

Transcription of full Saint Paul Police Oral History Interview with

Detective  
Herbert W. Scott



**Saint Paul Police Officer**  
**February 1, 1931 to July 10, 1967**

May 11, 1979

By  
Saint Paul Police Department Historian Fred Kaphingst

At  
The Saint Paul Police Department  
101 East 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Saint Paul, Minnesota

Hand in Hand Productions  
and Saint Paul Police Department 2006

All pictures are from the Saint Paul Police Department  
collections.

# ORAL HISTORY

Oral History is the spoken word in print.

Oral histories are personal memories shared from the perspective of the narrator. By means of recorded interviews, oral history documents collect spoken memories and personal commentaries of historical significance. These interviews are transcribed verbatim and minimally edited for accessibility. Greatest appreciation is gained when one can listen to an oral history aloud.

Oral histories don't follow the standard language usage of the written word. Transcribed interviews are not edited to meet traditional writing standards; they are edited only for clarity and understanding. The hope of oral history is to capture the flavor of the narrator's speech and convey the narrator's feelings through the timbre and tempo of speech patterns.

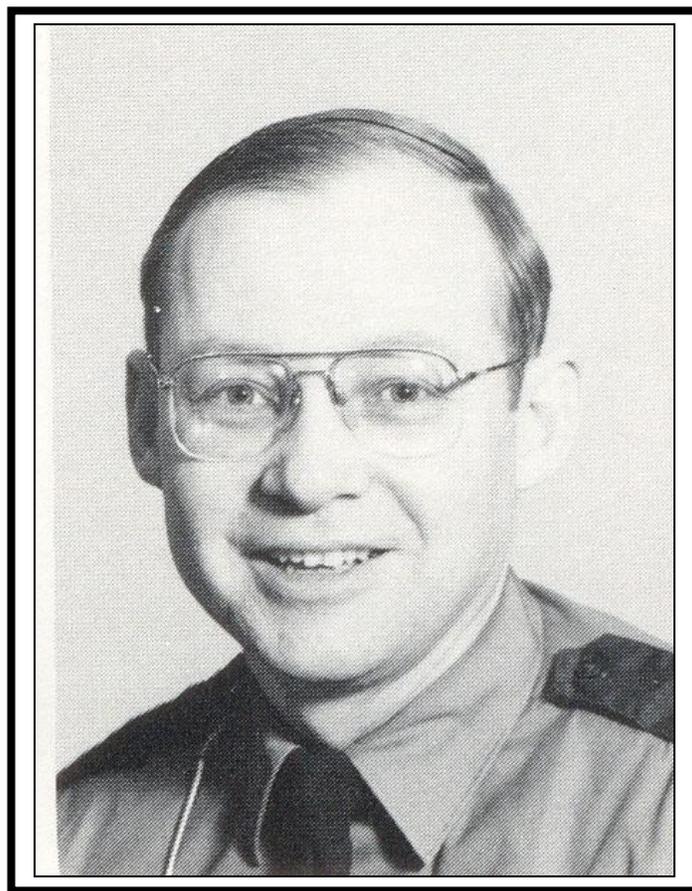
An oral history is more than a family tree with names of ancestors and their birth and death dates. Oral history is recorded personal memory, and that is its value. What it offers complements other forms of historical text, and does not always require historical corroboration. Oral history recognizes that memories often become polished as they sift through time, taking on new meanings and potentially reshaping the events they relate.

Memories shared in oral histories create a picture of the narrator's life – the culture, food, eccentricities, opinions, thoughts, idiosyncrasies, joys, sorrows, passions - the rich substance that gives color and texture to this individual life.

Kate Cavett

Oral Historian HAND in HAND Productions

Saint Paul, Minnesota



Interviewer Fred Kaphingst  
1983

Herbert W. Scott was appointed patrolman  
for the Saint Paul Bureau of Police February 1, 1931;  
promoted detective March 9, 1936;  
and retired July 10, 1967.

Present for this interview are retired Detective Herb Scott,<sup>1</sup>  
Officer Fred Kaphingst<sup>2</sup> and Sergeant Joe Polski<sup>3</sup> in the control room.

FK: Fred Kaphingst

HS: Herb Scott

FK: Good morning, Herb.

HS: Good morning, Fred.

FK: Would you give us your address where you're living now.

HS: 1765 Ross, Saint Paul.

FK: How old are you?

HS: I am 76. I'll be 77 in July, if I hold out that long.

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<sup>1</sup>Herbert W. Scott was appointed patrolman February 1, 1931. He was promoted to detective March 9, 1936, and retired July 10, 1967.

<sup>2</sup>Frederick Donald Kaphingst was appointed patrolman appointed April 1, 1968; and retired October 26, 1990. He was department historian 1978-1990.

<sup>3</sup>Joseph Peter Polski was appointed patrolman January 16, 1967; promoted to sergeant March 6, 1971; lieutenant November 10, 1987; commander November 1, 1997; and retired December 30, 1997.

FK: I'm sure you will. Before we get into your police career, we're going to get a little background information. Can you give us what your background was before you came on the Police Department, where you'd gone to school.

HS: I went to school in Waupun, Wisconsin. When I graduated from the eighth grade moved to Saint Paul here in 1917. They wanted to set me back in school there instead of going to high school the way I wanted to. So I asked Dad if I could quit, and I went and got myself a job driving an elevator in the old library. Then I went from there to a bellhop in the Aberdeen Hotel and then I got—figured I was old enough to drive, and I went to work in the garage moving cars around.

FK: How old were you then?

HS: Seventeen. I was driving private for Bartles, the oil man, for a little while. Then I went driving truck for the Crocus Hill Meat Market, Ever Ready Tire, hot shot tire deal, and Central Warehouse on the big trucks. From there I went to the railroad. I had an application in for Omaha Railroad for some time. I went there as a callboy, worked my way up to in-charge of the station nights, and then I decided to go braking instead. So, I went out as a railroad brakeman. That was during the Depression, times were a little bad there and I had a couple other little short jobs before I got onto the braking because I was down on the list so far. From there I stayed as a railroad brakeman for the old Omaha, that's Chicago Northwestern, until over Christmas 1930, that was my last run.

I had already taken the police examination because of the fact that on the railroad I'd go as far as ninety days without a call. In the meantime, I was driving taxi and shoveling coal and selling Hoyt's Products house to house. I did all sorts of things trying to keep some food on the table. There was no free give-a-ways in those days.

FK: We had talked previously about this and you mentioned that you were delivering coal. How much were you making?

HS: I got twenty-five cents a ton loading it on and off. The only way we'd make a little extra money was when we got a carriage out. We got sixty cents a ton for carrying on the truck to the house.

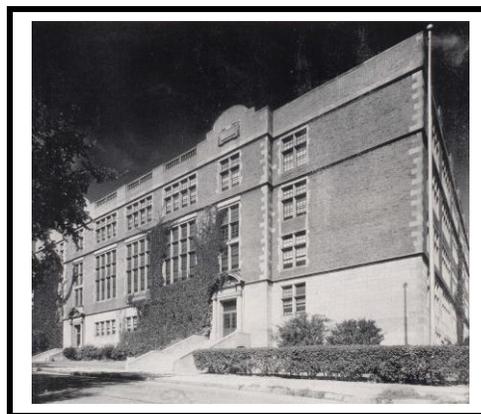
FK: With this background, what actually prompted you to join the Police Department?

HS: Just a matter of getting a job. I started taking examinations. I took the fire, the police and the mail carriers. And, when the police list was posted, I happened to be lucky enough to be seventh on the list. I think there was at least twelve hundred took that examination, so I thought I was pretty lucky at the time.

FK: Where did you take the civil service test?

HS: At the old Mechanic Arts High. That was in October of 1930, when I took that.

Mechanic Arts High School  
was located between Central, Robert  
and Aurora from 1911 – 1976.



FK: Do you remember what the test consisted of? What they tested you on and the entire testing process?

HS: Well, the written test was mainly catch stuff that you had to stop and think what you were doing. Such as – here's one question, if you were going down Fourth Street at 60 miles an hour and a car cuts you off at Robert street, what would you do?

FK: And then after the written test, did you have a physical strength?

HS: We had a physical test out at the Palace playground, which was a real dilly, too.

FK: What other testing?

HS: And then you had the medical down at the courthouse. Doc Prendergast<sup>4</sup> was the one to give you the final medical.

FK: And, the courthouse was located where?

HS: The courthouse, it was in the present courthouse.

FK: Were there any other testing after the ones you just mentioned? Was there any psychological testing at that time?

HS: No, there was none of that at that time.

FK: What date were you appointed on, Herb?

HS: February 1, 1931.

FK: Did you attend any schooling for the police department, like a police academy?

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<sup>4</sup> Dr. Harold J. Prendergast had an office at 25 West 4<sup>th</sup> Street, Saint Paul

HS: We had one month of there schooling at the public safety building. Where the identification division is up there, that was the auditorium at that time and we had most of it there and then they had just completed the range down below.



Public Safety Building at 101 East Tenth Street opened in 1930

FK: Now this is where the public safety building<sup>5</sup> was brand new, had just opened up?

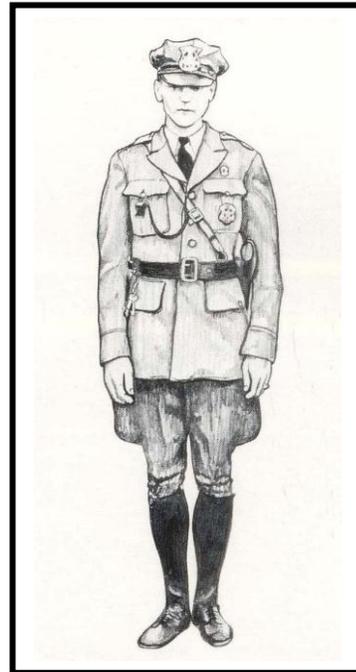
HS: Was brand new, yes.

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<sup>5</sup> Public Safety Building at 101 E. 10th Street was occupied 1930. All administration was centralized in the new building that also housed the Fire and the Health Departments. The health department moved out in 1958 to 555 Cedar Street. In 1985 the building was gutted for a new interior configuration. The main entrance was moved to the opposite side of the building with a new address of 100 East Eleventh Street. The headquarters operations moved to 367 Grove Street in 2004. The new building was named The James S. Griffin Building for the deceased deputy chief, who was the first Black to achieve high rank.

FK: What did the uniform consist of then, could you describe to us the color and what it consisted of.

HS: Well, the uniform previous to that had been all blue, but they put us in the new olive drab uniform, which consisted of wool shirts. They were such heavy wool that I had to have the collar lined because of the fact that it's scratching your neck so heavy. You wore them all year round, summertime you sweat with them. And you had these britches with the fancy peg-out on the sides there, and you had to have them cleaned and pressed at least once a week to keep them straightened out. You had puttee and you had high shoes to match the puttee, black shoes. And, I'll tell you another thing, Dewey Schaibley<sup>6</sup> was a guy that you had to have your shoes polished, your boots polished, and every bit of that Sam had all your sharpshooter medals and your decorations on your sleeve, Red Cross and Radio Patrol.



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<sup>6</sup> Dewey M. Schaible was appointed patrolman December 9, 1920; promoted to sergeant July 15, 1930; lieutenant September 1, 1931; provisional inspector January 16, 1935; assistant chief November 9, 1936; and retired December 29, 1941.

Browne Belt, everything had to be right up polished. Of course, then you

FK: You were mentioning previously that you just had come on the street and you were riding a streetcar, would you relate what transpired.

HS: I first put on the uniform and I was going home, got on the streetcar and the conductor he says, "Hey, soldier" and he pointed to the coin box, and I turned around to him, "Soldier?" "Oh-oh" he says, "New motorcycle man, huh?" I said, "This is going to be the regular squad patrol." I said, "You see the fancy lightning on my shoulder, that's squad patrol."

FK: Herb, where were you first assigned?

HS: In squad 6, out Rice Street. My regular partner was supposed to have been Curtis Burkholtz,<sup>7</sup> but my first night out was with a relief man, Boyd Carrier.<sup>8</sup>



Officer  
Herb Scott

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<sup>7</sup> Curtis Burkholtz

<sup>8</sup> Boyd C. Carrier was appointed patrolman October 1, 1927; injured while attending police training school February 9, 1931 —no loss of time; promoted to detective December 1, 1936; retired April 16, 1958.

FK: And what type of squads were they using, what make of vehicle?

HS: When we got on there, we got on with the new Pontiac, they were six cylinder Pontiac, and they put the radio in behind the driver's seat and it was all a big box. There was a great big box of it and the speaker was in the back window, so the people in the back heard it as well as up front.

One thing I can tell you, we chased a speeder out Rice Street, we had trouble catching him. I shut off the radio, I just thought we just couldn't quite close the deal, we were going a little over 70 at the time, and shut the radio off and believe it or not I got four more miles of speed, the radio used to take that much away from us.

FK: That was one-way radio then?

HS: All one-way radio, yes. The call was put out by the dispatcher from headquarters and repeated twice by the radio operator.

FK: Would you give us an example of how the dispatcher would call a car, what he would say.

HS: First call would be a ding-ding, you get that bell, ding-ding, and then the dispatcher would come on.

In the old Model A Fords that they had prior to this, I never worked them, I rode in them a couple times – they had a tin speaker behind your ear and at that time they were coming over the City radio station [KSTP Radio]. They would interrupt the program, in the meantime you were listening to how to make bread and how to decorate flowers and so on and so forth, but then you'd hear that ding-ding and when that ding-ding would come,

- well, that meant there was a police call coming out. I never got a chance to really work on them much, although, they had us out riding in them. We had nice new Pontiacs when I went on.
- FK: When a dispatcher gave out a call – give us an example how he'd call a squad, what he'd say.
- HS: For example, "Squad 6, one down behind the billboard on Rice and University." That would be it.
- FK: He would repeat this twice?
- HS: No, the dispatcher, and then the radio man from the radio station, he would repeat it twice after that. So, they put out the call, the dispatcher from headquarters put it out, and the radio station was out in the fire barn at St. Albans and University, and that call would come out from there repeated twice.
- FK: So you heard the original dispatcher and then this other man, two voices giving the same call?
- HS: Right.
- FK: So then you proceed to the call and then how would you check back with the dispatcher that you'd cleared that call?
- HS: Either call in from a telephone or the call box, you'd have to report back.
- FK: The Thompson submachine guns [Tommy Gun] in the earlier part of your career were just coming in because of the gangsters around. Can you recall about when the Thompson submachine guns came into service with the Police Department, that they started using them?

HS: I couldn't give you the date, but I would say it was around 1934. Shreve Archer [Head of Archer-Daniels Midland Linseed Company] bought six of them for the Police Department.

Incidentally, prior to that. Why one morning about 4:00, Frank Martin<sup>9</sup> and I were sitting in the squad at Dale and Selby facing west, that's the time when Dillinger had come out of Little Bohemia just shortly before that. They had stopped a family by the name of Finnegan or Flanagan or something like that, an Irish family. And they had taken their car, which was a maroon Ford with red wheels, 1934 Ford, an 8-cylinder automobile. I was writing reports and Frank was reading the morning paper and I glanced up there just in time to see that car coming, and all of a sudden I noticed it was Tommy Carroll driving the car. We happened to know Tommy Carroll, an old time gangster around here. He made off, he was going to turn one way on Dale then the other and then finally he gave it the gun and shot right past us, so we had to turn around. So, we did, we turned around chasing this car, here we got a 6-cylinder Plymouth chasing this Ford. Well, he walked right away from us, made a couple of turns and then we lost him.

Last we saw him he was heading toward town on Marshall Avenue. I went to the old Torkelson Garage at 414 Selby, I called in. Oscar Peterson<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Frank J. Martin was appointed to patrolman December 16, 1920; promoted to detective April 8, 1936; and retired June 1, 1961.

<sup>10</sup> Oscar F. Peterson was appointed to chauffer January 8, 1921; promoted to sergeant May 6, 1937; and resigned February 4, 1949.

was the dispatcher at the time, a Sergeant, and I was trying to explain to him what had just happened and all he could say was, "Herb, slow down will you, take it easy, take it easy now." Then I had to repeat it, and he says, "Don't you think you were a little lucky not to catch up to them?" Because all we had was a four-inch barrel .38 Special on a .41 frame.

But what I was getting at, that oval window in the back, there was a head showing there with a receding hairline and there was a thing with a spool, it looked like a spool on the end of it, was sticking up in that back window. Never realizing what it was until after we got the Thompson submachine gun, then here's that spool, I saw what it was then, so I think maybe we were lucky we didn't catch up to them at that time.

FK: Did you recognize anybody else in the car?

HS: Homer Van Meter was sitting alongside of Tommy Carroll, but in the back I took it for Dillinger because of the hairline. But we didn't see him anymore beyond that.

FK: Herb, the Department went into the gun squads with this gangster problem they were having. Do you remember pretty much what they did and how they worked that particular type of detail?

HS: Well, that was just more or less the homicide squad. They had three men on there, three or four, chauffeur and three detectives. They made most of the hot calls, you might call it.

FK: Did they have a special car that they used?

HS: Shreve Archer gave the Police Department a 16-cylinder Cadillac, which got four miles to the gallon of gas. They used that for awhile. They had a

special car out at headquarters all the time. We didn't have much to do with that, we were on the squad patrol. The Detective Division was an entirely different outfit in those days. They didn't confide anything to the uniform men.

FK: In a previous discussion we talked about one night you were in the process of writing a report and due to poor lighting you had gone to the Uptown theater to make use of that lighted marquee to write your report.

HS: Yes.

FK: Could you relate what transpired that night.

HS: That was the same deal, Frank Martin and I. I was driving that night and Frank was writing the reports. So, we pulled up there and got under the marquee in the early evening and I got out and left him to do his writing. I was just talking to the young lady selling tickets there at the Uptown Theater.

While I was there I noticed there was a couple came at Lexington and Grand, and they stood on the corner for quite awhile. Then they finally came walking up the street, slowly, and got up in front of the theater. The man had a handkerchief up in front of his face and this brown felt hat pulled down quite away. He kept one hand in his topcoat pocket and he stopped and looked at the pictures out in front while the woman bought the tickets and then she stood and kind of blocked me out while he walked in and then she went in behind him. At the time I had no idea who it was or anything about it.

Shortly after that when they had the shooting up on Lexington and Lincoln, and found out that it happened to be Mr. Dillinger and his girlfriend, which we knew was Evelyn Frechette at that time. We were that close to him. In regards to the same thing, Pete Kramer<sup>11</sup> and I, after we were made detectives, sometime later we were assigned to the fairgrounds. And up in the midway section there they had Al Capone's Cadillac with all the bullet proof glass and steel plates. We went in there just to see what it was, and the woman there she looked like I'd seen her before, I thought maybe that was her in the theater. So, I went up to her and I asked her if she ever saw me before and she said, "Not that I know of." And, I said, "If I had on a police uniform." And she just kind of gasped and she went, "At the Uptown Theater." And then she told me that she was so scared that I was going to say something because he had his hand on that .380 automatic all the time. So, there's the second time we were lucky we didn't say anything.

FK: That was a close one. In our previous discussion, you mentioned another incident and this involved Tommy Carroll, which you mentioned previously in the Selby—Dale car, and that you had arrested him. Could you relate what transpired there?

HS: This was sometime before when Boyd Carrier and I were working 14 in Lower Town and we were sent on a call up on Robert Street. Tommy Carroll at that time lived up near the Capitol in the apartments up there and he come walking down the street and he pulled his coat back, had a

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<sup>11</sup> Peter C. Kramer was appointed patrolman October 31, 1928; promoted to detective April 17, 1936; deceased June 27, 1959.

.45 automatic in his belt, so we nailed him. Took the gun off him and brought him into headquarters. We were told to take him right up to the Detective Division, which we did. And we were told to just leave him there and don't bother to write the report, we'll write it. About, maybe, two hours later, here he is walking up Robert Street and on purpose he opened up his coat and let us see that he still had that gun.

FK: And then after that, did you check to see – you had written a report anyhow, hadn't you?

HS: We wrote a report.

FK: In spite of what you were instructed not to do?

HS: Yes. Boyd Carrier wrote the report, turned it in. We were checking afterwards and we found out there was no report. In other words, when [United States Attorney General Homer] Cummings called Saint Paul *The Poison Spot of the Nation*, he wasn't too far off around that time.

But things changed, 1934 I think it was. We got a commissioner that wanted to find out what was the trouble here and at that time they had a commission of three -- five police officials, three outside businessmen. One I remember was from the Saint Paul Daily News and another one was the head of the Central Warehouse. I forget who the rest were. They came up with a deal that Saint Paul needed a completely independently investigative division where men could get out and do their work without worrying about whether they were stepping on the wrong toes.

And, if you want to check the records, you can go back to 1936 and see how everything, auto theft, burglary, stick-ups, everything cut way down. In the auto alone we took it from 1300 cars, and about 2% cleared by arrest, we took it all the way down to 565 cars for the rest of that year and we went up to 18% cleared by arrest. That's what was being done right along.

FK: Then, Herb, we had also discussed that you were on a call, this would be in 1934, University and about Farrington, on a dog that had been hit by a car. Would you state the events that took place that day.

HS: We were on squad 7 at that time, over in the Hill District, squad 6 apparently was busy so we were sent to Virginia and University where there was a dog hit by a car. His hind quarters were all crippled, we took him around the back of the store building there. I had to shoot the poor little cuss. Just about that time a lot of shooting was going on, we didn't know whether it was fire crackers or shooting or what right down east of us there a ways. We went to check, a fellow come along and he says, "My god, the police down there just shot some guy."

We had to go down and find out what was going on and, of course, there was Tom Brown<sup>12</sup> who was Chief at the time, and Frank Cullen,<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas A. Brown was appointed patrolman August 1, 1914; promoted detective April 1, 1919; chief June 3, 1930; returned to detective June 6, 1932. As chief he advocated for the *safe harbor* attitude for Saint Paul where the gangsters thrived.

<sup>13</sup> Frank R. Cullen was appointed patrolman April 10, 1916; detective November 4, 1921; assistant Chief June 5, 1930; detective lieutenant June 14, 1932; chief August 7, 1934; detective lieutenant October 11, 1934; and resigned March 23, 1950.

Assistant Chief, and Jeff Dittrich,<sup>14</sup> who was a Lieutenant police and Tom McMahon.<sup>15</sup> The four of them were down there and this fellow was laying in the alley and he was pretty well shot up. We found out who it was, it was Homer Van Meter that they had wiped out.

FK: Where was this located where he was laying?

HS: There was a filling station on the southeast corner of Marion and University, and he was in the alley behind this filling station. Well, anyhow, we weren't assigned to it, so we got out of there. Went back in our own district.

FK: We have some photographs with a date of 1941 and these photographs show police officers in green uniforms and they're designated as police reserves. Could you explain how they were used in this time period, they are exactly identical uniforms of the regular policemen.

HS: I can't recall too much about them because, of course, I was in the Detective Division, but they were used more or less for like the Winter Carnival and parades and things. They were just on civil defense work, things like that, as far as I can tell you.

FK: What date were you promoted and to what rank at that time?

HS: March 9, 1936, I was appointed to detective and assigned to the Auto Theft Division at that time.

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<sup>14</sup>John J. Dittrich was appointed patrolman December 28, 1912; promoted roundsman (buck-sergeant) September 1, 1919; assigned to pains clothes duty; detective; provisional lieutenant March 10, 1932; lieutenant March 27, 1936; and retired November 9, 1954.

<sup>15</sup>Thomas C. McMahon was appointed patrolman March 1, 1908; promoted to detective April 1, 1915; detective lieutenant May 15, 1931; detective February 6, 1932; detective lieutenant February 1, 1933; and retired November 5, 1944.

FK: What date did you retire?

HS: I retired on the 10<sup>th</sup> of July, 1967.

FK: And, I've got to ask you this, this will be the last question. If you had it to do over again, would you do it again?

HS: Under those conditions, maybe, but under the present conditions, no. Because in those days a policeman was a policeman. Today, why you've got to fight the courts before you can even get in there, so, I can't see that. Policeman – they used to believe the policeman, today you try the policeman first. No, I wouldn't.

FK: Thank you very much Herb for being with us today.