

Interview Overview

Narrator: Will Walsh and Dawn Toledo-Walsh

Interviewer: Samantha Rijkers

Date: March 24, 2011.

Place: Home of Will and Dawn, Astoria, NY

Duration: 1:47

Samantha: This is Samantha Rijkers with Will and Dawn Walsh. It's March 24, 2011 and we're in Astoria, New York. So let me just start by asking where did you grow up?

Will: I grew up in Bensonhurst in Brooklyn. I lived there my whole life. So I grew up in Brooklyn and moved to various places around there and then ended up in Manhattan and now I live in Astoria with my wife.

D: My wife... I grew up on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. I moved around quite a bit, but always ended up around New York and back in New York and now we're in Astoria. Been here for four years, right? Four and a half.

W: Yes. I didn't go away for school. I did everything in Brooklyn, grew up there, went to school there, I started to work there, right out of high school. I did retail and sales for about ten years before I started sanitation, which I have been for about five years. I worked in retail with Toys 'R' Us for about eight years and I worked for Nintendo of America in sales for two years before I started sanitation work.

S: Why did you start working for sanitation?

W: Because it's the best job you can have in the city. I was working as a salesman for Nintendo. Driving around to different stores in the city and pushing their image and products. I got tired of not having benefits and not having a set retirement and not being able to really plan anything so the sanitation department lets you have a focus in life and it kind of takes care of a lot of your worries as far as just having a job and being secure.

D: Having medical benefits. Having a pension, which is really hard to come by these days. It is security, definitely security.

W: It's not glamorous and it's not cool and it's not pretty sometimes, but it's safety, it's security, and not a lot of people have that these days.

D: Especially in this city.

W: We're not as cool as the firefighters.

D: [laughter] Yeah we don't have a show like about firefighters in New York, about sanitation workers in New York.

W: When the women say they love a man in uniform they're not talking about the sanitation workers. It's all about the cops, about the firefighters, we have no respect with that, but there we are every day cleaning the streets, making your lives easier, making sure you don't die of disease and dysentery and cholera and all those fantabulous things that we take for granted. And if you go out of the country, some places you just see trash everywhere cause they don't have what we have here. It's a very important service that, again, people just don't think twice about. We've been to like a couple of island countries, like the Caribbean, and there's just lots filled with garbage. There's nobody coming around to pick it up. And if there are people coming around and pick it up, you have to pay for it, out of your own pocket, so a lot of people can't afford it, so it just ends up on their streets. And it's not pretty.

S: What do you remember about your training? What was it like?

W: The training of the sanitation department is interesting. You kind of don't know what you're in for, cause they're doing everything by the book, into the letter and a lot of times in the real world you kind of can't follow that. In a perfect world you do the things that you can do the way they need to be done, as in by the book, but sometimes the real world changes everything. So there is a lot of disparity between what they teach you in the training and what you deal with everyday out in the street between the people and the weather and the equipment and everything. Just you kind of have to roll with the punches and learn more and more everyday but the training was eye-opening.

D: What was the name of the field you went to?

W: Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn. Which, by the way, is in the middle of nowhere. You know where King's Plaza is in Brooklyn? Well, Kings Plaza is a shopping mall and that's a horrible pain to get to. Floyd Bennett is past that, it's an old airfield near Rockaway and there's no easy public transportation. I think you have to take fourteen buses, probably four, but you know. There is no train that goes there and even driving there takes forever. We'd have to be there by six in the morning, so you'd got to drive there in the morning, pitch-black, when there's no lights in these fields with nothing around. It's just pavement and sand and trees and I've never been there before and never seen anything like there at 5:30 in the morning driving through pitch-blackness, no idea where I'm going. They pick us up in buses and take us to the classrooms and basically teach us about how to pick up garbage, which is not as easy as it sounds.

D: You had been out there a couple times, right, to do different things?

W: They sent us back a number of times for extra training. When I first came on the job I didn't have my commercial driver's license, so I had to go out there for training for that. Then when I got hired I got training for the actual job. Then when I came out of class I went to the broom

depot and they finally had to send me back there to train on the broom. Then they sent me back for training on the EZ Pack, and I went back for training on the vermin loader and I had to go for training on snow. And there's training for everything, so they do a lot of work to make sure people know what you're, so you know what you're doing.

D: So there's different equipment for every job almost, right?

W: They don't just say: well, here's your uniform, go do everything. They do a lot of work to make sure that people are safe and they know how to operate things and the ins and outs of each different piece of equipment. They even send you back for repeat training for the first few years on the job. They do refresher courses for the snow: snow removal and putting the plows and chains on the trucks, and things like that. So it's definitely, you learn a lot in a short amount of time out there.

S: Did you have any expectations and how did it differ from the training and the actual job?

W: When they train you, they really try to make us instill a lot of respect for the things you're working with and a lot of fear to make sure that you're as safe as possible. [00:10:00] When you get out into the actual districts it's just so different compared to the actual training. There they'll have the vehicles set up and it's in working order. It's perfect. Then you get out into the field and your windshield wipers may not work or the hopper may not cycle correctly, or you... It's so many different variables that you have to deal with every day. That trucks are constantly being worked on and constantly...

D: It's not a perfect world out there.

W: No...

D: The training exercises are as good as it gets! [laughs]

W: Coming out of Floyd Bennett Field, they just put the fear god into you, and half the things they tell you to do and not do out at Floyd Bennett Field--it's just not how it is in the world. You just can't operate that way, otherwise routes don't get done and people don't do what they have to do. I can't tell how many times I've seen crazy stuff, that makes you laugh. But they definitely would frown upon if you were doing that at Floyd Bennett Field.

S: Could you give some examples?

W: There's just basic things they tell you in Floyd Bennett field. When you're doing a route, you do your route, and you do one side of the block at a time. You pick up your bag, you do this, you pick up your bag, you place it in the hopper. In the real world they're running down the block like lunatics, doing both sides at the time, throwing the bags in the hopper from across the street, throwing things out into the middle. Your partner pulling up the truck and it's just the amount of

weight of garbage that's out there now. You can't do it the way that they want you to do it. It's just not realistic and if you try to do it the way that they want you to do it at Floyd Bennett Field, they give you a complaint, which is their way of saying: you're not doing your job correctly. At Floyd Bennett Field, when they teach you about your uniform; you have to be in uniform, and you have to have this color boots, you have to have this color pants and uniform things. Then you get out in the districts and it's not as important. There's a learning curve, a real big one. So things change. But the biggest thing that they do pound into your brain is to be as safe as you can, which has stuck with me. I know guys don't wear their seatbelts on the job, but frankly--I don't want to die, so I always wear my seatbelt. I'm always looking in all my mirrors, always doing things like that. I had spoken before about the guy who died last year in this district that I knew [Frank Justich] and that really stuck with me. Last week a sanitation worker got hit by a car and now he is in a coma. The day before yesterday somebody almost got hit by a car. The car ended up under the back of the truck, up to the windshield, and if the guy had been a couple of steps closer to behind the truck he would have been dead, because people don't think about us or don't respect what we're doing out there. So at the training they tell you that it's dangerous and some people don't listen. But it's on my mind every day and that's probably the biggest thing that I learned out there. The most important thing.

S: When was your start date?

W: 5/22/06.

D: I don't even know when I started my job! [laughter]

W: [laughter] You have to know your start date.

D: Oh, you do?

W: You have to know your start date, because that's your seniority. And seniority is whether you're going to be out in the cold, sweeping the streets with a handbroom, or in a nice warm truck, or on a spreader, or picking up garbage, or making money for the garbage for the day, or not making money, or going out of town. It's all seniority and you may have come on in the same year but then some people came on in May, some people came on in October. You got to know your list number and you got to know your hiring date. I kick myself every day, because I could have come on in March of 2004, but I decided it would be better to play around for a little bit longer. I worked for Nintendo of America for two years as a sales representative. I had no idea what seniority meant. I didn't know what it was, that it was a big deal, that 20,000 people took the test, or however many took the test at that time. I was number 90 on the list and didn't know it was a big deal and then when I start the job they tell me it's a big deal. I got tired of going crazy for my other job and got back on the list. I had to make a lot of phone calls, write letters in order to keep myself reinstated on the list. And it kind of worked out for me--I ended up in a good garage, in a good spot that kept me from having to balance around, cause in regular districts there's all kinds of shifts. You could work six to two, seven to three, eight to four, eleven

to seven, four to twelve, twelve to eight, and when you first come on, you have little seniority, so you don't have any choice. Whatever is left at the bottom of the pile is what you get. When I came on I went to a district that only had three shifts. We had six to two, seven to three, and midnight to eight. Midnight to eight is lockdown by people who want it. We don't have a lot, so I never really had to bounce to the night shift or have crazy hours.

D: Which is nice. You don't have to worry too much about whether he's going to be here this weekend, or he's going to be working nights, or when I am going to see him. We have a pretty good schedule set and we don't have to worry too much about it changing. Which is nice, because we can actually make plans every other weekend when he's off.

W: A lot of guys have nothing else but this job because of their schedules. They'll work one day six to two and then they're ordered back that night for twelve to eight and then the next day four to twelve, so it's just constantly changing. It messes with your head, it messes with your schedule, you can't plan anything, you can't do anything outside the job. I don't think I could handle that.

D: That's tough, that's tough. I know, I have friends whose husbands aren't in sanitation, but they're in the police department or other areas within the city and they have terrible schedules too. They'll get their schedule a week in advance and then: there goes any plans we had for that week. So it's nice to have some kind of regularity in life and I know he's home before I am and we can have every other weekend. He has every other Saturday off.

W: The broom depot is probably, what I think, is the best place to be. We have the option in my garage to stay on or off the brooms, street sweepers, we do the routes every day and all of Queens West, except for one or two districts. And we have the option of going out to actually pick up garbage a couple times a week, but if you don't want to break your back picking up garbage every day, you don't have to. So it's a nice option to have. Other sanitation workers have their names for the broom depot, like broom scum and various things like that.

D: Various.

W: Then some people don't think of us as actual sanitation workers, because we're not out there every day, [00:20:00] but we're still doing our job. We do our part and it's not an easy thing, driving those street sweepers around and constantly chasing the time segments that you have. You have to sweep a certain area or certain streets, and watching the cars, and watching the geniuses who stand on the corner with their baby carriage on the street, while they're standing on the corner as I'm coming towards them with this giant truck, sweeping the curb. They just stare at you. So there's a lot to deal with in that it's a trade off. You get to get a schedule, there's a lot of mental...anguish?

D: [laughs] That's not the right word.

W: That drains you.

D: It's definitely, that there's issues.

W: It was good that I ended up in this garage. And everything happens for a reason, I guess. So I didn't take the job when I could have, but when I did take it, I ended up in a good spot, in a good garage. And I really do believe that if I had been put in a regular district and had a lot of those crazy hours I wouldn't be married right now [Dawn laughs]. At least not to her. Because I don't think we would have had the time together to build our relationship. Based on what I see with these other guys, what these other districts put the men through, with those crazy hours and you don't know how they do it.

D: It would have been tough. You never know, but, definitely, it would be tough.

W: I think my life would be very different. Very different.

D: Yeah, you wouldn't have been able to get all that gaming time!

W: [Looks slightly annoyed at Dawn] I want that stricken from the record.

D: It is nice though, it really is. For him to have a pretty set schedule. Once in a while it changes. During the snow season, who knows. He works twelve, thirteen hour shifts. Especially with this past season, how much snow we got was crazy, I mean he was working a lot of hours, but that's the far end. So to know that he's home, we have our puppy, we have our dog. So he can come home before I can and take care of her. And then when I get home we can have dinner and our time together.

W: We can exist.

D: Yes, we can actually have a good time. Not a horrible life [laughs]. As opposed to him working at midnight and not seeing him, waking up without him, go to sleep without him. So it's nice.

S: So when you met, did you already work for sanitation?

D: No.

W: I was still in retail. I think I had just taken the test, but I was in the middle of moving out of my apartment. My ex had just left me when I met her. I think I was alone for a whole two days when we met.

D: I was rebound apparently.

W: Yes. She's still the rebound! It's only almost eight years ago. It's just rebound, not a serious thing. But I had just taken the test. I believe I was still working for retail as Toys 'R' Us as a manager and I had yet to take the job as the sales rep for Nintendo. Sanitation was still just an idea, not a serious thought. But I do remember when I took the test I was trying to recruit other people to take it with me. So I think my father was pretty adamant about me taking it. And he's the one who told me about it. He told me I could take this test, told me: you should take these city tests. He would bring home The Chief, which is the civil service newspaper and read that this test was coming. Alright, alright, alright. I still have friends today that regret not taking the test, or not having their information ready when it came time for them to get on the job.

D: It's been while. They hired one other class after you or two?

W: No, they've done a couple of classes. They had done one or two, actually, they took a bunch of classes off my list. They gave the test. Every four years they do give it, it's just they haven't hired many people off this current list .

S: So was your father in civil services as well?

W: He wasn't. He was a boilermaker on the ships in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. But he did take the sanitation test. I found his slip with the score on it, everything. I did score higher than him, which was kind of cool. He just for some reason didn't take the job. I never asked him if he regretted it or anything. I found out after he died. But there are a lot of guys on the job for whom it's a family business, families of garbage men, sorry, sanitation workers [laughter Dawn and Sam]. I still say garbage men, even though people correct me and say: no, you're a sanitation worker. People who aren't sanitation workers say: no, you're a sanitation worker. I always feel self conscious telling people what I do, because...

D: That is silly.

W: Isn't silly! We travel sometimes in affluent circles and I don't really feel like telling them that I pick up garbage for a living, because they're shopping for houses in the Hamptons and are going to California or Europe for two months.

D: We have friends in the arts and who are in different types of businesses. They just tend to have a different, more prestigious lifestyle than us. Some people do have more than we do, but we have a really good life I have to say. I think we have a really good life and if someone asks what he does he tends to get a little hesitant. I don't. I don't think he needs to be. I think it's interesting. I think it's extremely important and he tends to downplay it a little bit around certain groups of people. He'll make a little bit of a joke about things, but to me, every time I will say it's extremely important, regardless of whether or not it's fabulous--no. It is not making a million dollars a year, but it's an extremely important job in this city and it's something to be proud of and respect. And people are interested when he says what he does.

W: Not really.

D: He drives a street sweeper, he drives that broom. And people are like, oh really? That sounds like fun! [Will laughs] You see that every day.

W: Ludicrous! It sounds like fun, really?

D: It's them being nice or being whatever it may be. It's not something you hear every day: I drive a street sweeper.

W: Really there are only a couple of hundred people that do that.

D: It's not something that a lot of people can say they've ever done. It's something that you see in the city every day. And it's important [00:30:00] and it's something to be proud of, and not be hesitant or embarrassed about.

W: I joke about it, but I'm not embarrassed about it.

D: Not, not embarrassed... embarrassed is not the right word. But hesitant sometimes.

W: She mentioned respect. Which is something I don't think that the sanitation gets at all. I was just talking about how in the past week two people got hit and almost hit by a car, because everybody else needs to get around the truck. Everybody needs to go where they need to go and they don't think about it at all. We're a nuisance, we're in their way, they're in a rush, get out of my way, pull over, they yell, they honk. I remember driving around with my parents, and if we turned in a street and there was a garbage truck on it, my father would slam on the brakes, back out and not even bother going down that street. And I do the same thing and I have no understanding of people who will come down the street when there's a garbage truck on it, follow the truck down the street and then start honking. And then try to squeeze around it and hit somebody, like what happened last week, or, you know not pay attention and end up parked under the truck. People, they don't respect us, what we do and the trucks, the equipment, us driving, us picking up their trash. We're the garbage, I guess. I don't know. People don't think about it, that's the thing, they just...

D: It's taken for granted.

W: Absolutely.

D: In this city and it's disturbing to me, being the wife of a sanitation worker and hearing these stories and knowing that as I'm walking down the street and I see these people in their cars, honking at the guys picking up the trash on the street. Knowing that someone else could be doing that to my husband. It's hurtful almost and it upsets me and I take personal affront to seeing someone do that. I get angry and I'll yell at somebody: what are you doing? Why are you

honking your horn? They're not invisible, you saw them down the street, you know it's going to take a while for them to get down the block, so don't go up behind them and don't honk your horn at them, because they're doing their job.

W: It makes me very nervous when they honk and I just have to slow down and work very safely [Dawn laughs] and make sure that I'm doing everything correctly, not hurting myself, cause I'm just very nervous. They could be warning me of danger so I have to make sure that I slow down and do things very slowly. When they start honking, be very safe. But yeah, there's just a lack of respect from a lot of people driving, but then you're walking down the street and there's the guy outside his house, grinning from ear to ear, happy to see you. Morning, how's it goin'? Nice to see you. Then in the summer people will be handing you these bottles of water and in winter, you want a cup of coffee? People are nice and people do respect us, so it's half and half, but unfortunately the negative seems to just show up more.

D: It's also more dangerous for the negative, for the people in their cars who are impatient and don't want to wait and try to squeeze around these trucks. That's dangerous. It's not only that it's nasty [laughs] it's very dangerous for them to do those things.

W: A guy in my class, from when I came on, he got pinned behind the truck. A car pinned him, his legs, behind the truck. Not very seriously hurt, but it is an accident. One of the guys last year got crushed by a milk truck and killed. Last week, as I said, a guy got hit behind a car, got in a coma, and I don't know what is happening with him today. They've seen progress yesterday. Somebody almost got hit yesterday in the district that I work at. I've heard about, I guess, on a Friday afternoon this winter a guy in the Bronx, not even working on the truck, not picking up garbage, is at the garage. Was crossing the street, I think, to go get something to eat. Got hit by a car and killed. You don't hear a lot about it in the news, but it's really just dangerous. And the lack of respect of people on the streets, driving around us, while we're working just makes it more dangerous. Especially it makes me nervous, driving the street sweeper, going down the street, and people just need to cross the street as soon as they get to it. They don't, they really, really don't look and they would just walk down in front of the street sweeper. The other day I was working Manhattan for the St. Patrick's Day parade, I was sweeping the streets around there, and the police were letting me through the street. They opened up the barricades and I'm driving and the cops are holding people back and people just kept coming and they wouldn't stop. There's a giant white truck with spinning blades of death on the side that could just suck you up into it and just they keep walking at it. When you honk at them because they're in danger they yell at you, or they flip you off. It's ridiculous. And that was a stressful day. Especially with probably nine out of every ten were drunk for St. Patrick's Day. That probably made it a little worse. That was a very long stressful day. I thought it was going to be a good day, but it wasn't really.

S: So last time you mentioned you had gotten into accidents yourself?

W: Yes. I mentioned that I drive the street sweeper. It's not exactly a labor intensive detail. We call it a tissue. A tissue is a specific detail that you're on, the mechanical broom, EZ Pack, roll-on, roll-off, we have a specific garage slot, the garagemen every day, that's the garage tissue. So it's a specific detail that you're locked into and being on the broom tissue is safer. You're not on the street, you're not always out in the elements. But somehow I got hurt by climbing into the broom. I forget if it was icy or I had maybe grease on my boots. I slipped on the step and I grabbed onto the bar on the outside of the broom, reached out and grabbed it to stop myself from falling and as I did course all my weight got ranced onto my shoulder. I was out on medical leave, MDA is what they call it. It's light duty, for six months. I still had pain in it for another year after that and it still bothers me occasionally. Wasn't horrible, crazy...

D: Injury.

W: I was trying to think of another word...

D: Accident.

W: No, I know what an injury is, Dawn, thank you. Like a disabling ability, not injury. That's not it. It wasn't disabling, but it was just really painful and just, I couldn't do just day to day things like driving my car, I was driving one handed for like eight months.

D: It was painful, I had to hear about it all the time.

W: Yes and there was that. I was in Manhattan one day on a basket truck, I put a basket into the back of the truck and as I dumped it a gust of wind, it was a windy day, all the ash and dirt and dust and sand and all that's in the bottom of that basket just blew into my face. It was like someone had taken a handful of sand and just threw it into my eyes. [00:40:00] And I had to stand there hunched over, on the street, trying to clean my eyes. It took about ten minutes before I managed to stumble into the Rite Aid or Duane Reade, whatever the drug store that was right there, to get something so I washed my eyes out, and I couldn't, cause there was glass stuck into my eye. I couldn't get it out, I had to go to the hospital and get it cleaned out. I hurt my knee doing a basket once. A basket bounced out of the truck and hit my knee. I had to go to the hospital to get that checked out. I had a closed head wound, a mild concussion, slipping on the curb by the natural gas pumps, while getting off my truck at the end of the day.

D: Yeah, these are always wonderful calls from him or the garage saying...

W: Well it's, it's usually me calling.

D: Saying: your husband's in the hospital.

W: It's usually me that makes the call. Which is a good sign.

D: Which is better. Although, the last time with the head injury, Anthony called, and the garage calling, finding out where I am, can I make it to the hospital, he's in the hospital, he's going to be okay, blablabla. So, oh my God, alright. So all of these calls and then for me to... Of course I need to go, I have to go to the hospital, because I'm not going to say: I'll see you at home! So I need to go to the hospital to make sure he is okay and not just saying he's okay.

W: No, I think if I'm not okay I definitely am going to say: come get me! Although, that's another good thing about the job. That's if you get hurt...

D: You do have go to the hospital.

W: They take care of you, you get hurt on the job, you're not going to be stuck with thousands of dollars of medical bills, because they take care of you if you get hurt. They'll pay for the hospital, they'll pay for your surgery if you need surgery, if you need rehabilitation, everything, it's all part of their benefits. The danger is there, and it's not great to be put in that danger, but at least you have the confidence that when something does happen to you, you don't have to take care of yourself. They don't throw you out to dry. Not like some of the other jobs they may just tell you, sorry, kind of tough luck. Not a lot of people have that luxury.

D: No, it is definitely good to know that you're not going to be stuck with bills that you can't pay for the rest of your life because you happen to get hurt.

W: And I'm not going to lose my job.

D: And you don't lose your job for getting hurt.

W: A lot of guys do get hurt, but they do their best, I guess. The union has fought and gotten these things. We have a heart bill now. If you have a heart attack on the job, if you can't work because of your heart condition, you get I think it's three quarters pay now. If you're incapable of working because of that. And it's just, they really do look out for the workers, cause it is a physically taxing job that it is going to wear down on you over the course of 20 years. Which brings up all the kind of attack on the public worker that is going on these days across the country. And people kind of say, well, why do you get to work for 20 years and then retire? Do this for 20 years and see if you're able to.

D: See how long you last!

W: People in government say, well, you should work 25 years, or you should work till you're 65. People come on this job at 20. You want to work 45 years picking up garbage? You're not going to live that long!

D: You won't make it. There's no way.

W: And if you do, you're lucky if you get 5 minutes to enjoy once you do retire. The job wears you down. And I drive the street sweeper, I come home and I'm worn out every day. Just mentally, from just that constant looking around and constantly trying not to hit people who aren't paying attention to what we do. Because we really are invisible in a way. Be it sweeping the streets and people aren't paying attention, or driving down the street and they come down the block anyway. We're not in their universe, so the job in that way mentally, physically, it just takes a toll on you. There's only so much you can do. I've seen guys die on the job. I've seen guys or heard of guys retire and die within a week. Since I have come on, a guy who had over twenty years on the job had a heart attack in the truck, driving the truck on the house-to-house, while his partner was loading. He had a heart attack and died. A guy at my garage nearly died, they took him to the hospital, he ended up dying a couple of months later. That's depressing. I never really think about it. When you think about them trying to take away collective bargaining rights or try to extend your retirement to a later age. Come and do this for a year. For a month. And see what you think about it. And see if it's, you know. They say that we're, that public workers are stealing from the taxpayer. It's a joke. It's a huge joke and it's unfortunate that people get in line behind that mentality, because that's what they're being told in the media or in the news. That's a whole another story. I don't want to skew too much into politics.

S: But it affects you. How do you feel about the media?

W: Normally the media kind of leave us alone. Like we get taken for granted. We're not really noticed until something goes wrong.

D: Or something terrible happens.

W: Or something terrible happens and we don't clean things up fast enough for people's liking. Like this past winter. I've only been on the job for five years but it's the most snow in the shortest amount of time that pretty much everybody is probably used to seeing. And to jump back into the government side of things, for that second the city was trying to save money. They didn't declare an emergency right away for the snow. They had changed the plows on the trucks and set them up in a different way, they had new, lighter grade snow chains for the trucks... They did all these different things this year, that in the perfect storm could cause problems. And then we had the perfect storm and they caused a lot of problems, because our trucks got stuck, the plows couldn't handle the amount of snow, we didn't have, you know, we didn't have the full force that first night...

D: It was right after Christmas...

W: Yeah, not everybody was there, they didn't declare the snow emergency so people were out of the streets. And all anybody could say come Monday morning is: what did the sanitation department do? They must be on strike, they must be having a slowdown, because the supervisors are mad, because they're getting laid off or getting demoted, rather. The media found a story and then they just fed into the story. And people, a senator, it was a congressman or a

senator, or assemblyman, said that people from the sanitation department came in and said that the supervisors told them to slow down, because of the demotions. Which turned out never happened, but once the story's over and that comes out they don't talk about it as much. So people still have it in their mind, that there was a slowdown, when there never was. It was too much snow too fast, not enough chains, not enough people not enough, not enough men, men in the trucks and it was just, it was a nightmare, perfect storm. [00:50:00] But I was out that night plowing and it just was so bad working the way it was. The snow came down so fast and so many cars were out the next day, we couldn't plow anything, because there were cars in those streets. Even if we could plow we couldn't get to it because everything was being blocked, but then the media just hung onto that story. There was a slowdown, there was a slowdown, there was a slowdown. And then it turns the city against you and all of a sudden you're in the spotlight and you're not used to being in the spotlight. And now the city is giving us GPS devices in every truck so they can track us and follow us and it's just one thing into the other into the other... Another thing with the whole slowdown idea is the supervisors and the sanitation workers have separate unions so even if there was a slowdown which legally we can't do, if there was any type of action going on like that the supervisors could never make us do that or even suggest that to us. Cause we're separate unions, it doesn't work like that. But that again is something else the media doesn't talk about. They find their story and they ledge onto it and they feed into it, until it's, you know. Just to sell their papers and get people to watch the news and it's the same thing with everything else. It's the 24 hour news cycle and again, you wait a week or two, the snow was gone and the story went away and things that needed to be corrected were never corrected. And that's why people still in the media sometimes have a bad attitude. And then I heard that guys got things thrown at them because of that. I was in Staten Island one day during the snow and a supervisor was telling us how he went into McDonald's for lunch, getting something to eat, it's his lunch break, and people in there were talking loudly so he could hear them. All of these sanitation workers they don't do anything all day, they're in McDonald's, blablaba. A human being deserves to be able to go and sit and eat lunch. So that's what the media does. Media just... kind of screws everything up. [Dawn laughs]

S: And you mentioned that you worked a lot during the snow?

W: Usually I work a lot during the snow, but this year was pretty epic. I got the call on Christmas day, then I was working the day after, which was a Sunday, went to work and I was on a snowplow and I worked 15 hours that day. I worked 106 hours that first week. I worked New Years Eve,

D: New Years was fun [laughs].

W: I worked New Years Day, I worked...

D: Came home, he went to sleep, I woke him at 10:30, we watched TV until the countdown and then he went to bed and went to work in the morning.

W: I took the train to work almost every day. I think I got a ride the next day, the Monday after Christmas. Had to work in the Bronx one day, I had to take the train to the Bronx. I didn't bother taking my car out, the street wasn't plowed.

S: That must have taken forever.

W: I left it so it started to melt. The street wasn't plowed. I drive a Prius that wasn't getting me anywhere, so I just took the train.

D: I tried, I tried a little bit of shoveling but it didn't work very well.

W: She is the worst shoveler!

D: I try to, to move the snow a little bit. It's hard cause there's nowhere to put it. It's so much snow, there is nowhere to put it.

W: We make at least a little overtime, we get extra money. Snow money is really the only time we get a chance to really make any extra money with overtime and it helps.

D: It's almost like a bonus.

W: It helps but it's still not a lot, because you get it in chunks. They spread it out a little bit so you're not hit all at once with taxes. But it's still not a lot. I don't make a lot of money. People say, oh, the sanitation workers make too much money. Wish I knew how to do that, being a sanitation worker making too much money, because it's not a lot. Kind of enough to do what I gotta do.

D: To live in the city.

W: To live in this city, it's hard. If I was a single sanitation worker, living in the city, I don't know how I'd live. My wife works and we get along okay. We're no, by no means rich or even close to it.

D: Even close to it...

W: Or even close to, but yeah, it's hard. They make you live in the city too.

D: The base salary when you start is insanely low for the city and to live on your own would not happen. I don't know how anyone could live on that base salary and have to live in the city, which they require you to do you. You have to live in the five boroughs, right? Your first year probation.

W: It's a little weird.

D: It's crazy.

W: You are doing the same job. I'm still not top salary, at five and a half years I hit top salary. It's weird that people do the same job. The guy who was on twenty years and the guy who's on four years doing the same job, but there's a huge difference in what they make. It's a little weird but I understand it. It works out in the long run. It's good for the job but the union has worked things out and it's like that for a reason. I understand it, it's just very disheartening the first couple of years when you're bringing home next to nothing. Now it's good, it's a good paycheck.

D: We have a very good dual income.

W: Yes.

D: To live nicely.

W: It's gotta be nicer than a single man though.

D: But for someone who's single, or someone who has a wife who stays at home with the kids, or even someone who has a dual income, who are making not as much. It's tough especially in the city because it's so expensive to pay rent or if you want to own your own home. Anything like that, I don't know how some people do that.

W: And that's another reason why that kind of makes me think twice, what do you mean we make too much money? We have to live in New York City to have this job and they start off at 30,000 dollars a year.

D: Yeah, you could barely pay rent with that much money here. The benefits, thank goodness, are good. That's superhelpful.

W: Yeah, that's definitely huge.

D: It's huge because me paying for benefits for my job before we were married, I had to pay for my own benefits and it's a lot of money to pay for benefits. So it helps that we're married and I can be on his benefits and that's a little bit less of a stress that I have to worry about, as far as money. But still it's tough. You think about it and there's good and there's, you make do.

W: The benefits we get, we get a good amount of vacation time. We have our sick leave which is great, because when you pick up garbage all the time, you get sick, because you're out in the elements every day. So we have unlimited sick leave, if you're sick you don't have to worry about not getting paid. If you get a bad flu or something you can stay home and take care of yourself and not worry about losing a week's pay. Which people in the public sector may have to worry about, which is another thing about the whole attack on civil service employees and

collective bargaining and all that. They say things in Wisconsin and they are talking, well these public employees they get all this stuff and benefits and everything like that. You don't get it, take it away from them. Should be the opposite, if you're in the public sector and you don't get good benefits, you should be fighting for more benefits. Not saying spitefully, oh I don't get that, take it away from them. **[01:00:00]** It's just so backwards and the way the sanitation department is set up should be a model for people, public and private. It's a good job. People should be able to make a decent living, retire at a decent age and live. You shouldn't have to work until you're ready to keel over.

D: Until you're dead.

W: It's just not the way it should be and unfortunately it's the way things seem to be heading in this country. They want people to work longer for less so they can boost profits more and more and put it on the backs of the...

D: Yeah I could be working forever I don't have pension.

W: And she will be working forever cause I'm retiring [Dawn and Samantha laugh].

D: Somebody's has to make money in this household.

W: Somebody's gotta bring home the money.

D: I make a decent income but I will be working forever basically because I don't have that security. Who knows? It's hard to save for retirement.

W: Yeah, it's also hard to put all your faith in the lottery. To plan for retirement.

D: Yes, cause he insists on playing...

S: You never know.

W: That's what they say. Hey, you never know.

D: It's the best, the best catchphrase ever! But it's true.

S: So you mentioned that you're in different districts, how does that work? Because you work from one garage but you work in different districts.

W: I work in Queens West 5A. It's the Queens West broom depot. The brooms that come out of my garage, mechanical brooms, street sweepers, they cover the alternate side of the street parking and rules in Queens districts 2, Queens West districts 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. That's everything from Woodside, part of Long Island City, Sunnyside, all the way through. That's Q2, you got

Glendale, and Middle Village is Q5, Q6 is Forest Hills, Q3 is East Elmhurst I think, Q4 is Corona. It's huge, everything from Citi Field to Long Island City is Queens West. Every day we go in and that's when seniority comes into play. They fill the broom routes and usually we have a couple of extra people and they use those extra people to fill in slots in other districts. These aren't exact numbers but just an example, if we have thirty guys working tomorrow and fifteen broom routes going out, you have fifteen extra guys. So that's fifteen extra guys who are used to fill in slots in other districts. Could be Queens West, could be Queens East, could be in Manhattan, could be in Brooklyn. They can send us anywhere, wherever they need bodies for the next day. So it's kind of the luck of the draw what you can be doing tomorrow. Tomorrow I'll be on the broom, who knows what I'll be doing Saturday, who knows what I'll be doing Monday. It always changes, but at least being with the brooms I have a steady shift. There's six to two, or seven to three. It never changes off of that. Unless I volunteer for it. Going out to different districts is fine, it kind of gives you variety. Some guys who work in regular districts do the same routes every week, so they kind of get into a routine. I like being able to have variety. Today I'll be sweeping on the broom in Q2 and tomorrow I could be working in Manhattan and picking up a recycling route. It depends on what options I get and whether or not it's my turn. I don't have a lot of seniority in my garage. I think I'm maybe number 30, or 32, or 35 out of 45 people, so I don't get a lot of choices but I get more than some. Again, it's always different. Not only do you not know what district you're going to the next day, you may not know what you're doing when you get there. So you could be on a truck, you could be sweeping with a handbroom, you could be doing anything. So it's always changing.

S: Do you have any preferences?

D: I like the broom. I'd rather do that than anything else. It's out of the elements, it's out of the rain. Guys go out on the truck in the rain and I don't know how they do that. I mean, I've done it before plenty of times, but I can not do that, I'd rather stay on the broom. There are perks to going out of a district. If you work in Queens and you go to Brooklyn for the day they give you earn time in the books, earn time off, so you get time off in pay. My home district is Queens West, if I work in Brooklyn tomorrow I get four hours in the books, it's half a day I can take off with pay. So they have a little reward for driving way out of where you're normally going. And they could send me to Staten Island tomorrow if they want. Which isn't ideal, to get up at four in the morning and drive to somewhere I've never been before and then have to worry about fighting traffic on the way home. But there's not a lot to complain about. You know, I do have pretty good options.

S: How did you become a broom operator?

W: Well, I lucked into it I guess. In my class, they were looking for volunteers for going to the broom depot. I guess people were transferring out or they just needed to fill up the garage with more bodies because they were short, so I made sure my name was on the list. I signed the sheet that said I'll do that. I thought, if I can stay days that would be great, so I did that. You do have to go for extra training if you want to do that. A lot of districts have brooms coming out of regular

garages. My garage is the dedicated broom garage. Other districts have one, two, three, four broom routes coming out of their garages and then that's just a regular seniority thing within the district. People have to wait their turn basically to get the option. I guess it is for certain people a desirable detail. People want that option to be out in the elements if they want. Really it is just a matter of taste. Some people like being on the truck, some people like being on the broom, some people like being on EZ Pack and if you're on a regular collection truck money comes into play. You get paid extra if you're on a collection truck. So a lot of people usually go after that. Being in a broom garage I cannot make that every day, it's not an option.

S: You usually work alone, is that something you prefer?

W: It's... it is what it is. I have no problem working with a partner on a truck. I like being on a broom by myself, you can just kind of be with your thoughts. **[01:10:00]** I found being on the collection truck is a lot more stressful, because you have to worry about, if you don't know the route, how much weight you're going to have to put on the truck, you can get the route, you're going to have to work faster, it changes all the time. When you're on the broom, the route is written out for you, you just drive. You can be alone with your thoughts. You have to pay a lot of attention to everything, but still it's kind of cool. You just have the day to think to yourself and really it does sometimes just fly by. Because the way they set it up in the morning, the first thing you do is the metered parking, for there's the coin fed meters you do that first. They're broken up into half hour segments, so you'll have only half an hour to get all those streets done. You can have anything from two to ten, maybe twelve, fifteen streets to do in that half an hour so you're constantly moving. And it breaks it up a little bit, you have this half hour, and the next half hour, so it kind of keeps the day flowing. There is not a lot of down time with that so you constantly move into the next segment and it helps the day go by faster.

S: When and where would you talk to other sanitation workers?

W: In the morning. At the end of the day. I don't do a lot of the social stuff that the sanitation department offers.

D: You do some. Just some dinners...

W: Yeah. They have societies, there's the Emerald Society which is the Irish society. The Columbia Society is the Italian society. Different groups that kind of socialize and have the information from the union, information from the city, they do sometimes dinners, they do fundraisers, charities, things like that. I don't do a lot of it, I have a lot going on with my wife. We do a lot of kind of...

D: Our own thing.

W: Our own thing and it doesn't really have afford a lot of time for that. And also, there's not a lot of vegetarian food at these events. So it's kind of difficult for me to take part. But people talk

in the morning before work when we sign in. People show up different times, the signing time in my garage is seven o'clock so people start coming in 6:30, so we chat in the morning, we chat in the afternoon before we sign out. That's about it. There are people who do take advantage of the societies and events a lot more than I do, but I guess it just hasn't reached me yet.

S: Last time we talked you mentioned that you're thinking about making a TV show about sanitation. What would you think that would look like?

W: [laughs] I think it would be the most fascinating show [Dawn and Samantha laugh], because there are things that happen on this job, you just can't make up. It would be a cross between like Rescue Me and NYPD Blue. There's no other way to do it, because it would be hysterical and heart-wrenching. I don't want to give too many specific examples, but there are things that cannot be matter of public record. But I've heard stories of a guy who put a garbage can over a woman's head once, who was screaming at him because he wouldn't put her cans of paint in the truck, because we're not supposed to take paint, because it breaks open and it leaves a trail of paint behind the truck for blocks and blocks and blocks. I don't know if he had problems at home, or if she said something very bad to him, but he emptied the can and put it over her head. And she fell down and he got in trouble, of course, which is logical.

D: That would make for good TV.

W: I think that would make for good TV. And then there's just so many different people. I mean, I don't have a lot in common with the people I work with. I'd be a character on the show that's the vegetarian, the environmentalist, the liberal, a hippie, whatever they like to break my chops about. There's just so many different people and so many different influences and so many things happen and there's so many different characters in this job, you just can't make it up.

D: There's a lot of different personalities.

W: But there are so many instances I'm just hesitant to talk about, because I don't want to [laughs] get people to hate me. I don't know if it's going to be in a museum one day or a matter of public record. This guy just slept for eight hours on his shift and just came back. Or this guy, you know, went home one day because he just felt like it, and it's not that it ever happened, these are just examples that may be good for a television show. There really is a lot of stuff that goes on, you just can't make it up. You can't. You can't. It's very fun. It would be, it would be great dramedy.

D: It's also along with all of that ridiculousness that happens.

W: There is a lot of ridiculousness.

D: But also, these are people, they have their lives at the end of the day. Once they go home and that's important too. To see that side of things. Along with what goes on at the job or in the garage or with elections for your next shops to work [laughs].

W: These politics.

D: Or the politics about who should get what route and, you know, all these insane things that go on.

W: It's always, always something.

D: There's lots of content, that could make for good TV.

W: But what's a crazy story that you heard, not so much about the politics of work, but I'm sure I told you something that stood out, I'm blank right now.

[yelling from upstairs]

D: That.

[all laugh]

W: The screaming in the background is my landlord who is also a sanitation worker. That's why everyone is laughing. Uhm, another character.

D: I don't know, there's a lot of stuff that goes on.

W: There's guys who just...

D: The dinners are fun too.

W: Dinners are fun.

D: That would make for good TV [laughs].

W: Suffice it to say there's a lot of characters on the job that would make for a lot of entertainment. Hours and hours of entertainment. I'll leave it at that. There is a guy I know who had his own clothing line. Yeah, there's guys that design things and sell stuff. I knew a guy once that would make sanitation department air fresheners and then sell them.

D: The New York Strongest stuff is cool.

W: All off the job of course, not during the day, off the job when they got home.

[01:20:00]

D: There's pride in it too and they'll come up with logo's and make sweatshirts, t-shirts, hats, they put that across as well. I like that New York Strongest.

W: There is ingenuity and people try to do more with their free time once they're done with their job for the day. They got their own little side projects and it's not just about the garbage. I work with my wife. She works in the arts and I am still aspiring to be a writer. And that's, again, another good thing about the job, you not working 9 to 5, you're not in an office all day, coming home and just drop after rush hour. I work a little bit earlier so it gives me a little bit of time in the day. I get home at three o'clock most days, so I have a couple of hours before my wife comes home to pursue something else. I tried starting to take up piano. I tried another language, so I started working on that for a little while. I want to write, I do have time during the day.

D: He has a little ADD with projects and interests, but it's nice to be able to have a little leisure time and try different things and do different things. Not have to worry about not being able to pursue other likes and interests. I wish I had more time, but I work long hours. And come home and continue working [laughs]. It's kind of cool to have him home and I can ask, okay, can you do this, this, and that before I get home? So that when I get home we can take care of other stuff. And eventually it'll be nice for when we have a child or maybe two [laughs]. I don't know. But it'll be nice for him to have that kind of schedule to say okay, he can be home earlier with the kids and not have to worry about me needing to run home or him needing to run home to pick the kids up or something like that. It's nice.

S: Totally different question. What, in your opinion, makes a good supervisor? And would you want to be a supervisor?

W: I would not want to be a supervisor.

S: Why not?

W: I took the supervisor's test when I first came on the job. It came up, I think in the first six months. I didn't really know anything. I opened the book to the test and literally I laughed out loud, thinking, I have no idea what this is about, I have no idea. But I've since learned that I have no interest. It's just kind of a constant dance between the men below you and the superintendents and the chiefs, everything above you. Because the chiefs and the superintendents will be hammering you to get these guys to do more. Get them to do this, tell them to do this, get them to do this, do this fast. And then there's a very fine line to walk when you're supervising somebody who's been picking up garbage for 22 years, 23 years, 25 years. They are going to do their route and they're going to do their job and they're going to not do their job. If you're bad supervisor, it doesn't work together. If they try to push you to do too much things and they don't get done, it's kind of hard to even out the expectations of the bosses above you and with what the men below

you can realistically do. You know what I mean? It's just not possible to get done what they want you to do. They want the supervisors to try and cut a truck in a section to save money for the city and then they have to add that weight onto other trucks. A, it's physically not possible for these guys who are already picking up in a day fifteen tons on a truck to add another three tons onto their truck and the trucks probably are not going to fit that much on there. And B, these guys just cannot do it. It's literally too much work to do in that time. And not to mention that the city's growing, more people live there all the time and there's more garbage all the time and they keep expecting them to try and cut corners and shrink the force. When I came on I think we had about 8,000 sanitation workers and we're below 5,000. They haven't hired a lot and a lot of people have retired. The whole thing with the supervisors, what they do, it's a tough job. They just demoted I think a hundred supervisors back to sanitation worker and they're expecting the supervisors left to do so much more with their time. They're expected to supervise, one supervisor for all the trucks out that day in their section or all the brooms out, the trucks out, everything, and they're stretched so thin. And if something doesn't get followed up on, or if they're not following the mechanical broom because they're with the truck, or if there is a problem that somebody got hurt, or if there's a problem that there is a truck down.

D: It's not enough people. There's not enough people on every level.

W: Well, there's levels where there's too many people, they're usually up here. But they're stretched so thin and they expect so much of them that it's not for me.

D: You also have to deal with a lot of personalities. It can be difficult. Which happens in any managerial position, but...

W: Again, there's some characters [Dawn laughs] on this job so I don't...

D: There's characters and personalities and it's tough.

W: Hysterical, I love it, I love this job. But the good supervisors, they let you do what you gotta do. They're not going to be on top of you for no reason. I know what I'm doing, I know my job, I know what I have to do. I'm out there doing it all day every day. And when you get that one supervisor breathing down your neck, looking over your shoulders, tell you to do this, do this, do this, do this, when you're in the process of doing it. It just kind of turns your off. Just today I was driving my broom route and on the radio one of the supervisors or superintendents called out over the radio for me to go sweep a street. And mind you, the street that he wanted me to sweep is on the route. And I'm not there yet. And it's just like...really? That's what you're going to go over the air for the whole city to hear? To make me look like I'm not doing what I'm supposed to be doing when I'm just not there yet. And that kind of little thing makes a bad supervisor in my mind. But the good supervisors, they, you know, if they don't know you yet, they'll just watch you do what you do and let you work. It's just not a lot to expect of people. It's what we do. So there is a lot of everything. And when we do our work, just don't ride us too hard. We are working hard, doing what we do, we do our jobs.

S: So what did you think about the Chasing Sanitation exhibit?

[01:30:00]

W: It thought the Chasing Sanitation exhibit was kind of touching, to see people having interest in us. And outside of just somebody saying good morning, or the media telling everybody what a horrible job we're doing and that they wanted to meet us. They wanted to meet sanitation workers, they wanted to talk to them, learn about their lives, about what they do. And it's really impressive to see what Liz and Lisa have done with that and just putting everything together. I would never thought to do anything like that. When I went to the exhibit I did get a little touched, it was a little emotional. There was a banner up on the wall about the things we do and there were photos from the funeral last year, from when Frankie Justich got killed on the job. Maybe three quarters of the force showed up at the funeral that day and they brought us all out there. So they had some photos at the exhibit of us lined up, they had photos from the Q1 garage, photos from the men and just everything. To get that recognition and basically just see a little respect for what we do. It was emotional. Again, I haven't been on the job that long, but I still feel that it meant a lot that to see that.

D: It's definitely moving. It was nice to see someone taking an interest and showing these people that are doing this job every day and the honesty and the realness in their photos and the stories that they had up about these people that they were taking the photos of and just getting a little deeper view into what those are. Seeing the honesty from the workers, it was really, really honest. I thought it was a beautiful exhibit. That banner that he was talking about, the banner, you know, I am a father, I am a son, I am, I go home every day. It was amazing.

W: It was huge.

D: Really awesome.

W: A banner that could cover the whole wall and it said something like, they are there out in the rain, they are, you know.

D: It made me tear up a little reading that, it was, it was amazing.

W: A couple of talented ladies.

D: The guys and the women on the force, they don't get a lot of recognition, they don't get enough of a voice in the city. And for something like that to be out there and give them their moment and time. It was nice.

W: It does give us a bit more in the respect department. I mentioned a couple of times the guy who got hit by a car last week. And hit his head, landed on his head, got in a coma, and you heard nothing in the news. They said there was a little tiny paragraph on page eight or something

in the New York Post and that was it. We only hear about a cop who got shot. It's a big deal. Firefighter gets hurt in a fire, it's a big deal. Why isn't a sanitation worker in the line of duty, picking up the city's garbage, cleaning the streets, making sure that it's out of the way and it's not rotting and in the middle of everybody's lives. Why is that not a big deal? Why is that not important? It's a bummer. It's sad, it's sad and disrespectful and it's just speaks to the fact that people take us for granted and they don't want to hear about us unless we do something wrong. Or they perceive us to do something wrong.

D: The exhibit took that to a whole other side with that. Which was fantastic.

S: What do you feel is the most misunderstood about sanitation department?

W: That we're just as important as everybody else. Just, you know, we really are. The sanitation department is taken for granted. People come out and go to work in the morning and they go to the curb and they take their empty garbage bin and they put it back behind the gate. Half of the time they don't even see us, we're there so early in the morning. And that's out of sight, out of mind. If they come outside and the garbage is still there, they ask, where the hell are these guys? Why is my garbage still here? That's it. And it's kind of unfair. After the snow, people complained that we didn't clean up the snow fast enough. There's a lot of snow. There's two foot of snow in a night. It's a lot of snow. Two days later, I'm out there cleaning the snow, clearing the snow. When are you picking up my garbage? Yelling. Really? If you could find your garbage I'll be glad to take it with me. Dig it out and I'll carry it back to the garage. It is... [Dawn laughs] What do you want? What do you want?

D: They expect them to be Supermen that are invisible.

W: Yes. We don't want to see you, but we want you to do everything right now. Come on.

D: That's tough. It's tough.

W: I think it was the Monday. First day of the storm, I was driving down 43rd Avenue in Woodside and cars were stuck in the middle of the street, I'm in the snowplow on a salt spreader, driving around. And I look out following a supervisor car, following with the truck, and a little old man on the corner with his cane, hunched over, just gave me the thumbs down. This little, crotchety old man, shaking his head, thumbs down up at me in the truck. I just laughed. What do you say? What do I do? Start yelling at him, explaining to him, you know, there was a lot of snow and I'm sorry your streets aren't clean. Just to get that we're not important kind of vibe. It's sad.

S: Is there anything else you would like other people to know about sanitation?

W: I guess the main thing is how dangerous it is. I guess people don't realize that. I wish people would just be a little more courteous and a little more mindful. Instead of speeding by the truck

that just pulled over and somebody's getting out of it. I have almost gotten hit by a car once or twice, getting out of the garbage truck, to get down and get the garbage and they fly right by me. It would be nice if they thought for a second. Man, you're doing a rough job. I don't want to do that—thank you.

D: There should be those signs, they have them on the back of school buses that come out and say "stop." That you can't pass the school bus. They should have that for the garbage trucks.

W: But the, the danger is the main thing. People don't think that we get hurt and even when Frankie Justich was killed last year, there really wasn't a lot of coverage for that either. We had a huge funeral and it was on New York One for maybe fifteen seconds. And it was, just amazing, the outpour for this guy. [01:40:00] He worked in this neighborhood, he picked up the garbage outside this apartment, he would pick up the garbage here.

D: Young guy.

W: Standing on the corner. Everybody from the neighborhood came to that spot to just talk about him. Everybody knew him. And that's what I would like people to understand that the sanitation department is not just there to clean up after you and be ignored and taken for granted. We're doing the job, we're here for a reason and you don't want to get killed doing it. I forget exactly how many people have gotten killed, but it's far too many. Before I came on the job somebody left acid, threw it out, I think left it in a corner basket, which sprayed this guy's face and killed him right there. And somebody, a guy in my class, a relative of his, she got crushed on an EZ Pack by the bar. While she was cleaning the top off. It happens far too much and it's avoidable. And people don't think of it as a possibility. People will always talk about the cops and the firefighters, I know that they have their own issues and their lives are in danger every day, but so are ours. And that's what I think people don't realize and I would like people to be more conscientious of us. When dealing with us and being around us and driving around us and interacting with us. We're not easy to miss, but somehow these big white trucks are pretty invisible.

S: I have another question. You mentioned that you're an environmentalist. How does that affect you? Do you think about recycling? Does it bother you when people don't?

W: It bothers me when people don't recycle. In certain neighborhoods you work in, people don't sort their recycling. And in the interest of just getting the garbage off the street, the supervisors will tell you: just take it. Whichever has more paper in it, put it in the paper side. If there is more metal in it, put it in that side. And it bothers me, because I sort my recycling. How come I have to sort my recycling, you don't? That doesn't seem fair to me.

D: It's not a difficult thing to do.

W: It's not. There's one pile or bag for paper, the other for everything else.

D: And it's important.

W: It's important. It helps, it's not going to save the world, it's not a cure-all. It's not going to solve all of our problems, but it's an important step to keeping the planet less dirty. When you keep throwing things out, eventually we will all be sitting on a pile of garbage, reuse something every once in a while, just recycle it. It's not a horrible idea and people don't care. Sanitation workers don't care. They just throw everything in the back of the truck. They just don't think about it. But it bothers me I try and I sort things as best as I can, but it's not my job to stand there and sort your recycling for you. So I get caught up on it, but even supervisors say, oh just put it in the truck. No, this is recycling truck not a garbage truck, or this is garbage truck not a recycling truck. And I'll end up leaving recycling out, because the recycling truck missed it and I'm on a garbage truck, and they try to tell me: oh, just put it in the truck. No. I don't do that, because it is a big deal to me. The environment matters. I drive a hybrid, I recycle, I eat organic food, and I'm a vegetarian. I keep saying that, I keep saying this over and over. So it's definitely, it's on my mind.

D: Yeah. It is. All the time. It bothers me too. We're very specific in our own world, about our apartment, about our own things, but even me at work knowing that they don't do all the same things in the office building that you would do. I see all the paper that gets wasted and I'm like, oh my gosh. You get to see these things and I see the way the garbage gets thrown out and I'm like, who's taking care of that? Is somebody sorting that? Because you're not doing it here.

W: All just goes into black bags and just thrown out. And then I pick up a black bag at a stop and it just clings. It's a black bag full of cans and glass and they put that out as garbage. Just put it in a clear bag and it gets recycled, what's the difference, you already have it all in one bag! It's frustrating and not a lot of people care. So it's kind of hard to bring it up a lot.

D: To me it's not only about people caring anymore, in New York City you're supposed to recycle.

W: Yeah, it's the law.

D: Now, you are supposed to, it's the law. It's not a choice anymore, but you're supposed to do it. So figure it out.

W: But what drives me crazy though, styrofoam is not recycling. Yet, tomorrow is recycling pickup. Walk up and down this street and you'll find styrofoam, tied up with paper and in with metal and glass. People don't know what to do with styrofoam. They can't figure it out. They don't know, it's garbage, throw it out, they tie it up real nice and neat with cardboard, put it in the bags with the cans. Why? And people will leave out giant boxes from flat screen TVs with the styrofoam still in it. And then they get mad at you when you don't take it and put it in the trucks.

Well I can't take that. Why not, it's recycling? No it's not, it's full of styrofoam! It's garbage and you're not supposed to mix the loads. So... I get really riled up over that.

D: Yeah you do. We have bins and we actually the recycling stickers on our bins in our kitchen, so that I know what goes in which bin. There's still times when I have to ask him, is this recycling, is this with paper or is this with cans?

W: The stickers are everywhere and they're free. They'll mail them to you.

D: There's certain things that are a little confusing. I still was not sure about milk cartons, because it's paper.

W: It's not paper!

D: But it goes with the cans and the metal, like the glass. I would have put that with paper.

W: The city mails out leaflets that tell you what is recycling. And where to sort it. Everybody gets them, it goes in every mailbox [Dawn laughs]. You do you not know that this is paper?

S: And they throw it right in the garbage.

W: Exactly. They don't recycle that leaflet, they throw it in the garbage.

D: Hey look, we have it on our fridge too.

W: It's on the fridge, we have a magnet on our refrigerator that tells you it's recycling [laughs]. Yeah I get way too excited about that question.

S: Well I'm glad I asked [all laugh].

W: It's a hot topic, I don't want to get into it, it's very stressful.

D: Recycling is so important.

S: It's interesting that a lot of people at sanitation don't even really seem to care.

W: Guys don't care. Guys, again, guys on twenty years.

D: Some people have been on forever, they didn't recycle before, so.

W: They're just like, throw it in the truck. They want to finish the route and wash up and get changed and they want to do what they want to do and you're not going to reach them. But maybe some of the new guys will.

[01:49:37]