

Raw Transcript: Cancel Interviews Rivera

Cancel: Muy Buenos días. Mi nombre es Mario Cancel y estoy entrevistando al Sr. Joey Rivera. Estamos localizados en el Garaje número 6 en Manhattan. Y la fecha fecha del día de hoy es Abril primero del año 2011. Antes que nada Joey, yo quería darte las gracias por tu tiempo que es sumamente apreciado y bueno, quería hacerte una primera pregunta relacionada a tu niñez y a tu familia. Si pudieras decirme de dónde vino tu familia y cómo fue tu niñez. (Good morning. My name is Mario Cancel. I am interviewing Mr. Joey Rivera and we are localized in Garage 6 in Manhattan and today's date is April 1st 2011. Before starting I wanted to thank you for your time which is highly appreciated and well I wanted to ask a first question related to your childhood and your family, if you could please tell me where your family came from and how was your childhood).

Rivera: Ok. Mi mama es de Agua... Aguadilla y mis padres son de de San Lorenzo. Y estamos aquí en Nueva York hace 40 años ya. Vivimos en Brooklyn y uh eso es todo. (My mother is from Aguadilla and my father is from San Lorenzo and we are here in New York now for 40 years uh. Ah we live in Brooklyn and uh that's all).

Cancel: Y cómo, cómo fue tu niñez? Cómo describirías tu infancia? How was your childhood how would you describe it?

Rivera: uh, uh, cómo se dice? (Uh how do you say...?)

Cancel: Si se te hace más fácil en inglés también no me molesta para nada. If it is easier for you in English that doesn't bother me at all

Rivera: ok Brooklyn park slope Brooklyn I went to a Catholic School I never thought I would be a sanitation worker as a child there was a joke used to say that uh I would pick up garbage and everyone would get mad at me and as it turned out ah later in life I took this challenge and I'm really happy

Cancel: And what did you want to be when you were growing up, when you were a kid? Some say I want to be a doctor, others say I want to be an artist others say...

Rivera: I think I wanted to be a policeman

Cancel: ok

Rivera: I wanted to be a policeman and prior to this I was in correction and uh after correction I finished that and I started this career in sanitation

Cancel: and and and what led you to apply for a job in Sanitation?

Rivera: I had taken the test when I graduated in high school and they never called me and they called me and now I have over 20 years on the job but they never called I went into business for my family uh the I

got into law enforcement and uh then uh run the peer and after 40 years old and I'm very happy its less dangerous uh and it's a great job, great job.

Cancel: You told me about the exams that you need to take to get this job and I understand that they are very complicated but if you could go in depth about them, how are they about your experience.

Rivera: In I believe in 1986 I took the exam uh and did very well I believe I scored 103 or 105 but it's basically a lot of resistance and I believe my number was in thousands, 4 thousand 5 thousand so basically what happens is they start calling from number one and if you don't make it then they do not call you, the list usually lasts for 4 years after those four years they start the testing over and they throw out that list and then it's a process um I moved away when I came back the test was out I took the test again it was 2001 and they called me right away and uh I said no the first 2 times they called me and I was having a problem at my other job and I said you know what let me see if I can take this now and they uh put me back on the list which I believe they had taken me off after you refuse twice they take you off the list and I went down to Nycers they put me back on the list and I believe they called me in a few days to come to start the job

Cancel: that's amazing

Rivera: so it's very nice I went from one job to another 1,2,3 which is ah pretty amazing, pretty amazing...

Cancel: wow, we were talking earlier about the board of operations and I received some information about it in another Garage and I found it extremely complicated, right, and elaborated but I wanted you to talk a bit about it, how does it work so that people can...

Rivera: When you first get hired you are given a chart number and you're given a calendar and according to your chart number you get a you can see and check what days you're off for the whole calendar year so there's two types of chart numbers there's the officer's the officer's chart and a um a san worker chart the officer's chart are given to guys who work nights so that there's always extra amount of people on that shift so you don't have everyone and off and then you don't have no one to replace them and this has to been balanced out this way obviously if you 6 ... on midnight shift you can have all 6 guys off the same time cause there's no one to replace them uh that's how the officer chart works now on the calendar if you notice on the calendar you'll have a number and its officer's chart 1 through 6, obviously we work uh six days a week we are off on Sunday everyone's off on Sunday and you get one day off during the week but in the officers chart every six weeks you have a 3 day week-end you'll be off Saturday the normal day Sunday and you can get Monday so you have a 3 day week-end which is very nice as far as the san workers where it gets complicated you usually once you get your san worker chart number you're stuck with it unless you sign nights and you'll get an officers chart now that you get a calendar they usually give you a pocket calendar it has no dates just what days you're off for the whole year and you can schedule I mean it's tough to schedule things with school, children, wife but uh you have the calendar, they give you the calendar in December and you can see when you're off the whole year, you can schedule your vacations around that so that you'll have uh you try to schedule so that when you come back from vacation you have a three day week-end and stuff like that um since I'm

officer too I was off yesterday next week I'm off Friday the week after that it's my 3 day week-end cause I'm off Saturday and Monday and the week after that I'm off Tuesday, Wednesday and it keeps going the whole cycle of the year

Cancel: for the whole year?

Rivera: for the whole year

Cancel: oh that's interesting

Rivera: they give this calendar out you get in December and its pretty good it shows you all the holidays now if your day off falls on a holiday you pick up 8 hours

Cancel: ok

Rivera: because you don't get your day off

Cancel: umhum

Rivera: everyone gets that day off

Cancel: ok

Rivera: so what the union does is that being that everyone gets a day off plus an extra day they give you 8 hours in the book so if you want to take a day off you just fill out a form which is 1005 and ask for whatever day off and generally you get it you know depending on manpower you'll get the day off which is pretty good although there's people here with a lot of hours they have 2, 3 hundred hours which is nice so when you have a 3 day week-end you want to make it a 5 day you take a day off in the front a day off in the back and uh you do something with your family

Cancel: and how is that affected when there is a blizzard, there is a calendar but...

Rivera: When it snows it's a given nobody's off everyone's working what they do is we have a seniority list it includes everyone our garage has 81 people of these 81 people You need to have extra amount of days extra amount of nights because its only 2 shifts we go from a 3 shifts we have a day line six to 2 a 4 to 12 a 12 to 8 a 8 to 4 in the garage all that's out the window it just goes split in half 40 guys day 40 guys night and the only fair way to do it is by seniority nobody wants to work at night so they don't have to so usually the cut off will be around 40 so the first 40 guys will be days, the next 40 will be nights. unless you have a tissue, a tissue being an easy pack operator those of the guys that work the big containers with forks that go into the truck those guys stay days regarding to their seniority their days go year round they also get an officer's chart um for the same reason when they're off we need an easy pack operators to cover their shift um the garage guys we have operators garage guys field guys those guys there's one on in each shift so what they'll do they'll still be in their position but there will be also 12 hour days so to have 4 guys days 4 guys nights so they'll usually go 8 t 8 so they'll go 8am to 8pm and the 4pm guys will go 8 pm to 8am so they are always the same guys cause those guys have to change tires put on plow put on chains on the tires and you don't want to put someone who doesn't know not

that we don't know cause we are all qualified to do it but if you don't do it all the time what good is it cause it's going to take you that much longer to do it and especially when it's snowing you'll get the order plow everything up which means put those big orange plows on all the trucks put chains on all the tires if you haven't done it since the last year you know a year or 2 it's going to take you a while to do it especially if you have to do 30 trucks that turns into a process

Cancel: wow

Rivera: so you try to keep the normal guys where there supposed to be

Cancel: and how the mood of the workers change when this process is going on?)

Rivera: Well the first they talk of snow you know we all like I mean we don't have to shovel our own home cause we are not home we are all over here so especially in my house my daughter and my wife they go out and shovel so really i don't have to deal with the shoveling at home but um it's nice because obviously is more money that we get in overtime some guys like it some guys don't, i personally i like it but I'm inside the garage, I'm not outside in the field um but it's fun i mean you're responsible for clearing the street, you have the situation with the taxi drivers outside, everybody's you know it's just total chaos for people trying to get to work people who can't get to work people who are snowed in uh we're plowing the snow on to the cars they're trying to get their cars out so it's pretty much uh it's a tough situation if you try to get your car out and there's a foot of snow out there and you just shoveled it out and here comes a plow and just puts all the snow right back to where you took out of but um usually the mayor cancels alternate sides you really don't have to move the car and they tell you if you really don't have to move your car don't move your car but some people feel that they have to move their car personally i live in Brooklyn there's no parking why would you take your car out when you come home there's going to be no place to put it. uh you see any spot that is open people take the snow from the sidewalk and fill in that spot so unless you really want to shovel a spot to get your car in and then shovel yourself out you have a heart attack it's really not worth it just take the train, take the bus there's always another way to get to work personally i leave my car here and i take the train because I'm not going to shovel myself in or out i need to get to work so the trains always... and the buses we always shovel so that um the buses can run

Cancel: and in those times, how do you balance, right your labor life vs. your family life, have you missed birthdays, festivities, what do you do to deal with that?).

Rivera: All right I'll give you a perfect example uh this year on Christmas day was on a Saturday and we worked Christmas eve it was a normal Friday everyone went home no problem they weren't expecting a snowstorm so uh i woke up in the morning to have breakfast with my family and the phone rang at 10:30 telling me that i was ordered into work i said well its Christmas and they said you have to come in because they're going to make everyone work on Sunday and they needed me to call everyone in the garage and make sure that everything was done correctly so I looked at my wife and she looked at me and she said are you kidding me it's Christmas and i said honey i have to go they call me in i have to go she understood um she's really understanding and my kids they know that if it's snowing daddy has to work so i kissed everybody i lost my Christmas dinner and i cam in and i called everyone and uh had

everyone came to work, i mean people like to work, i mean, i mean, i means it's pretty simple you work for sanitation, when it snows you have to work it's a 12 hour day, this is what, this is our job so its snows and you come to work.

Cancel: and you are the person who is in charge of organizing the board of operation right? Do some times people get upset with you because you assigned them a particular shift or because that's wrong, what do you do...)

Rivera: Well, usually what happens is as i said they split the shift in half so if your seniority puts you right in the middle where you might not make days you might not make nights those guys get really upset cause it's always one guys that says: i have all this time why am i going night um personally i would rather have nights um there's less people on the road you can get more plowing done but on the flip side everybody wants to sleep at night, you know you don't want to be at work so but there are some guys that volunteer so i'll try to work it especially that first day because once you're on nights you're stuck on nights till it's over there's no way off the shift um and the same thing with days if your days um believe it or not even when you're days they might cut it and put more guys nights so even if you made the days every day in an adventure because you worked today and when you're coming after a 12 hour shift i tell you you're coming in tomorrow at night granted you're happy you're having a twenty four hour break but now you're stuck nights and there's no way to come back until we are back to normal cause it's usually a couple of weeks process

Cancel: wow

Rivera: it's tough it's tough and um but everyone understands you know it's not my fault i mean your seniority is your seniority you started on this day usually what we tell them is get more time on the job i mean it's the biggest joke you know but it's the truth if you have more time on the job you there would be no issues you would be days so.

Cancel: And what happens when somebody is absent last minute what do you do or what funny or anecdotic or interesting excuses they give you

Rivera: Every day is an adventure, your guys go done for so many different reasons um especially here we have unlimited sick i mean if you're sick you're sick so um if you're not feeling well obviously we are not going to put you to drive a 30,000 pound truck if you're not feeling well or or or why would you come to work which is why they give it to us it's a hard job um but we have a thing called emergency and it's not sick um you go emergency for whatever reason you wake up in the morning your car doesn't start you have a flat tire and you can't get it fixed um because we work early hours, you're not going to find a shop i mean if you start at six you have to be in route to work at 5 to get here on time so you know you call and you say i'm not coming in my car was vandalized , i got a flat tire, a broken windshield uh things happen ah as far as funny things uh I mean you hear all different crazy stories um i can't find my keys, um i mean it doesn't make sense, let me see if i can find an example of something funny here, i'll go back to last year

Cancel: those are the excuses?

Rivera: we keep track whenever someone goes emergency we have it's called an absence or lateness book

Cancel: incredible!

Rivera: so what will happen if for instance here's the first page um car down that just means that we had car problems now here we have hot water leak

Cancel: what does that mean?

Rivera: if you have a hot water leak i mean grant that we all own a homes and all that, i don't buy it i mean i hate to say it but um you got to say something i guess you can only go what else do you pick up um i got guys that call last minute that they have to go to court, now you've known that you have to go to court for months why wouldn't you this prior so that we wouldn't have any shoe wear you know now I'm short of body now however specially in this job there's always a way they'll always figure out what to do uh there's always we always schedule extra bodies all around um different garages for when this happens because this happens a lot especially if its snows i know that last year that first snow storm a lot of guys went sick um it looks bad on us i mean personally i try not to go sick but if you're such you're sick but um this is when the city needs us the most, i mean there's a lot of snow out there and if a lot of guys go sick that's less guys out there plowing the streets, that means ambulances don't get through, firemen don't get through and these are our families that are home we need these ambulances, and fire trucks and police cars to get through and and school buses got to get the kids to school, i mean basically all that stuff doesn't work if we don't plow these streets. I mean, they say the mail gets delivered, if we don't plow the streets the mail is not getting delivered. I mean it's pretty simple everybody get praised and that's another thing, everyone hates us, we pick up garbage you know, especially you know you are out there you are picking up garbage um you're cleaning the streets and people look at you like you're a third class citizen and meanwhile someone's got to do this job, you know, i mean, garbage is garbage, i mean we work in Manhattan where we have a little advantage where garbage is a little bit neater we call it gift raft because it's put out. we have these buildings that have porters um they're out there when we pick up the garbage, they're usually out there right behind us sweeping behind us and and hosing down the street because obviously in Manhattan people pay a lot more money for rent and all that but i know in the outer boroughs it can be really disgusting, i mean you got a lot of rats, i mean we have rats here too but i mean there just certain stops where just I mean corner baskets by the parks you know you go to pick them up and 6 rats jump out of it, its its its pretty disgusting

Cancel: and have you had guys that get sick because of the rats urine, that is very dangerous...

Rivera: We get guys all the time they go load I, we had a kid uh, i say a kid, we had a gentleman here he got splashed when you cycle the back of the truck sometimes people put chemicals in the garbage, they put stuff that uh, they are just not disposing of it properly and uh you can get hurt and he got sprayed and he got this horrible rash all over his face and his neck

Cancel: oh my god

Rivera: and he was home for about a week and um putting cream on but i mean you don't know , i mean every once and a while you cycle a truck and it starts to smoke, some acid was in there it got mixed with something else, you have a reaction, i mean um there's a sanitation worker in Brooklyn died for that some papers came out he breathed it and he dead instantly, i mean this is people they do illegal dumping, i mean if you know that you're running a business and you have these chemicals, these chemicals can't be mixed, and they'll just put it in a corner basket or they'll put it... the funniest thing is on these corner baskets you know we go around to pick up these baskets on a corner you got to pick up these baskets i mean they're about 45 pounds empty so once you fill them, it usually my understanding of corner basket is for coffee cups, people that walk their dogs they put all the stuff in there um newspapers (?) but some people put their house hold garbage in um i mean I've had instances where you go to grab that basket and you feel that your arm is going to be pulled down because there's a car battery in the bottom of it, a cinder block, i mean now this basket weighs 400 pounds, you can't even lift it you can't even drag it, so you need your partner to come out and help you get rid of this basket in and then when you do dip it, there it is 2 car batteries, i mean one car battery is heavy enough but 2 batteries plus the normal garbage hidden in there so

Cancel: wow

Rivera: yeah it's pretty funny. I'm trying to see what's the funniest emergency that I've had here, well um earlier this week i had a guy tell me he's got jury duty, he knows he had jury duty for months, so he calls in the morning I'm not coming in because i have jury duty which is pretty funny you know cause now i have to call the borough or central operations to tell them I'm missing a guy and the first question is why , is he a sick or an emergency, um now i got to tell he's going for an emergency for jury duty and uh i mean it's funny now but i mean you're trying to get the garbage picked up you're trying to get this job done and you're running to these silly silly excuses, that's what i call them um what are going to do, car accidents um often being that nobody lives in Manhattan basically or the majority of us don't live we all come from the outer boroughs every once and a while they'll close the Brooklyn bridge or there'll be a major accident and everything's backed up, now everybody's going to be late because there's only three ways in or 4 ways in you have the Manhattan bridge, Brooklyn bridge or 59th street bridge, they close one of those bridges, you might have 4, 5 guys you know, they're going to be half an hour late and um um but it happens, i mean they they make adjustments and they usually they usually let the guys work, i mean there are instances where they tell them don't bother coming in its too late but in general they usually don't do that, you know, and then you have guys that just don't show up for whatever you know they call that absent without leave but um i mean that's bad , that makes us look bad (and is that unlimited, the amount of excuses that they have) Well no what happens is if you go car down or absent without leave they're not going to pay you, now that comes out of your check, i know i come to work to get paid, to feed you know, to feed my kids and pay my bills, um usually, if you don't come in, if you come in for instance an A-1, where you just don't call you don't show up, you're not getting paid for that day and when they call and they write their complaint they usually take another day from you so not only are you losing that day s pay they're going to take another day 's pay from you so um i mean you why people would do that i don't know but um i means that's the nature of human nature i guess some people just don't take their job serious

Cancel: But they don't get fired then?

Rivera: It takes a lot to get fired um well trust me these guys do the best they can to get themselves fired um our union is very strong and and the sad part about the union is the really have to fight for the good guys they're basically, their job here is for the guys for that reason, the guys that don't show up to work, guys that always have issues with coming to work , um they're the ones they have to fight for and it's a shame I mean i pay my dues and never have to call the union because i come to work every day what do i need the union, I mean, don't get me wrong I love my Union and they give me the benefits and it's a great thing but as far as um fighting for me , I come to work, you know they fight just for basically my benefits and I'm grateful for that but um you know it's funny you see them here and they're fighting for these guys that um don't come to work that are chronically late and they're basically trying to keep them from losing their job...

Cancel: Talking of that, if you could be President of The union hypothetically, and without having necessarily to make a negative statement, what would you do different or in another way?)

Rivera: Well, I would um, I mean I don't want to take anyone's job, I would never want anyone to lose their job but if you don't take this job serious there's a lot of people that would take this job serious, specially the ways things are now, people don't have jobs, people will do anything for a job, um if you don't want to work maybe you shouldn't work here I mean you know this job is a big I mean people say its garbage department, it's not the garbage department, I mean, like I said before with the snow if we don't do what we have to do and get our job done people gonna die, people gonna die, kids are gona, you know , these are our families out there, we got a, this is the time when we shine, when you, when it snows, and a lot of these guys take out sick and and it's a shame because that makes us look horrible, for instance I need 40 guys on a day line and i only get 35, 5 guys call down that first day of snow, and that's a shame you know it's a shame, this is the time when they really need us and when it comes to garbage they can make other arrangements if people go down, not that it is not a big deal but picking, getting the garbage off the street nobody wants to see the garbage on the street especially in Manhattan you know people you know are paying a lot of money there you go to Times Square you really want to see flies and rats running all around the place because somebody didn't show up to work and now they have to everything's late or or postponed but um if i was in the union I would I wouldn't fight for those guys, they don't want to work, no problem, I'll get somebody here that wants to work (chatting with a fellow worker) I'm sorry about that

Cancel: Don't worry. I also wanted ask you which characteristics define a good supers clerk, which are those qualities?

Rivera: Oh, it's tough you have to be um United Nations because um you have a lot of senior guys here who um hate everybody, they don't want to talk to nobody, um they have a lot of kids with different attitudes, i mean that's in any life but um its tough, you have guys that are just angry all the time um you have guys that are just trying to get over, they're trying to make days they don't make days um trying to bend the rules that when where it comes you have to know the rules um i mean you have to make sure, i mean everyone here mistakes will get made but they usually get caught before anyone loses money

you know everything gets caught you know you'll be able to make sure that everyone is supposed to be on a day line during the day line everyone who's not supposed to be on a day line is on um a nightline so but it's tough its tough i get guys come in here: i didn't get paid for this i didn't get paid for that, i don't pay nobody, that has nothing to do with me but for some reason, you're the first line of defense, I'm a sanitation worker just like everyone else

Cancel:ok.

Rivera: we all make the same amount of money um there is really no difference

Cancel: ok

Rivera: so I mean our pay scale once you get to top pay we all make the same money so I'm no different than you and if there's something that needs to get done either one of us can do it there's nothing that there no job that one guy can do and the other one can't um there there's a few spots for instance a wrecker where you tow the truck you have to get trained for but anything to do with garbage or garage functions , we're all qualified, we're all trained so there's nothing that only you can do or I can do we are all the same basically

Cancel: ok

Rivera: so..

Cancel: And what has changed since you started working here?

Rivera: Um

Cancel: if anything

Rivera: there has been a lot of cuts, we used to have a lot more um cleaning , um a lot of more basket trucks, a lot of spots at night are gone, um we used to have an 11 am to 7 pm basket truck is gone, but that's just budget cuts but um as a result of that um the baskets on the street are um overflowing you know and that's the first thing people see, it's the first thing people complain about, you know nobody wants to see a corner basket with garbage all around it falling out of the top of it um i don't want to see it

Cancel: and what are those changes due to?

Rivera: It's the city budget you know they don't wanna they're trying to which I understand you know no one doesn't see the city doesn't have any money but you also have to think quality of life you know people don't want to see that out there, you know people don't want to be exposed to these baskets i mean you go out to the corner to throw out your coffee cup or your dunkin donut cup and there's no room for it it falls on the floor now its blown onto the street and now the street are filthy, i means the whole idea of putting the basket is to keep the streets clean

Cancel: exactly

Rivera: so if can't empty that corner basket it kind of defeats the purpose

Cancel: that's a problem right?

Rivera: It's a lose lose , you know for instance Sunday we have two basket trucks on a Sunday they are so packed especially from the people at night you know especially at Manhattan you got a lot of night life um they are all over the floor, we can't even finish it in 8 hours because every stop you have to bring out the broom , you have to bring out the shovel because you're not only dumping that basket you're dumping it then you're bringing it back you fill it up again with all the stuff that is not in the basket , it's just all around it, so it makes pretty much double work and um lately they've been not even finishing which is silly because we used to finish it all the time and now it comes to the point where it's so overflowed that we can even finish a normal 8 hour

Cancel: wow

Rivera: we can't do a basket route which you used to get done without a problem so but that comes to the same thing you know, will they add a 4 to 12 basket truck so that at least a little bit of something get done because for instance in this garage we run two basket trucks every night on a midnight to 8, so midnight to 8 Saturday morning , um 8 o'clock in the morning that's it, basket truck is done, now on Sunday midnight to 8 there's no basket truck so now you lost 8 hours there, Saturday the city is packed on a Saturday (Chat) So um you have a (chat) um you have all these baskets that haven't been touched in 24 hours and between um the people at night the people during the day thank you it's an issue so now um there's just more work for Sunday, don't get me wrong it's our job and we do it but um you know its tough do you want to go and do an overflowing every basket overflowing you know it gets annoying i mean you know it's our job and we do it but i want to finish the job that I'm starting, they are not going to gives us overtime just to finish that not going to happen so um i mean you do your best

Cancel: so then, I imagine the some workers that day in particular right they hate it and don't want to...)

Rivera: Well with us Sunday is double time

Cancel: ok

Rivera: so everyone wants to work Sunday but even if they get paid double they don't want to do double work that is what it comes up to at this point of the game now you're going to work Sunday for double pay and you're getting you're going to have to do double work so that's kind of tough it's nice to come in and get double pay and get a day's work

Cancel: and have you seen a change in the attitude of the worker before this vs. now?

Rivera: Well especially in the Garage everyone wants to work Sunday because its extra money, you know every so often when it does come around to you i i for one never say no for Sunday no matter what it is , I'm coming in and my family knows that its daddy's turn to work Sunday, daddy's working Sunday, daddy aint going to be home Sunday but its only 8 hours

Cancel: aha

Rivera: and um you know you make the adjustments at home so...what else

Cancel: I am going to ask you the next question in English for I do not know how to ask it in Spanish
What makes for a tight garage and his this garage tight?

Rivera: Now, I'm going to try not to, let me think before I answer so i don't get myself in trouble

Cancel: ok

Rivera: ah a tight garage um. I'll give an example, there's always emergencies, people lose family members, death death in the family happens all the time that's part of life some garages they like to party, when i say party throw a barbecue, go out to dinner, you know do something nice where all the men sit down and and break bread and have a meal, um since I've been here, I've been here four years, it's getting better, it's getting better little by little, we have 81 guys, we had a little party for a retirement party, i actually had half the garage show up which was great, my first year we tried it i think i had 12 people so each year we're getting more and more people involved but um you gotta remember um back to personalities you got people that just don't like each other which i understand you know not everyone's going to love each other and we're here to do a job we're not here to make friends, you know, you're just here to do your job, um but it is nice when you come to work and everybody does get along, and everybody does like to have a good time, um and everybody likes to eat if you notice, the majority of san workers are all overweight because they like to eat, because i mean in our f you got there and you break your hump i mean you're picking up 13, 14 tons of garbage, that's that's a lot of garbage, now especially in the summer it's really hot and the winter is really cold there's nobody here (chat) Excuse me man I gotta call the boss.

Rivera: Ok. We were talking about the men. It's getting better here. When I first came here I remember we had a senior guy in the garage in number one, they called him number one. he wouldn't say good morning, he would not say good morning to me and I found that pretty strange, I mean, here I am I mean I started later in life, I started 40 years old, um for a grown man not say hello to me, just because I was the new guy, um a, a did I find it Maybe not insulting, just strange, that uh, we pick up garbage here, why, what could I possibly do to annoy anyone, basically you go to work, put the garbage in the back of the truck, then you go home um, I found it very funny and now we're very good, good friends but um yeah that was it he would not um acknowledge that I was even there because he had 25 years on the job and I had two on the job

Cancel: Oh my God, so here we could say that there is a type of "discrimination" for the time that one has on the job?

Rivera: Yes, it's a ...

Cancel: Would you say that that is more important than racial or social class issues or...

Rivera: No. especially in this garage there is no white black issues, no what so ever but the only issues are time if you got no time , you're a rookie and um

Cancel: how interesting

Rivera: whenever you first have an issue or you complaint the first words out of anyone's mouth is get more time on the job

Cancel: wow

Rivera: yeah it's pretty funny

Cancel: and is that a major issue than if the worker is a male or a female?.

Rivera: No, believe it or not, when women come here, everybody's happy as, they love to see women here. We have a bathroom in the back that non one uses; its locked cause there's no women in our garage

Cancel: ok

Rivera: so every so often I have to go into, we haven't locked the key locked up, i have to go get the key and um, let me tell you i mean it's nice, it's nice to, I mean we all have wives, we all have daughters, um and it's nice to see a woman out there picking up garage, I mean its its a sight you know, it's nice just to see that, and they do it, believe it or not they work very well, you would think that their nails and all of that, they throw them out the window

Cancel: laughter

Rivera: they come here, they get it up and um yeah, yeah its interesting, interesting, for instance in this garage we have a locker room for women and we have a bathroom and they're both locked and it gets clean on a regular basis but no one ever uses it, maybe one day we'll get a woman transferred in here

Cancel: So in all the time that you've been there hasn't been a female worker?

Rivera: Regularly scheduled to work here every day no

Cancel: ok

Rivera: no I mean they'll come from out of town on Thursday we get a lot from out of towners, every so often we'll get one or 2, yeah so...

Cancel: Maybe that's why people don't come to the parties...

Rivera: Um, you know, these guys like to eat, they like to eat a lot of the young guys like to drink, um but it's getting there, I would hope that by next year, our Christmas party we got about 60 guys , so I would love to have a party where everyone comes, you know, I think we might just have to, before could have, you know they don't want us to have any parties in the garage because obviously I'm not going to lie,

people are going to drink and there's no drinking, you know that's really big, they don't want any drinking in any any city building, so um, you really can't have a party here, because its, everybody's here party, they associate drinking with it, which makes sense, it makes sense, so you really can't have a party in the garage, cause someone's going to want to drink and that's a gonna, you know we could get into big trouble if that happens

Cancel: and that you're aware of do some fellow workers hang out or you yourself do have friends among them?

Rivera: Well, I have, um a few guys that live close to my house but as far as like after work go out to eat. I had one friend that was here that, he transferred out to "Wall" Street and I still talk to him on a regular basis but um when we do have any kind of function where we would go out to eat he will come but I mean as a regular basis, just to go out no, everybody, everybody here is, um you stick with the guys that you started with, for instance I started with about 6 guys , we're down to 4 which , we talk, we talk every day, but um i don't see it, everyone has one or 2 friends that they're tight with and they'll do things with, that's about it, usually its circles, small which is weird i don't understand it, but i guess its human nature

Cancel: I also wanted to ask you about Puerto rico, which we have in common, do you go a lot to the island to visit?

Rivera: I try to go every year. My father's there now and um, i try to go every year I mean it's hard, I mean it's expensive but um we didn't go there last year but we went the year before and i love it, i love the weather, i went to school i did one year there, 2 years of school there, um yeah we love it. now, financially it's easier for us to drive to Florida, that's what we've been doing for our vacation just travelling to Florida

Cancel: ok

Rivera: because i have a wife and two kids, so at the flights you're looking at 1500 dollars I can drive to Florida and back for 200 dollars

Cancel: I understand

Rivera: So I mean, it's a big savings that thousand I spend on air fare or save, I pay for a hotel, plus my son is 8 and he likes Disney

Cancel: Oh, his small

Rivera: yeah, I have a 20 year old daughter and an 8 year old son

Cancel: wow

Rivera: yeah it's a big difference (phone rings) big difference

Cancel: and when you were growing up, you were born and raised here right?, what kind of music did you listen to? Did you listen to salsa or what kind of music?

Rivera: Let's see my grandmother always played Spanish music, um my mother was pretty much Americanized, she would listen to regular music, uh i mean English music, um we heard Spanish music i mean we spent a lot of time, I mean at my grandmother's house, as a child I think I was in my grandmother's house every day, which is typical, typical Puerto Rican family, you know you spend just as much time, i mean you spend more time with your grandparents than with your regular parents um excuse me let me get this (phone conversation) um I guess I had a normal childhood. My parents divorced when I was young. I still kept in contact with my father, obviously, um but we had a good life my mother gave us everything, it was just me and my brother, she gave us everything we ever wanted and um you know, we went to school i graduated high school, i went to school, you know i didn't. I did the best I could and i still try to do the best i can

Cancel: Let me see what else I can ask you, well, let me see this is a personal curiosity but do you know how the Sanitation Department in NYC is different from the one in Puerto Rico, if you know, I mean perhaps you don't...).

Rivera: I know that our Union here gives us a lot of benefits, it makes our job a lot safer, um what I've noticed, i mean, i haven't gone in detail but in my experience, i mean I lived out West other than New Mexico, it's a different job, but you don't have all the garbage there like you have in New York. I mean this is major operation getting rid of all this garbage. I mean you don't have a population like this anywhere, anywhere! I mean these big buildings, they're throwing out on a regular basis uh 20 tons a week of garbage these big buildings, and where does it go, i mean these people they just think that it goes to the truck and that's it it's over, you know out of their building and into the truck, um this is a whole process and no one has any clue, i mean you just think you put it into a bag, you shoot it down you shoot in these big buildings where you're putting the garbage can , you pull it out and its gone, I mean I don't know where it, I mean this is a major thing especially with recycling paper, metal, i mean they have you have 3 different "camaries" I mean I know my house I got 3 garbage cans. I mean you go to other states, I mean they don't recycle they throw everything in one in one pin, and you, are we trying our best? yeah but um this a major operation getting rid of all this um all this garbage and I'm sure that the general public has no clue of of what's really involved in getting rid of all this garbage

Cancel: And does it ever happen that a worker finds something interesting and takes it home?

Rivera: Oh, we have, we call it, we're not supposed to take, the garbage from the street, they call it , the mango, if you look in any garage, most of the chairs most of the couches in the back, it's all mango it's all stuff, that someone threw out, that's in decent shape, that they bring back to the garage, um some people take that stuff home , they know they're not supposed to

Cancel: aha

Rivera: but you know i mean hey, i mean it happens the few times, i personally would never, and my wife would throw me out of the house if i brought any of this stuff home, but if you look in the parking

lot and you see some sanitation workers cars, they're loaded with junk, and all that junk is stuff they pick up in the street

Cancel: wow and they take home

Rivera: I ask you because back in Puerto rico everything I had in my apartment I picked up from the street, bookshelves, everything, i got my apartment together like that cause just imagine...

Rivera: Well now with the internet and craigslist I mean, if there's something nice you can pick it up, but you'd be surprised especially in Manhattan, people throw away brand new furniture, um, computers that work are there in the garbage, um copy machines, chairs, brand new chairs, they just got a new chair and they're throwing it out, um every so often the couches in the back get replaced, um same thing tables, chairs, TV's, they pick up a TV and it works, any TV you see on the street, it probably works, they just got a new TV and they're throwing it out um its funny, i mean i think it's funny but um like i said, i n the early morning if you look to the parking lot and you look at the back seat of a lot of these cars, they're stuffed with junk and its junk that they pull off from the street, dvd, books, um, what else do they bring in here, i mean I've seen it all fans, Christmas ornaments, Christmas decorations, our garage had all kinds of decoration, it was all garbage that someone else had thrown out

Cancel: wow

Rivera: and they brought it here and they plugged it in and it worked and they left it up yeah it's pretty funny

Cancel: wow. Why is it called mango?

Rivera: I have no idea where that comes from

Cancel: what does it mean, does it mean anything?

Rivera: It must have a definition but I don't know what it is but um they'll say um . There's gotta a be a definition out there but um like i said you into a bag and um someone will see a new couch and they'll say oh nice couch did somebody bring it in? I mean sometimes people bring it from home but being that we're in Manhattan, I live in Brooklyn, how am I going to get it from Brooklyn to Manhattan unless you find someone with a truck, i mean that's a lot of work, it's not going to happen, so most of it is mango so they'll say oh that's the new mango couch (laughter) yeah it's pretty funny, it's pretty funny, for instance chairs, i can't get a chair in here , i know it's... budget cuts and all that, you tell somebody listen you see a decent chair bring me a chair and they'll be 5 chairs in the morning, 5 chairs , everyone's going to bring you a chair

Cancel: wow

Rivera: yeah (conversation)

Cancel: And what is the strangest thing that someone has picked up?

Rivera: I've seen people bring clothes, boots, i would never put my shoes in something that's been out in the street

Cancel: everything has a limit, right?

Rivera: You got to draw the line somewhere, um , um what else did i see , i think that was it clothes, i mean, it's not even clothes, i mean you've seen the people that walk to the streets, you've got between them the homeless people going through all the garbage, how are you going to put boots on that you found on the street, you don't know what , where that came from, now with that bed bug situation, that epidemic that's here, how can you do that and they do it

Cancel: wow

Rivera: they do it they do it all the time, it's insane i mean books i understand , and i hate to see books get thrown out magazines but i mean I've had guys, I'll give you a perfect example, couches, couches are famous for having money in them, so if you're driving by and there's a couch, you put in the truck and you can break it, so that it breaks open and you can find money in it all the time, you find money, people find money, diamond rings people, things get thrown out , i mean i see guys come in, they found you know, hundreds and hundreds of dollars, that were thrown out by mistake , they were hidden in the couch, hidden in in you know, people throw out dressers , sometimes they tape them underneath, people pass away and throw out all their stuff so i know i was told , when you're picking up furniture break it and look through it

Cancel: wow, and sure enough envelopes taped underneath of the drawer, um envelopes inside their cushions in the couch

Cancel: incredible

Rivera: its, you know, especially older people they wouldn't they wouldn't put that stuff in the bag, they keep everything at home um now with the mattresses not so much but couches and dresser drawers , there's always something in there

Cancel: and has it ever happened that they find illegal drugs and what do you do in a case like that?

Rivera: Well, I'll give you an example , um, uptown, um on the basket route a lot of the drug dealers will leave their drugs in the corner basket so you're on the basket route and you're going to grab that basket and they'll tell you no, don't touch that basket, and you, you are not going to get shot, the basket stays I'm not going to dump that basket if the foreman says you know what didn't you dump that basket you say listen the guy told me don't empty it , I'm not going to empty it I'm not going risk my life , i say you want to get me in trouble i say if you want to go back there with me and maybe we can work it out but um , no i mean those things happen all the time , especially in the bad areas , you know where a lot of drugs are being sold and stuff like that , it's perfect i mean, they keep it there, cops come they don't have them on them and um that's the way that they beat the system

Cancel: wow

Rivera: but I've seen guys find phones on the route all the time just basically the city people getting in and out of cabs, they drop stuff , they lose stuff , um yeah, I've seen it all , I've seen it all but nothing better than finding an envelope full of money, that's always a great day, always a great day , yeah it's like a Christmas bonus

Cancel: aha

Rivera: I mean it's a shame cause someone lost it but what are you supposed to do, there's no name on it , who are you going to give it to, who are you going to give it to? Obviously you know you split it with your partner

Cancel: laughter, well done

Rivera: and there we go, there's lunch we're having a good lunch today

Cancel: So there are no rules that have been legislated or that have to be followed or are there but people just don't follow them?

Cancel: I mean you're not supposed to take anything off the route but I mean, if there's an envelope full of cash, are you supposed to report that, I mean its cash, i mean I've never seen anyone say here i found this envelope here, give this to someone else , i mean we're all adults here um, um i mean it's one thing if it's found in in you know someone's suitcase , it's an issue where someone was robbed, its different, that's a different story , i mean but if it's in a couch, cushion , in a building that has 400 apartments , it's pretty much fine just to keep it, you know, you find jewelry all the time, especially when you, i mean, when you're picking up garbage you're walking the streets , people get in and out of cabs, i mean you you , you're really walking through the streets I mean that's the only way to pick up the garbage , is to walk through the streets , so you'll find these things all the time , all the time, it's basically jewelry , um jewelry, cell phones, yeah its interesting , interesting , and you see someone come in here i found a blackberry , um or you find a wallet, that happens also a lot , you find wallets but what happens is they'll give to me I'll go look through them, usually you'll find their number in there, you call them , you hold on to it i know what it is to lose a wallet, you have someone's license, um pictures that can't be replaced , I'll keep it here and they'll usually come to get it and even some people leave a few dollars and say hey give this to the guy who found it and you did the right thing um i know third avenue is all bars , people drink till they can't even function , and usually that's what happens they drop the wallet um um they get their bags stolen in the clubs and they just take the money and they throw everything else in the corner basket , so this guy's sees they open it , if it's got some information in it , they usually bring back here and um , we get it back to that person. Excuse me (On the phone)

Cancel: And noticing that you are organized here, do you also keep a track of that?

Rivera: (On the phone)

Cancel: As i was saying do you keep a track of the things that get lost?

Rivera: I don't keep track of that , usually um um, you get the person on the phone, they are usually interested in getting it back they usually come within the next day they're here to get it i mean those are things you know , you can't replace that stuff you have um phone numbers, for instance your cell phone , i lose my phone i have everyone's phone number in here , that's another thing i wanted to mention, these new smart phones and text messaging has made my life so much easier, um granted my cell phone bill my wife is not happy with it , but um I'll text these guys their orders and um that eliminates so many phone calls , i mean i could sit here and um, um, i mean , tell 20 different people what their orders are for tomorrow and um, it's pretty cool, it's pretty cool , it makes my job a lot easier , as opposed to standing here , taking out the sheets start calling people, do you wanna do this do you wanna do that , ok that's also another issue, by seniority you get to choose where you go, um this phone is the best thing , best thing

Cancel: wow

Rivera: yeah

Cancel: and does it ever happen that you get phone calls where people say, hey i lost my wallet, do you receive that kind of calls?

Rivera: We've had calls from people that they threw away something in the garbage, we'll get about 5 a year , um believe it or not most are good sanitation workers well tell you exactly what part of the truck that garbage is in um, I've had people come in here , we've pulled out the garbage for them to go through and they found their their engagement rings

Cancel: wow

Rivera: um money that were thrown out in error , um we'll make every humanly possible , if we can do it we will do it, i mean it happens all the time, we had the police department call us , they issue metro cards to the to the rookies , the class, they threw them out and we found them we went out to pull out the garbage and they found them it wasn't a few, there was a box of them , these were unlimited metro cards for the police to use you know cause you're not going to pay the toll, they get to use them, they're working , and they had thrown them out in error , and we found them for them

Cancel: wow

Rivera: cause we service the academy and sure enough they threw it out in error and we found it

Cancel: And has it happened that the police has called you to check the trash in search of evidence for a particular case?

Rivera: Well right now, we have the FBI , they're going to come Tuesday, and there's one house that they're watching obviously the don't tell us what house but what happens is they'll they'll follow and once we pick up the garbage of that house they'll come and take the garbage from the truck and um build their case , yeah it happens , you'd be surprised but um, yeah, it's funny that you say that because that guy was here yesterday

Cancel: incredible

Rivera: and they want to come for Tuesday, they wanna come this Tuesday and do that , take someone's garbage out

Cancel: wow

Rivera: mean they don't give you any information other than you know they cause they are obviously watching the house and they see the truck comes every Tuesday every Thursday , Saturday so they know what they wanna take and they just come take it put it in the van and just take it with them , once you throw out garbage, a lot of people don't know this , it's not your anymore , once it hits the curb its property of the city, um like those that go picking up cans and all of that , they're stealing from the city , that now becomes property of the city and um it's not enforced i mean how do you really enforce that , it's basically homeless people picking up cans to make a few dollars

Cancel: umhum

Rivera: but there is issues where um , especially if there's newspapers , people buy newspapers, you can sell that to recycling place and and um you see a big decline because of internet in newspapers and magazines , there's not that many anymore, but there were a lot of times especially uptown , i mean that that that again in Manhattan , that the garbage is gift raft , papers are in nice neat bundles, they go around in vans and pick them up... so then our numbers go down because they're way too down .
Excuse me (chat) Perfect example

Cancel: aha

Rivera: that's um the business agent from Manhattan who just called me from the Union. They're extending night plow. Night plow is designed so that if it snows you have plow trucks out there that are salt spreaders . We have 5 of them . They try to keep at least 5 people on these night shifts just in case it snows you can get those spreaders out the door because basically when it first snows that your um that's the biggest weapon that we have cause it spreads salt it has a plow in the front that's our best weapon. They're gonna extend night plow which means that they gonna keep bodies nights . Now each time they change this night plow it's a volunteer basis . They're gonna keep some garbage trucks at night I just have to call so now I have these guys signing this sheet this morning is the same guys you usually if finished they have second jobs they are during the day so they work at night and they can do the second job during the day if you run a garbage truck though at night it get a little tricky because there's a little bit more money in that garbage truck not a lot a few dollars more . This changes everything. Now you may wanna stay nights . So now I got throw this out and start all over till I found out cause now I gotta let them Know they're gonna keep running these trucks

Cancel: ok

Rivera: do you want to stay nights so now i went through all this for nothing. I gotta start all over all Monday. It's good to know and like I said, the cell phone saves me all the time all the time

Cancel: I also had some curiosity, we spoke earlier about the rats and objects that you find in the garbage, I was somewhat curious as to which insects are found and if you knew any interesting anecdote about workers being scared by these animals.

Rivera: Oh, I've had especially in the summer where you're doing a basket route on first avenue, I think that's the worst avenue, first avenue, uh you gotta kick the basket first, you have to kick it if you do not kick that basket and you just go to grab it

Cancel: aha

Rivera: they'll crawl up your arms

Cancel: wow

Rivera: It is disgusting you freak out

Cancel: (laughter)

Rivera: I mean you don't, those baskets are really heavy, I mean everyone says Oh New York strongest ok

Cancel: (laughter)

Rivera: if you think that you're going to pick up, let's see our district has, let me do the math here 14 to 59, there's two in each corner, 45 that's 90 we're talking about it's close to 300 baskets you're going to tip into the back of the truck. if you think you're just going to pick them up, you'd be like the incredible Hulk, you'd be that big so um basically what we do is they teach you how to do it, you swing it in, this way you're not hurting yourself or your back there's a lot less you let the weight get it to the back of the truck, so you grab it by the corners and you pivot your body and you let the weight of it swing it you pull it up and then go into the truck and then you pull it out, that's how I do it cause I don't want to break my back, when you go to grab it, they crawl up your arms they jump on your chest

Cancel: Oh my God

Rivera: and what'll happen is you'll see the basket rolling into the street because you let it go because

Cancel: (laughter)

Rivera: the "r" hit you now there's this basket rolling across the avenue, um so if you're driving, it's pretty important, when you're doing especially baskets at night you have these mirrors, you have to watch the guy back there because that's all you got, you know you're watching him and you'll see that mirror school, the basket shoot out you know that obviously something came out of that basket

Cancel: Oh my god. And which animals other than cockroaches come out?

Rivera: Bats, roaches, water bugs um, it's disgusting

Cancel: oh my god cause people put food in there

Cancel: umhum

Rivera: there's a lot of food I mean People eat in the summer people eat in the street all day , so rats they eat good , and they are not small rats , they're really really big rats

Cancel: wow

Rivera: or there'll be a family of rats , believe it or not not so much mice , these are these hugs rats the size of cats and it's scary i mean they're just scared i mean they're not attacking you but it's scary, it's disgusting , um now your freaked out and now you're all itchy and now you know, you wanna go home , you can't, you can't go home

Cancel: wow

Rivera: usually what they tell you is um you have a bag and that bag is antibacterial , wipes

Cancel: maybe THAT'S WHY THEY ARE new yorks STRONGEST

Rivera: you have a towel, another pair of pants , a pair of socks, underwear all that because um it happens , or, this happens all the time that people get sprayed, a lot of restaurants and all that hide their bags their garbage and they'll put like uh, oil waste , all that stuff, so when you cycle it and it pops, that liquid shoots out

Cancel: oh my god

Rivera: it's disgusting, i mean you've had guys come here i mean covered head to toe

Cancel: ay bandito

Rivera: and I mean it stinks laughter , i mean it's just this real stinky , i mean i had a guy come in here and we had to kick him out

Cancel: (laughter)

Rivera: i mean he was just covered

Cancel: (laughter)

Rivera: and i mean i took his shirt off he was walking around with no shirt i mean it was disgusting

Cancel: and do you have showers in here?

Rivera: Oh we have showers sinks, we have all that . Um not a lot of people like to do it , i always shower before i went home , i mean i don't want to get into my car, my boots, my boots never go into my house , my boots stay outside my house , they stay on my porch because i mean you walk in, who

knows what you walking, especially when you in the dump , you go to the dump to dump these trucks , you're not even touching the floor when you jump off of the truck is that much of sludge

Cancel: wow

Rivera: so when you step your foot goes, so, you know you're walking slow ... What's up pal (chatting with another worker

Cancel: And have you found dead animals, for example, cats dogs?

Rivera: Our job

Cancel: (umhum)

Rivera: is to pick up dead animals, we'll get a call, there's a dead dog on 14th street , it's our job to pick it up, dead dog, dead cat, dead bird , we got to go pick it up , that's our job, dead horse , I've heard stories, there was a dead horse , how you gonna pick up a horse?

Cancel: And where did that horse live?

Rivera: Well, we have liked the horses here that do the...

Cancel: Aha

Rivera: it was just a dead horse , someone just left a dead horse, dead 800 pound horse

Cancel: Oh well, yeah in Central Park also they use horses...

Rivera: how do you pick it up and put it in the yeah

Cancel: and you have to pick it up?

Rivera: Yeah we got to pick it up ; it's disgusting, disgusting , it's gotta be the most disgusting part of the job but

Cancel: And that horse, does he go alone in the truck or does go with all the garbage?

Rivera: It gets cycled in with the rest of the garbage

Cancel: No! .

Rivera: First of all you have to figure out , how you're going to get in there , it's just me and you and an 800 ;pound , animal, I've heard stories I've never seen it, I've heard stories of guys , you know we have a shovel, they've broke into pieces with the shovel to throw it in

Cancel: oh my god

Rivera: ,imagine that, i wouldn't do it , send me home, I'm not doing that, or these big big dogs , i mean they've been there for a while, they're covered in maggots, i mean , oh it's disgusting , disgusting

Cancel: It must be extremely sad and difficult

Rivera: People get in trouble all the time, i mean it is our job, um but guys have been sent home for refusing to do it , somebodies gotta do it i mean its our job

Cancel: well but one would think that the treatment of a dead animal would be different from the treatment that one gives to garbage

Rivera: You try to tell the public , that you know ... it's going in the garbage, it's going in the garbage and that's the truth

Cancel: Once it is dead it is garbage

Rivera: its garbage

Cancel: It's not an animal

Rivera: It's not claimed , i mean things happen all the time, dogs get hit by cars , usually if you have your dog and its hit by a car you're going to take it to the vet , you're going to do whatever , but some people don't , some people don't or it just ran away , and it got hit by a car 4 blocks away, and its laying out in the middle of the street and they keep running him over, and running him over, and running him over and you have half a dog on the street you the to shovel , you have to out there and shovel him up

Cancel: And would you say that the most common dead animals are cats and dogs?

Rivera: Cats and dogs all the time, cats and dogs and birds, pigeons

Cancel: And squirrels too?

Rivera: Everything

Cancel: raccoons?

Rivera: I haven't seen, I haven't got the call . Usually what'll happen, someone will call 311 and it'll come up in my printer automatically, dead animal on the corner of this, i tell the boss , the boss calls the basket truck , and the basket truck has to go get it , that's a horrible, horrible call

Cancel: oh my god

Rivera: A lot of the, most of the time still someone picks it up , someone with heart will pick it up and do the right thing , but um usually when they do go , its gone , it's not there usually when someone called , usually that person that called just couldn't see it get runned over again

Cancel: of course

Rivera: they take it out of the street and i don't know what they do with it , but um we go and investigate

Cancel: It is so difficult in New York City, I mean in Puerto Rico there are always green areas and you would go when your animals died and do a little hole somewhere but here

Cancel: Yeah its tough... it's a tough situation , it's probably the worst part of the job, when you get that call dead dog or dead saint , how you gonna pick up a saint Bernard? Or you're going to pick it up and it falls apart , i mean you're talking about the most disgusting thing that you could possibly imagine and um there you are...you grab the legs , I'll grab the back legs you grab the front legs and it falls apart and the rest of it is there, now you're throwing up, you're passing out, you're sweating , oh its horrible, horrible, horrible, horrible

Cancel: wow

Rivera: i mean you know, you wear gloves , you know you wear the best equipment you can , and the city doesn't give us gloves , they give us a uniform allowance , uniforms, you get dirty , you're out there, this thing get filthy , how long you think the shirt is going to last? You have to wash it every, you can't wear it twice, you can't wear anything twice , it has to be washed disinfected, my clothes get washed separately , um everything i have um when I'm out in this field , here i can you know i can wash with my regular clothes cause I'm not being exposed to it but um when you're out there in the truck you got paint on you which is pretty funny people throw out paint , they just put it in the bag , so you'll see a garbage truck , dripping paint down the street making a line

Cancel: (laughter)

Rivera: like a parade um and they tell you hey didn't you see it... um there's some much stuff dripping out of this truck , i mean it's pretty disgusting , i mean are you keeping track if its paint , it's not like people are going to put paint cans cause then you know we won't take it , we don't take paint cans , then they mix it up in the garbage , they put it in the bag , you throw it in the bag the bag is going to break at some point, and that stuff is going to drip out , so you'll see just a trail of paint coming out, especially if it's a full can of paint

Cancel: wow

Rivera: it's pretty funny , it's all different colors down the street . It's like art , yeah, it's pretty funny . You'll see like the basket truck going down the avenue and there's a lot of paint all right behind it

Cancel: wow ,

Rivera: yeah it's pretty funny

Cancel: You mentioned a while ago, that first avenue was the worse one

Rivera: in our district is the worse avenue

Cancel: why?

Rivera: Um, First Avenue, we have from 14 to 59 streets . On 14 street there uh...it's a big section there you have um Stuyvesant town you have um train station a lot of people go there , we have 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8 baskets on those 4 corner, 2 on each corner. No matter what time you go , its, they're packed , they're always full uh...we try to go there , six times a day , and six times we go and they're always full , i means, it's a lot of people there. a lot a lot a lot of people go through there, you've got Sty Town it's got 10,,000 apartments , um they all got a walk to 14 street if if they're taking the train , um you have um ...some schools there , uh the bus you have the hospital a block away um so from 14 to 23rd is Sty town and ten you have, the hospital Bellevue , all these hospitals , um you have um a couple of shelters uh then you have a park , i mean it's just its just a wrong situation for these baskets, um there's not too many residential after that , i mean there's some but it's mostly ...you have people going to the hospital, everybody's sick you have again the shelter, you have all these food trucks, you know it's just dirty dirty dirty garbage half the street down, then it gets better , you know, after 42nd streets its nice but between 14 and 42nd , there's that park there on 40 , between 43rd and 45th...it's always full of rats and you have to kick that that that basket before you pick it up or if not the , they will jump on you , they will jump on you

Cancel: wow

Rivera: and that's for sure, for sure, for sure, that basket is always filled with rats

Cancel: and are there any reports on workers being bitten by rats?

Rivera: Well, you get cuts , for instance someone will throw away a knife, a regular kitchen knife and they'll put it in a bag of garbage (pause) Why, what would possess you to put it in a bag of garbage , now sometimes, you know, you throw it , you know you're pulling it out , sometimes the bag you know, that why you have to be very careful people thin uh this is real simple , all these guys here, everyone's got stitches on their legs from getting cut between glass , people that throw out the bottles of glass they break

Cancel: aha

Rivera: so you go to throw it and there's a piece of glass sticking out, it's going to go right in, these pants aren't i mean , it's not leather pants , pants everyone's got stiches , everyone gots stiches on their legs

Cancel: wow

Rivera: and even an infection, i mean its dirty garbage um that's just the hazards of the job you have uh needles , people throw needles in the garbage, you go to grab that basket, there's a needle sticking now you got stuck, now you gotta to the hospital you gotta go and get a shot , got a go through all that , now you don't know what to think of aids aids or whatever you don't know what to think... that's bad that happens a lot you know people get stuck you hear about ten 20 guys a year get stuck with needles, that people just throw them in those baskets or they throw them in garbage , I mean you got a lot of diabetes but you don't know, i don't know what's, what's in this needle

Cancel: aha

Rivera: i don't know, you know and you got stuck with it , now what a you tell your wife what do you tell your family, daddy got stuck with a needle today at work it's a horrible horrible feeling

Cancel: wow

Rivera: it hasn't happened to me but it has happened to guys here

Cancel: ok

Rivera: you know that another one of the hazards of the job

Cancel: I also wanted to ask you if you have noticed any difference in the trash of the poor area vs. the trash in the rich areas , related to the animals, the needles all of this if there is more conscience in one sector than another?

Cancel: Well yeah in in Manhattan for example, i our district you have doorman in the building, And again they call it gift raft , you have your garbage, nice, bag, nice and not broken , they're perfectly sealed they're not dripping , then you have your recycling in blue bags , different color bags , they're blue , the paper all tied up in bundles, real pretty , they won't even break it up they'll put the metal on one end , the garbage and then the paper so that it doesn't it doesn't get mixed up , cause its 3 different trucks that they go , really nice , in the outer boroughs , it's disgusting, disgusting , its garbage cans , no bags it's just loose garbage in there , which creates bugs, flies, mice, rats , raccoons all kinds of stuff that are out there and it stinks, it stinks and now you a a a garbage can with the handle is broken, you gotta drag it and now you gotta pick up , now you gotta lift that up , dump it and its just loose garbage all over the place it it it gets really disgusting and that these guys i mean i would never want to work in the outer boroughs. I don't want to do house to house ; it's a longer day, grant that we do a lot of weight here but it's not a long day because it's all compiled you know you're doing 5 or 6 blocks and your truck is full, you know cause they're all high rises , you know it's a lot of garbage as opposed to 2 bags this house 2 bags the next house you'll walking all day just picking up garbage that's just the way they do it is you spend 20 minutes picking up garbage, then 20 minutes driving , you just take turns with the other guy , it's a lot of walking you know , sometimes it's like that , a person will be I'd rather be in Manhattan where it's all wide open and you know , it's much cleaner, its gift raft we call it you know , just cleaner garbage, cleaner garbage, to put it that way

Cancel: That's an interesting concept

Rivera: Yeah, cleaner garbage

Cancel: quite paradoxical .Well and to end our conversation, our interview, I wanted to ask you what is the most in comprehended part of your job?)

Rivera: (Sighs)... I know people don't appreciate us. I know um that when it snows, everybody loves us . This past snowstorm everybody hated us. It wasn't our fault. The snow came down too fast , um there was a change of shift which no one understands , you know , our 12 hour shifts, for instance, where um, um, I'll give you my explanation of what went wrong. Everybody's on split shifts , 7am to 7pm, 7pm to

7am . The first thing was Sunday, the weather wasn't too bad but it comes 7pm , we had the shift change so , for instance what I'll do I'll round 40 people . You've got 40 trucks coming in to get relieved to go back out . Of those 40 trucks it takes roughly here about an hour now we're on the west side highway, our district is on the east side , that's travel, so for them to leave at 7 they have to try and at 6:15. The guys come in 20 minutes later, they come in, they wash up .Its chaos, and you gotta see when it snows, its chaos, controlled chaos but its chaos. Quarters don't wanna go on this truck , who's going on this, who's going on that , it's a long process to get these guys out to work. Roughly it takes 2 hours in Manhattan, its 2 hours to switch ?So if it's coming down 2 inches an hour, its 4 inches of snow on the ground ... on a good day, its 2 hours , 4 inches of snow on the west side highway , you lost the highway , in the boroughs its gotta be twice as long . So say it took 4 hours to change the shift. You're talking about 8 inches of snow, you can't even drive over there due to the snow , you lost the city and that's why we lost the city. it was coming down in the blizzard , there was no bosses you know, they didn't make the right calls , they didn't call snow emergency, they didn't tell people stay home . They didn't do any of that stuff. Which in all fairness when we left Friday , there was no snow coming . Saturday was a holiday , Saturday, Sunday it was a long weekend. It's Christmas... No one made the call to scatter the release . They could have kept paying everybody longer . Stay out there. Don't nobody come in . We would have brought the guys and switched them out in the field , which is done before , it makes more sense, you can't pull out a truck off when there's a blizzard , you don't pull the trucks in. they stay out there. If you're going to get paid 14 hours or whatever it is , you can't pull those trucks off the street . bring the guys to the truck , don't bring the trucks in , "gasem"or if you're going to do bring in a handful , don't bring everybody in , that's where, that's how we lost the city . I mean, I live in Brooklyn , and my block, every year , we never get plowed onto the third day , that's just how it is, i know , i aint going nowhere, nobody in my block is going anywhere I mean where are you going to put your car

Cancel: Is that in Park Slope?

Rivera: I'm in I'm in, My mother is in Park Slope , I'm in Marine Park

Mario: Ok

Rivera: um...they never park there , that's, I mean the East Route, have been made, I don't know when they were made but these are the routes and your main concern, your main concern is your main avenues and the highway because if you don't do the main avenues and the highway ... for instance, worst case scenario , an ambulance has to get on your house , you're between 2 avenues, if both avenues are done they can park on this avenue or this avenue and then walk down the block and get you with no problem... they had all these cars blocking everything, people just got out of their cars, they abandoned their cars , you couldn't do the avenues, you couldn't do anything because no one told them stay home, emergency vehicles only . Giuliani used to do it all the time . Emergency traffic only do not be on the street , authorized the cops to tow, if you see a car tow it , immediately tow it immediately . bring everybody out , every tow trucks out there , you see a car, you know one of these snow emergency areas , which is the major avenues, tow it , tow it, tow it, tow it, tow it. They didn't do that . There was nobody here to it to my understanding , right? The mayor wasn't here , uh nobody was here to make that call , um that was where it went wrong , once you have all these cars blocking, now we're

stuck , you make a turn and there's a car all the way down there , now, you can't back up , i mean there's a lot of snow between the turnaround or the shift change, it was over, even here like 14 street , they had those long buses folded in half , they spun out, what are you supposed to do? Can't get down the street . Now what? 14 street don't get plowed . You see what I'm saying you lost 14 street , lost 23rd street there's two cars in the middle by the police station. The cops can't get out

Cancel: wow

Rivera: where's the tow truck , what tow truck? We're not out there towing snow , we don't got no tow trucks , my trucks got here, what's it gonna tow, we're not, we're not authorized to tow public cars , you see what I'm saying, so many things went wrong , you know, had the word gone out , emergency vehicles only , first response only , you know would things gone wrong? Of at least all of these cars wouldn't have been out there , um they're would have been someone responsible just to um, take responsibility , we didn't have none of that, didn't have none of that . Um you see when it snows, as far as all the time , it is what it is , guys gotta stay there extra hours , they've never ever ever said don't it, guys gotta come in , they've never done that cause first comes getting the snow off the street. And everybody knows it. You're doing at least 12 hours if not more . And no one's gonna complain about it, no one's saying i gotta go home , that's not coming out of anyone's mouth , we're here until we're told we can go home , until the snow is over you know so they're saying Oh the sanitation workers they did a job action . Why would we put... These are our families. We all live here. You think I'm going to put my family in danger. For who? Because you think someone's gonna... First of all , no one would ever say something like that ever, because there were some rumors of some guys getting demoted . You think I care if a supervisor , don't get me wrong ,you know i boss is a boss , they don't give a shit he's gonna get demoted, what does have to do with me? I don't wanna listen to him when I have to listen to him . Much less I'm going to jeopardize my family my job because he's getting demoted? Or 30 guys are... I don't care. What does that have to do with me? I'm here to you know do my time and go home, but much less i would follow order i mean it's a shame . The public hated us at that point. There was sanitation workers getting assaulted in the street, saying that that lady that died in the hallway, you know it was our fault, how is that my fault, how is that my fault? I gotta wear my uniform to go home . I was arguing with people. I couldn't even play lotto or get gas without having a situation every day that i had to now change before i went home . I couldn't wear my uniform home

Cancel: wow. It was horrible, horrible, what this mayor did to us . Horrible. He put it all on us . That we we did something on purpose . How could we , this is the, snow s snow , it's been snow for a hundred years , this is how it gets done, nothing change other than... order weren't given from the top which i can't make that order , they don't come from me, it comes from someone at the top and that order wasn't given

Cancel: And do you think that people's perception on sanitation workers has gotten better

Rivera: No

Cancel: You're still dealing with that?

Rivera: Everybody used to hate the mta. Everybody hates the MTA, now we're the new MTA

Cancel: (Laughter).

Rivera: That's what I told my wife we just became the new mta , because i know that when they had the transit strike, i mean , everybody hated the Mta , for keeping people that couldn't go to work , i mean we're now the new mta, which sucks because i don't like, my brother in law works for the mta and i , you know , i mean everyone has their own personal opinion but i think the mta for the money they make, the 2 dollars and change they get per person , you would think they'd be the cleanest trains and the best trains in the country and its horrible, i don't know if you take the train it's disgusting

Cancel: All the time , I don't have a car

Rivera: Its horrible , horrible . You rely on that to get on to work, i mean don't get me wrong for \$2.50 you can go 100 miles and all that stuff fine, but what's the quality of life, it's disgusting. It's hot in the summer . The trains, they're always late. They're never on time

Cancel: Well of course, my perception is slightly different since I come from a country where the train is very small and buses are give a very bad services but I can understand what you say

Rivera: Its tough People have to get to work and uh. There's always something going on . So these guys strike, you know there are laws against that . The Taylor law, you know, you're not allowed to strike and these guys they went on a and they really, they should had fired everybody , cause i know, we're not allowed to strike

Cancel: Really?

Rivera: We're not allowed to strike, police can't strike, firemen can't strike

Cancel: ok

Rivera: why can these guys strike you know they got the city , you know, they crippled the city, people lost their jobs, you know come on, how could you do that? People gotta go to work.

Cancel: wow

Rivera: and they they should have punished them

Cancel: So the right to strike is not a right that you have or ever had?

Rivera: No, there's a law in the Fed, it's called the Taylor Law that states that we cannot go on strike

Cancel: ok

Rivera: yeah, that's not an option , so when there's issues, whatever you gotta settle it like men, like gentlemen

Cancel: (laughter)

Rivera: you know you gotta sit down and negotiate

Cancel: ok

Rivera: which makes sense you know

Cancel: (umhum)

Rivera: you know it makes sense i don't wanna...Like when it snowed , there was all this garbage out there . We were caught up in Manhattan, everybody says Oh Manhattan . They take care of Manhattan first Of course we take care of Manhattan, there's a lot of issues in Manhattan, you have millions of taxis driving over the snow , as you drive it over its melts. Even if it's freezing out, it will melt . You have doorman in every building kicking that snow into the street . The street is warmer here, we've got all sorts of pipes underneath the city , you have the subways, all the heat , the the streets are warmer so it melts... the streets are simple they go in the grid pattern , it's really simple, this is simple math here , you go to the boroughs, Brooklyn, queens, they're like this , their narrow, nobody drives over them My block for 2 days, nobody drove down my block . How's that, where's that snow going . Nobody driving over it . Here you have a billion taxis . Taxis are going to work .No matter what happens, the taxis are out , usually at night its nothing . It's not the case it's a different situation in Manhattan . We were caught up and we couldn't pick up the garbage because the boroughs weren't caught up , cause in Brooklyn, queens, Staten island, they were still plowing, we had to send our guys over there , so now yeah, you make days you're going out of town , laughter, there were days when i had 10 guys in the garage 10 out of 40, 30 guys out of town , to go plow somewhere else in another borough (wow) yeah it's a shame. Meanwhile ... I mean we do good we have a great garage. all these guys here do the right thing , um i really can't talk for other garages , it's just simple, i mean we have a great district , its perfect street pattern, 4 avenues and you know 60 blocks, its 50 blocks up and down, it's pretty nice, it's pretty nice and it's all pretty much nice nice buildings , you know, mostly high rises but some small buildings but the majority is high rises, and with the high rises come doormen , porters that are out there . They wanna keep the street clean , they're out there sweeping the street , we're out there sweeping the street, i mean its just a little more help , you know, my days off , i sweep in front of my house , you know that's that's my responsibility , i don't wanna live like a pig , i want my streets to be clean , they did construction for a few houses away , they put down asphalt, there's rocks all over the place, i m gonna have to go pick them up cause no one else is going to do it , there's rocks everywhere and its annoying i don't want see them, they've been there for a month now . So now, on my next day when I'm off I'm going to have to go away from my house to go sweep the street yeah

Cancel: wow

Rivera: What are you going to do?

Cancel :Incredible. Well, Joey Rivera, thank you so much for your time and for sharing your experiences, for me it has been a pleasure, I say it with all honesty, and I have learned a lot and I know that the people that listen to this recording will learn more about the Department of sanitation and about all the

problems and issues that you go through, and i hope that contributes to clarify misguided concepts or prejudices that people may have or actually have so thank you very much

Rivera: It's been a pleasure.

Key words:

Dead animals, mayor, union, Puerto Rico, MTA, Strike, Board of Operations, Blizzard, DSNY Test, Manhattan, Super's Clerk, Basket, Trucks, Art, Found Objects, FBI, Interesting excuses, seniority.

Abstract

Mr. Joey Rivera, the super's clerk at Manhattan Garage 6 for the DSNY, talks about his job duties and life experiences. He also shares other workers' experiences. Found objects, risky situations, conflicts of time in the job due to seniority, the FBI searching the trash for evidence, dead horses, visits to Puerto Rico, money hidden in couches, paint dripping from the trucks and leaving a trace of art... The interview is realized on April 1st, 2011 and takes us on a voyage through the amusing -and somewhat surreal- world of Sanitation workers.

Summary of the interview

It was 8:00am of a cold rainy New York City regular spring day. The sun, so said the clouds, was still in Spring break. As I approached Manhattan Garage 6, using my hair as a natural umbrella, I remembered Kafka, who fortunately, was cast into oblivion as soon as I met Joey Rivera. Bureaucracy had been defeated: he was more than willing to be interviewed. Light skinned, with green eyes, not too low nor too tall, slightly overweight –as he himself joked that most sanitation workers are- and lacking my natural umbrella, Mr. Rivera is one of those Puerto Rican descendants with a high percentage of Spanish-European DNA heritage. In my hometown -the eternal colony- the Irish, Italian, and French influence has also been felt, along of course, with the Taino Indian and the African which are more predominant. As we sat down in front of different brands of chocolate which would be sold for a buck every now and then throughout the interview, Mr. Rivera answered my questions. I began my interview in the language of Puerto Rico's Stepmother country, Spain. Noticing that my interviewee stumbled, I told him that he could also speak in English. He switched, and never came back: language as a geographical allegory. I continued to speak in Spanish and he replied in English. Yet I never doubted that I was in front of a fellow Puerto Rican. Call it mysticism or a non-reflexive-extremely patriotic- anti-postmodern attitude, the fact is that I felt in family.

At the beginning of the interview, Mr. Rivera was a bit serious. Throughout the interview my biggest dilemma was whether to use "tú" or "usted". The former is used when talking to friends or someone who is around one's age or younger; the latter is utilized for strangers and older people. I

settled for “tú” in the hope of putting formality aside but my culture was constantly telling me to use “usted”. You can hear me stumble throughout the recording. In retrospect, I believe I did the right thing. Mr. Rivera, especially at the beginning, was pretty formal, and I was pushing the familiarity... It took him a while to loosen up but after half an hour or so we were able to bring some sense of humor into the process. Gradually, Mr. Rivera started smiling more, his movements became less stiff -to the point that I started to keep an eye on his microphone- and laughter –that liberating force- made its way through. (Although I think I laughed more than he did).

The stories narrated by Mr. Rivera were sometimes his; other times, of fellow workers. But even the latter were made his through his view and narration. Workers’ nonsensical last minute excuses, drugs in the trash bins, intimidating drug-dealers, high class trash and low class trash, hundreds of dollars thrown away by accident in the sofas (a sort of lottery), people calling the Department to check collection trucks for objects that became trash because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time, the FBI in pursue of dangerous criminal garbage, knives and other hidden sharp items leaving a scar, rats that could scare any cat, corpses of cats and dogs who are fused with the trash in a questionable ritual, dead horses who have to be picked up by sanitation workers, insects who crawl up workers bodies and remain in their minds as does everything else... And garbage as art. Yes. Mr. Rivera talked about how sometimes there was paint in the trash bins. This paint was thrown into the truck, crushed and dripped on the streets leaving a trace of Art. I had always thought that certain art was trash (I’m actually sure it is!) but never the other way around... Meeting Joey Rivera was a great experience.

As I left the garage, it was still raining. I set my hair loose, walked towards the subway and wished that the Sun would come back from Puerto Rico.

