

Interviewer: Cristiana Baik

Interviewee: Javier Gomez

Date: March 27th, 2011

Location: J. Gomez's home; Dyker Heights (Brooklyn)

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Cristiana Baik: So this is Cristiana Baik. It's March 27th, 2011, and I'm here at the home of Javier Gomez, who is a sanitation worker for the Department of Sanitation, New York City. We are just beginning our interview. Can you describe to me what you do for a living, for the Department of Sanitation?

Javier Gomez: For the Department of Sanitation, I do. . .we do quite a few things. We do MLP, which is Motorized Litter Patrol. . .which is picking up the garbage that's dropped off by random people in the street. We do recycling collection, which is using a split-body truck. One side holds paper, the other side holds metals, but they're totally separate units.

C: But all trucks have that?

J: Yes all split-body trucks that are for recycling, we do that. And then we have the real loaders, which are for collection, which is just regular household garbage. And from day to day, we are on different routes, different sections of our garage, on any particular day, we start out. . . we could do 3rd Avenue to 4th, five to seven, seven to eight. Everyone has different times of garbage pick up throughout the district, so that's what gives us the opportunity to cover the entire district.

C: Do you guys, do you cover specific district numbers?

J: Yes. We are BK7, which covers Sunset park, part of Sunset Park, part of Park Slope and Windsor Terrace, which our district is encompassed by. . . from actually, from 15th street to 65th street, from 1st avenue to 8th avenue. And also, parts of Windsor Terrace, Park Slope that go up to Fort Hamilton Parkway, Caton Avenue, from east 1st to east 7th, part of Ocean Parkway. We cover a very large area. We also are responsible for the BQE leading up to the Battery Tunnel, and leading up to the Verrazano.

C: So that's the pick up route that you do?

J: No, that's actually, no. That's actually the highway, our responsibility for snow. So we, you know, we have a big district, and we have a big responsibility, because we have major thoroughfares that run through *our* district to lead to Manhattan. For you know, business. . . fire trucks, and just . . . even the commissioner travels through our district, to get to Manhattan—

C: District number seven?

J: Yeah, because he lives in Staten Island, so he has to come through BK7. . . because through our highway, pretty much, the BQE, Gowanus, but on any given day, we don't know what we're doing. We don't know. . . because, my seniority—I'm like in the middle—so I pretty much don't have my own set route yet. I mean, on recycling I do because I'm mostly on recycling, so

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I'm pretty much on the same route every day. But it's not the same streets every day.

C: Can you describe that a little more in detail?

J: Ok, today, let's say it's Monday. So today we pick up garbage here, in this area, which is, let's say, hypothetically, let's say, from 25th street to 27th street, from 3rd Avenue to 5th Avenue, both sides, that's your whole route. Now tomorrow. . .you're still in the same area, like, say that. . .to considered, let's say section two. So tomorrow, you'll be in section two because that's where your route is, but you're not gonna have the same streets that you had the day before. Now let's say you have 27th street to 34th street, from 3rd, from 3 to 5, both sides.

C: So it's the same district number, but different section numbers?

J: Yes, our district is BK7, but we have four sections in our garage. Section one, two, three, and four.

C: Okay.

J: So for me, as far as my routes, I'm on mostly recycling. Five days a week, there's the occasional day that I will be on garbage pick up because someone's off, or someone, when, you know, is sick, we're short of man power, you know. . . 'cause they. . . we get our orders from our borough, our borough is in BK11, which is another district. They have what's called the borough, they get their orders from Manhattan. And then the borough gives us our job description and job activity for the following day to clerk [*chuckles*]. We have a clerk, which is a garage clerk. He gives the order from Manhattan, and then he sets up the board accordingly. So the borough says, *Well you know what, we're gonna do, you're gonna have ten extra people that are coming tomorrow from Queens*: it's called *out-of-towners*. And then they'll set up the board to have them do various things in the garage. MLP, if we're short people, they'll put one of them on the truck. They can do work around the garage, but for the most part, it's mostly, usually MLP. Whatever problem area we have in our district with a lot of garbage, they'll bombard that area to clean it up. . . because we actually get graded, our streets get graded.

C: Who grades?

J: You know what? That comes from Manhattan. We have, I believe it's called the—oh my god—uh . . .like, it's pretty much a district. . . it's. . . like a school card. You know, we get 90s, we get 70s, we get 60s, you know, you wanna be up in the high 80s to 90s, because the cleaner the district, you won't have MLP in your district, you won't have Motorized Litter Patrol, which in turn they could, you know, set their attention to another district that may have problems with garbage, you know. Our biggest problem in our district—because we have the Gowanus—it's actually under the Gowanus and the BQE, that area, for years was a big dumping ground.

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C: And you guys have to cover that?

J: Yeah, we have to—

C: —underneath. . .

J: Yeah, we have. . .

C: Wow. . . interesting.

J: . . . pick up all the garbage underneath there. And you know, you're not getting truck money for that.

C: Oh really?

J: Yeah, you're not getting truck money for that. That's just straight labor. You know, for picking up garbage, we get additional, we get truck money, we get paid additional money for that, aside from our salary.

C: Yeah.

J: You get garbage pick up money, and then if you dump the truck, you get dump money.

J: Recycling, we don't dump on shift; that gets done on the four to twelve because it's. . . you. . . won't be able to do it in the allotted time. You won't be able to do it in eight hours. Pick up the garbage, or the metal and the paper, and then go to Staten Island to dump the paper, and then go to [Bayo?], New Jersey, to dump the metal.

C: So complicated.

J: Yeah, it's not. . .right. We don't have the facilities in Brooklyn where we could dump both commodities. I think we eventually will I think they're planning to build a recycling facility here in Sunset Park, in the Bush Terminal area.

C: Oh, okay.

J: They're thinking about putting some kind of recycling for paper and metal, but—like I said—for my, for me and my district, on any given day, I could be, you know, like, I don't know. I was off Saturday, so I don't know what I'm doing tomorrow, actually, in my garage. I didn't call for my orders because I know I was days. I'm gonna be days, but I don't know. I have to—when I go—I can call and find out or I can just wait 'til tomorrow, walk in, and see where

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my name is on the board. I could be on garbage or recycling. But I'm pretty much guessing I'm gonna be, I'll be on recycling.

C: So is that— in terms of your weekly schedule—you get it through your order, but that starts at the beginning of your week, and before that, you don't obviously know?

J: Right, we don't know, we don't know what we're doing. We won't know what we're doing Tuesday until tomorrow afternoon.

C: Is that a frustrating part of the job for you?

J: Eh, a little bit, but for the most part, it's not snow. It's—well days—as long as I'm days I don't really don't care what I'm doing. You know, whatever it is that I gotta do I'm gonna do. Whether it'd be MLP or you know, recycling garbage. In the beginning it was tough, because you were on MLP *everyday*.

C: Can you describe MLP a little bit?

J: MLP's—you, you usually get a truck. They give you a route, and you literally take your can and your boom and your shovel, and go sweep the streets. Literally [*chuckles*].

C: Is that usually given to people who first start out?

J: That's given, yeah, that's given every day, if our district is—like I said—has a problem area where they're always constantly getting a bad score card because of the, you know, litter on the street, just from pedestrian traffic, or contractors who dump their garbage in—you know—under the Gowanus—all that affects us. So you know, we get MLP, and then beginning it was tough because they dump tons of garbage under the Gowanus, that you literally go from block to block to block just picking it up and throwing it in the truck, and sweeping, and it was very, you know, very monotonous work, but it was, it was work, you know.

C: Yeah.

J: You gotta make your—you know, making your bones—so to speak. You start out, you gotta start at the bottom, you gotta start somewhere. But we knew—when I say we, I'm talking about my friend, my friend and my partner, Chris—we knew that it was going to be a five to six year plan. That in other words, once we have five to six years, we won't be on MLP anymore. We'll be on collection, and we'll be making the actual money, we'll have more seniority, and now... it's been... I would say, it's been almost, it's been about two years since I've been on MLP. But there's the occasional day where we're short and we may get stuck on it because they cut trucks. Everything that happens in the garage on the board affects everyone, because if we have forty, let's say we have forty people. So now we need twenty trucks—they say they have

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twenty trucks—for between recycling and garbage. So now we have the forty bodies to fill the spots, but now if they turn around and say, *Oh no we're not doing those two extra routes today*, they take two trucks away, they're not going to those routes. Now you have four bodies, you have to do something with them. . . so now, because those two guys, let's say, have good seniority, now they took the two trucks away, you gotta accommodate them somewhere else on the board. So now it trickles down, anyone with low seniority has to get pushed off the truck. And usually it comes down to guys like me, or guys that are below me. But sometimes it does affect me because we have certain number of people on nights and certain people on days, so I may be on that cusp where I may get forced onto MLP. But I get lucky sometimes that I don't [*laughs*]. . . which has worked out most, most of the time for the last two years. I've been on, like, on the borderline on MLP, and then. Boom! I'm on the truck. Because, someone during the night got sick, and they call in, *Listen I'm not coming into work*, so then I won't be there anymore, you'll see me on the truck. I'm on obs [?], and I'm on MLP. Like you gear yourself up to be on MLP 'cause you're gonna out there all day.

C: Do you think—I mean, it sounds like with what you're saying—seniority is a pretty big thing in the department?

J: Seniority is key, seniority is key. Without the seniority, it's, you know. . . it'd be a free-for-all. It works. . . it works to your advantage and to your disadvantage. There's two sets of rules: there's the rules that are set by the union, and then there's in-house rules.

C: Can you describe both for me?

J: Union rule—for example—union rule: senior man has to make the money.

C: What does that mean?

J: Senior man has to make money before the junior guy.

C: Ahhh okay.

J: So I can't, I can't make money before you if you have more time than me because you are the senior man. Your seniority makes you get the money. In other words, if there's MLP or garbage, you're gonna go on garbage because it's money involved. In other words, you're getting additional money.

C: So I get the better job?

J: Right. Not necessarily better because it's heavier, you know, my MLP day might be just sweeping two blocks, and the might not be, require me to lift up any heavy garbage, where as you're gonna make the extra money but you're going to work for it, cause you're going to do ten

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to twelve tons of garbage. . . [*chuckles*]. So are you really getting the better job? Probably not, but you are making the money. So [*clears throat*], the union, that's the union rule. In-house rule, senior man can go wherever he wants on the board. So you got twenty-five years on the job, you're tired of lugging garbage, but you don't want to retire yet so you wanna take the easy job, you want the recycling, which is easier on your body, you know, you're not picking up heavy garbage, like you're picking up between both commodities, on any given day, you're probably picking up between seven to eight tons. Whereas on garbage, you're picking between ten and thirteen tons.

C: Do you make more money doing garbage versus recycling?

J: No they both, they both. . . those both, those two jobs make the same money as far as truck money. The only thing you don't get on the recycling is the dump money because you're not dumping on shift. Which is, I think, now, it's like seven dollars and twenty-two cents to dump. But do that times five days, times 56 dollars times five days. You have an extra \$350 dollars a week on your check, aside from your base pay.

C: Do you feel like people on the job prefer certain jobs?

J: Oh yeah, yeah they do, but see, this is where the. . . see in-house rules—like I said—they can do whatever they want. But now the junior guys in my garage, we got tired of that because. . . the senior man today knows, *Oh my god, that route is very heavy today. I don't want to go on that route. Put me on recycling. Put a junior guy there.*

C: [*Laughs*] Uh huh, and that happens often?

J: And right, and they were abusing it, and you know what? We got tired of it because even though they're senior, it's a junior garage. There's more junior men then senior men there. So we pretty much said, *Listen . . . we don't want this in-house rule anymore, 'cause you guys are abusing it, and you guys are, you know, think you're gonna keep, you know. . . you know, putting us in the, giving us the bad jobs everyday—the bad, you know, the bad details, so we're not doing this anymore. In union rule senior man has to go on garbage; that killed them.* Because now you got twenty-five years on the job, you wanna stay on the job, you're going to be on garbage everyday because your seniority puts you there. You wanna make the money? You're gonna be on garbage. And I'm going to be on recycling, saving my body for when my turn comes, and I have no choice but to be on garbage every day. So that, you know that's why we wanted that too because I know that, you know, I'm not gonna leave at twenty-years, I know I'm not. I'm only going to be 53. Can't retire yet, can't collect social security. I can collect my pension, but you know, I'm 53. So I know that I'm gonna say, minimum, twenty-five years, [*clears throat*] so with that being said, why would I wanna take garbage every day? I don't. I wanna give my body a rest so if I can do recycling I'll do recycling for the next five to six years, or however long it takes me to be on garbage every single day. Once I hit eleven years or ten years,

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I'll probably be on garbage every day. So you know, I wanna take whatever little break I can take as far as being on recycling over garbage, I'd rather be on recycling.

C: Is it hard on your bodies, the way that were describing it, it sounds like—

J: Oh yeah, it is, because you know, the constant—it's all repetitive. It's all repetitive motion. You know, your knees. . . jumping up, jumping in and out of the truck. . . pounding on the knees. . . just lower back, always, you know, shoulders. . . 'cause you're always doing the same motion. Some guys bend at the knees, most don't. They don't pick up a bag the right way, don't pick up a pail the right way, because they're just trying to get their job done. Not that they're doing it because they wanna get hurt. They're just trying to do their jobs, so you know, they just. . . when it's cold out you. . . you really don't want to be out on the street when it's fifteen degrees, picking up garbage. But you, you gotta do what you gotta do, and we have to pick up the garbage, so you know, they're out there. . . so they might be working a little faster. . . to try to get done because it's freezing out. But you know, when. . . when you're doing, you know, twelve. . . twelve, thirteen, eleven tons a day for five days. . .[sighs]. . . you know that's—

C: That's a lot.

J: If you do twelve tons a day, that is sixty tons. Sixty tons a day times three-hundred and. . . no, not three-hundred sixty five, 'cause we don't work three-hundred six. . . I think we think we work two-hundred and. . . no. . . there's two-hundred hours. . . that's uh, two hundred hours, which means five days is 45 times 15, 25. . . I think we were two hundred fifty days, I think it is, two hundred fifty-five days. So do that times. . . a week, break down that by weeks, we work actually forty-seven weeks. So sixty tons a week, for twenty, you know, for forty-seven weeks times twenty five years.

C: Yeah, so how do you guys rest your bodies?

J: I rest my body as soon as I come, I mean. . . I work, I come home, I try to relax. You know, after *my* day's over, 'cause my day doesn't end when my day at sanitation ends.

C: You have your painting job?

J: I do my what I do, when I go, I go do whatever jobs I have to do. . . and then, when I get home, which is usually about seven-thirty eight o'clock, from my day starts at 4:30 in the morning, 'cause that's when I get up. It doesn't end until about 7:30 or 8, on any given day, and then I'll relax for an hour or two. . . I'll be in bed, try to be in bed by nine o'clock, nine-thirty at latest. Anything after that, I'm, I'll be worthless the next day, because I'll be really tired.

C: Yeah, is that what your weekly schedule usually looks like?

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J: Yes. Yes, and you know, we have a revolving day off so, so Sunday we're always off. And then we have a revolving day off during the week. Every week that changes to the following day. Like this week for me, was supposed to be Friday, but I changed to Saturday 'cause because my friends took me out for my birthday.

C: Right.

J: But this week coming up, since my day off last week is Friday, this week coming up, Saturday. . . and then for the new week—

C: It'll be Monday.

J: It'll be Monday, so I'll have a three-day weekend.

C: Ah.

J: Saturday, Sunday, Monday. . . 'cause we're always off Sunday. Then the following Tuesday, the following week Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. . . like that.

C: That must be nice when that happens [*laughs*].

J: Yeah it does, I. . . you know, I. . . I like the three-day weekends, but I don't like it because I have to work Tuesday and Saturday, and it makes it just a long week [*laughs*]. You know? Excuse me [*drinks water*]. 'Cause. . . it's just that, I like the day off in between, I like that—Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday the day off. Mostly Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, I like those days off. 'Cause Friday and Saturday, you know, I'm already used to working them so I'm, I'm working them anyway, regardless if I'm on sanitation or not, I always work Saturdays and Sundays. . . well not Sundays, really.

C: So can you just tell me. . . I know your schedules change week by week, but just what does a regular week like for you, in terms of what time you get up?

J: A regular week for me?

C: Yeah.

J: I don't like to rush, so I get up four-thirty in the morning. . . wash my face, brush my teeth. Sit down, have my cup of coffee, watch the news see what the weather's going to be like. Prepare my, myself mentally. If it's going rain, you gotta prepare yourself mentally. . . 'cause. . . it really, it's really, bad when you know it's going to rain, and you're going to be out there. Especially when you're on recycling. . . you're going to be out there, minimal eleven-thirty.

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C: PM?

J: PM... yeah eleven-thirty PM. . .[I mean]AM, AM.

C: Ah ok.

J: That's when most routes get finished by eleven-thirty, the recycling. 'Cause that's the cut-off time. If we finish before that, you can possibly go to the dump, but probably won't make it. So I get up, have my coffee, watch the news. . . if it's going to be a good day—that's no rain—that's good. My day's already started good, right there. Rain and snow are probably the worst things that a sanitation guy.

C: Which one's worse, do you think?

J: I would say the snow. . . because. . .you have no life. You have no social life. It's the job. That's all it is, seven days a week, no days off.

C: Can you describe it, like what a day looks like?

J: Oh, a day in the snow is. . . an eternity [*laughs*]. . .because you know, like I said, our job is all about repetitiveness. So we plow, we get a route in the snow that we have to plow, streets. . . and you plow those streets for twelve hours.

C: Is it a twelve-hour shift, usually?

J: It's a twelve-hour shift. . There's two shifts. 7pm to 7am, 7am to 7pm. And no days off, seven days a week. And you plow the same streets the same streets you plowed six hours ago you gotta plow those streets again until, you know, until they're caught up with the snow, and all the streets get salted. And then once you do the primaries—which our primaries are 3rd Avenue, 4th Avenue, 5th Avenue, 6th Avenue, 65th street, the Gowanus, the BQE, because the major thoroughfares. . . because we need ambulance, fire, police to, to be able to get through. And once that's done, we move onto the next phase of snow operations, which is possibly, if it's do-able, we do bus stops. We dig out the crosswalks, we dig out the fire hydrants, 'cause if there's a fire, so the firemen know when their hydrant is. Schools, we do school also. Make sure the highways are, you know, not frozen over. No ice patches, or they make sure they are constantly salted. And then once we catch up with all that—if it's do-able—we start picking up garbage 'cause garbage gets suspended during snow, garbage gets suspended.

C: So snow is sort of the priority?

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J: Snow is priority? And then everything else is pretty much secondary, until, until they, you know, they catch up and they feel that now they can go after the next phase of snow operations. And once you catch up with that and, it's just—like I said—it's just repetitive.

C: It's endless.

J: It's always the same thing. We always do the same, you know, we've been doing this for for knows how long, I think it's hundred years maybe now.

C: Yeah, it's a very old department.

J: Yeah, it's a very old department. It started out very. . . shovel and broom. Broom and shovel and a pail, that's what it was, literally. And now it's evolved into. . . it's a machine, it really is a machine. There's always going to be garbage. It's like death and taxes.

C: [*laughs*] That's a good way to describe it.

J: Yeah, it really is. . . there'll always going to be garbage. . . they're always. . . someone is always making a mess somewhere. They need to throw it out.

C: We're constantly always throwing away things.

J: Yeah, it all started out because it was about health. They used to—I believe—Sanitation was part of the health, something with the. . . with the health administration, if I'm not mistaken, because back then contagious diseases and the garbage. So that's how it started because that's our symbol has, we have the symbol like the medics, it looks like the cross and it has wings and it has two serpents—that—I believe it or not, that has something to do with that, 'cause everyone in the medical field has that. If you ever noticed it, and our emblem carries that. . . which is, has to do with health. So I think snow is probably the worst thing possible. Yes, we make money but it comes at a price.

C: Does that involve blood money at all?

J: It's blood money because you're doing it, but you don't want to do it because, you know, you have no choice, it's our job. But that's why, that's called blood money because you know, they're like really, you know, you're out there, and you're killing yourself for twelve hours, thirteen hours a day. You know, because it has to get done. You. . . yeah, we're getting paid, you know, you get paid double-time, time and a half and, but you know. . . you're, you're killing yourself. . . you know really, it's really back-breaking work to sit behind the wheel of a truck that's bouncing constantly, and the blade on the plow trips every time it hits a raised man-hole cover. And it jolts the truck, you know, it's just—

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C: It's not that great for your body.

J: Yeah, it's for twelve hours, thirteen hours sometimes. I mean. . . the first day of the storm is always thirteen hours, everyone—

C: Can you describe—I mean obviously this past December was—

J: [*Sighs*] Oh.

C: A really bad period for the city. What were your experiences with that?

J: I personally, you know, I blame the powers that be, for me, it's that simple.

C: Who is?

J: The powers that be, be Goldsmith and the Mayor. The mayor wasn't here. He was in the Bahamas in his house.

C: [*Laughs*] Right.

J: You know, drinking a bahama-lama. . .

C: [*Laughs*]

J: Or a Mai-tai. And we were here, you know, dealing with snow, and no one declared a snow emergency. You declare a snow emergency, the buses don't go out, the trains that are running outside the elevator trucks don't run, and you advice the public to stay off the streets. That didn't happen.

C: Do you feel like most people look at it, with the responsibility, that it was Bloomberg?

J: Oh yeah, absolutely. But they. . . you know[. . .] they needed some body to blame [*chuckle*]. . . who better to blame than the guys who are responsible for removing the snow, because obviously, if you're going down the street and the snow is there, that means someone wasn't doing the job. But how could we do our job if the streets were littered with cars, and buses. . . that was stuck in the middle of intersection. I mean it looked like a wasteland, it looked like the Arctic. Everything was frozen over, no one on the street, cars just abandoned. . . so how could we plow? We couldn't, we couldn't get through! I mean, my first night was. . . the. . . fourteen. . . fourteen hours. . . I was loading salt up to the salt spreaders when they were. . . they were on the streets salting, trying to catch up with the, with the. . . with the. . . the snow on the highways. Then cars got, started getting stuck, they got stuck on the BQE. . . on Fourth Avenue, Fifth Avenue. . . it was just, you know, chaos.

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C: What did you guys do with the cars stuck?

J: We couldn't do anything, we don't have authority to move them. The only ones who have authority to move them are the police, DOT. . .you know, but. . . how could they get through? It was a big domino effect. One car got stuck, then the twenty cars behind them weren't going to go anywhere either.

C: Were there worse areas in the district?

J: The whole district was just. . .like I said, we have major thoroughfares that run through our district . . . Fourth Avenue's a big thoroughfare, Fifth Avenue, Fourth Avenue, Third Avenue, the highway. . . the BQE. . .

C: They were all backed up?

J: [*Sighs*] I went to. . . one of the opportunities I got to go get something to eat and drink, I drove on my front-end loader because you couldn't get through with a truck. . . I had to take my bulldozer with me.

C: Oh my gosh.

J: To the store. . . I saw people walking down the entrance ramp to the BQE.

C: Oh.

J: And I'm like. . . *that's weird*.

C: [*Laughs*]

J: And I said, I said, *What's going*. . .he goes, *Cars are stuck on the highway*. He goes, *I had to leave my car there*. They were leaving the cars and just walking off the highway because they could not get through, they couldn't go anywhere. So they just left their cars up there. So now how are supposed to get up there to plow if there's cars everywhere, that were just abandoned? So we were. . .and we couldn't move them. . . and if that wasn't bad enough, we started getting trucks that were stuck in the snow drifts. So people were saying that we weren't out there. . . granted, that's their, that's their opinion, everyone's entitled to their opinion. But how could you see us if we couldn't get through the streets? You couldn't.

C: Right.

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J: How could you. . . you didn't see a garbage truck come down, plow your street because he couldn't get through the street because there were cars in the way. You know, every, like I said, they needed someone to blame. Why not blame the guys who were in charge of getting rid of the snow, 'cause obviously, they didn't get rid of the snow. Yeah, but we couldn't get rid of the snow because it was just a breakdown in the system, or in the mayor's office, who was the one in charge of hitting the panic button, you know, stall the emergency. . . let's close the schools, let's get the traffic off the streets, let's warn the public not to go out. It's going to be a bad one. They didn't do that. So we got blamed for it. So were on the slow down because of budget cuts. No, I have a sick mother. You think I wanted her street not plowed? No, absolutely not! I want her street clear, because—God forbid—she needs an ambulance, or anyone else needs an ambulance, the ambulance can get there. I wasn't on a slow down, that's not, it's not in my best interest.

C: Did you guys feel like that people, the general public was blaming you guys for the—

J: Oh yes. Yes, that we were money-hungry, they were over-time hogs. You know, they weren't in our shoes, they weren't out there. Yeah, they were out playing with the snow, I was out there shoveling the snow.

You know, it's a difference. When you're out there actually plowing it for thirteen hours, you know, you don't want to play with it. You don't really want to see it anymore you know. And after two days, three days, four days, you want a day off. So imagine, ten, twenty, thirty, and forty days. . . without a day off. I wasn't making money because I wanted to. I was forced to make money.

C: How many days in a row did you work?

J: I worked forty-six.

C: Forty-six days?

J: No, no, I'm sorry, wait. . . January. . . February. Oh, ahhhh. . . yeah, forty-seven days.

C: Wow.

J: See, I worked from the 25th. . . of Christmas. . . all of January, and all the way up to. . . February. . . 14th?

C: It took that long to clear out the streets?

J: Well no, because what happened. . . the first thing was just—

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C: Madness.

J: Madness, you could hear it on the radio. . . people yelling, *We're losing the highway, we're losing the highway!* 'Cause I always take the radio because I, I wanna know what's going on in my district . . . and if spreaders need to get salt, and. . . you know, they're coming down the block. And it was total white-out. I couldn't even see the cars that were parked on the street by the district as I was driving up to the district, because you know, I needed a break, I needed to go the bathroom, you know, I wanna just to stretch my legs, you know, it was night out. A total white-out, couldn't see a thing, so I could only imagine how the street was—like I said—until I took my break, and actually saw the chaos. . . the cars, there was just the police station. . . they, they. . . it was just terrible, terrible. . . the second I. . . 'cause I was on nights. I was 7pm to 7am, so once we got out, I got out at 9 o'clock in the morning. . . and I was taking some friends home, because they couldn't get their cars and I. . . got. . . god, thank god for my four-wheel drive Jeep Cherokee.

C: [*Laughs*]

J: My baby hasn't gotten stuck in the snow yet, ever since I had her.

C: Yeah, you were smart to get that car.

J: Yes. I, and you know what, and I'll never ever own a car again. . . unfortunately, I'll end up paying more for a four-wheel drive and gas prices, but it's well worth it, because I've made it to my job every day. It took me two hours and forty-five minutes to get from 86th street and 14th Avenue, to 75th Street and 14th Avenue.

C: Jeez, that's crazy.

J: It took me ten minutes to get from my garage to 86th Street and 14th Avenue.

C: Wow.

J: Just imagine, how quickly I got here, 'cause this streets were open, the second da, we had, you know, we had it opened, it was good. Coming to my house was a nightmare, the first night, the first morning, the morning of. There was a car forged in, fire-bombed. Just burned, because the guy burned out his transmission, the car caught on flames, it was a shell. People were stuck, people in little cars that have four inches of clearance space underneath their cars, trying to drive. Where are you going? With twenty-nine inches, where are you going? Park your car, get a hot cup of cocoa, and just hang out! Look out the window, and just admire the snow, because there's nothing you can do, and there's no where you can go. Nothing was running. Most stores weren't even open, and the ones that were open were open because they live upstairs from their store, not because, you know, they drove in. It was just, over here .I mean thank god I had

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supplies. I had food in the house, water, and bread, and[. . .]you know for the next couple of days, because it was just, you couldn't go anywhere without getting stuck. I mean, I mean thankfully enough, I didn't get stuck. But it took me two hours to drive. . . two hours and forty-five minutes to drive ten blocks.

C: Did you feel like it was the worst snow storm that you've seen as. . . working for the Department of Sanitation, or is it the same every winter?

J: No actually, this was probably worst than the first year that I was on the job. That year, we had a snow storm, and it was like twenty-four inches, I think it was. . . but it wasn't, it didn't come down with such intensity that this one came down. That one, the reason we went so long, so many days, I think were up to thirty-five days—I only worked twenty because I got hurt, I had an accident, with a plow and cut my eye brow.

There was but that one, what happened with that one, was as we cleared up the snow and getting ready to go back, bring back the shift days, we got another little clipper. So it kept everyone at nights.

C: What year was this?

J: This was in two-thousand. . . 2004, into. . . excuse me. . . 2005.

C: So December 2004?

J: Yeah, so December 2004 into 2005.January. . and then January, like that was what happened, we kept getting little clippers, which prevented the job from bringing everyone back days. So we got a little clipper, we worked another five days, six—

C: What are clippers?

J: Snow clippers, like [. . .] you know, flurries, like two, three inches, two to six inches. Just snow—small—snow clippers, that weren't significant enough to cause too much headaches for the street, but enough to inconvenience the job for putting us off days again. So we would work five, seven days, nights. . . alright, we are gonna get, next week, we're gonna give you guys back days, and we get another snow clipper. . . *[laughs]*. So it went like that for like thirty-something days, until that's it. . . there was no more snow. One year, 2000, 2006, I believe. . . 2006, yeah, 2006. . . we were in Manhattan, St. Patrick's Day, plowing snow. In March. And you know, usually March, we don't usually get that, like crazy snow, but—

C: That's when Spring break ends usually [for students].

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J: Yeah, we're like six to eight inches in Manhattan. And we were, they literally sent us all to to Manhattan to plow the parade route, because the parade was going to go on. St. Patrick's is a tradition so we were there.

C: Was it stressful?

J: No, it was actually a fun day because it was a warm day, it was a clear day. It didn't, it wasn't snowing. It was, you could feel the atmosphere, and the city was all amped out over the St. Patrick's Day parade. So we were in high spirits, anyway, 'cause we were all in green. And everyone was like saying, *Hey, how are you doing? Happy St. Patty's Day, Happy St. Patrick's Day*. So everybody, everybody's Irish, you know, on St. Patrick's Day. Everybody's you know, doesn't matter, everyone's wearing green, everyone's you know. And believe it or not, in New York, New York celebrates St. Patty's Day more than, they don't even celebrate it, like, in Ireland. Saint Patrick's Day, they don't celebrate it in Ireland like we do.

C: It's an American holiday.

J: Yeah, it's like an American thing. They don't even. . . yeah, it's like no big deal to them, but like whatever [*laughs*]. But for us, you know, I guess it's just another excuse to party, I guess. But that year was, that snowstorm was. . . it wasn't a bad, bad snowstorm. It was fun because we were actually out of own district, you know, a different, different area. Different sights, different people. . . that breaks up the monotony too, sometimes you get to go to a different district. 'Cause they have what's called "hours." That means, when a district is short personnel, they'll reach for the other districts that are over in personnel for the day. So listen, get these guys, we need thirteen bodies in Manhattan, so you guys can send four guys if you want. We'll give you four slots. But to go out to Manhattan you get four hours on the books that you can use that at your convenience.

C: What does that mean, four hours in the book?

J: Four hours comp time. So in other words, you accumulate hours. So, eventually when you have eight hours, you can take a day off.

C: Ahhhh.

J: You submit your form, you say you want to use your hours. You use them at your convenience, but that's a compensation for traveling to another district, on top of what ever you're doing for that district for the day. If you're doing garbage, you're getting paid for garbage, you know, and then you're getting four hours in the books.

C: Do people prefer that sometimes?

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J: Yes, that's like gold.

C: It's like a little treat.

J: Yeah, everyone, but the guys with more seniority get it, they're the ones who mostly go out of town.

C: Why do people like being out of town, because it's something new?

J: Yeah, it's just different. Yeah, you get away from the same. I guess it breaks the monotony from being in your district every single day. And seeing the same people every single day, you do get to know the people in your neighborhood.

C: Yeah. I actually wanted to kind of ask you that, because you know, you were also raised in Sunset Park. So, first of all, where did you grow up in Sunset Park?

J: In Sunset Park, we first moved, we first lived on 21st street, between 3rd and 4th Avenue. The building is no longer there, there was a fire. It burnt to the ground. I think three people died in that fire.

C: Wow.

J: By that time we had moved out, and we were living on 29th street, between 3rd and 4th. And then, we lived there for, 'til I was. . . I was about fifteen. . . and then we moved to. . . 42nd Street, between 8th and 9th Avenue, which is borderline Borough Park. It borders Borough Park, which is a Jewish community. Sunset Park. I went to PS 172, which is on 29th street and 4th Avenue, which is right across the street from the 72nd precinct. So growing up, I was always in the precinct. I was always hanging out with the cops, in the precinct.

C: Huh, that's interesting.

J: Yeah, officer. I remember Officer White. He was a. . . he operated a scooter patrol. His name was Officer White, but he was black [*laughs*].

C: [*Laughs*] The irony.

J: Yeah it's pretty funny. He was black, and I was like, Officer White. And it was spelled White, "W-H-I-T-E."

C: Yeah, I bet he got that a lot.

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J: Yeah, but a really nice guy, you know. He was a cop. He just let us hang out, hang around in the precinct, with all the other cops. And we always knew they were bringing in people and they were arrested. We looked through the window. . . the neighborhood was safe . There was a lot of gangs back then. But they were. . . starting to put them all behind bars.

C: We can always, also pause the interview, whenever you want, if you want to rest.

J: No, I'm good. . . um. . . yeah they uh, the gangs. There were the AEDs, and FMDs, which stood for *Filipino Mad Dogs*.

C: I mean, what was the—

J: It was just, back then, growing up, it was, that was the era of the gangs in New York City.

C: Is that the 70s? 60s?

J: Yeah, the 70s, because I was born in '71. So when I was of age to understand what was going, I was like eight or nine, so you know. You knew, I knew who the gang members were, you could see them lounging, and you knew who were gang members back then, you know, the guy was walking around with. . . you know, just a jacket, a ripped jacket, and patches, and you know, bandana, carrying a knife in his pocket, and you could see it. . . but then they never bothered me. They would call me "Young Blood." It was like, *young blood*.

C: They liked you.

J: Yeah, yeah. They didn't bother me, I didn't bother them, I didn't get involved with them.

C: What was Sunset Park like, I mean, in terms of the racial makeup?

J: The racial makeup when I was. . . it was funny. Between 3rd and 4th was Spanish. . . you know, Puerto Rican, Mexican, Dominican. Not so many Dominicans and so many Mexicans. Mostly Puerto Ricans, though. Above Fourth Ave. . . Fourth Avenue and Fifth Avenue, was like, all Italians, Norwegians, Irish. You know, a block over, my friend Anthony, his family was Italian. On the other side, my friend Rob's family was Italian, it was mostly Italian.

C: So it was heavily Italian back then?

J: Heavily Italian back then, yes. And then Fifth Avenue was. . . whew. . . that was all. . . that was all. . . all Italians, Norwegians, Irish. . . you know, it was . . . it was just a big, you know, it was really, really white. Sunset Park, you didn't have the problem that you have now with, like the Mexican gangs fighting in the park over the territory over the park. You know stupid things,

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fighting over something that don't even belong to them. But whatever, that's nothing to do with me.

C: That's happening now in Sunset Park?

J: Yeah, that's happening now in Sunset Park with the Mexican gangs. That, you know, they're just young punks that don't, you know, don't have anything else to do with their time, so you know. . . they're, they're mugging people in the park, and—

C: This is the park that you grew up in?

J: Yeah, I grew up with this, with the pool. You know, we would go to Sunset . . . the park, Sunset Park pool, and in the summers, it was a really big pool. That was like a safe haven. No one would fight in the pool because they didn't want it closed. So the gangs—even though the gangs, all gang members went there from different gangs—they wouldn't get into fights because they knew that they if got into fights, they would close the pool down. Then we would have nowhere else to during the summer and cool off. So that was like neutral ground.

C: Sacred?

J: Yeah, yeah in that area. The Mexicans were, you know. . .there's now's, it's like. . . but I think things have gotten better. But then the Puerto Ricans moved in to Fifth Avenue, the Italians started to move out, you know, they . . . further into Bensonhurst and Staten Island. And then Puerto Ricans moved in, they took over 5th Avenue. Then the Dominicans moved in, and in the area, all together, not just the businesses, but the homes, too, the buildings, Mexicans started to move in. But now, it's predominantly all Mexican. Sunset Park is very, very full of Mex. . .and then you have also, you have now, you know, in Sunset Park, you have what everyone calls Yuppies. . . there are more Yuppies. . .[*chuckle*]

C: Moving in?

J: Yeah, moving in, which is diversifying the neighborhood again. . .not just Spanish anymore, now you're getting back, you know. . . white back into the neighborhood, which is what almost like how it started, when it was all white [*laughs*]. Then Spanish moved in, whites moved out, now Spanish moving in, and now you also have Asians. They're like dividing up, you know, Sunset Park's is getting divided by the Asians, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans. . . and the Yuppies.

C: There's a New York Times article about that.

J: Yeah, they're, they, you know. . . they're buying up everything. The problem is— the problem that people have with Asians in Sunset Park—is that they don't buy from anyone who's not Asian. They don't. . . they stick to their own, they stick to their own businesses. If you own a

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business on 8th Avenue, guess what, you're going to go broke 'cause they won't deal with you. A, maybe it's the language barrier, who knows. . . but for the most part, the Asians that I've come across in Sunset Park and in my district, they speak English. They pretend they don't speak English [*chuckle*], but they speak English.

C: Do you run into people when you work?

J: Yes, because when I'm on recycling, I'm like, a recycling nazi. If it's not put out the right way, if it's mixed, I'm not taking it, it's considered contaminated. And we've been recycling long enough, that you should know how to recycle. We've been doing it since 1992. So, you know, I think you should know by now, this is the way it has to get done.

C: Do you feel like you've noticed these certain kinds of different changes in terms of race and demographics through your work, in the past seven years?

J: Actually, yeah. I mean, you know, 'cause, you know, you could see on different routes you do on a different day, you see who's moving in, who's moving out. And you know, you can see the racial makeup of this building that was once, you know, black, let's say. Oh now there's a white family living there. And then, next door, you're like, oh, oh look, the Asians bought the house, you know, they're gutting it. You know, you could see especially like Saturday mornings, because you know, we don't really see too many people in the morning hours. I mean we'll see them occasionally, but some people like to leave early, some people leave later then when I pass through their blocks, so some blocks I don't even know most of my people.

C: What time do you guys usually pick up in the morning?

J: We start at six o'clock in the morning, those are our summer hours. Winter hours are seven to three. We have three shifts: six to two, four to twelve, midnight to eight. But as far as people in my neighborhood, where I work, for the most part, I see them between eight. . . seven-thirty and nine o'clock, you could see whose going to work, you know whose running late. . . there's just certain people I see everyday that I know. And they say, *Hello, Good morning, How are you ya?* And *Thank you very much*; they thank you for picking up their garbage. . . you rarely get that nowadays. One time we were in my neighborhood and we were doing corner caps—corner caps are the corner crosswalks—we were clearing, clearing out the corner crosswalks, so people could cross. So my friend, Chris, my partner, we came on together. . . we came on the job the same time. . . we rolled down, we had to write down how many crosswalks, how many bus stops, how many hydrants. And we also wrote down how many “thanks yous” we got. Out of a twelve-hour day, we got 105 thank yous.

C: That's a lot.

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J: Yeah. We did like one-hundred. . . no, we did like seventy or eighty corner caps, because you know, there's four corners. . . we were on 5th Avenue, actually. And we got, yeah, like 105, 115 thank yous.

C: What year was this?

J: This was actually last. . . uh no, sorry. . . it was 2008, I believe. 2008. . . 2008, yeah, I think it was 2008. It was one of those icy, icy winters. There was a lot of ice [*clears throat*]. We had Fifth Avenue, it was a long stretch, from 39th Street to 65th Street. We were doing the corner caps and the bus stops—bus stops, because if someone on a wheelchair has to get in, they have to have clear sidewalks, so the ramp can come down and pick up the wheel chair—but yeah, you can. You have noticed the racial mix-up of my district change in the last eight years, because I've been there now, I'm almost there now almost eight years, complete. Since I started, I've been in BK7; I knew I was going there out of class.

C: Did you want that?

J: Yeah, I wanted to go either BK7, BK10, which does Bay Ridge, or BK 11, which is, does my district here in Bensonhurst. . . but this is actually Dyker Heights where I live, but we're on the borderline with Bensonhurst. But they cover, BK11 covers right up to 14th Avenue, from this side of 14th Avenue, which is actually the east side of 14th Avenue, is BK 11. The west side is BK10, which is the sidewalk where I hurt my hand, that's BK10. So I'm pretty much. . . oh and BK 12. . . which is Borough Park. They're all, they do Jewish and Chinese. Their demographic is—because they deal with, not only with Jews, Hasidic Jews, Asians—they also deal with Russians. BK 12, because they're. . . they're part of Ocean Parkway, there's a lot of Russians, and there's. . . there's a lot of Norwegians up there, too, and. . . it's. . . they're different, all together.

C: [*Laughs*] Is that an interesting—

J: Yeah, I used to work there every Thursday, we would go there out of town. But we didn't get hours for that [*laughs*] because you're still in your zone. If you're in the south—south side of Brooklyn, like if we go to BK11, BK10, BK6, BK12—you don't get hours for that because that's part of the south. Now, if I go to BK15, which is the north—

C: Which is not the same zone?

J: Which is not the same zone, I get hours for that. So I, we would go every Thursday, to do MLP, in BK12. So you could see it was very Hasidic, Hasidic and Asian. They. . . I don't know how they're working out together, but apparently they are not having any social problems.

C: They might keep to themselves?

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J: They all keep to themselves. Same things, see the Jews, are the same way. They keep to themselves. They buy from their own. They'll go to a business if they have to buy something, but they predominantly stay with their people. Same thing with the Asians. You go to 8th Avenue, there's not one non-Asian store there, and then the other thing that gets people mad in my district about the Asians is that most of their signs are in, are in their language. But they don't have an English translation. So even if we do want to buy here, I don't now what they sell! So I don't. And if I go in there, and I . . . you don't feel welcome. You know? So I guess why a lot of people that are non-Asian, they don't go into their stores. Like you can see what they sell, some of them, but for the most part, the ones you can't tell what they're saying, you can't even read their signs, so you don't even know. I'll go into a store because I just, it's my district, I'll go into any store I want. You know, I know about Asian pastries. . . you know, I like the tao-shi-bao. I get the tai-shi-bao, the pork buns.

C: Yeah, they're really good.

J: Yeah, they are really good [*laughs*]. So I know what I'm getting. I walk into the Asian store, and I don't mess around with them, and you know, they're like surprised. . . like I go into this, there's a smoothie place on 8th Avenue. . . they sell frozen smoothies. They're Asian. I go in there, I get my card, she punches my card. . . but you know, like I know, I'm not afraid to walk in and go into a store, and you know, and ask, but a lot of people don't. They don't.

C: They're intimidated?

J: Yeah maybe they're just unsure. I . . . it's weird. It's really weird, but you can see they're moving slowly, but surely, they're moving further down to Sunset, to 5th Avenue, towards 5th Avenue, the Asians.

C: Really?

J: Yeah. It's funny, because between 8th and 9th, half of that block, like say 42nd street. . . it's like half Asian and half Jewish [*laughs*]. The Jews are going up towards 13th Avenue, and the Asians are coming down towards 13th Avenue.

C: When did you note this happening, these sorts of changes?

J: Oh that, that's been going for now about a good ten years. At least ten, fifteen years, that's been going on. But the sudden Asian invasion [*laughs*]. . . it's been, that's been going on also for about, probably now, it's gotta be at least fifteen years. Because, it's been about 15 years, because when we moved to 42nd, between 8th and 9th, all the stores up there were Italian, Norwegians, there was a bar called the Double Nickel, which was a very popular bar. Going over there, and it's no longer there, it's an Asian hair salon. That was probably one of the last places to go in the late 90s.

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C: Are these all places that you were familiar with also growing up?

J: Yeah . . . all these. . . on 5th Avenue, on the other side of 8th Avenue. Yeah because we, I lived there, we moved there when I was. . . we moved out of 29th Street when I was fifteen. Yeah, fifteen, sixteen. I just turned sixteen when we were, lived out of 42nd.

C: This was the 1980s, in the 1980s?

J: Uh-huh, and we moved out there in 80s. '84, I want to say? I think it was '84, we moved there. You could see the Asians weren't, they hadn't taken over 8th Avenue yet. There were very scattered, the businesses, one, two. In between an Italian deli and a pizzeria, there was one little Asian store. One little salon. Now it's, they took over, they bought everything.

C: What streets, starting from what street on 8th Avenue, to—

J: It started from 49th Street. 49th Street, that's when they started. Then they went the other way on 8th Avenue, they were from 49th Street, now they got it all the way to 39th Street. All the businesses are Asian. Now they're Asian stores. And that's the other thing. . . like I know a couple of cafes that opened up, but they're like, the windows are all dark. It's got like neon lights, but there are no signs that says come into our bars! It's like, almost like they don't want anyone who's not Asian to go there, because you walk in, they look at you like you have three heads, like, *What are you doing here?* So you know, people get that uncomfortable feeling, so they won't go in. But I guess they don't need—because they get, you know, they get frequented by their own race—you know, so they're making their own money anyway.

C: How do you feel about that? I mean, just because this is also the neighborhood you grew up in.

J: You know, it doesn't bother me because, you know, I don't live there. . . [*chuckle*]. I guess if I lived there now, it'd probably bother me. But I don't. But I make friends easy anyway. I have Asian friends, and I ask them about that. And like, listen, it's just. . . he goes, if you go there, you know someone. . . they're not going to treat you any different, then they treat anyone else. But he goes, they are very, they are a very closed off society, very closed. . . in their ways, what they do, and how they feel. Because I have friends who've dated Asian girls, and their families have told the girls, *If you don't leave this guy, we're going to disown you*. You know, and the girl goes like, *I'm going to love who I'm going to love*. . . like you can't tell me not to see this guy because he's not Asian, but that's, you know, that they still feel. They're old school, the parents are old school, even though their kids are living here, Americanized, they still want them to follow, their traditions. And one of the traditions is that you don't, you don't date outside your race. Italians have been saying that for years! But they've changed over now, eh, it's a little more, it's a little more open.

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C: The Italians, and—

J: With the Italians, Asians, and you know, very rare. It's a funny thing, you always see, like an Asian girl, you know, with a white guy. Very rare you'll see an Asian guy with a Spanish girl. And I saw that in my district—

C: Really?

J: A couple of weeks ago. I couldn't believe it, that I actually had to take a double take. You know, it was like the oddest couple because he was chubby, and she was slim, very good looking girl. And he was Asian, and you hardly ever see that. You mostly see Asian girl with white guy. You don't see an Asian guy with a Spanish girl or a white girl.

C: Do you think things are changing?

J: Oh absolutely. . .absolutely, yeah, they are changing. In the district, yeah. Like I've seen a couple, I've seen a few more inter-racial marriages, too. Black guy, white girl. . . you know, they. . .they moved into 47th Street. I just recently saw that, I was like *wow*.

C: It's amazing that you could remember the street name—

J: You know whose new, who lives where. And you, you've see somebody that's new, you're like, you could tell. Oh, they just moved here, they're not from here. You can always tell, I can tell you. I can tell you everything about your life from your garbage.

C: Can you describe that, what you mean?

J: You know because, you can see, who you know, whose budgeting for a new stereo, new computer, new TV.

C: Because they're throwing those things out?

J: Or new clothes. . .yeah, because they're throwing all the other stuff out. They're throwing out the boxes. Oh look, this guy who just bought furniture from Ikea, you know. . . you can tell, oh someone's sick in the house. There's lot of tissues, you know. . .there's like empty cold cough, cold medicine bottles, oh someone's got, you know, someone's sick. Or you see the big, the big diapers, oh somebody might be going through chemo. And then especially when we go dump the truck. If, because they have the radiation, it's in the dump. We have radiation detectors.

C: Ahhh, that's interesting.

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J: So when they back the truck in, there's already radiation, there's radiation detectors. If there's, if it goes off, that means you have a hot load. There's radiation, so you can't dump it. So the truck gets quarantined, you take the truck off, and then you have to walk through the ramp to see if you're contaminated. You get on the ramp, and the machine scans you, see if you have any radiation on you.

C: Does that, has that every happened to you before?

J: Yeah, I've got what's called a hot load, but it's more than likely that it's from someone going through chemo, 'cause from the radiation when they go the bathroom. Like it's in their bowels. And they're usually wearing the panties, because they have no control, 'cause they're so sick. So they'll end up throwing it away with the garbage, because it's garbage, and you can't flush it down the toilet. So we end up getting a hot load, only happened to me once in the whole time I've been on the job.

C: Do you feel like your ideas of garbage have changed, working on sanitation?

J: I can tolerate the stench of it. . . there was a time [*whistle*] it was tough. I mean, I almost lost it behind the truck a few times. You know, tossed my cookies [*laughs*] because it was unbearable. The winter's probably the best because the cold air just keeps everything from rotting.

C: And the summer's the worst?

J: Ohhhh, the summer's the worst because you get, you know, the maggots, and the juice from the hopper, when it splashes. You got to be care. . . oh it's terrible.

C: Can you describe the smell?

J: Let me tell you something. . . it's probably. . . it's a cross between. . . sometimes you get the delicious smell. It smells like fresh food. Yeah like, like you get. . . funny things. This is going to sound funny, but sometime when you pick up from the Asian houses, they throw rice away. And it's fried rice. . . and it smell wonderful. . . [*laughs*] . . . it does. It makes you hungry! Like oh my God, I'll do whatever to get Chinese for lunch because some of their garbage. . . is. . . it's rice, and it smells really good. And then there's stuff that's really, really rancid. . . you know, like putrid rancid that you get that I can't even describe. It's a cross between dead human and it's just, is just . . . best word I can describe it is medley of disgust because it's just, it's just. . . I can't explain it. You, you know . . . it's. . . this is going to sound gross, but if you've ever, ever smelled vomit from someone that vomited, if you've ever gotten that smell. . . just magnify that by, like, a thousand times. It's that bad.

C: Is it like that a lot?

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J: [*Sighs*] Yes. . . yes. You can smell it constantly, it doesn't—

C: How long did it take you to adjust?

J: Oh man, it took me years, years to get. . . I would literally. . . you can see whose got the smelly garbage, you just know. Like when I would pick up, I won't breath behind the truck. When I dump the garbage, I won't breath until I'm walking away from it. And even then. . . I've . . . I've literally, like, had to walk away before because I was heaving. . . . [*imitates gagging noise*] . . . like I wanted to throw up because it was so bad, so so bad. And then when you go to the dump, to dump it, t's that bad too.

C: It's pretty bad?

J: Yes 'cause. . . you know it's not just, it's not just smelly. It's visually nasty, because people throw out everything.

C: Where do you guys dump?

J: We have a dump a block, actually away from the district, on 50th Street and 1st Avenue. IEC, that's the name of the company. And it took me uh a good, I would say, a good six years to get used to this.

C: So very recently?

J: Yeah, very recently, right, very recently. But as far as the, the people, I really don't have bad people in my district, as far as the way they see us. And for the most part, they say *Hello, Good morning, How are you, Thank you*, and . . . you know. . . they treat us like humans, not like second class citizens. And I was talking to a friend of mine, and he said that the reason why Asians don't look at us is because in their country, in China, sanitation is done by criminals. That's what he told me. And I was like, my friend Wilson, he's Asian. . . you have to see him. . . oh man, when he works in the Asian neighborhood, in Sunset Park. He screams at them in. . . in Cantonese. . . or Mandarin, I think it's Mandarin.

C: So he's Chinese?

J: Yes. So he's giving these people an earful. What is saying to them? I have no idea, since I don't speak Mandarin. But he's letting 'em know, because I'm sorry to say this. . . they're the ones who put the garbage out the worst way.

C: Really, I was going to ask you that.

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J: Yes because. . . if you have ten bags that weigh 100 pounds each, why would you put it all in one bag? You think I'm superman? You got to remember that. You got to remember that when I get to your house, you may not be the first house, you may be the 500th house I visited today. So I'm very tired. I'd rather you put out ten bags that weigh half as much than one bag that weights ten times as much. It makes no sense. So he yells at them all the time. And like. . . and. . . this is when I say they don't know English, they claim they don't know English, but when you leave something, it's funny how they know English. Oh, you left my garbage. Oh you speak English. Oh, so listen, let me school you on something here, buddy. And I let them know. Listen. You know, and they . . . and they'll motion to you. *Take it, take it.* . . and I'm looking at them like they're crazy. And I go like this: if you can pick it up, go ahead. If you can pick it up, then I'll pick it up. If I can't pick it up, and you can, there's something wrong here because I'm twice your size, and if I can't pick up the garbage can, and you can, there's something wrong. So try to pick it up. And he tries to drag it, can't move it. Why? Because it weighs, like, 500 pounds. Because they load it up with all the garbage of, how ever long. Whether it be two days or one day. . . it's a lot of. . . and they eat a lot of shell-fish. So the shells are heavy. A LOT of shellfish. They love snails, too, because they have. I've seen them.

C: The shells?

J: Yeah, because they break in, they break in the, in the hopper. Once you cycle it, they break and they're all over the place, you can see them. So I know they eat a lot of shells, a lot of clams, a lot of oysters. They eat a lot of fish. But—and I told them—so he tries to drag it and he can't move it. And I'm like, you see? Too heavy, too heavy, no good. I said, take it out, put five bags. And then, *Okay, okay.*

C: So you think people change?

J: Yeah, if they don't, we don't have to pick it up. We have to be able to pick up to seventy pounds. Anything over seventy pounds, if I can't lift it, I'm not lifting it, I'm not hurting myself, I'm not doing it. And our job knows that. They tell you, if it's more than seventy pounds, you don't have to lift it. Even with your partner, I don't have to take it, so. And if they don't remedy the situation, a couple of times, I'll leave the garbage. . . I'll leave it. And I'll tell them, no, I'm not taking it, not until you learn. And you see how quickly they learn. Same thing with the recycling. If they mix it, I won't take it. I throw it back, put it back. I take it. . . well not throw it, I'll put it behind the fence. Take the bag and put it behind the fence. And then, they'll sometimes. . . and you'll see, people are looking out their windows. Some people have nothing better to do than wait for sanitation, to pick up their garbage, I kid you not. . . they're out there, you can see them, and you know. . . [*phone ring*]. . . and most times. Oh hold on a sec, can we pause it for a sec?

C: Yes, definitely.

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[Recorder stopped]

J: The recycling. . .yeah, they know. So, and they'll chase you down the block. Oh, you left my. . . no, no no, I didn't, I didn't forget it, I left it, it's mixed, you gotta separate it. I let them know.

C: Does that happen often?

J: Ahhhh! You'd be surprised. Yeah because. . . some people, you know that. . . something's not right when they're looking out the window, and they're looking if you'll take the garbage. People think that, people think that they're smarter than you. Listen, just because I'm wearing a green uniform and I'm picking up, that doesn't make me stupid. Not by any means. I'll take their, like if you feel a pail that's really, really heavy. . . nine times out of ten, they'll be rocks in there. And you take out the bags of garbage, and sure enough, they'll be like a couple of bricks, or a couple of rocks.

C: Why would people throw that?

J: 'Cause they're throwing it away, 'cause they're cleaning out their yard, or whatever, and they want to throw it out. But that's not my job to take your rocks, that's not household garbage, so I don't have to take it. And so people think they're smart. They'll put it in the garbage can. So I'll put it back behind their fence. You know, why don't you just put it out, and ask me: could you take it? Alright, I can take it, no big deal, it's biodegradable anyway, it's stone, it's going to go the landfill. But they try to be sneaky, you know. That annoys me, I can't stand it. Don't try to, don't try to think that you're going to pull a fast one. Like I said, I'm wearing green, I'm picking up garbage, but I'm not stupid. I can pretty much tell by picking up a bag if it has plastic or bottles. And if it has plastic or bottles, *really*? I don't have to take it, it's contaminated it, you have to recycle, it's a law. It's not a city law, it's a federal law. So if you know, you don't wanna separate it, I'll leave it, call my boss, and you'll get a summons.

C: So people have to actually separate trash from recycling?

J: Yeah, you're supposed to. And you're supposed to wash your recycles, too. You're supposed to.

C: Do you think most people do that?

J: Ah [*sighs*], you know what, most people don't. I do 'cause, well, I don't want my recyclables to be stinking up my house. So I wash them. I wash my bottles, I wash the jars, I wash everything. You know I don't want a mess. But most people, they don't. And then people, it's common sense. If you have a full jar of whatever, it's not recyclable. Why? Because the contents

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is still in it, so why would you put it in recycle? It's amazing, how the simplest things people don't get right.

C: Why do you think people do that?

J: They just. . . I just think they, they don't know, they're not informed, but that's something that's common sense. You know, if it's empty, okay, and it's plastic—a recyclable. If it's plastic, it's a jar, and it's full of whatever, not recyclable [*laughs*]. It's garbage, you have to put it with the garbage, then you can put it with the garbage. But some people will put full. . . they'll put tupperware containers with food still in it in the recycling.

C: Yeah, that doesn't make any sense.

J: And I get that a lot. And I put it back. I'm like listen. . . and some people will come and they'll try to fight with me! I'm like, listen, it has food in there, it's garbage. Separate it from the recycle. So I'm telling you nicely, I put it behind the fence, I'm doing you a favor. If I don't put it behind the fence, my boss is going to come, see that I left the bag, come look at the bag, see that it's mixed, and he's going to give you a summons for improper disposal. I'm doing you a favor. You don't appreciate it? *No problem*. 'Cause next time, I'll make sure you get the summons 'cause I'll leave the bag where it is. I won't move it and you'll get your summons.

C: What do most people say?

J: Oh thank you, I'm sorry. . . yeah, like with some people you have to be a little crass with them. . . because you know some people, they mistake kindness for weakness. . . and they don't make that mistake with me because I'm just picky, so I guess they get intimidated.

C: You are intimidating.

J: You know, you have to know how to talk to people. With some people you have to be a little bit hard when you talk to them 'cause they don't get it. It's simple. There's certain things that I just don't like, and that's one of them. It makes my job. . . I don't like it when they throw out containers of whatever, ammonia, chlorox, and it still has stuff in the jar, because people have gotten killed on this job because of that.

C: Do you know anybody whose ever gotten really seriously injured on this job?

J: I never, I never met him personally. But before we came onto the job they told us about, a sanitation worker who. . . they were throwing out recycle. When they were doing real loader, they weren't using split bodies back then. It was just a big truck with a big open back, wasn't a split body like ours, which is two small cut sections. They threw bottles of containers and one of

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the bottles had acid in it. Like it was sulfuric acid, and when he cycled it, it sprayed, and as it sprayed him, he fucking. . . he took, he inhaled, and burned his insides. And he died. . . he died.

C: Oh my gosh.

J: From the fumes, killed himself.

C: Do you worry about that at all on the job, your safety?

J: Oh, absolutely. Whatever we throw anything in the back of the hopper that has liquid in liquid form, you have to be careful. I don't stand back there when it cycles because if it's acid or whatever and it splashes out at you, you're going to get hit. And you should see. . . just with regular water, when you put enough bags in there, you should see how far it shoots out of the back of the truck.

C: How far does it shoot out usually?

J: Eh, like three or four car lengths.

C: Wow.

J: Yeah because of all the pressure from the bags that's. . . pushing against the, the juice [*laughs*] from the hopper, it just . . . sprays out. . . and you can see the—like it's a spray cloud. So imagine if that's acid, you don't want to be standing there. And I normally don't stand there, because I don't wanna be splashed by anything. Very rare the time, the times that I've gotten splashed. I've gotten splashed by water from the rain, 'cause thank god when it rains, all the juice, you know. We, they have plugs on the side of the hopper, which you can take the plug out, and drains—

C: It drains it out?

J: It cleans it out, so you have a nice clean hopper. And usually it's just full of water, and sometimes they don't put the plugs out, it's full of nasty water.

C: Ewww.

J: And that's how you, you're not supposed to, but sometimes people are literally on top of you, when you're working behind the truck. And that annoys you, because: a, they're getting too close to you, and b, you're afraid that you're going to get hit. So, you have a lot of juice in there. You load up the hopper, put as many bags as possible till it's really, really packed, and then you cycle it. You cycle it, and when it comes down, you push your hands up and run for cover. And that car that's too close, he usually gets the hint after that, because he gets covered, and ech.

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C: And they learn their lesson.

J: Yeah, and then you see how quickly they stay back. Because you know, guys have gotten hit. Not too long ago, one of the guys in our garage, he was working in his other garage that he was at before transferring back to our garage. He's doing the garbage, minding his own business, and he hears like a car screeching. So he turns around, he saw a car barreling down on him, and he jumped out of the way. He would've gotten pinned. . . the back of the hopper. . . his legs would've been pinned because the car came this far. . . would have pinned him, would've killed him. He jumped out of the way, he hurt his knee, but he jumped out of the way. Otherwise, and the car [*makes a blasting noise*] right under the hopper. . . And his partner came out, *Uh, what happened.* I don't know, this guy lost control. . . the guy was drunk, a drunk driver. Now they're supposedly in the process of getting us vests, reflective vests, like DOT so people can see us.

C: That makes sense.

J: It does. I mean, our uniforms have reflective stripes on them. So it's really not visible when it's raining out, and it's dark, because we're out there when it's still dark out. It's 5:30 in the morning, six o'clock, the sun now is now starting to rise 'bout six thirty. . . so it starts getting. . . when we first get out those doors, it's six o'clock, it's dark out. And also with daylight savings, when you turn back the clock, it's even darker, 'til seven. The sun doesn't come out until seven thirty. So it's dangerous, but yeah, I'm always, you're always constantly looking back, constantly looking back when you're behind the truck because you get, you get comfortable. I learned that almost the hard way. I was getting out of a truck one day and—I don't know why I didn't, I always look back when I get out of the truck. And for what. . . it was one of those days I got comfortable. I stepped out of the truck— and I usually step out backwards— and I look behind because I'd rather have this time. I turned around, I stepped out facing forward, I didn't take a step and then a bus, like this [*hand motions*]*—literally right here.* That I was like, I just leaned back into the truck, I was like, holy crap, I almost got killed. The bus driver. . . when he stopped at the light, he opened the door, and he got out, he was like, *You alright?* I'm like, wow, I was like, *Yeah man, thank you. Sorry.* I apologized to him, because oh my god, it was my door. *I was going to hit you.* He goes, you came out so fast, it was like, I didn't have time to do anything. . . literally, he didn't even have time to blow the horn. I just stepped out like that. And I've never done that, I've never done that since. But guys have done that. Like this one guy not too long, a couple of months ago, stepped out of the truck, this old lady barreled him, just blasted him. He has swelling of the brain, he has broken legs, broken arm, fractured skull, too, he was in bad shape. She claimed that he just jumped out of the and the other guy was like, no, he was already outside the truck, walking, back when she barreled him down. He didn't just get out of the, yeah 'cause she tried to say that he just walked out of the truck. And he didn't, he was already out of the street when she barreled him, and thank god there was an eyewitness who saw

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the whole thing. An old lady, she was like eighty something years old. She just, just didn't see him.

C: So do they tell you, like sort of during training, like these various safety issues?

J: Oh yeah, they tell you, you know but they can only tell you. It's up to you to, you know, not to get too comfortable, because it... because it is repetitive, it's all routine. So that's why you get so lax, so you gotta, you know, you gotta be on your Ps and Qs out there when you. Like I said, it's only garbage, but it's dangerous, because you're dealing, you're out on the elements, you're out on the traffic, and some people just, they don't see you.

Like this one guy was in a van, he was on his cell phone, and he thought he stepped on the break, but he stepped on the gas, and he... hit the sanitation guy. And it threw him into the truck. Like you know, it happens every day, all over the city, there's somebody's always getting into some kind of an accident.

C: Really?

J: Yeah [*clears his throat*]. I mean... where they're getting hit, you know... I mean, so thank god, my accident was... wasn't my fault. It was a manhole... it was not a manhole cover, it was an access panel for ConEdison, and the door was sunk in on one side. So it was, it's supposed to be flush like this with the asphalt, the doors. So this side was flush, but this side was like this... there was a lip... so instead of being level like this with the asphalt, it was like that [*demonstrates with his hands*]. So this side was level with the grade, and this side had a, had a dip down, so there's a big barrier there, which was the steel frame. So my plow hit it 'cause it was covered with snow, so I couldn't see it. So when the plow just followed the grade, it followed the dip, jolted the truck to a stop, my head went through the driver's side door, the blade snapped, the truck launched forward, my head was still out the window, and I hit the frame of the door [*makes a popping noise*]. And I busted this right here. See you can see the scar [*points at scar on his eyebrow*]. So...

C: Did you need stitches?

J: Yeah, seven. Yeah, they shaved half my eyebrow, to get here. They gave me seven stitches. Yeah, so I mean, I was... that was, I just got on the job when that happened. I got on August of '04, that happened... February twenty... twenty-eighth... of... 2005 [*laughs*].

C: Did that make you want to quit?

J: No, what actually made me want to quit was the first torrential downpour that I was in. It was so miserable.

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C: When was that?

J: That was the summer of '05. It was so bad, oh my god, it was so, so. . . the water was coming out of the manhole covers. We had a lot of rain that day. I was sitting at the train. . . I was sitting at the light, in the truck, with my partner that day, was, his name was Salmaro. I was sitting with him, and I remember looking at the train station. And I told him, I can jump out of this truck, jump onto that train, and be in my house in ten minutes. That's how I felt I wanted to quit.

C: Why?

J: Because of the rain.

C: What about that was so difficult?

J: It was just a very miserable day. We did heavy garbage, we were out there, it was like, 12:30, one o'clock almost. It was bad, it was a hot day, it was after a holiday, I believe. It was just, just. . . the working conditions were just miserable that day, just the weather, the buckets of rain that were coming down that day. It was that, that just. . . that more than anything was just what made me want to, I really thought of quitting that day. That was probably the worst day, for me, ever.

C: What made you not quit?

J: Ech, 'cause you know, what am I going to do? It's rain, I have to get used to it. And you know, just like everything else, I've gotten used to the cold, I've gotten used to the rain. You live and learn, as they say so I got the proper gear. . . rain gear. I had rain gear, but it was worthless that day [*laughs*]. It didn't matter, it really didn't. Yeah, I was soaked all the way through, with rain gear, I was soaked all the way through, down to my underwear, my socks, and that was. . . my feet were so wet, and it was just miserable. Just a miserable, miserable, miserable day.

C: Do you still have days like that?

J: Yeah, but you know, they're not as. . . I. . . they're not as intense anymore. I just, you deal with it. You deal with it, whatever, it's raining. You just get yourself mentally ready. That's why I watch the news in the morning, just to see, I'm like, uh, okay, whatever. You prepare yourself mentally, too. Because you have to. 'Cause it's just. . . you know. . . it's just like when you warm up before you do exercise, you're getting your body ready. So you gotta get your mind ready. Alright, I'm going to be out in the rain, it's just water, and I'll get through it.

C: Do you feel like you have to be a mentally strong person to do this job?

J: Yeah, yeah, yeah. You do because, like I said, you know, you deal with the same things

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everyday, it's all repetitive. So same thing with the weather, eventually, it all comes back around, the rain, the snow, you know, which is what we look. We don't look forward to it. I mean we make money in it, but we're not looking forward to it. We just know that it's coming. So you prepare yourself, alright, this winter's here, you gotta get ready for night plow. And when the summer's, *ah man*. . . summer's here, you look forward to getting to work. You're out in nice weather, and you know. Yeah the garbage is heavy and stuff, but you know, the day's nice, the day goes by faster. The days go slower in the winter. . . they really do.

C: Because you have to deal with the snow?

J: Yeah, because you're on twelve hour shifts. . . twelve hour shifts. . . they. . . everything just crawls because it's such a long shift.

C: Do you dread winter when it rolls around?

J: Yeah, I do. I do because you know, it's that you're gonna. . . especially when they start predicting it's going to be a bad one. . . they said it wasn't going to be bad this year. . . they got that one wrong. They got, they got all the weather wrong this year. They called for six inches, we got nineteen. . . that was another, that was another fiasco. But that, they were pretty much prepared for that one. But now, because of the aftermath of the snow, or whatever, they put GPS on all our trucks.

C: Was that because of what happened in December 2010, as an aftermath?

J: Yes. Yes, now because, the city was, they want to monitor what we're doing, and where we've doing, and blah blah blah. . . like I said, they needed a scapegoat. And they used us.

C: How do you. . . do you feel like your view or your perspective on city politics has changed at all since you've been working for the department?

J: Hmmm, no. It's the city politics you know: take away, give them less. It's like, take away, take away what you've already given them, and you know, see how much you more you can get out of them, but giving them less, which is what they want to do to us. They wanna change our pensions. . . they want to put a cap on our pension. We can only take, they already put a cap on it. They put a cap on our pensions because of the tier one guys. The tier one guys. . . they can make whatever they want at the last, whatever, year of the job. And they would retire with, whatever, you know fifty percent of that.

C: This is seniority?

J: No, well, no, no, this has nothing to do with seniority, this is their retirement. In other words, you make \$200,000 that year, you can walk away with 57 and a half percent of that. So now,

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they put a cap on our, on our overtime. You can only take ten percent of your overtime. How much more do you want to cap it? The reason they put that cap on was because of the tier one guys, they were bankrupting, bankrupting the city. Because they, that's what they did.

C: Does tier one. . .is that for everybody who works for the city?

J: Well yeah, but yeah right, but now they made tier two, there's tier three, I'm still tier two, which is twenty years and out. I can make twenty years and I can get out. They're back then they had the thirty year plan. You didn't have to contribute anything to the pension, but you have to work for thirty years. And you retire with a full pension, from the city. We have a guy in our garage who's on the thirty-year plan. He's got like, six years to go, I think. I don't know if he's going to make it. He's an older guy now, he's like in his sixties, or his fifties. I think he's in his mid-fifties, but he looks like he's seventy. He looks so beat up.

C: Do you think the job has worn him out, pretty much?

J: Yeah, oh yeah. That, and I think he has mental problems, so you can, you can see that it's taken a toll on his body. And his mind, probably. You could, you see guys that retire now, they come back like to visit, they look so rejuvenated and fresh. They don't look as tired, because they're not doing this job anymore, this job takes a lot out of you.

C: What made you go into it, in the first place?

J: Just the security of a pension.

C: That's important.

J: Yeah because I was working for the union, the painter's union. I was in the painter's union. It's good money, when you can work, you know. The winters you're suffering, you're on unemployment. And in the summer, yeah, you're working, you're working five days a week, awesome, you're making good money. You're making, like, thirty-five dollars an hour. That's good money, you're making over fifty grand. But then comes the winter, and now for six months, you literally got to be like. . . you got to be like an ant, with the painter's union, you have to work in the summer, save, because the winter's going to be a long, tough one, and you have to have money to get through it. And you'll be on unemployment, but unemployment only give you so much. You get the max, which I think is like \$450, if that, I think.

C: So it's pretty inconsistent?

J: Yeah, very inconsistent, very, very, very. So you know, my friend was like, listen. He actually talked me into it. He was like why don't you take the sanitation test, they have a test coming out, it's a city job. You're not going to get rich, but you're gonna have a pension. After twenty

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years, you'll get a pension for the rest of your life, and I was like, eh, I'm doing alright, because between painter's union, my job, my painting on the side, I was doing okay. I can't say I wasn't, you know. So I was like, yeah, I don't know. He goes, give me the money. He actually mailed the application for me and everything, he filled it out for me and everything. I just gave him sixty bucks and he took care of it. Me and my other friend, a friend of mine, Edison, who's also on the job. The next thing, I got the thing in the mail for the test, and I took the test, it all happened within a year, *bang, bang, bang*. Took the test, got the results, I gotta a thing for the interview, went for the mini-medical. Oh forget it, it was just *bang, bang bang*. . .quick, quick, quick, quick. And I was like, alright, and next thing you know, I got hired. I actually got my CDL license on March 30th, on my birthday, and I was turning. . . thirty. . . I turned thirty-three, I was thirty-three.

C: So have you liked your time so far with sanitation?

J: Yeah, I've liked my time with sanitation. You know, you got good days, you got bad days. Just like anything else, just like any other 9-5 jobs, you have good days, you have bad days. There's people you like, there's people you don't like. It's like a regular job, it's just a heavy job, you know, just a lot of garbage. A lot of garbage, and eh, you know. I have twelve years to go for twenty.

C: Do you think you're going to make it through?

J: I'll make it to twenty, yeah, I'll make it. Will I make it to twenty-five? I don't know, I'll be fifty-three then.

C: What happens at twenty-five years?

J: Twenty-five years, and that's it, you can't make any more money on your pension.

C: Ah.

J: You can only. . . the reason why guys stay the extra five years because you get an extra point and a half. For every year you stay after twenty, so you get an extra seven and a half percent.

C: So you think most people stay for at least an extra five years for that?

J: Yeah, 'cause you get to walk away with an extra. . .if you walk, if you walk away at fifty-percent of your hundred thousand. Why not stay the extra five years instead of working somewhere else, when you're gonna be making whatever, you know, \$450 a week. Why don't you just stay an extra five years and gain an extra seven and a half percent on your pension? So instead of walking away with \$50,000, you're walking away with fifty-seven and a half thousand. It's almost sixty, yeah 'cause you know what you're doing, you're making the salary. So you know,

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why would you not do it?

C: You're used to it.

J: Right, right, exactly. You know what you're going to be doing, it's either going to be garbage and recycling [*laughs*]. And if you that kind of time, you're definitely going to be on garbage. And you'll probably have your own route, you know, you'll know where you are every single day.

C: Is that what, what people want?

J: Yeah, that's what you want eventually, is you want your own route, in one section. You don't wanna be bouncing all through the district, which is what I'm doing now. But I'm mostly on recycling. I know where I am, for the most part, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, I know it. Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays are like, up in the air, because I might be on garbage, I might not be. But for me, if I could, I would stay on garbage, on recycling for the next eight years, at least, if I could.

C: It's easier on your body.

J: Yeah, it's easier on your body, absolutely. I mean then I could for the last four years, or whatever, nine years, be on garbage. There's nothing I can do about it, you know, we'll see. I don't know. But my district I've liked my time. . . and I've only been in one district. I started here, so I know all the guys, all the guys know me. I really don't have a desire now to transfer anywhere else. I mean, I could transfer to right here, BK 11, their weights are not as heavy as ours because they're. . . there's a lot more. . . private houses here, by the street, there's a lot of buildings.

C: Is it funny for you to be working in the same district that you were raised in?

J: No, because that doesn't bother me, you know. I run into people that I went to school with from time to time, see how they've changed, whose gotten bald, whose gotten fat. You know, how've changed, and you get to see them. You know, *Oh my God, you look so good. You got bigger*, they tell me. Because I was very skinny in school, I was like a twig. Then I just got broader, I just put on size, and started working out.

C: It helps with the job, I'm sure.

J: Yes it does, believe it or not, you do. You should do some form of exercise. Oh my sister. . .hold on one second, I just want to see what she. . .

C: Okay, let's pause.

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[Recorder pause]

J: What did you, what was I just saying about the—

C: About exercising.

J: Oh, you definitely should do some form of exercise. I wouldn't necessarily recommend, you know, going out and running out five miles, because you do enough walking in the district. but some form, some sort of exercise for your back. I wouldn't do anything pounding for the knees because you're pounding them constantly, up and down, up and down, up and down all day. You know, we have we have a lot of up hills in our district, because we're on, on a hill. Sunset Park's, the top of Sunset Park is, is on top of the district pretty much, that's the highest point in, that's one of the highest points in Brooklyn.

C: Hmmmm, I didn't know that.

J: Sunset Park, yes. You have a nice view of the city, too. I don't know if you've ever been, you've never been to Sunset Park, right?

C: I have.

J: Oh you have, then?

C: I mean, specific areas, but—

J: Oh, but not like, have you walked through the park?

C: I haven't walk through the park, yet.

J: Oh okay.

C: But I should.

J: Do it during the day. It's crowded, a lot of people. But yeah, most people go there. . . we used to go there when we were kids, to watch the fireworks, the Fourth of July. But now they moved, well now people can't enjoy it anymore because they now do it on the West side, from the Jersey side. They're not doing it from the East River anymore. They didn't do it this Fourth of July.

C: Why?

J: I don't know, but it makes no sense. Why move the fireworks when you're building

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waterfront parks? Right there, by there by the water, on the Brooklyn bridge side, they just put two waterfront parks. Really nice. But now there's nothing to see but the city. But Fourth of July, it would be a great place to. . . a beautiful place to get a birds-eye view of the fireworks, but they didn't do it. Last year, they didn't do it on the East River side, they did it on the west side. Why, I don't know. . .but like I said, it doesn't make any sense, being that they put waterfront parks over there. They didn't bring it back, but who knows? But yeah, you definitely, for this job, you definitely gotta get rest, and you should do exercise. You really got to watch what you eat, because you put on weight so easily. The worst time for us is the winter because you have such a crazy schedule that you just throw your body off by the way you eat, the way you sleep. . . you can't get to the gym and exercise the way you like to. I like, was. . . I didn't work out for, like, two months, and I noticed it because I put on, like, thirteen pounds because you're not eating healthy. You're eating—

C: Whatever you can eat?

J: Whatever you can eat at three o'clock in the morning. Nine times out of ten the only that's open is Dunkin' Donuts, or the gas station that have the stores, but it's all junk food. There's no restaurants that are open that you can get a real good meal at that hour. And you have to brown-bag it. Some people don't want to do that. It's carrying around a lunch with you all day with you in the dirty garbage truck. . .ugh. . . I'd rather go into a place, sit down, and eat something.

C: Is that the hardest part of your job? What is the hardest part of the job you do?

J: The hardest part of the job is lifting up the garbage, by far. Everything else is secondary. It's not that difficult [*laughs*] you know. The garbage, that's the most grueling part of the day, it's the garbage. And it's really unappreciated, it really is. . .you know, you get, like I said, you get some people that, they'll thank you. . .they'll say like, *Thank you very much, Have a good day, Good morning, Stay warm.* . . in the winter time, *Oh my god, you guys are out here, in this weather.* But you know, you take it with a grain salt. You do what you got to do. I mean, I don't regret being in sanitation, I like sanitation, I like my job. Eh, I love my job, I do. If I didn't like it, I wouldn't be doing it, I'd just stick to painting. But I like my job. I don't. . .you know, it's heavy work, it's hard work, but it's work. It's why they call it work. If it was easy, everybody would be doing it. And believe it or not, there's a lot of women on our job. And they can, I know a couple of them, they can pick up garbage with the best of them.

C: What's the relationship like, though, between men and women within the department?

J: You know, the girls that I know, they do their job. They know how to their job, you know, they carry their own weight. They get harassed, they get, you know. . . the women who came into the lines then. This is a job that's been held by men for—

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C: For a really long time.

J: Yeah. Tens of, you know, over thirty, forty, fifty years beings ruled by men. So for women to come in and try to be accepted, it's hard, it's hard for the women. You know, there's only like two-hundred throughout the city, and a lot of them have gotten sexually harassed. You know, these older guys, the real older guys, the season veterans here, really, those that don't really know, don't know or care to know about the sexual harassment policies—

C: Because they've been there for so long?

J: Right, you know, they'll block—like she told me—they would block her path, *Oh you can't get by me unless you give me a kiss.*

C: Whoa.

J: Like, things like that. They get slapped on the ass. And you know, what she's going to do? She has to log in a complaint, and she told the people, you know, listen, I don't want to cause any waves, I don't want to cause any problems. I wanna just get out of this, this district, I wanna go to another district. So she went to the district where her, her aunt works in, where she's a lesbian. She's a big woman. . .no. . . I wouldn't say big. She's that, she looks like a man. She's very brawny, but she's a woman, but you know, she wouldn't let anyone mess with her niece there, and unfortunately, that's what she had to do. She transferred out, and they transferred her quietly. This person was spoken to, like listen, you know, are you kidding? You know, you're gonna get, you're lucky that this girl is not a vicious person. You would, she would have your job right now. You have no idea, how. . . women have a lot of power on this job.

C: You think so?

J: Because they're women, because—

C: What does that mean?

J: Whose word are they going to take, if you decide to say that I sexually harassed you. Who're they going to believe, you or me? They're going to believe you. You're small, you're petite, you're a woman, I'm big, I'm intimidating. Who're they're going to believe? They're going to believe you. So that's why I say women have a lot of power because they pretty much could, you know, they could lie, and they would believe them because most women are not big and brawny like men. They're petite, feminine, and they have pretty faces. So they're going to believe a woman over a man.

C: But do you feel like most women who do get harassed don't say anything?

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J: No. I think they keep it quiet. I think they don't want the attention, or whatever, but I think they should, you know, open their mouth, they should say something if they're gettin' harassed, absolutely. I don't, I wouldn't want it to be done to someone that I knew. If it was my sister, or my wife, or my girlfriend, I wouldn't want that. You should learn. . .this is an age of technology and computers. Everyone is aware, everyone is informed; you know you can't do that nowadays. You can't slap a woman in the ass like you could thirty years ago, and no one would say anything because it was condoned. It's not going to be put up nowadays, you can't do that. You know, so in this case, in this situation, they did him a favor, she did him a favor, pretty much. That's what I mean. She pretty much. . . he definitely would have gotten fired. And she would have had a major lawsuit, but she's, well she just didn't want that. She didn't want that kind of publicity, and 'cause right away, watch what you say around her, you know. . . she'll put a sexual harassment charge on you. That's how men are. . .because they're idiots, the woman's gotta suffer for it, you understand? You know, if she had protected herself, and did what she had to do for herself, no matter what garage she went to, she was gonna be viewed as, oh you gotta watch what you say around her because she'll put a sexual harassment charge.

C: Because she would suffer in that way?

J: Right, she'd suffer in that way, right. So, you know, but you know, she kept it quiet, she didn't want that, and she just, they transferred her out, and they kept it quiet. And this guy was spoken to, and they were like, oh my god, you know, I'm so sorry, whatever. Oh well, forget it now, she's gone, so just whatever. . .like in my garage, we don't, we had a woman. She's no longer there, she transferred out when I first got there, she went to Staten Island. I heard she was useless, she was always sick. Yeah, she was always sick, she was in the office. I don't know, I never worked with her, you know. But for the most part, I like everyone in my district. You get to know people, after years spending time with them.

C: Are you close friends with anybody in your district?

J: Oh, I'm close, I'm close friends with a lot of guys in our district, and my district, and. . .well, a couple of guys that went to other districts. . . a couple of guys—the guys that took me out yesterday—were my friends from sanitation. And a couple of my own personal friends that came out also, you know, that were just friends of mine. Not from the job, they came out. . . but yeah. . . I've gone on vacations with these guys. We've gone on vacations together: to Vegas, to Mexico, to Cancun, Puerto Rico, Miami. I've, you know. . . there's like three, three guys that I'm like really, really close to, from sanitation.

C: All from your district?

J: No, one is, one is in my district the other one was in my district, now he's in a different district. He's in BK12. And another friend of ours, he actually got, he got promoted to supervisor, then he got promoted to superintendent. So he's a superintendent now. And yeah,

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we're all close friends, they all came out this weekend. So I'm friends with a number of guys. Close, close friends? Like three guys, there's three guys that I'm really, really close to in sanitation. Yeah, my partner, Chris, we came on together, we work out together. In the snow, we work together. If the opportunity arises, we work together on recycling. If we can, we work together.

C: So you guys met through the department?

J: Yeah, actually, his name is Geertz, Chris Geertz, Christopher Geertz. I was sitting, we were sitting in alphabetical order in training. There was another Gomez next to me, and then there was Geertz. So he sat like one person away. And so, we always joke around I say there was only one person that separated us. Otherwise, we would have been together from the very beginning. He says to me, he goes, wow that sounds so gay. 'Cause it's just a joke, but you know, we were like so close, but we didn't. . . I didn't even know he lived in Brooklyn. I didn't even, I knew . . . people at your table, you get to know them while you're in training, so eh, *What's up guys*. In the morning, you get to talk to them, or whatever. But I never, ever. . . it never, ever crossed my mind to ask him where he lived. So when I got my orders, I actually came down on a Friday, 'cause I wanted to check out the garage, and I wanted to see if I could get a locker, which I actually got a locker [*chuckle*]. When I was there, when I went there, one guy was transferring out to BK12. He actually said, hey, you know, you can take my locker, I just emptied it out, and he goes—

C: Is that uncommon, or common not go get a locker?

J: Well, in the beginning, you have to, you gotta, they gotta try to find you a locker, because there's so many people who have two lockers when they're only allowed to have, should have one. So we know, we have to, they have to find out who has how many lockers, and you have to start giving up lockers, 'cause the new people are coming in and they need a locker. Some guys have to live out of their cars for like a month with their uniforms. I walked in my, in my plain clothes [*whistle*], guys in their. . . wait, where's your uniform? I was like, it's in my locker. You got a locker already? I'm like, yeah. Oh my, they're like, holy crap. How fast you've got the locker? I said I came here Friday, I said, this guy was transferring out, and the garage foreman said, listen, if there's a locker, then take it, he goes, because they're gonna go fast. So I had my tools in my car. I had tools, I had my drill, I had my hasp. So I put my hasp on, I put my lock, I put all my uniforms there, I was prepared already. And I just, I moved in, I moved in right away, and. . . which was good, 'cause. . . I didn't have to live out of my car, dragging my clothes everywhere, and getting dressed, and putting on my free. . . I hate that. So I'm settled in, and I settled in before I even started work. And it was great. . . it's been good, it's been good. It's been. . . there's bad days, there's good days.

C: It's a job.

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J: Yeah, it's a job. It's a job. I try to as be as safe as I can, without hurting myself or anyone else. You know, when you're driving, it's dangerous when you drive, 'cause we have blind spots. You're making a turn, and your doors are open, because we have bi-four doors. So in the summer, we open them. So it creates a bigger, a bigger blind spot, on the left hand side. Not the window per se, but the frame. So if the blind spot was this big, now it's that big, because the bi-four job opens, it comes out further so it creates a bigger blind spot. So you literally, when you're making a left turn, you literally have to stick your head out of the door to make sure there's no one in the cross walk. I almost came close to killing someone, oh my god, it was the worst feeling ever. I was making a left turn. I was, excuse me, I was on the school route—we were doing the school route. The school route is, you do all the schools, in, like four districts. . . BK6, 7, 10, 12. . . 11. . . you're doing like four districts . . . all you're doing is schools, you're picking up the garbage and the recycling. So I was turning over by—what was that—Coney Island Avenue. I was making a left turn onto Albamore Street. . . so I'm making the left turn, and I'm like, I'm stepping on the gas, I'm doing maybe ten to fifteen miles per hour. And my partner says, *Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa!* And as soon as he said, I look, I just peek my head out [*makes a skidding noise*]. I see a lady, she's carrying a baby, and she's walking. . . she's walking with her son. I stand, I literally stood up in the. . . and I put all my body weight on that, on that break. And the truck [*screeching noise*]. And you have to remember the truck has weight on it. So if this lady didn't run, like, the last four steps, I would've hit her.

As she ran, her son's feet came off the ground. It looked like something off of a cartoon. And she smashed his arm, and he flew.

C: Wow.

J: I was so. . . I'd. . . I pulled over, I said, *I'm so sorry, I didn't see you, you were in my blind spot*. Oh my, I was, I thought I was gonna kill this lady. It was the worst the feeling ever. That's probably my biggest, that was the closest I've come to actually running someone over. It was. . . yeah, because that blind spot is very dangerous,. That's about the only thing, really. I mean, it's a big thing, you know. Thank god that thing happened. I mean, I don't know. I don't know how it would've affected me after the fact, but I mean just to think, oh my god, that woman and her two children. . . ohhhhh. . .

C: That's pretty serious.

J: Yeah it's. . . I. . . I probably would've quit sanitation if that would've happened. Yeah. I would have probably quit, 'cause—

C: It would've been hard to get over that.

J: Yeah, terrible. There's people who have gotten hurt. I've heard of people that. . . who've gotten run over by sanitation. And it's not a pretty sight.

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C: It doesn't happen often, but it happens?

J: No, right, it doesn't happen often, guys are very careful. I mean, if you get into—

[Recorder stopped with approximately forty-five minutes left in the interview.]