

## INTERVIEW WITH ANDRÉ RAMOS

### Interview details

**Narrator:** André Ramos

**Interviewer:** Giovanni Castro

**Date:** March 28, 2011.

**Place:** Manhattan Seven Sanitation Garage

**André starting date at DSNY:** August 28, 1995.

**Giovanni:** Well, today is march 28, we are at Manhattan Seven Garage in New York City, we are going to interview André Ramos, my name is Giovanni Castro, and lets begin. Thank you very much André for giving us your time for remembrance, to recall your memories from your work and your family, and as I told you I'm interested in life histories. Well, could you begin to tell me about your family, where did they come from?

**André:** Right, thank you very much. My family emigrated from the island of Puerto Rico in the earliest to late fifties, my father, who is deceased, is Luciano Ramos and my mother, who is still living, is Ana Luisa Santiago Ramos. They migrated to give me a better live. Like I said in the early and late fifties. I have two other brothers, one is Felix and one is Edmond. Edmond is a doorman, Felix is right now unemployed due to a health issue with asthma. I was married fourteen years, and then I divorced.

**G:** Tell me, did they keep a close relationship with the extended family when you grew up? You know, you were close to cousins, to aunts, to...

A: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. Back then I was growing up in the Lower East Side of Manhattan in New York City, it was a lot of family around, and we were very close, we were close with the families of my cousins, which was one male who went to Vietnam and two female cousins, one who became a nurse late one and another one who likes to fly around, she works with the airline industry as a ticket agent. But we were very close, and it was a close community. We also used to have a lot of friends; we were very close and very protective with each other at that time. But I grew up in a multicultural environment, not just strictly Hispanic, it was a cultural environment which involves polish, Irish, Italian, Puerto Ricans, some Dominicans, and Jewish. That was my melting pot and the experience that I had as I was growing up in the Lower East Side, which I think prepared me for the future, because you see, I understood, because they were my neighbors, I understood the Irish, I understood the Italian, I understood the Polish, the Jewish, I understood them because they were working families too and we lived in the same building and shared the same hopes, dreams, problems, living in those conditions that we lived in the old tenements. Well, some times we didn't have heat, the bath was in the kitchen. So we went through a lot, but that prepared me to be a better person for the future.

**0:04:10.3**

G: So, there were many other relatives living on the same neighborhood too or...

A: Yes, we would live in the same neighborhood if you want to call that. Usually the most distant was like ten blocks away, but ah... those relatives late on and all the

relatives I guess they had the New York experience and decided to go back home to the island to live their final days. But we were close, yes.

**0:04:40.8**

G: How was the home where you did grow up?

A: How was home?

**0:04:55.0**

G: How was home yeah...

A: Oh, actually it was... it was tough, because my mother was very strict, you know we had curfew, and that curfew we had to follow it, if I was five minutes late my mother wouldn't stand for reasoning shows. That the lights in the apartment were off and we were going in it, she could be ready with a broomstick or daunt, because we were late five minutes back then. My dad was more, he was religious, he was a devoted catholic and ah... he was strict, when we would... He and my mother were separated but we were only blocks away, then we would stay over the weekends in his house because we weren't at school, and while we were there my dad really was to want to truly infuse to believe in God and explained to us how important part that it is in his life and he wanted to make it part of our lives as well, believe in a high creator. But he was strict, my mother laid on when ah... to the street as far as no prosier tooling, but she became an alcoholic. And I saw that side of her when she drank she was a totally different personality, she would fight with anybody, (with knives?) it doesn't matter.

But one thing I remember, while hard problems ah... she always took care of us, she always kept a roof for our head, she always made sure that we went to bed ah, having a full, you know, our stomach full, she made sure we had clean clothes, clean lining, and ah... she was very much protective of us, but ah... that was my mother, she was tough, she was strict, she instilled in us, you know when you are right you stand up for your right and when you wouldn't you say you're wrong. When you disrespect somebody you are going to hear from me, we are going to take it to that person, you are going to say sorry. Because back then was a different era, back then even a stranger would come up to you and you would respect him. You know you don't go around disrespecting anybody. My mother was big on one thing, we would go visit as young (tail of hers), she would visit our friends, she would sit us on a place, could be a chair, could be a loveseat, sofa, we would stay there, we wouldn't move to go around other people's apartment, start touching things, you see there are kids that like to touch things all over the place. We were trained just to sit down. People loved the (----) brothers over because (---) she said us of you stay here, you stay here, don't move, you don't move, because we knew if we did, we're going to have to face a raft later. My mother was like that, she would instill, she instilled in us ah... morals, good morals, even (---) she was imperfect, but, you know, then she was fighting with a (demon?), but, she had instill us morals, that late on became part of us and we can share with a family, with my daughter, that what she did I shouldn't do. Late on I understood that, you know, I can be a better person. She made mistake, I shouldn't make the same mistake. She came over to give me a better life, a life (---) I would have over somewhere else. You know it is the land of opportunity, if we ever

do make it here I don't know where we would make it, you know as far as education, as far as (good ways) this is it, so you know she gave me that opportunity and late on in life I returned the favor by being there for her, provide for her as much as I'm able to.

**0:09:13.8**

G: Was she different with your sister than with you?

A: I never had a sister

**0:09:24.7**

G: ah... yeah, you told me that... having a...

A: No, I had cousins, cousins.

**0:09:26.1**

G: Sorry, I misunderstood you, OK, but you had siblings, right?

A: I had two brothers, I'm the youngest, and there are three brothers all together. I'm the youngest of the three, I have an older one who is a doorman, and I have a middle brother, and then is me.

**0:09:46.3**

G: ah, so... she treated you guys the same or she was different with the older one, or with you or with the middle one?

A: Right, right, well, the oldest had the biggest responsibility because being the oldest he is got to look out for his other brothers, right? So really he is more on a high seat than the middle and than me, because he had to provide guidance, see, if I see him doing something right I guess I would follow, but if I see him doing something wrong I guess I'll say to myself is OK, see. But as far as my middle brother, he... would get away with a little bit more, but me, I would get away with everything because I was the smallest, and I knew that, I knew that so I would take advantage of that, see. So my mother would let me get away with... but she loved us equally, but I guess when me, being that I was the last of the batch, before she closed the bakery and stop (laughs) giving birth, I got away with a lot more.

**0:11:02.6**

G: Can you remember what was your favorite food, what special dates you, did you celebrate, how was it?

A: Yeah, my favorite food, I loved the *chuleta*<sup>1</sup>, (laughs) the *chuleta*, I was so (---) of the *chuleta*, and, the rice and beans, but complemented with the *chuleta*, I eat the whole thing, no *chuleta* I would have to beat on the protest. Yeah, that was my favorite food, ah... the *chuleta*. Ah... the holidays were special because being poor, poor, ah... you know, my mother, she worked in Broadway Lafayette as a tailor, she would tailor dresses at that time in a factory, and she only was given paid like twenty seven dollars a week at that time. With that she had to pay rent, with that she had to pay host sister for providing childcare for us, because we're still too

---

<sup>1</sup> Breaded and fried pork cutlets.

young to go school. And even when we would... when we got a little older to go to school, somebody needed to be at the pick us and provide shelter until my mother got back home. Ah... the holidays, as I said it was a poor family, we wouldn't eat (---) of full things (---). I didn't have my first TV in my mother's house till like, late in the seventies. Ah... but the holidays (---) because, even that we were poor, somehow, someway everybody managed to their little, their money together, and scabbled some kind of gift, for each and one, each and everyone of us, and... you know Christmas, Christmas was special, I like Christmas, cause of the gifts, the toys, ah loved toys, I mean, I don't know who doesn't... ah... Thanksgiving was special because then, you know, you get together with the family as well and you get to see family you wouldn't see on a regular, you know that they come when it's full in festivity, sometimes I don't know (interviewer's cough, sound unclear) talking about, but ah... it was special. Well, those always were my two holidays that I remember, that I really enjoyed was Christmas and thanksgiving. For some reason they fell back to back late in the year... the Halloween, to me wasn't a holiday, it was just sound to be, you know be full of mischief, I just clowned around and dressed up as your favorite super hero, you know I begged for money, cause the way it is, is called trick or treat, you would act, you would trick the person to giving you money, or you would trick the person by doing some kind of magic of some of sort in order... that is why it's called trick or treat, you know, anyway, you go to strangers say trick or treat as like, a sign to, to give me money, you know what I'm saying, and people would give you money for some reason. But it never acts you, trick or treat, what's the trick that you're going to do for me, like a magician or something, you know, or

what's the trick, you know what I'm saying, so, they never act stuff for some reason and to this day no one ever explained to me so I guess I came on my own conclusion of that trick or treat, but it was sweet it was my childhood and my childhood is something that I hold dear to me, because is like we... we started the interview, what do I remember, you know, and that was because my family, who are not around anymore, deceased, and a lot of my friends were around then, and I had a sense of security, a sense of belonging, the neighborhood, everybody knew everybody, I mean, you lived in a tenement. I had maybe eight apartments on five floor but ye everybody knew everybody, now you live in a building, you can live in a building ten, fifteen, twenty years and you still don't know everybody in that building and is a shame, because that was before cable, see, that was before all this internet stuff, because everybody wouldn't stay at the house, everybody would be out on the streets, so you get to know everybody, everybody get to know you, and you knew who was from the neighborhood, you knew who was a neighbor, and when a stranger enter the neighborhood everybody knew, and they already knew the guys, persons' reputation, if we had good intentions or bad intentions, we had bad intentions, (in the last moment) in our neighborhood cause we would chase some out. But it was a sense of community, of security, you know, some things that we need, and also what I notice, it was deeply religious, the community that I came from, why? because the worst kid in school, I'm talking about the kid that cursed, the kid that always was fighting, the worst kid in school on Sunday you see him in the church, yeah, you, wouldn't believe it, but, you know, it seems that we lost that, we lost that sense of community, you know, it is so much important to have it, you



know, it's gone, you know these kids, they wouldn't never know that, that even a stranger on the street, how knows you as part of that community, they would be there for you, they would give you a ride home, they would look out for you, you see, even provide shelter for you, even provide a first aid if you got a cut, today you don't see that. If they see you on the floor, something happened to you God forbid get hit by a car, you see like a dozen out who come from nowhere, today get hit by a car nobody wants to stop, nobody wants to help, maybe one... people wouldn't get involved.

**0:16:56.0**

G: And about that, the school and your schoolmates, how was that? can you remember your school time?

A: Oh again, this school that I went to and my school mates were my friends from the neighborhood, yeah, so it was like no difference, I knew them all and they all knew me. But ah... it was cool, it was cool, at the same time, other times you had to fight, you see, it's a difference, then you fought with these two things (rising his fists) and it didn't matter, whether you won or lost, it wasn't such a thing, it was called respect. You lift these up, and you fight to see another day. Your reputation was carried over the fact that you stood up, even to a big guy, and they'll say, that guy there is not a punk, he stands up for himself, meaning he is not a coward, you know, you would get a reputation... even when you got beaten, you get up and you keep going, and if you couldn't do it with these, you grab a stick of (---), you just do the best you can, and that alone was enough to carry your name, because then you

had to, sometimes you don't want to, you don't go to school to fight, but you get picked on, and in such as things as bullies, and you got to be ready. The main thing is that you stood up, and that day it was worth its wait is gone. But it was no difference; I went to school with the same kids I was growing up with.

**0:18:24.5**

G: And have you been in touch with some of them or...?

A: Absolutely not because through the years they moved out, they went to jail, they fell into ah, drugs, they overdosed... they died, so no, very little, very little from the area, I walk down that neighborhood today, I felt that I'm a stranger, I feel like I'm the person that came from another neighborhood. Nothing there is recognizable as far as people go, as far as my friends gone. The building is still there, but that's it, is like I'm the outsider, so every time I walk to my old neighborhood the Lower East Side, I'm looking around, oh I remember this, I remember I used to be up on the roof, flying pigeons, ah I remember the dogs, they used to be with us, animals, the dogs we had as part of the gang, you know, that would walk with us and run with us, and all kinds of mischief. I remember that person, I remember the person that used to have a furniture stood here, and he used to put out some times trees, Christmas trees, and we used to play on the Christmas trees, underneath, and he used to come with a broom sticking under it, cause he knew we were under there, playing door mischief, just looking for fun, you see?

**0:19:49.3**

G: And have you ever been working there as a sanitation worker, on that district... the Lower East Side?

A: Oh yeah, I have, sure I have. In my career here I worked, I worked almost pretty much all over the place as far as all the boroughs go, yeah, I've been, yeah, and it was one of the districts I went to work, sure.

**0:20:11.5**

G: And what are your feelings when you got back there, where you grew up?

A: It makes me feel good, it makes me feel good, one, it brings back memories; two, I look back and I say wow, here I am when I used to dirty the community, one day (short laugh) I used to do mischief and jump on cars and brake bottles, and burn litters, trash, and, yeah that was us, you know, but know I'm back over here, wow, cleaning up, cleaning up my community where I grew up, because that always will be my community, nobody could ever take that from me, I'm here cleaning my community, and wow, you know, ah, it revives, you have a sense of pride, wow, you know, if they could see me now, who would ever think that I would (laugh), that I would be doing this job, this wonderful job. But, yeah, it makes me feel good, yeah, I was the guy, I was messing up my community, and now here is the guy who is coming to clean up after myself (soft laugh), at the end of the day I look back and I say wow, I can pat myself on the back, I did (---) job, and taking care of my community (laughs).

**0:21:25.2**

G: And what is now in, at this building, that tenement building?

A: It's been renovated, and none of my friends or people that I know still live there, is all new tenant now.

**0:21:43.1**

G: It is not ah, tenement anymore?

A: It is tenement, but is different people living there, is not the people that I knew, right. But the building is there, and like, they cannot take that from me, they cannot take the memories.

**0:22:01.4**

G: Well, you told me that you have been working in all the boroughs, in many other districts... can you compare for me that community with other ones? Maybe they are similar, or what differences you see in them?

A: Right, right, well, a lot of these districts and different boroughs, they take a climb from a poor neighborhood to a more upscale neighborhood, meaning, some of these districts on impoverished neighborhoods have more crime, (---) excuse me, and lot more garbage, you know to be collected, ah, to compare, I can compare Manhattan, this district to some other districts that I've been and is a lot more cleaner, maybe because of the different race that lives there in this community, like in this district here, we pull it much care of like to more middle class, we really don't have areas that are like impoverished, you see, where it's a lot of low income, but we do, but it's not like lets say ah... the South Bronx. The South Bronx, this area that is

impoverished, South Bronx is an area it's been neglected, now is becoming to be recognized. But is rough, there's a lot more garbage, garbage meaning there's a lot more lots there that haven't been built and people use them as dump, garbage there, when we don't come to pick it up. There's a lot more garbage because a lot more tenements, closer together, opposed to Manhattan where we are, in Manhattan Seven you have a lot more high rises, and of course, they got their residential supers, employees, which make sure that all that goes down to the basement, as far as garbage and (---), and they themselves are the ones that collect everything, put it in bags, tied up the recycling, and put the bow cap neatly, oppose to some of these other district. In the South Bronx they don't have that kind of service so, when the tenant decides, even if is not that day of be picked up, they decide they want to (---) the apartment, they just put everything out, you know... ah, and the super there, if (- --) a living super, cause today they don't want to give, in those buildings, apartments for supers to live in, they just decide to hire anybody from the street or the super next door, the super as three or four blocks away, that come and mop the building, maybe twice a week and just take the garbage out, and when it needs to be put out. But, yeah, these neighborhoods are rough, can you see, you know more crime... When I started here in the beginning years ago, they had a certain portion of Manhattan Avenue from one hundred to one-o-nine (109), Manhattan Avenue and then you got Central Park West, Manhattan Avenue where it projects out between Columbus and Manhattan, and then upside down, all right? Three avenues between one hundred to one-o-nine. They were full of drug dealers, there was a lot of drug deal going on there. I remember when I used to be in midnight to eight, and I was

tipping corners cans, which we call the baskets on the corner. Some times they would run, these dealers run to me and said: don't touch that basket. But I understood why, because they had the crack cocaine inside brown bags, and they put it in the cans, then when the cops come to search them, they don't find no drug, and what cop is going to think about tipping over baskets full of litter to search everything, so I understood that, and some times the former would come to me, at night, at midnight to eight, and he would tell me why did I skipped that basket, and I would explain to him: is because they're dealing drugs there, they got drugs in that basket, and they don't want me to touch it, and I always made myself clear, I'm only here for eight hours, I'm just here to do my job the best as I can, I'm not here to get killed, yeah, these guys, well, you know, they had weapons and they don't hesitate, but it came up a time that, yeah, they had thrown their drugs in a hard pot, and then they had come up to me three blocks running, ah, you see and I said this: I don't know nothing, I'm doing my job, I'm staying here, I don't know, if you can find it, good luck (interviewer's laughs). You see what I'm saying... but other times it was the opposite, some of the wealthy people in this district, they would throw, it was a lady who had threw away her jewelry, all her jewelry, a life possession, threw it in a bag and threw it in the truck. She got to call the district - it wasn't my truck by the way -, she had to trace the truck that had that route, that street that day, and they had to go to New Jersey, and stop that truck, dumped the truck to the floor, all the garbage, and go through everything within, and she finally found her jewelry, she got it back.

**0:27:44.4**

G: And why did she throw that?

A: That's a good question, people, throw away everything and anything, it just happen, is one of those things. I mean, I look at garbage, people look at garbage and they go like this (his fingers to the nose), they hold they noses, but I look at garbage as my canvas, is like an art, you know like an artist he paints a nice picture, that's my canvas, because when you start philosophizing and thinking about garbage, I know what you eat last night, you know, who was that person who had that beer, how was that person last night that had that big box of pizza, you know, oh, who is this person pictures, of the time passed, I mean, from the nineteen fifties and nineteen eighties, pictures of family, who are they? Where they at? Are they alive? You know, some times, you see everything in that canvas, you know what I'm saying? And while people hold their nose, I smell, you know why? Because that to me is job security, you see... if there's no garbage it were no sanitation. So sanitation is like crime, and fire, there's always is going to be fire, there's always is going to be crime, they're going to need police, and is always is going to be garbage, they going to need someone to come and pick it up, you see. We provide an important... I'm engaged with the subject, but we provide an important service for the communities, without us, in any borough, it would be impossible to live here, and do businesses here, because the city would completely be shut down and be a hell crisis. But I've seen the other boroughs, the good and the bad, and I've seen that other districts have the tough, these districts and the Bronx, that do two loads of garbage for the same amount of money me do on one, one load, meaning one truck, they do two loads, you

see, because it is so much garbage. And it's very little, somebody's places got very little organization, they just throw everything out.

**0:30:01.8**

G: All recycling...

A: Right, but the people (---) only a small percentage is recycle, the rest of the recycles is thrown away with the rest of the garbage, so you want to look at percentages, is like twenty eight percent they recycle and the rest, all the recycle goes into the black bags.

**0:30:25.5**

G: Yeah, you're are a hard worker, so as you told me, sanitation is one of these key services to the city, for the normal working of the city, but, do you allow yourself enough spare time to enjoy family time? And how do you balance your commitment to your work and the time you allow yourself to your family, how is that?

A: Right, well, I balance it like this, I signed up for eight hours with the Department, I come up here and I do the best I can, I do my job with the city, I fulfill my obligation with this city for eight hours, after that is family time, it's my time, when I can do what I need to do, get my things done, or spend time with my daughter and my brothers or my mother, ah... there is no problem, is simple (---), is just so simple, you know, and when one does in conflict with the other, the only time when it runs into my private life is during the snow season. When we get hit by snow here, then the rules of engagement changes because now I'm not working eight hours, I'm



working twelve to thirteen hours, so when that happens I'm only have enough time to make it home, shower, eat something, and get it back, because by the time I full sleep, it's time to get up, is like I never left the job, I come back and, ah, I pour a hard coffee before I left, and left it here, I come back at ten and coffee would still be warm. Remember because we go under split shifts, we go from seven in the morning to seven at night and then another group of guys come in and do it from seven at night to seven in the morning, and in snow times that is to keep plowing the streets and drop in salt, and cause your clog ride, and plowing the streets, that's the only time it conflicts with my private life because really, I don't have a private life, is more about the job right now.

**0:32:54.2**

G: It's more about the job, ah, usually the snow time is by the time of celebration, by Christmas time, do you have any special memories about your work on the streets and maybe, overlapping or in relation with these celebrations?

A: You mean with the job?

**0:33:19.9**

G: With the job and, ah, in conflict with, lets say Christmas time, or some celebrations, birthdays...

A: Well, birthdays, not a problem, really not a problem cause you want like to celebrate your birthday you can put it for a day off, if you have the hours or you could take it, (---) be excused without pay. As far as, yes it did conflict with me

because my daughter gave birth to... I'm a grandfather, ah, in December fifteen and, ah, I was bottle-feeding my granddaughter on a Saturday, in Pennsylvania, when I got the call from here saying that we would go on full force on Sunday, it means everybody had to report to work, because it was a snow emergency, that's when it conflicted me cause, one, one hour I had my daugh... my granddaughter who just came into this world, feeding her, which is an experience on itself, and then in next few hours I'm driving back because I had to report to work on next day. So, yeah, it conflicts and is not a good feeling, you know, you got to go through all these emotions, you feel cheated, specially on special occasions like that, now oh I got to come back here and I got to do list, but you have to do it, that's when you separate the voice from the man, you have to come in and do your job, this is what I do, this is what I've been trained, this is what I'm good at, when it comes to this Department. And I know that I'm needed, that they need all hands on because this is a big snow emergency and this wasn't jus a snow event it was a blizzard, and I knew I had to come back. So yeah it conflicts with me and I was upset with that, you know, but what can I do, I had to come here and do my job, I figured out: I'll make it some other time with my granddaughter and my daughter, and they understood it, they understood my job, they understood what I do, and that I was needed, although my daughter protested that a little bit why, but she understood that I had to come back, right.

**0:35:34.4**

G: Ah, tell me more about how does your job have supported your family, you told me you were married for fourteen years, and how is that?

A: Supported yeah, because city job is big, specially this job, this job, ah, they give the test every four years, by the tail law, by law they have to give it all. They have to, even if they don't hire, they have to put it out, so people can take the test, this is civil service exam, to take this test because we are part of the uniform force, as the police and firemen, is three uniform, four uniform force, police, firemen, us, and corrections, and you got to take civil service test. Over two hundred and fifty thousand people apply to take this test, and they only allow forty thousand and take it. Actually go into a school, a classroom, and sit down and take the written exam, and out of this forty thousand you go into a lottery, a lottery, is, I don't care if you... a hard perfect hundred don't mean anything, that the lottery, the machine kicks a name out, so you can have a high school, he can have a low school, they can pick him, the machine, and not you, it's just a lottery. At the twenty thousand that the machine kicks out as potential sanitation worker candidates, only like maybe two thousand, maybe the most three thousand, depending on the budget, get hired, all right? This job is one of the most (---) jobs, believe me, in New York city, because it pays well, we got paid by a contract, every four years my union goes into contract negotiations with the city, you know, increasing wages for us, but this job is a blessing because this job has opened up doors, made it possible for guys in this job to own houses and they're still in their twenties, they own big houses, brand new cars, all narrowly they probably wouldn't been able to own these houses if it wasn't for this job. This job enabled me to put my daughter to college, this job enabled me to get a brand new

car from the dealer, this job enabled me that when I submit an application to live in an area - I live in a (---) building, here in upper Manhattan, Lenox Terrace -, it opens up doors, when they see that you are not a bum from the street, you know, they see that this guy has his job, he is paid well, he's got a good reputation, you know, for some reasons is like a magic one, it opens up opportunities for you, and this job made it possible. It made it possible for me... when I got married I wasn't in this job yet, but after I got married, once I was called for this job, it opened doors for me, while narrowly those that wouldn't been open, like I was able to apply for places to live, and they called me right away, opposite if I was just on welfare, they would hesitate to call me. This enabled me to fully furnish my home, this job enabled me to buy my first car, you see, this job enabled me to take trips with my wife then, to different places, it could be in the Caribbean, it could be here in the States, and it enabled me to do a lot more, opposed if I hadn't have this job.

**0:39:42.6**

G: When did you begin to work for the Department?

A: August twenty, yeah, August twenty eight, nineteen five (8/28/1995). I am in my sixteen year, I'm finishing up my sixteen year, in August I start my seventeen year in this job.

**0:40:07.0**

G: So, are there any other memories you have to share with us?

A: Man I have so much memories, ah, it would take more than a few days but, it just give you a sense of pride, you know, that you get in up and you're doing something important for your neighbor, who maybe don't know that you are a sanitation worker, or the folks you don't know, or the stranger that comes to visit this city, you see. It gives you a sense of pride, and is a good feeling man, you get in up, you got a job, on this day when economy is bad an people unemployed, I still come to work, and I have a job, and it is just been such a blessing, you know, and it housed me to bless other people that, normally would, and are unable to do for themselves, you see. This job enabled me to bless my brothers, I take care of one of my brothers because financially he can't, I provide for him when he needs, furniture, TV, DVD, all narrowly he wouldn't been able. To one of my brothers, one of my brothers just finished doing five years in a state prison, and I was there for him, I sent full packages, no money, they don't allow money, but I sent full packages, whatever he needed I was allowed there for years. And you know what? That makes a difference, you know, and it made me feel good, because if it wasn't for this job, I wouldn't been able to send him all those packages on a regular basis, and it was made me to put away save for tomorrow, and establish my credit profile, that if I go anywhere... When I went to purchase my car, in less than an hour I was approved for a very, very expensive car, and is due to this job, but is also due, again, like in the beginning, the way I was grow up to be responsible, and...

**0:42:21.4**

G: Yeah, tell me about that, how do you compare the way you were grow up, the way your father gave you example on the way he used to be with his sons, and the way you feel in your role as father now?

A: Well, my dad, he was very strict, he was a devoted Catholic, you know, to really talk to my dad it was like a box on certain things in life, meaning, dating, sex, it was like pulling too far from somebody without anesthesia because... he would start right but then he would like not fully opened up, he would like on the most important part he would leave off, so I had to use my imagination, you see what I'm saying. But he did, you know, he infused me respect others, stand up for yourself, always have to believe in God, and we never spoke about how we got kids, but I saw on him, on his devotion, his dedication that as our young age he could walk away from us, and start a new life somewhere else, he decided to stay, he decided to stay single, but he was there for us. He separated, I mean, my mother and him separated, but he was there for us. They never divorced, but he was there for us. Someone else would have taken a flight and left, who (---) young, you had three kids, your marriage fell apart, why should you want to stay around, but he stick there, he always let us know he was around, you know, he always came looking for us, he always took care of us. And take that and I bring it into fatherhood today, and one thing, he never put his hands on me, he never, ever, raised his voice at me, and disciplined me, and threatened to hit me, and with that, when I had my daughter I always talked to my daughter like I'm talking to you now, and the reason why, you can do this, I spoke to her like a person, I don't need to curse, that's what you hear a lot today, a lot of cursing, and these kids have feel that they, they shit, they yell

shock, you know, because they don't listen, you yell at them and is like, when a military guy goes to war and all these bombs go off, they call that shell shock, right? You've ever heard that saying? Ok well, this is yell shock, you yell at a kid (---) so much that after war is going to be a numb, like, you are not yelling at him, he is going to continue... tell him: don't put your finger in that outlet, he's going to do it. Don't touch this is hot, he is going, he or she is going to do it. Me, I learned the opposite, I always brought my daughter and I explained to her the reason why, in a calm voice, never put a hand on her, and I always spoke to her like an adult, not using foul language around her, and thank God I did it that way because today I'm very proud father of a teacher, (---) her childhood, you see. And now she has a kid and is like, she's crazy about her daughter, and I now she is going to teach her right.

**0:46:07.1**

G: I guess you are so happy with your granddaughter...

A: I'm flying high man, I'm like up there, you don't see me up in the atmosphere? (laughs). I'm high up there man, this is like... you got, is like, you got to experience it, is part of life's journey, this like have two guys into one, you know... it's a journey, is one of those journeys, one of those stops I have to make along my journey on life. And let me tell you man, it is awesome, is just awesome, I can't compare it. I took on, when I saw my dad, what my dad brought us up, and treated my daughter with dignity and respect. My mother on the other hand, she was a tight, she had no patience, and hot dealing with us was, with belts, and like I said broomsticks, you know, she didn't play, but then I compared them, I compare apples to oranges and I

said, you know what? Is a way to do it and is another way not to do it, and the way my mother did it, is not the way to do it, the way my dad did it, was the way of do it. And that is to be patience, and to talk to your kids, and the mode to return the favor, to dealt, you know, teach the kids.

**0:47:25.9**

G: And what about the role in parenthood of your wife, or your ex-wife, right? You want to tell me something? You feel comfortable...

A: Yeah, yeah. My ex wife for some reason couldn't conceive, that was a fact that has gone to separated us, you know is a big thing, we tried but it wasn't happened, we went to doctors and it wasn't happening. My daughter is not from my marriage; my daughter was from a girlfriend, an Italian girlfriend that I had in the past, that's where my daughter is from. But, my Italian girlfriend became sick late on, she had mental issues, she became very sick so I took custody of my daughter, and thus became a single parent, but, but, what made it easier for me is that I had my mother here in New York living at the time, and I had, you know, my family, which was my brothers here, and they were really, you know, was a support mechanism for me. They helped me to take care of the baby while I was at work, and provided for the support of her. And it's tough, it's tough when you are a single parent, I mean, you're young, you know, I had this, (---) ah, social worker told me: "listen, you don't need your baby", and this happened because when my girlfriend gave birth, she was under medication, so she gave my daughter off for adoption without my consent and knowledge. So when I go see my daughter I'm pulling to in Bellevue hospital here in



New York, in Manhattan, I'm brought into a room like this, and there was a psychiatrist and a social worker there trying to convince me to give up my daughter, that she already had given my daughter for adoption, she signed the papers and... let me tell you, that was a few times in life that I lost it, I lost it but in a sensible way, ah, I protested this, I said: you have to kill me, kill me, because I will not leave today out of here without my daughter on my arm. They would tell me: you, a young, you don't need this responsibility, you got your whole life ahead, this is too much for you, let, let, you know, walk away from this. I go not, I said: over my dead body would you have my daughter, I said that's my daughter, I fought for three hours, the psychiatrist, they both taking turns on my, and each time I had an announce for all they know, at the end, I walked out that hospital with my daughter in my hands, all right? And I looked to her as I said: never, would I ever give you for adoption, I made you, I'm going to take care of you. Remember I was in my, in my mid twenties (---) don't need it, now I'm fifty, so...

**0:50:41.7**

G: And you were already working on, at the Department, or...

A: No, I wasn't, I was working for this program called Pueblo Nuevo, which had to do with maintenance of old tenements buildings, preventive maintenance, you know you go in there, and you do preventive work, repairs, until they form into a program with the city, the city comes in, and goes in, and got the whole building out, and build brand new apartments for poor people where they can live and, like that yeah, but no I wasn't in this job.

**0:51:16.3**

G: And you guess that, maybe these people they were assuming some kind of preconceptions about your work or your...

A: Yeah, right, they figured it: this is a young guy, you know, Hispanic, he doesn't want this responsibility, this guy is about probably looking for women and pregnant them he would continue on, he doesn't need this, it's too much responsibility, he is young, that's what they were telling me, you don't want this, you're young, you got a whole life ahead of you, you are not ready to be a parent. How dare they, how dare they, I told them this: how dare you judge me, how dare you say I'm not ready to be a parent, that's my daughter who we are talking about, that's my flesh and blood, and I beat them... if I wouldn't walk out of here where I'm today.

**0:52:08.4**

G: This seems get better once you started to work here to support your daughter...

A: Of course, of course, it made life easier, it made me able to put away for her, for college, it just opened up a lot of (---), that I all narrowly endorsed and I've been available to be, because of this job.

**0:52:33.2**

G: I'm seeing also that solidarity network, it was your family and your mother, and your brothers, it works both ways, right? Can you tell me more about that?

A: You mean the support mechanism?

**0:52:55.4**

G: Yeah, that support mechanism.

A: Oh yeah, yeah, my dad at that time was already up in age, he was in his eighties, so my dad really couldn't do much as far as, you know supporting, because he started to develop Alzheimer's disease, I mean, it was affecting his mind, he slowed on down, but my mother was the trooper on this, she really helped me out a lot, she sat the baby. She even let the baby stay there at the house, you know, really got a like into the baby, she was really the one that really supported me, and made my life easy, that I can go on, and work with a clear mind, knowing that my daughter is in capable hands, in family at. So she was a true supportive mechanism because she would take care of my daughter, she would shower my daughter, she would feed her, and she was there for me, I cannot repaid that, that was big. My dad couldn't do much, because of his age and his Alzheimer, but my mother, she... the last one and (- --) that she had within in, she gave it to my daughter. And I got a twenty-two years old daughter today.

**0:54:09.6**

G: Wow... let me check... is there anything else you want to add?

A: Well, lets talk about what we do here, you know, the city hasn't been as clean in over thirty years, the cleanest as been it's now, under Doherty, John Doherty the Commissioner. Ah, you know when the business, this is the Bureau of Cleaning and Collection, BCC, but we have other departments within the Sanitation Department,

which could be Building, Building Maintenance, which could be enforcement, and the civilian part of this Department as well, ah... this Department, we aid for you, provides an important service to our citizens here in the City of New York, because what we do is just as important as what the police and firemen does. Police fight crime, the firemen, they fight fires, while we on the other hand, we pick up garbage, you can say we fight garbage (laughs). We do everything we can to keep the city open for businesses, for people like yourselves either live here, or just come here temporarily to visit, we want you to feel that you are coming into a big city like this, you are able to move around, without fearing a raccoon and that out of a sudden, without stepping over garbage and maggots and dead animals. This city to me, this Department, this agency provides an important service to us citizens helping in keep this city open for businesses, is the best way I can put it. And I'm proud of it, I'm proud of what we do, all the people look at us, and they don't say anything, but there are those that come by and say thank you, thank you, you know, that's to me is wow, thank you, you know, how many people I had, come up to me in my career and say thank you. How many people I had cursed at me, while I'm doing my job, because they think that is deliberately that we are on the middle of a block, they can't get by, we're doing that on purpose, when we have no choice. They want us to keep the truck in the middle of the block, in the middle of the street, in a block that we cause cannot by, what we do is go over a little bit, as a courtesy, so they can try to get by, do the Department want us to do that? Absolutely not, they want us to stay in the middle, but we do it anyway, just as a courtesy.

Ah, this snow storm here (blizzard on 11/26/2011), in all the years I've been here, this snow storm here for the first time in my life I was fearful for my safety, because someone in the news media put out that it was a conspiracy, that we conspired to slow down deliberately, which, there's not true into that, it was just the media to sell newspapers, and I was fearful due to the fact that I saw the anger on people faces, and I had people literally come to me and says: are you happy? Are you proud of yourself of what you guys did, and I look at them and I said: don't believe the hype, don't believe everything you read. What happened that day, we were seating in our trucks, but there was not snow, I remember sitting in that truck from seven to close to eleven o'clock, no snow, suddenly started snowing, we went into action, but you can't plow if you are in not more than an inch and a half to two inches on the ground, what you are going to plow? Black top? But that came down as a blizzard, there's a difference, snow event accumulates one or two inches, three, but when a blizzard comes down is like a big pipe burst, and whatever it then came down it caught everybody off guard, we could keep up but also the citizens forget that day we're also, the cause of us not been able to clean the street, specially the secondary streets is because, they were caught in the middle of the snow, they couldn't get out of the street, they couldn't get in, they left their vans and cars there. That Sunday after the snow I was rescuing the fire department, I was rescuing ambulances... I got stuck, in a front-end loader, the bucket truck. I got stuck, do you see those big wheels, I got stuck and had to be pulled up, after I'm pulled out, the guy that pulled me out get stuck a few blocks away, he is calling me to come rescue him. I mean, I spent the whole day rescuing buses, rescuing access ride, fire trucks. But I was fearful for my

life then, because people were very hostile to us. And up to this day some believe that we were on a work slow down, which is totally non-sense. But ah, this job is a beautiful journey man, you know, time goes by fast, is experience, you meet people as you go along, some of them are not longer around, some of them died, before they could retire, ah, all those that retired, and you miss, you know, you miss the person, you miss the people like that because they made this job a lot more easier cause, (---) is a lot more of a family, a community in here. You see all we got is us, and maybe we are not as close as the firemen are, and as the police are, for some reason we don't have that kind in this Department, we don't have that kind of closeness, which I hope one day they would really be brothers to one another, you see, and look out for one another, and look out for one another's family, right now we lack that for some reason, you know. But ah, is (---) places this Department, the future is bright for this Department, and future is going to be different, they're going to have more fuel efficient trucks, and they'll work harder then, the people, the sanitation workers are going to be better trained, they're going to run a more efficient operation, ah... and these transfer stations are going to be modern man, and up to date, and it's going to make... hopefully we can convert that into energy, which we can use fast, the garbage, which we can use for own personal uses, and maybe sell some of that energy to other states where we can make a profit. Right now we take that garbage up to Exes, is this dump in Jersey, what they do is, we dump the garbage on the floor, they push the garbage into a big room, is huge with close, as this, big as this room, huge, and what they do with that closet is, there they sift the garbage for like three days, because garbage is wet, the garbage can't be burned if is wet, after they sift

there for few days they take it and put it into another room, real quick, and they begin to incinerate it. What they do with that, they convert that into energy, steam, and they put those electricity, and in turn they sell that to the communities and counties around them, they're making a profit while we're making nut. So I'm open as somebody is looking at that and says you know what, there will be good that we convert some of these empty stations into something similar like that, one day this Department could be efficient, and we can take some of that money that we're contributing, and bring it back to this Department, and use it for future purposes, whether be for better equipment, better training personal, better benefits, so then we don't have to rely always on the city budget. But the future is bright, and is becoming (---) men's job, you know, a lot of people that will start in this job, a lot of sanitation workers, men and women, they're young, they are the future of this Department, me... I'm old school, right.

**1:03:27.0**

G: And helping to make this city as great as it is...

A: Right, so they're the future, they can learn from me, all I can do is teach him, and show them, listen, this is our job, this is how things operate here, and now is up to you, I pass the torch to you now, now is up to you to teach an ex guy, I was never forget that, because you're the future of this Department. I will hate to see this Department fail because someone doesn't want to do the job, or because they were improperly trained.

**1:04:02.9**

G: And also you are doing the same thing by helping us with this interview because, you know, this is going to be the Sanitation Museum and Archive, this is going for the generations to come, so your memories, that we really appreciate will be helpful for the better understanding of this Department and the history of this city.

A: And that's important what you say, that's, if I could chose one aspect or sort in the seasoning to help bring this Department into people's mind, and what it is that we do more than just garbage, is a whole life story behind it, and if I could contribute with this grain of salt, then it has been worth it, for future generation. That they hear this, and they say: wow, this is I was then, and look at how it is today, and I could only see a beautiful future for this Department and this city, the citizens, yeah, the service that we are bringing to them, they just going to get better and better. We are not perfect, but that's OK, because, in imperfection you learn to be perfect, that's part of the journey, remember, is not the destination, is the journey. And with this Department, is not the destination is the journey, you live and learn.

**1:05:42.8**

G: Well, great, André, I appreciate so much, and I also missed to mention for the recording my partner Mario Cancel, who is taking pictures and setting the audio equipment, thanks a lot André, and I desire you the best of the best in your life and in your work and with your family, it was a great story.

A: Thank you, you welcome.