

Interview with Angelo Bruno and Susan Tedesco-Bruno

April 2, 2011

Draper Program- 14 University Pl.

Emily Haidet: So this is Emily and I'm interviewing Angelo and Susan on Saturday April 2 in the Draper Program. So Angelo, where did you grow up?

Angelo Bruno: I grew up in Brooklyn New York in Bensonhurst, born and raised Brooklyn boy. I graduated high school, Lafayette High School and then after graduating high school I joined the service. I'm a Vietnam veteran, two tours in Vietnam. I signed up for six years and finished in four. And I was glad to come home in one piece. And in my first marriage I have two children, 34 year old, two girls, 34 and 30. And I'm blessed to have 3 grandchildren; two girls and a little boy. And the second part of my life I was blessed to meet Susan. And we're together 14 years. And we were together for a little while and then I asked her for her hand in marriage. And it was a good thing. If it wasn't for her I probably wouldn't be here right now. She's my veins, she's my heart, and she's my lungs and that's how I feel towards her.

EH: Alright, thank you. How did you become interested in working for the Department of Sanitation?

AB: Well when I came back from the service, there was really no jobs in New York. It was very very very slim. They weren't hiring and my old job was with Western Electric that moved out to Arizona. Picked up all the plants in New York and left that was building computer back boards when computers were just coming out. And I got a letter from my mother, got a letter sent home saying that the company was relocating and since I was a veteran they would ask me if I would like to go with them. But just coming back stateside I wasn't about to pack up and go out to another state. So I decided to wait it out. I have two siblings, a brother and a sister, my brother Michael Bruno and sister, Connie. Michael Bruno was on the Department of sanitation before me. At that time, when you came back from service you're looking to something solid, something steady, something with a pension and with insurance, stuff like that. And most of the guys when they came back were thinking about getting married. So they weren't hiring they

weren't doing too much so I did a couple things. I opened up an ice cream business, bought some trucks and did some vending on the street with my brother and then the test was starting to open up a little bit. Guys were starting to retire and they needed more men so I took the test and in '75 but I didn't get hired till 1979. It was a freeze on everything for a while. And um I took quite a bit of tests, I took the fire department, I took corrections, I took police. The fire department I passed everything but there was a six foot wall that if you just leaned off the wall they would see how much of a balance you had and I just leaned a little bit back and the buzzer went off so they disqualified me from that. I think that's where my heart would really have rather been, helping people. So I decided to go with the sanitation and finding out that you can help a lot of people with sanitation too.

EH: Absolutely. So can just generally tell me what it's like to work for the Department of Sanitation?

AB: Well I'm going to tell you the difference when I first went on the job; you really was considered a garbage man. And I took that to offense because I don't think I'm a garbage man. In 1985, '86 they changed the title because the girls were starting to come on the job to sanitation workers and I personally think that's one of the best things that happened, when the females came on the job, because it gave you a different outlook of the job and you know we were always like getting the, if you were in the parade, we were always the last group in the parade but for some reason when the females came on the job, it changed a little bit. It gave us a little bit of a better living environment because now we had to make different rooms and stuff like this. So I was a union delegate shop steward. And one of the reasons why I ran for shop steward was because when I first got there, there was no respect for the new guy that came on the job, meaning that the old timers would say, "hey kid, get outta here," or, "don't touch that," or, "don't touch this." And it bothered me because I wasn't a kid. I had just got married and had 1 little daughter and I served my country so I didn't feel like a kid. To me a kid is someone who's coming out of high school and stuff like this. So I took it as an insult when the guys would call me a kid and I would say, "I'm doing the same job you're doing." "No you don't know what you're doing." I said, "Well I know certain things that I would like to start changing some of these things around," like there was no showers when I first got there. When my daughter was

born I was a little bit scared to touch her when I came home so I would actually have my washing machine full of hot water and I would actually change in the hallway in my house and throw everything into the washing machine and my daughter would put her arms out and there was no knowing what I would touching during the day. So to make a long story short, when I was working in this garage, I saw these showers. A big room with a couple shower heads on and I said wait this is a shower room what happened. And I went to put the water on and the pipes were banging away so one old timer said to me, "get outta there kid. It don't belong to you." "So why don't it belong to me. We're in the same uniform you're wearing." "Get outta here kid." So one thing led to another and I got pretty insulted about that so I said, "wow. I'm going to take a shower tomorrow," so we had a little altercation over it cause they didn't particularly care to see me seeing what's in that room. They kept saving stuff and again the garbage man comes out. I have to say today in 2011 in all these years, you're not a garbage man no more. You're a sanitation worker. And the job went a long way, it changed our life. You know, it's very important to have a steady paycheck when you have a family. It wasn't much but it was a paycheck. And to have babies and kids getting sick and going to a hospital and every bill was paid. I had open heart surgery in 2001, quadruple bypass and 150,000 dollar operation. It cost me 15 dollars from my co pay. So what does that say? And at the Lenox Hill hospital. I was on a lot of committees, negotiating committees and contract committees and I was the young guy on the block and I always worried about getting benefits. Everybody would say, "Shut up Bruno, get the money." But I always looked into getting the benefits because one day I will be the retired person, as I am today. I'm very proud of being a New York Department of Sanitation worker. I was very proud to support the men that had. I went through a lot. We were the last guy at the end of the parade now I can say that we're the first. It's not about garbage it's about recycling, it's about everything. The job went completely 360 circle. I'm proud to say I had a great career. I have lasted 31 years and if it was up to me I'd still be there but you have to know when to walk out the door. I wanted to walk out the door the way I walked in it; not with a crutch, not with a cane. You have to know when it's time to go.

EH: So why did you stick with it so long?

AB: I just loved it. I was in a great area. I only had about 4 partners all my life, in a 31 career. I was blessed to meet some great people on and off the job. And I fell in love with my neighborhood. I call it my playground because every day was an adventure. But to wake up in the morning go down the block and say good morning or have a nice weekend or see Millie that had a sickness and you could see cause she wasn't coming out, then all of the sudden seeing Millie waiting on the doorstep for me with a cup of coffee or glass of lemonade in the summer. That made my day. You know it's not about you running down the block getting the garbage. I was again blessed to only have 4 partners. I used to explain to them that I'm a little bit different. I didn't have to rush to go back to the garage and do whatever they did in the garage. I used to like to stay on the street. And I met a lot of people, a lot of great great people. Sarah Jessica Parker, Matthew Modine, they became friends not just acquaintances. And I was blessed to go through this neighborhood all through my life. And went through a lot of turns, this neighborhood went through a lot a lot of changes. Washington Square Park went through a big big change

EH: Can you talk some more about some of the changes?

AB: Well the changes you saw in these buildings were rundown in the 80s, early 80s; people didn't want to put money into this area for some reason. The meat market, packing district was just factories, it was just meat, fish whatever it was. Now its people alive again you hear laughter in the street cause kids are going to school now. When I first came here there wasn't too many kids. Now there's actually kids playing in Washington Square Park. People are bringing the family value back into the village. And it's very important to have the family value. I made the turns with them we went through a lot of hard times. Even with the Department of Sanitation. Never bought equipment, never had stuff, good stuff. Now the job really changed and I have my local 831 to thank for that. President Harry Rispoli and the executive board, they really really worry about the men and the females on the job. A little story about the females on the job is when they came on the job, they took the job and some of them didn't want to do the work. You took a man's job so you have to do the man's work and it took a little while and I will say I worked better with some females better than I worked with some men. It gave them insurances, it gave them a pension. But when single mothers came on the job just to have the insurance for the

children. And like I say, we make a very good living. We work very hard. It's strictly 100 percent labor so you have to remember that. You're out there in all the weather just like all the cops and the firemen. And it's a great job. I would highly recommend it. Were getting guys on the job now with master's degrees because they actually know where their paycheck comes from every week. A lot of them were unemployed and they changed the job once we got some higher education guys on the job. They managed to look at things a little differently. A lot of guys didn't like people coming behind you because that means your seniority changes but I used to love these new guys. It was fresh breath of fresh air; it was new education. They would pick my brain and I would pick their brain. So it was good.

EH: So Susan, what's it like to be at home and not see Angelo for days?

Susan Tedesco-Bruno: It's pretty tough. I mean weekends you really can't plan cause if you do plan, you don't want to break your plans. Summer wise not very bad. But winter wise...

EH: How do you deal with it? How do you make it work?

STB: It just becomes second nature. You just deal with it. You know, if he would come home 3:00 or 3:30, we would make plans from then on. If he if we wanted to make plans on a Sunday, they have rotation on Sundays every, what is it? Every fourth?

AB: You work Sundays, the rotation Sundays so when it comes up on your time to work, and it's a good day's pay so you go in most of the time on Sundays if it's not snowing you're basically doing little baskets on the street and there's a couple of jobs in the garage, security jobs. So when you get a hire, when you get seniority built up like myself, I was number one, when I first started I was number 196. So I went through 196 men before I became number 1. And number 1 feels good. It's a comfortable zone. And when you're in your comfort zone, nothing could bother you. So most of the time I would take security in the garage. I would make sure the trucks are up and running. You would check the trucks you would, there was some vehicles you had to wash on your shift and security, making your rounds every hour on the hour to make sure no one's tampering with the vehicles outside the perimeter.

EH: So you could choose then what you wanted to do?

AB: Yes, they would come around with a sheet. We used to have 15-16 guys on every shift so again we go by seniority. So maybe this Sunday's in the spring and the fall you like to go work outside. Again I was very blessed to have Eddie [Nieves] right next to me as far as seniority goes so we could've worked together. When I met Eddie, it was hard, my partner, my first partner Kirk Haarklow, we were together 14 years and he hurt his back and doctors were recommending him to retire. And hurt his back so much to the point that they put a computer disk in his back. He walks with a little bit of a cane right now but he's doing ok. And again, I had to look around to see who would work with me. I wasn't in the rush like a lot of guys were. So it was very hard for me to find someone so every time I'd go walk around the garage id say, "wow, who's going to work with me?" So I approached Eddie, I just I explained to him and he knew Kirk was leaving, matter of fact, he used to drive with Kirk coming in together. Eddie lived up in Harriman and Kirk lived in Bloomberg so they would meet on route 17 on the way in. So Kirk mentioned to me, "Why don't you talk to Eddie." And Eddie just came to our garage. Eddie was a mechanical broom operator in Brooklyn for so many years and then he came into Manhattan. So I had hesitation because I didn't know him that well so one day I said listen, every day I had a different guy and it really wasn't working out. It was getting to a point that there was like little arguments because I was not the rushing type of guy. I'll give you a little story. On days when you're short men, since we have a five borough operation, say on the Tuesday we need 90 men to get out the door meaning getting out the garage door and getting all of the trucks on the road to clean up the village so say we only have 75 men working that day. Maybe on a vacation, who's out sick, who's on jury duty, you reach out to other boroughs. And we would ask, "Are you over men?" And that was one of the parts of the jobs that I myself as a shop steward had to make sure those operations was correct. So most of the time you would call other boroughs the day before for the next shift and they say, "Ok I'm over 6." "Ok send me 6 men to Manhattan." And then you would get them. So most of the time I would get a guy from another borough. So out of all the men they used to have on the borough, they used to like the day because it's just a little courtesy thing that you would buy them lunch or buy them breakfast like they would do if you went to their area. And again I was blessed to have a nice route and most of the time the

people would say hey Angelo here's coffee and stuff like this. One gentleman I had from Queens told me, "I know why you don't ever leave." (laughs). A couple of times it happened that me and Eddie were working and it was 4 o'clock. Our shift was over at 2:30. So they knew that at the end of the day we would get in. they knew we were one of the last trucks on the street. "They'll come in sooner or later." (laughs).

EH: So let's see. We talked about the neighborhood a little bit. So is that the only route you worked?

AB: No, I first started off in Delancey and Lewis, that was my first career in 1979. They put me working Delancey Street Bridge. I stayed there for almost 2 years. What happened was they called it echo datter when seniority was broken down. The community board now runs the Department of Sanitation, so they zoned out in different ways. So once they found that this area was getting built up, they knew eventually they'd need more men. Since we were over men where I was, they asked if you wanted to leave to pick up seniority. Over there I was 196, so I had to go someplace that I know I would be picking up men. So I winded up coming to this side of the town. First I was on Canal Street for about 3 years. There's a small garage on Canal West. and they broke that down, they made a single garage and then they sent us again, picking up more men, I wind up going up to 14th street. And that's how I winded up there. And I had only had about 3 different routes since I'm on this job at the Department of Sanitation. And most of the time I just went from one side of the street like when I had MacDougal I stayed there for 8 years on the left side and then when an opening came for the right side, I found that he was a better guy to work with than the guy I had. So when that happened, I would switch over. So I really never left the neighborhood too far.

EH: So yeah can you talk about some of the relationships you had with the residents other than you know, they bring you coffee?

AB: Well, yeah I believe in giving back. Again, I'm a veteran, I had open heart surgery. I look at life maybe a little bit differently than some other guys. I got a chance to come home from the war in one piece. I survived the operation on the table. I survived a marriage. I got a gift from god

when I got Susan. So it was a lot for me to be thankful for. So when I wake up in the morning every morning now, I don't want to complain. I basically say thank you god for giving me another day. And that's how I look at life. So I try to make a bad day a good day. I can't dress it up that there weren't bad days on this job. When I first started even to the end because when the winter comes, you're out there doing this job, it's a very dangerous job. We have the highest accident rates because of the work we do. We work with heavy equipment. We work 24/7. We work around the clock. It's a full operation. And everybody looks at the very beautiful snow coming down and we don't mind working cause that's part of our job. In these last 10 years most of the men were hired because of snow. We had enough of men to do the collection end but we needed men to work the 24 hour shift when the snow comes. So it becomes a big part of your life. And out of those 3 or 4 months that you do work the snow, it's a very tough tough job. Because everyday you're getting up, going do go do something for 12-14 hours a day, white on white, getting tired and sleepy. And tomorrow morning you're doing it all over again. And as my wife could tell you, when you get home after working fourteen hours...

STB: If you get home...

AB: Because a lot of times, guys that live far away couldn't get home. I used to try to make it home, I like sleeping in my bed than my cot or a broken down chair in the garage. You never get your full rest that way. Four hours in your own bed is like nothing like 8 hours in a chair. So I would, I got home in all those years, by hook or by crook I got home. Whatever it took me to get there, whatever I had to do, I got home. The hardest job that I found was after the snow stopped. Everybody would say oh those streets are nice and clean, everybody's walking, now you have to really go to work, real hard because now I have to dig that stuff out of the snow. A lot of guy's legs are hurting them at the end of the day. I used to try to tell guys you know, you got to buy good equipment, you got to buy good boots, you got to get ready for your day. Some guys didn't, some guys did. The city would give us some money for uniforms and some guys would use it for the uniforms and some guys would use it someplace else. I believe in buying good equipment because that's what saved me. You know there was 2 dollar pairs of gloves or 10 dollar pairs of gloves. I would rather buy the 10. Well like the boots, the boots were a couple hundred dollars; some guys when they came on board bought the Kmart boots. Everybody's different.



EH: So tell me about your friendship with Eddie, more in detail, like what would you do out on the truck with Eddie all day?

AB: well first days like anybody else, you know you see the police officers going down the block in his patrol car and he has a partner and he'll be yakin' away, talking about things. The firemen, you see them standing outside or waiting to go to the fire. So we would start our day by saying good morning to each other, how was your night before. You know. He's a character. I was a little bit of a...

STB: Neat freak?

AB: Neat freak. You could call it that. I used to wash my windows every day on my truck. I used to clean the inside of my truck, pledge down the dashboard because if you think about it, there's some days we're in the 12-14 hours so I was, maybe I was a little too much. They would dump my truck at night because me and Eddie were out late so we wouldn't dump the truck. So I expected to find the truck the way I left it. I used to buy a roll of paper towels and a bottle of Windex, it was no big deal. A lot of times the guys would use it at night and throw their little half of sandwiches in the back of the storage bin where I'd keep my bag and my radio. So maybe I was a little bit pushy. I would go find out, because we had a carding book, in the carding book, you would know what the truck would do for the whole day; you would know who drove it. So most of the time when I went upstairs and I saw the guy changing his clothes, I would hand him his sandwich back. I would say it calm but most of the time in the morning, I'm not saying it calm. "Did you find it that way?" "No but Angelo." "It's no but Angelo; you have to walk to the back of the truck to go to work right, so take your sandwich and your coffee cup with you." Sometimes I would see guys throw a coffee cup out of the truck while the truck was driving. Why would you do that? What are you showing people? First place you have a big truck with a big open whole that you could put the cup in. Eddie was ok with it. Eddie would tell everybody "he cleans it, he cleans it". You know, he's a great guy. I think I've lasted longer because it was him. We became friends. And we'll be friends for the rest of my life. He has a wife Mary with two children. He's very blessed to have what he has. His wife always tells me, "It was cause of

you he talks now.” Because he never used to talk (laughs). So I rubbed a little bit off on him and it was a good thing. I found it very hard to tell him that I was leaving. Really it took me a long time to find the right words. But I think he surmised that I was getting ready to go because I took a week in January off. Nobody takes January because of the snow and stuff. I wanted to try a different venture. Working in the corporate world now. Susan’s girlfriend is the Global HR Director of this restructuring company. My wife will tell you a little story about that. I was a fish out of water. I tried something I didn't think I could do.

EH: How was that transition?

STB: Very difficult. It’s like sending your kid off to school and they really don't want to go. But he stuck it out. He’s doing well. He was offered this job twice and we figured you know how many times you get lucky like that at our age to have something.

EH: What is the position then?

AB: I’m a facility coordinator for Alvarez and Marsal, a restructuring company. They're global all over the world and I’m running a couple buildings for them, making sure the corporate end and the conference rooms are ready in the morning to go, bringing supplies, going to the bank, they bonded me going to the bank.. It’s interesting.

STB: It's a lot of stuff, he does.

AB: Every day is a different adventure. We’re in the process of buying a building in midtown right now. So that'll be one of my jobs to get it cleaned up and running. It’s different.

STB: It's very different. He still loves Sanitation. Every time he sees a truck... When we had all the snow, this year, he would run to the window to see the truck. I’ve never known someone who loved their job so much. And if he could, he would go back in a heartbeat. But things change, people change. The job isn't the same with all the faces he used to love. So it's very different now. And the young people on the job don't look at it like the old timers did. It's a very different

feel. I'm sure they have a lot of comradery but all the stories that Angelo used to come home and tell me, I know everyone of the characters. I've met every one of the characters. You know, it's not like I was on the sideline. I met every one. Great guys.

EH: Now do you hang out with their wives, is it like a big community?

STB: Well you know, I mean, we're very busy. Everybody has their busy lives, children, grandchildren and whatever other affairs you have to go to but we try to always make time to get to see them.

AB: Most of them are retirement parties or we just make sure once a couple of months we'll get together for dinner. Some are retirees, some active guys, so it's good to keep the door open. They're friends for life. Everybody talks about the cops having a bond and the firemen are bonded. I have brothers everyday and sisters on the job every day. I did a film one time on NBC and they said, "Wow you actually call him your brother." Well, "I'm standing next to the gentleman I'm working 14 hours with today, is that my brother?"

STB: I'm not saying every one, every partner loves each other, he just has been very fortunate to have had good partners. Which it is not easy to work with someone all those hours and days. And not have a good relationship.

AB: But I think that we started and I started with all my guys, don't ever hold anything in. You don't like what I'm doing, you have to let me know cause I can't read your mind and we'll talk about it. There was plenty discussions and believe it or not it was maybe stupid things, like why are we doing the route this way or how come we ended up here or something. I'm a little bit old fashioned, and I look at all the people, they got that far. So for me to go carry something in for someone or take someone's air conditioner out of a window... We used to have this lady Millie on Greenwich Avenue, once a year I would put it in in the beginning of the season and take it out and it's no big deal. Fifteen minutes and I was up and in and out. But I know it made her life a little bit easier. She would say, "I know Angelo's going to come today." And she'd make a little cake or something for me to take home. Or just help someone with a baby carriage. What effort

did it take me to do that? Sarah Jessica Parker would come down with James so I would wait for her to come out and I would help her, two seconds if I was there. I didn't run over there, if she was coming down and Matthew Broderick wasn't home, the husband or whatever. Same thing with Matthew Modine. We just made friends. They're good people.

STB: He's very special to him, Matthew Modine.

AB: Well Matthew was there a lot of good times and bad times that I was going through. He was just a special person. Carrie his wife... Can't say any more about them. When I was in the hospital they came to visit me, they would say, "Angelo I got no time to be here, we got to get out of here." So it was cute things. I met great professors over the years and just regular people too. It's just a little "good morning" or "have a nice weekend." It was Amy's birthday so I'd bring a little gift for her. What's the big deal? I bought little trinkets maybe a little gap card and now she's in college. No one had a career like I had. I never got tired of the job, thank God. Again I had a partner that we stopped when we wanted; you know we didn't do everything by the book and they knew that, the big bosses knew it. They would pass me up and say, Angelo and Eddie, you know leave them alone. You know, same thing in the snow, I used to be on the salts or the plow and they wouldn't give me a route cause they knew I was going to the people on dialysis first to make sure the ambulance could get in. I would go to people's houses and go to synagogues on Saturday to make sure people could go pray and worship. Sundays I would go to my church and same thing with that, I'm a religious man, I believe in God. And wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for him. And having her (gestures to Susan). And I'll give you a little story, the snow was coming down heavy, this was maybe in the 1990s, and I'm doing St. Anthony's Church on Carmine Street so I'm doing the sidewalks and making sure the salt's all over. It was like 8 o'clock in the morning, so I thought I better go to mass now because after 14 hours, I won't be able to get to mass. We always go to church every Sunday. So I said you know, babe, I think you should go to church because I'm going to go here. So I parked my truck and the snow's coming down. I go in the church and stood the half hour. I walk out. While I walk out there's 3 official cars all around my truck. I see about 4-5 bosses, you know suits on and stuff standing out there. One guys whispering to the other guy. He says, "how ya doing." I said, "Okay." Some of these bosses I didn't know. He says, "What's going on?" I said, "What's going on?" He says,

“You’ve been in church a half hour.” I said, “Yeah at least a half hour.” He says, “You’re supposed to be working,” I said, “Yeah but I couldn’t get to church tonight because I’m not getting home until 7 o’clock,” and in Brooklyn the last mass is at 530 at that time. “So what does that mean?” I said, “What do you think it means, I went to church.” One boss says, “I’m going to write you up for that.” “You can write me up; you can do anything you want.” So one of the bosses standing next to him says, “I told you, this is Angelo Bruno, he went to church.” A lot of good things. You know, maybe I pushed the button a couple of times.

EH: Would the young guys be able to get away with that?

AB: Probably not. But I finished my route...

STB: And it was a snowstorm

AB: Every day. There’s the difference. If it took me 6 hours or took me 8 hours, and it was some days it took me 10 hours, but they knew at the end of the day that that street was clean. You know, when I first came on this job, Gordy Flow was an old timer, he was two careers, he was a coast guard, he was petty officer in the coast guard for 20 years and then he came on the Sanitation. He was from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, a good old boy. Big guy. And he tells me his partner was out sick. So now you don’t have to stay when you first come by, you don’t have a steady gig. Takes you a while to come around. Guys retire, so what they would do if you saw a fill in, then say Anthony was on vacation. So most of the time the senior guys would pick a young guy. And for courtesy they’d let you stay the whole week with the guy or two weeks, however how long, it depends. So Gordy picked me, he said, “You know kid, I know you’re a good worker, I watched you a couple times. Come with me for 2 weeks.” I said, Okay sir, no problem.” “Why you calling me sir?” “That’s what you are.” So went on the route and matter fact where we’re sitting right now was one of the streets he had, he had 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> from 6<sup>th</sup> to Broadway, 3 days a week. So now he’s a character. Real farm boy and he made himself a leather vest so we wouldn’t get the garbage on him; very clean man. So walking down the block and he saw the way I was working. You know, if I saw something in the street I would pick it up. So one day he says to me, he says, “At the end of the block we’re going to stop the truck and I

got to tell you something.” I say, “Okay.” Now we’re going down say 10th Street and there’s garbage all over. There’s only about a couple of inches to walk because there was so much garbage. In that time, years ago, we took everything on one truck, not like today. So we get to the end of the block, he shuts the truck off. He says, “Turn around.” So I turned around. He said, “Okay. What do you see?” I said, “What do I see?” “What do you see?” “I see trees; I see babies and carriages.” “What did you see when we first got here? Did we see the trees? Did we see the sidewalks this clean? Look at the job we just did.” And he’s right because now baby carriages could go on that sidewalk. Now maybe a handicapped person coming down doesn’t have to worry about something in their way. And I took that and put it into my heart and I remembered that for a long long time. I used those words a lot of times with some guys. As a matter of fact, just last week, this kid Dennis, 32 years on the job and he was working nights of where I’m up on 52nd and Lex and I’m walking down from Madison and I see a sanitation worker picking up garbage and it was Dennis. And he actually said, “Hey Angelo, remember the day you told me this?” He said, “I just told a guy this story.” So it’s a good thing you know, I can’t express it. It’s just a good feeling when you’re giving back. You know you have to pay forward. And in my heart I like to pay forward everyday if I can.

EH: so Susan, if there’s a couple things you would want people to know about living and being with Angelo on the job, and even after the job, what would those few things be?

STB: you have to be understanding. I mean, even though deep down inside you’re a little upset that you can’t go and visit your best friend who you haven’t seen in, let’s say, a year up in New Rochelle, and twice already you made the appointment and twice you had to cancel and the woman cooked. So you know, people say when we make plans, we’re going out. You know so it’s like you feel bad. So it’s basically we started making plans just, “Listen, I’ll call you that day,” or it’ll have to be spur of the moment, but you can’t make plans. If it’s like a normal day that there’s no snow and he comes home, things would have to be after. After the hours, not like being able to go in the morning. So. It’s hard, yeah; I’m not going to say it’s easy. Getting to see the kids would be. You can’t commit until you’re up that morning and the phone is not ringing at 6 o’clock that you have to come in that so and so didn’t show up. Because you know then they get

disappointed. So everything depends on whether he's going to get that phone call or not. It's hard.

EH: But you guys seem to have, you know make it work.

STB: You know, you just deal with it.

AB: You have to make it work.

STB: But then again, I'm a person that doesn't mind, you know, I can occupy myself. You know, keep myself busy, do whatever I have to do. But you know, when you have a large family, and you need that person's help, it's difficult. This is it. That's how it is, and that's it.

AB: You really have to put it into your head that this is how it is from the beginning of January and hopefully by April, but we had a little snow yesterday, you never now. But that's the job. You have to open up the streets; you got to get it ready and Manhattan is the glory pot. The melting pot has to be done first because that's all your colleges, all your schools, it's important that you can get to school on Monday morning. If it happens over the weekend, you got to come in and do your job. That's what you're getting paid for. You took a job. I'll give you a little story, I had a very young guy from Queens one day with me one day and most of the time they wouldn't drive the truck because they don't really know where they're going. so if you're driving the truck, and I was blessed that I learned how to learn the dual wheels on both sides so I would try to drive the sidewalk side, that's why they put these dual wheels in, for most of the outer boroughs, not for Manhattan. So I got it to the point that I knew how to guide myself. So now I'm watching him through the window and say we're going down Charles Street. And I see him kicking the wood back, I see him kicking the metal can or whatever. And I'm looking; I say, "What's this guy doing? I don't know this guy." So he said, "Okay bring it up, pull it up pull it up!" So now Millie's the Super of 7th and Charles St. and Millie, Millie is a character, husband was Jose, and when he passed on, she kept the place because she really didn't have that much money so the rental apartment comes with the job. And she had two older sons that lived in Queens and they would help put the garbage out and the recycling and stuff like this to keep their

mother in the place that she was. We made a little bit of a bond with her. So Eddie was with me that day, had this younger gentleman with me. And she's on the second floor. I see the window open, "Angelo! Angelo!" So I get out of the truck. I said, "What's the matter." "What's this crazy kid doing?" she said. Now I'm looking at her and the gentleman right, he says, "No I don't pick up this, it wasn't tied up or the wood wasn't stacked the right way." I said, "Don't worry about it Millie, I'll get it, don't worry about it." "No, he's making a mess!" "Millie, don't worry about it, we'll get it." So now I look at the kid, I say, I could call him a kid because I was definitely a couple years older than him. And I say to him, what I am going to tell this guy. I said, "What's going on?" "No, where I come from, we don't pick up the wood like that, it's got to be tied up you know. That's metal," he said, "But it's mixed, it's got some broken." I said, "You know I think you're right. And maybe I'm wrong. You know who's going to pick this up?" I said, "Do you know the guy with the big red truck with the lights on top that bubbles and the guys standing? They're going to come right after us and pull over here and throw it into their trucks." The kid says, "What are you crazy? That is the fire department." I said, "Oh geeze I'm sorry. You're right. The car with the light on top with the blue and white car?" "What are you crazy? That's the police department." I said, "Well that's your job to pick this up right? If we're left and the only thing that's left is the sanitation." "Ah you guys, you treat people too good." I said, "I treat people too good!" He says, "Yeah. So leave it there what's the big deal." "But that's your job! Same thing when it snows, you got to be at work. Then we have to shovel snow." But did I like to go across the block? Thank God I didn't have to do it that many times, but that's the way it is. You knew the job when you took it and this is the best job. You could quit anytime you want. I used to tell the guys, "Are you going to stay on this job for 20 years and be aggravated the way you are? I feel bad for you because you're not going to get the glory out of this job as much as I love it. You're going to stay 20 years at something you don't like? My friend, quit the job. There's so much else you could do out there. I'll even help you; I'll help you get the papers filled out." They used to laugh, "You're crazy! You got papers in your bag. You are actually telling me to quit." "Yeah, cause you don't have the heart. You got to have the heart for it. You're not a garbage man, you're a sanitation worker. Remember when I'm telling you that. And be proud of it. And wear the button when you can wear the button." I'm going to have health insurance for the rest of my life. I just retired in June, June 2nd. How many guys can say that me and my wife will be covered for the rest of my life with health insurance? And getting a pension. A lot of



people out of work. A lot of people don't have what I have and again, I'm going back to this new executive board, because years ago it was different. And I have to thank the crew that was there that really turned this job around. It made me be a part of it, like say being on contract and negotiating committees and stuff. I used to fight for benefits. And they said, "Look, Angelo. Forget about the benefits, get the money." "Forget about it, we're all going to be retired one day, you'll want the benefit. Don't give me the 5 dollars; give me an extra 3 days of health care if I'm in the hospital." Listen when I'm telling you, open heart surgery at Lenox hill. I paid 15 dollars.

EH: That's so great. So okay, I think we kind of covered everything I had. Otherwise, is there anything else, any anything you would want people to know about the profession, like 3 things that you think everyone should know about sanitation workers?

AB: The first thing I would like to say, I think people should respect them more. It's not the garbage truck coming down the block, it's Angelo and Eddie coming down the block. Just like you have a career, I have a career. Respect them. You know what the best part of the day is? When someone actually says, good morning, because it's a good morning. Two words. And it means so much. Have a nice weekend. What are you doing on the weekend? Little talk. Talk to your sanitation workers. They won't bite you. They're great guys. And respect them. And I mean it, just don't thank me after the snowstorm, thank me in June when it 115 degrees and I'm out there sweating. It's a tough job. It's not made for everybody. I don't expect guys to take it. There's a lot of guys who quit and rightfully so. It's just not for them. You know, I believe in taking a shower every day, coming home. What's inside the truck, I don't have to be a part of, and believe me I went through the years ago we had nothing. We made our own garages, we did everything. And the job, and I have to thank the girls for coming on the job. It changed a lot of it. It helped the sanitation. The one gal who was number one girl she just retired, I went to her retirement party last week, a couple weeks ago. Just a great lady, you know, we're blessed, and this union turned a lot of things around. It gave us a good living. A very good living.

EH: So what year was it that you got involved with the union?

AB: I got involved right away because I made the shy guy, got voted in, cause it wasn't too many older guys, not too many young guys came in they were really fighting me. The old timers would be very mad at me, you know, and I ran, and "What are you running for?" stuff like that. I'd find my tire in my car; the air would be out or something like that. But they understood I did it because I wanted to make a better life for everybody. I wanted a clean environment to go back at the end of the day. To take a shower and go home like a gentleman. And I met some great people. I consider them my friends. I met a lot of good people; I met a lot of bad people. But you know, everybody has something good in them and everybody has something bad in them you just have to find the good part in the person.

EH: Well I think that's all I have. Do you have anything else?

STB: Just that it did give him a very good living. You know, food on the table. Nice environment to live in.

EH: And you love the job.

STB: He loves it. He still does like I told you.

AB: I think, it took a lot of conversations at night.

STB: I had to learn to adapt. You just learn to adapt. It's hard in the beginning. But then it's just a normal way of living. It's just normal, you know for us. Not for someone else, but for us, it's just a normal way of living. And we worked everything around it. I'm not saying it's easy, but we just had to do what we had to do.

AB: And a lot of guys didn't have what I had with her, because guys, "Oh, you're working again." But then 2 weeks later when you get your pay check, it was a big difference, guys don't understand that there was...

STB: Where do you get overtime in regular normal life? You're lucky if you have a job.

AB: So I used to tell the guys, just tell your wife, you know, the crocus will be coming up very soon, just bear with us. You know, the flowers are right around the corner and then you're almost good to have a steady life. As soon as the weather would break, we would make plans then because I really wouldn't be going in. They have an emergency list that I was on but again that's extra pay. You know I mean, I came in and go to work.

STB: But again, that emergency list does affect plans.

AB: Because if someone doesn't come in and you're the next one on the emergency, you got to go fill that spot, or get thrown off the list then you don't get that list again for the next year. So it did make the extra money. It's extra pay, yes. Again, we have to thank the local 831 for that because they did a great job, laying out the job. And again, sitting on those committees, negotiating committees, contract committees, it opened up your eyes to a lot of things. And of course, I'd come back if they were meeting and bring it to the membership at my garage, an average of 100 guys, 120, I would stand in front of them and explain to them.

EH: So what was that like, mediating?

AB: Well you had a lot of people. When I first took it I took it for good reason. I took it because I wanted to make a better environment for not only myself but for other men coming on the job. And we changed it. When you put back into it and the union seeing you put back, they would back you on it. And a couple times it came back, we didn't have water fountains, and it's 100 degrees outside and coming in, you think, I'm going to bend my neck to get water out of a faucet? This is ridiculous. This is 1980 or 1990. We don't have to live like that. I fought for a water cooler, I called the one guy one day, he was the commissioner, engineering department, and I just explained to him, I said, "Sir, I just got to explain one thing to you, where you're sitting now, I don't know where you're sitting, but I guarantee you where you're sitting right now, you have 2 nice glasses and a thermos and I bet there's cold water. I just did 10 tons of garbage or 12 tons of garbage and I'm coming to look for water. I want water. I'm not asking for a lot." "Okay kid." Again we go back to the kid. But that's okay. I guess I call people kid now. But a lot of

arguments, had a lot of fights, I had some job actions that I do had to take, only with the backing of the union, I would never sanction anything on my own because I didn't have that kind of power. And the union would maybe say, "Bruno said we're going to do it, we're going to do it." Because I would talk to the bosses first. Give them a little time to get things done. "I went to you two months ago, and I shouldn't be asking for water in 2 months? I'm asking you for water." And now there's a law now, after a certain degree, they have to issue us water in the morning before we get on the truck. Again, we go back to trying to get things better. And it did get better. We have air conditioners in the truck now, just to give you a little coolness. First they said they did it because the engines would heat up. But then thank God they did it for us too, because now we're interstate. You're not dumping garbage in New York. We drive to [New] Jersey, all the way up to Pennsylvania, Delaware, so you don't know where this garbage is going. The job really changed for the better. And I don't care what anybody tells me, it's definitely for the better. The taxes are higher now because of this but things will work out. There's something we can do about that.

EH: But the city is clean you know?

AB: It's clean. You can actually go walk outside, go walking. It's a great thing. You know and I tell this a thousand times. Protect your job. Fight for your job. You know, not every day is all good news in the paper about the Sanitation.

STB: There are a few bad apples in the bunch.

AB: Right. But that's ok. You need that little mixture once in a while. The only thing I try to explain to them, when you're making mistakes, you say you don't want to come in today, let's use that, there's two men for each truck, you got 30 routes cut out, you need 60 men. When you say you're not coming in, you're not only affecting you, and you're affecting the other guy that's waiting for you to go to work. So now he can't go to work. So there's a lot that happens when they don't come to work. "Angelo, I went out last night and we have a CVO Commercial drive by us when we get some random drug testing, and I tell them that. "You're driving a dangerous piece of equipment." A lot of times I tell guys, "You're not working today." "What are you

talking about?" With the smell of alcohol on their breath or whatever it is. "You crazy Angelo? Are you nuts?" "Listen to me; I wouldn't want that on my conscious that you hurt somebody on that street." And some guys on the truck I said, "Listen you're not touching the wheel no more, I'll drive all day. Don't touch the wheel." So again, I made some friends and I made some enemies, but I think I did more good than bad. And there are some guys today who will come over and say if it wasn't for you I wouldn't still be on this job. Like have a 401 or 457 that you can enroll in for saving money. I used to bring applications and give it to them. Until this day, some guys say, "Hey Angelo, I never thought I'd have this kind of money if it wasn't for you." So little things. You know, it didn't take much to help people again, helping is easy. I really strongly believe in respecting each other. But the wives do have a big part of this job and a lot of guys don't like to admit it. It is nice that she sat home and then coming home after working 14 hours, you really not going to start, you're looking to go to bed, because you know the next day we're starting all over again. The most I ever worked was 96 days straight in 1996. That was the snowstorm of 1996.

EH: Yeah any insight about...

AB: Well this year was pretty tough for these guys. These guys worked very hard. Unfortunately I wasn't there. And they worked hard. You know, it's the same boredom routine and then when you get some bad stories, and I'm not saying the guy sitting in Dunkin Donuts, but it's different. Like you read in the front page of the Daily News, these guys were inside. They were but people don't know what happened, maybe the truck wasn't running. There was a lot of things that could come into play with this before people say, "Oh they're not doing nothing." You know, it was a bad call this year, politically. Nobody wanted to push the button because Mr. Bloomberg wasn't in town so the Deputy maybe didn't want to take the chance, cause once you push the button, its a couple million dollars to get us in. You can't start fighting snow while it's snowing. It takes every garage a couple hours to get manned out and ready to go. It takes time to put chains on the truck; it takes time to put the plow on, time to get the plow on maybe there's a defect; you have to change the plow. Change the shoes on the snowblade. So there's a lot involved with it that regular people don't know what happened in that garage before we get on the street. You know unfortunately you have to plow in to open up the street. And yes you're going to get upset, there

are a lot of times I would go around the block to help get the guy out once he starts going. You know, you live in New York City; you're not living up in Ohio. You know, it's different. We have no place to blow it. You go upstate New York, their roads are nice and of course you're blowing it into the woods. Where are we going to put it? Years ago we used to dump it in the sewer plate. We used to bring the plows, push it and go down in the sewer. But then what happened, the EPA got involved because we were killing the fish in the ocean because it was going into the sewer out to the ocean and everything in New Jersey. All our garbage was going over there so we'd get fined over there so it was a lot different. Now what they do is they actually have melting machines, they take an engine from an airplane; turn it upside down, turbo. They mostly do it in the financial areas, Wall Street, anything around City Hall, or Broadway, and you would box it and then you would get front end loaders that would pick up the snow, bring it to a designated location, put into the chute, they would melt it down, and melt it away, or actually put it into a very big, we call it cut down truck, dump truck, and haul it to empty lots and it would sit there and melt. It's a different job.

EH: There's so much. You know, I was telling my friends that I was interviewing you, and they say, "You know, I've never thought about all the work that goes into that." And I think that's what's so great about doing this. Everyone's stories are being told.

STB: Do you have any other questions? I mean I'm sure Angelo could you know fill you in on all the details.

EH: Well maybe if I come up with something else I can call you?

AB: Of course. Absolutely.

EH: We could meet for lunch. Well thank you so much.