained us on the tower truck, that we had our qualifications when the call came out. He wanted us to be ready: so when the call came out we were trained. He wanted everyone to be as advanced as they could. He expected that from people. You knew that. You would feel that. If you were slacking, you knew. There was something very unique about him.”

“He was the type of personality that everyone should have a person like that in their life: a go-to guy for whatever. It could be about how pencils are made. He was always thinking about how to better things.”

**I.T**

“As a fire fighter, I would trust my life with him. If you went into a building with him he knew what we were doing. To know the guy, you knew the guy.”

**B.G.**

“Not only did Tom do the optimum training here. He made sure that with surrounding mutual aid communities that we knew their equipment, too. So when we assisted them on something we knew the better way to work with them. Whether it was hooking up to a truck or any piece of equipment he always made sure what we did was not only effective for our community and communities coming in to help us, but also for going into other communities and being able to mesh together.”

**P.P**

“Tom was probably the best asset that (the residents) came upon, because of his initiative, his drive for knowledge and his strive for more knowledge. He was unreasonable at times. It was his way or no way. You know though, it can be overlooked, because he was that determined of a man to see things done the right way. On a scale of 1 to 10 as a firefighter I'd put him at 11. On a scale of 1 to 10 as an administrator I would put him at a 13. On a scale of 1 to 10 as a training officer I would put him at a 26, because he made sure, no matter what, that he had all the facts and he had all the facts right.”

**D.L.**

“One thing I got from Tom was that every situation you go into there is always something to be learned from it.”

**R.S.**

"Tom believed in location. Every call we went on Tom found a reason to locate ourselves. He would bring a bad thing or a good thing that would happen on a call. He would explain to us in his own words the bad thing that happened on a call and how we could do it better next time. He would bring that to the membership. He was a guy with a vision. He knew we could do things much better than the way we were doing it. He was a guy who had a gift. It's true. He was a person that people wanted to be around."

**S.F.**

"Tom did have a love for life. He enjoyed living and doing. He did everything with energy. "Lets go do this and we're going to have a blast doing it."

**K.E.**

"One day his son Brandon and I were flipping through the log book with all the records of the fire calls. We began at the beginning of the 2011 and looked through the whole year until that point, which was some time in December. We were counting all the calls we saw his father's name checked on. We counted 127 calls. Throughout the course of the year, his Dad missed 17 fire calls during his life that year. That's it. He was always there. When you look at the numbers of calls that everyone else answers, we are not even at half that amount. He was always there."

**B.G.**

"When we left the funeral home the day we took Tom back, we came down Clover Hill Drive, the street my parents live on and where I grew up. Just seeing the kids in the community who made posters saying, "Tom, You Are Our Hero," was heartwarming."

"Tom is a hero to us. They stood there saluting the casket as we drove by. These are people, who may not even have met him, but saw him drive by. Just the sense of community from that was so overwhelming. There had to be 400-500 people lined up on Clover Hill. I just knew at that point that it reaffirmed how much this community cares about other people. They know we care about them, because of what we do. They support us in the same rate. We don't see it until something bad happens sometimes, but the sense of community that day was overwhelming. It was tear jerking."



**K.E.**

“He was definitely an innovator, but he cared about his family deeply. I would want them to know that they should take that on to their families. Tom always said that family came first, even ahead of all the stuff that went on down here. No matter what he got involved in, they were first. He would miss drills here, because they had football or Boy Scouts or whatever was going on. Tom and Nicole would miss things here to make sure that their boys were taken care of first. They would take turns.”

**M.M. from West Paterson**

“For Tom's sons, I would say that after reading Tom's legacy that they will realize the person, the man, the firefighter, the father, and the member of the community that their father was. They could not be anything less than proud of their father and have aspirations to be just like their father. As I said In my personal letter to the members of the Flanders Fire Department, Tom lives on in the eyes of these two young men, and there is no doubt in my mind that they will ascend to the ranks of the Flanders Fire Department and make their father proud.”

***Cover photo:*** *Courtesy of M.G., Flanders Fire & Rescue No.1*