

DNSY INTERVIEW BETWEEN JACQUELINE COLOGNESI AND EDWIN NIEVES
CONDUCTED MARCH 29th, 2011
MANHATTAN 2 GARAGE
ORIGINALTRANSCRIPT

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Ok, so it is March 29th, 2011, um, I am Jacqueline Colognesi recording this interview for um, uh, Robin Nagle's oral history class and I am here with...

EDWIN NIEVES: Edwin Nieves

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Edwin Nieves. And we are um, completing an oral history. It is about 1:10 pm and we are at the Manhattan 2 garage. So I guess to start, I just want to find out more about your background and where did you grow up?

EDWIN NIEVES: Well I grew up in, um, Brooklyn, New York. I was born in Puerto Rico in Bayamon and I came to...my parents brought me here when I was like 3 months old so I really don't know too much of Puerto Rico. So, I'm a New York-Rican I guess.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: (*Laughs*) What year was that when you came to, you know...

EDWIN NIEVES: Uh, I was born in May 27, '55. So I came in '55 probably around July or August.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: And how long did you live here for, in Brooklyn?

EDWIN NIEVES: I lived in Greenpoint, for like around 35 years and then I moved upstate to Monroe, New York, where I'm living now.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Um, so what led you, what made you decide to take the sanitation exam?

EDWIN NIEVES: Well, I was uh, nineteen years old and this test was given at the Brooklyn Navy Yard in Greenpoint, and uh, I just, one of my friends was taking, you know, picked up applications and I just happened to fill one out and give it in and the date uh, to take the test he called me and got me out of bed to go take the physical and that was..and here I am now!

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: So when was your start date?

EDWIN NIEVES: Uh, my start date was July 29th, in 1985. I took the test in '74 but they froze the list for like nine years because of the budget. You know, no money. So uh, I waited eleven years to get called. (*Laughs*)

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Oh, wow. What did you do in between?

EDWIN NIEVES: Well, I used to be...I liked to work out doors. So I used to be, driving trucks outside, you know, outdoors, I don't like to work indoors.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Yeah.

EDWIN NIEVES: So this is the perfect job for me! (*Laughs*)

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Um, definitely. So how is this job kinda compare to working in the trucks before you started in sanitation?

EDWIN NIEVES: Well, this job is very good. I like it because when you're on a route, you get to meet people. You get to see kids growing up, from you know, birth, you know, because I've been on the route, like, 25 years, so you get to see little kids growin' up, they keep running to the window when they hear the trucks they always like to hear the noise of the white trucks, you know, so, you know, meeting the people on the route, it's one of the good things about the job.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Do you have anyone in particular, that kind of stands out, that you've...over the years?

EDWIN NIEVES: Um, yes. We pick up Sarah Jessica Parker's garbage, so when James was born, he would always run to the window, so we seen him from like, I guess two months old, six months, and once he was able to walk, once he heard the truck, he would run to the window and he'd be there, wavin', and Sarah would come wave. So, you know, stuff like that, it's fun. And who else did we see...you know, Matthew Modine, lives on the route and they're all great people, you know. You get to talk to them personally. It's good.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: That's good. So did you start in this area? Or..?

EDWIN NIEVES: No, I started, my first garage was in Harlem. I...I stood there maybe, three months, then I transferred to Bedford-Stuyvesant because it was closer to home. And I was there, Bedford-Stuyvesant, around twelve years, and I've been here, like, the rest, thirteen years.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: So, which year, do you know, did you transfer from Bedford-Stuyvesant to here?

EDWIN NIEVES: I guess it had to be around '90...'92? '92, '93.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: What would you say are kind of the main differences between neighborhoods and working in different neighborhoods?

EDWIN NIEVES: Well for one, Bedford-Stuyvesant, it was a little more dangerous. It was a lot more drugs there, so you really had to be careful around what you pick up, but um, the people in the neighborhood was really nice. And in Manhattan, it's uh, you got more traffic so you've gotta be careful when ya, come out of the truck so you don't get hit by a cab or anything. But um, the gar-you know, the work is about, is the same, you know. It's just uh, neighborhood's different.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: So, with, in, in terms of the cars and the danger, I mean, have you ever come across any close calls, or...?

EDWIN NIEVES: Um, one time, uh, what was it. It wasn't more of a car, it was just that I stepped out of the truck and put my foot in a hole, like a little, it was a little hole in the street so uh, good thing I have boots on 'cause I woulda sprained my ankle pretty bad, but stuff like that, you're supposed to look before you leap, it is like they say...um, and um, that's about it really. I try to be really, very careful, so.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Mhm.. Um. So you were in the village, you've been in the Village now for how many years?

EDWIN NIEVES: I would say around thirteen years now.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: And how long were you working with Angelo in the village?

EDWIN NIEVES: Um, I was with Angelo around seven years. So, you know, through Angelo, I got to meet a lot of people, 'cause he was on the route 25 years, so he knew everybody. Yeah. And he's uh, typical Italian, gets up to everybody, kisses everybody, so, I became the kissin' man with him, you know, kissin' old ladies, babies, and, you name it, we kissed it. *(Laughter)* It was fun working with him.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Yeah. So how was um, do you miss working with Angelo?

EDWIN NIEVES: Uh, yes. You know, cause when you work with somebody that long-seven years ain't really that long, but it is long, with one partner, you get to know everybody, his habits, or he knows my habits, I know when he had a bad night, he knows when I have a bad night without saying a word. So it's like marriage, I guess, you know. Marriage, I guess, is harder. *(Laughter)*

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: So, um, what is it like, working with, you know, new partners, when-

EDWIN NIEVES: Oh, my new partner's um, Marc Murphy.? Um, I think he mighta been one of the youngest kids to come on the job. 'Cause when he started working here, he wasn't even allowed to drive the truck to Jersey, because that's interstate, so you had to be, I think, 18, or 19, and he wasn't even that yet.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Oh wow.

EDWIN NIEVES: So, I went from Angelo, who was, you know, he's around 58, to somebody that's like uh, Murphy's around 26 now, *(laughs)* so, it's you know, you learn a lot from Angelo, and I, hopefully will teach Murphy a few things.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Kind of, changing the-

EDWIN NIEVES: Yes.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Um, what do you talk about on the route? Just?

EDWIN NIEVES: Uh, *(laughs)*. Where we're gonna start the route. It's really...you know, it's changin', I really, It's hard...that's a hard question.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Yeah.

EDWIN NIEVES: You know, talk about sports, we, you know, I'm into sports, he likes sports, so we talk about sports, how your weekend was, what did ya eat for dinner, stuff like that.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Yeah. Um, so what's it kinda like to do this every day. Could you describe a typical day, or...?

EDWIN NIEVES: Oh, a typical day, say, alright, like today for instance. Roll call is six o'clock, you get your route, and then um, by 6:15 you're usually at your route, and so you start your baskets is the first thing usually on a route, so, uh.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Could you describe baskets, to...?

EDWIN NIEVES: It's the corner baskets on um, the green, the green cans that are on each corner. So basically, on your route, you hit every basket that's on your route. So usually when you

turn into the block that's the first thing you hit. And um, you try to work your way, we try to go where people don't live, when it's that early, 'cause you don't wanna wake them up. So, you know, you do some like factory areas, sometimes, you know, you work your way where people don't really live that much, cause you don't want to wake them up at six in the morning. *(Laughs)* And basically you do the route the same way, 'cause people set their clocks by ya. Some days, you know, they'll be telling you "Oh, you're late today." So...we try to do it the same way every time, basically, so they don't-you don't miss them.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Mhm. So do you have kind of a favorite, like a best or worst day on the job? That stands out?

EDWIN NIEVES: Uh, my best day on the job is Friday. And, my longest day is Saturday. Mondays are pretty heavy. Mondays are short distance, but more weight. Usually the first two pick-ups and uh, the first pick-up of the week is the heaviest, which is Monday and Tuesday. Cause we, we do each route three times a week. Monday, Wednesday, Friday, Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday. So the first two pick-ups of the week are usually the heaviest. And uh, and they'll usually go the longest. You-you get extra work, like on a Saturday and a Friday.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: So when it's the heaviest, I mean, this is a really physical job?

EDWIN NIEVES: Um, yes. It's um, Monday, we used to be doing like thirteen, fourteen, tons of garbage a day. And now, your typical day on the route, now, for some reason, it's got lighter, I don't know if it's the people moving out of Manhattan and not coming back, but now your typical day is around eleven and a half tons, twelve tons.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: So how is that, um, like, on, like, you, like the physical toll, like on your health, or, you feel like?

EDWIN NIEVES: Well, I don't have to join a gym, 'cause, uh, I do pretty good. And um, it keeps you in shape, 'cause you're always moving. The worst time to work outdoors, is when-for me, is when it's raining.

EDWIN NIEVES: But, um, it keeps you in shape, you know. One guy drives, one guy loads, and, when it's a lot of bags there, the driver comes out, and you work together, so, usually, whoever's the closest to the steering wheel, will jump in the truck and move it to the next stop. That's uh, that's a good partner. So...you try to do the same amount each...and my partner Murphy, he's so much younger, by the time I get back to the back of truck, there's no garbage left, so...*(Laughter)*

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Um, how does the job change when it's, um, snowing out?

EDWIN NIEVES: Ok, when it's snowing out, it's-to tell you the truth, when it's snowing, it's easier than doing collection. You're inside the truck, and um, they give you a route, and basically, Manhattan, our garage, West Street is the main thing. You do the avenues, those are called primaries. West Street is the main thing, Broadway, all the avenues you try to hit first. And then um, the secondaries are like the side streets so, that's, that's typically your snow route. You know, and you try to do by the bus stops, hospitals, fire department, you got, you know, and with the spreaders, you try to hit them areas, you know, pretty fast. One of the first times, you know, going out.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: So what's the...spreader?

EDWIN NIEVES: The spreader is the salt spreader?

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Ok.

EDWIN NIEVES: It's the big, uh, orange truck that has a plow, and um, you should, it lays down salt. And then usually the plows, are the big sanitation trucks with the plow and usually it gets pushed to the right when you start it. The spreader, though, is basically when it's less than two, three inches on the ground, because you can't plow it, until there's like, three or four inches on the ground. So the spreader's one of the first things to go out when it snows.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: So they go out...just after, right after it starts snowing?

EDWIN NIEVES: Um, no, sometimes when they know it's gonna snow, you got stand-by spots, so you got—you go on stand-by. Like, one truck will be on Canal and West Street, one truck will be on West and Bloomfield. One will be up on Fourteenth. They're pre-positioned, you know, to hit the route. So they like spread 'em out through the district.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Ok. And then this past winter, I know that Robin said you worked...many days in a row after the big storm.

EDWIN NIEVES: This past uh, this past winter is the longest—the most I've worked straight days, without a day off. Which was 49 days straight, without a day off.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Oh wow.

EDWIN NIEVES: My first day off, I was sick as a dog. (*Laughs*). Couldn't get out of—but um, 26 years, I'm almost on the job 26 years, that's the most.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: That's the most.

EDWIN NIEVES: It takes its—you know, it's good, the money's good, but it takes its toll.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Mhm.

EDWIN NIEVES: And uh, I'm very lucky that my parents live in Greenpoint, cause I live upstate, I'd never make it, I would never make it home, so, I stay at their house a few times, during the week, which makes it easier.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Oh, definitely. So what are you, kind of, doing when you're working 49 days in a row with the, with the snow?

EDWIN NIEVES: Well the first thing, is the, you're plowin'. I basically like to go out on the spreader because it's what I know. I know my route will be clean. But you know, but uh, I'll usually go on the spreader, and that's, after the spreader, you're plowin', the next few days, until you know they open up the street, they won't pick up collect—they won't pick up any garbage or recycling, so that's, that's put on hold. So um, usually after a big snowstorm, for the first week you're just really pushing, pushing to the right, and then when it gets warm enough, you're pushing the snow back into the street so that the cars can chew it up, and that's how you get rid of the snow. And then um, after that, it's when uh the rough part starts, when you gotta start looking for the garbage, between the cars and the snow piles. That's the—that's the hardest part of the job.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Mhm. And why would you say that part is kind of the hardest...

EDWIN NIEVES: Because you're never on solid ground. You're on between cars, you're on

between snow banks, and the cars don't move over here, so you're basically working between cars and snow, and um, it's a lot of work there because the garbage hasn't been picked up in over a week or so, so it's, one block you can load up, load out a truck in one block. It's hard after the snow.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Definitely. So would you take-when you load up a truck after one block do you have to bring it back to the garage every time?

EDWIN NIEVES: Um, usually when it snows you're usually working 12-hour days. So, it's you know, sometimes, it'll take you sometimes that long just to fill up the truck because you're moving very slow, because of the snow, trying to get in between cars, some-some blocks you might not even be able to get down because the cars are sticking out, but um, usually load up the truck, it usually takes you the full day, the full 12 hours.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Oh wow. So was that like, 49 days of 12-hour shifts?

EDWIN NIEVES: Um, some were 12, some were—one was like maybe 14, 10-hour shifts. The beginning, for the first few days, it's usually 12-hour shifts. And then it goes down, to like 10. The less snow on the ground, the more you can do, the less time you need to be working, so—it takes its toll, it was a long—it was the roughest winter I had so far.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: So even compared to past storms, like—

EDWIN NIEVES: Yeah, past storms, I think it was '96 was pretty, pretty heavy too, cause it just kept comin' on the weekends, so you never really got a break, but um, this was the worst.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: This was the worst. And then there was also kind of, the media fallout with the sanitation slowdown allegations?

EDWIN NIEVES: Well, I'll tell ya the truth, we never-in Manhattan we never even heard of it, you know? Everybody has their opinion, but, um, between me and you, there was no slowdown...and that's...they were saying it because the supervisors were gettin' laid off...but you go out there and you work, you know. I know if I was workin' I would want my block clean, because you know, say, God forbid there's a fire, fire truck's gotta get through there, ambulance, so...if there was a slowdown, it was-I didn't see it. Not in Manhattan, and it was very stupid if there was, you know, safety reasons.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Mhm. What about other, kind of, major events that were in Manhattan, like, maybe like 9/11? Or, How's working after that?

EDWIN NIEVES: Um, 9/11 was rough because, uh, we, you know, we were able to see the towers, I was able to see the towers going down. And then um, to see all the people walking out, West St, coming, they were stopping in the garage, with all their sensitive--you know, just to clear their face, and um, a lot of things went through this garage. They had, you know, we were gassing up ambulances from Virginia, it was um, it was a rough time. Sad. And I happened to get to go down there, the next day, the day after, 'cause we were on the front-end loading, and it looked like something out of a movie. You know, it was unreal.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Would you say that's the hardest thing you've ever had to deal with, or? How-how does it compare to kind of other events

EDWIN NIEVES: Oh yeah, that was the hardest, because one of our worker's brother's a fireman, and I was down Canal Street, he came down there looking for his brother 'cause he seen the fire truck right next to where we watched the Twin Towers and his brother's-his

brother's passed away. He was in the Towers, so that was you know-seeing him looking for his brother, that was pretty hard.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: That's really hard. Um.

EDWIN NIEVES: And another thing, to um, which was very stupid, on the route, right across from St. Vincent's, some lady threw a newborn in the garbage can. And, for some reason, somehow, they found out, and they had to bring the truck to the garage floor. Dumped it, tried to look for the infant, and they found it. It was very horrible. Looked like a little...stuffed animal...I don't know-right across from St. Vincent's. And all they had to do was leave it there. That was, that was hard.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: And when was that?

EDWIN NIEVES: That had to be around, it's hard to say, I think it was around seven or eight years ago. It was awhile, I don't really remember. Oh, that was hard.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: So, I guess to bring it to a more positive...what is some of your, you know, more favorite memories from being on the route?

EDWIN NIEVES: Well, the Halloween parade's fun here, it's-it's crazy, you know, so the Halloween parade, what else is-what other parade we do, we do uh, the Gay Pride parade, those are fun, cause it's just, just, usually the Gay Pride parade, it's hot out, so it's nice out, in the street. It's crazy, you know, you think you seen it all, but...you'd be surprised. *(Laughs)* That's fun. The parades are fun. You know, it's work, but it's fun. And everybody's having a good time, usually. And it's, like I said the worst time for me, in my experience, workin' in the rain. The rain stinks. *(Laughter)*

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: What's extra bad about working in the rain compared to I guess, other...?

EDWIN NIEVES: Well, the rain, it's cold, you gotta wear them rubber gloves, wearin' the rubber gloves...and you have to--when you're trying to pick up the bags, they're slippery, there's times there you go pick-up the bags and you punch yourself in the face. You know what I mean? You try to make sure you do it and nobody's lookin', but it happens. I've punched myself in the face and almost knocked myself out. 'Cause you-you're putting on, you know, trying to lift them heavy bags, and it gets slippery, with the rain. And you gotta wear your rain gear, it's-it's about it, you know. In my experience, I don't like the rain.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: You don't like the rain...what's the rain gear like, do you wanna?

EDWIN NIEVES: Well, it's um, it's pretty heavy. What do you call it...heavy rubber. You need a tarp, and boots. It's something to keep you dry, I'm, it's...it's hard to explain. My raingear, you know it's good. You have to go cheap. You could go buy cheap raingear, and, you-you get wet more with the raingear than without. So, it's heavy, it gets hot, and, it's just not fun working in the rain.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Um, what about working in the summer. Like last summer, we had, for example, it was 90 degrees every day.

EDWIN NIEVES: The summer's good, cause um. Everybody's, everybody—usually in the summer everybody's happy. So, you know, everybody's joggin' around, you've...as long as you have your water you take your time, nobody rushes ya, and, we've got very lucky that now we have air-conditioned trucks, so when you go to the dump, you're in the air

conditioning, when you're used sweatin' your butt off going to Jersey, cause we dump the truck in Jersey. So now, it's the newer trucks have got a better ride, and it's got air conditioned, so...summer ain't that bad. No.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: When did they put air conditioning in the trucks?

EDWIN NIEVES: I would say we got air conditioning in the last two years. So probably, 2008? Maybe around there?

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: That's a long time you went without air conditioning.

EDWIN NIEVES: Yeah. And um, driving the truck to Jersey, you can't have the doors open, so it's, it was—you could sweat, you know, there's times that people were almost passing out, that's why I think they got the air conditioners in the truck. It-it just gets too hot. And...in the summer the only thing bad about it, working, is that garbage is cookin' in the back of that truck. So, it, you know, after awhile you get used to the stink. And...and the rats.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Do they get on the truck? Or...

EDWIN NIEVES: No. The rats, they're usually just hanging out. It's in the garbage. Usually after, when you're on the route long enough you know where all the rats are, and, usually, when you used to have the cans...now, there's a lot of the garbage it's in black bags. But when you used to have the cans, you used to kick the can—not the game—it's kickin' the can and uh, waitin' for the rats to come out. And then you would dump it. Now, they're usually right in the bag, so...I happened to have a rat run across my arm and jump off my face. 'Cause I was dumping the can, and it came out the bottom of this plastic can...but it happened so fast, that you don't even really have time to react. So if I woulda seen it comin' I probably woulda had a heart attack.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Yeah. Yeah, definitely rats, and I guess as far as New York pests go now that we have the big, you know, bed bug infestation, do you take special precautions to kind of...?

EDWIN NIEVES: Well, now, they're supposed to, when they throw out the mattress it's supposed to be plastic—wrapped in plastic, so...hopefully that helps, you know. That's about-you know, there's really not much protection you can do, you just, you have your gloves and you just try not to rub it against ya. If it's gonna get on you, it's gonna get on you, and either way, so...not much you can really do. You can't see it—

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Oh I know.

EDWIN NIEVES: 'Til-when it's too late. *(Laughs)*

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: That's terrifying. Um, what is the strangest thing you've ever seen...on the job?

EDWIN NIEVES: Um, good question. Strangest thing...eh...I don't know. I don't think, I...*(laughs)*...I really have a strangest-strangest thing to see.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: No strangest thing.

EDWIN NIEVES: Uhh...I'm going blank right now, I would have to think. I...I don't really know, I gotta tell you the truth, that's...I'll get back to that question, I really don't know what-
(Laughs)

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Ok! We can always come back to it, we've got plenty of time.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Um I had been reading, I had read one article, I think, you know the exhibit that had just been done, downtown?

EDWIN NIEVES: Yes.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: And someone had mentioned they pulled out, they found like a diamond cross, in the trash once. Have you ever--?

EDWIN NIEVES: You do find stuff in the garbage. Like with me—I really don't know jewelry, it could be gold, I could be throwin' gold in the trash, you know, it's—and it's, but um, every once in awhile you'll find like twenty dollars in the corner baskets, around like—we, we deal with Bleecker Street, where you got a lot of the bars. On the weekends, people throw their cigarettes away, and then, in between probably their money goes out too, so every once in awhile you find money in the corner basket. There's a few times we found somebody's cell phone, keys, and you know we're happy to be able to return the cell phone, you know, 'cause, it's a pain, you know. A lot of people don't keep them numbers, they, they don't know the numbers, everybody, every, all your numbers are on the cell phone. You lose them, now you're out all them numbers. I'm one of them.

EDWIN NIEVES: I always say I gotta write it down but I never write it down.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Yeah I know..my parent's numbers, that's about it.

EDWIN NIEVES: Sometimes I don't even know my own cell phone number, 'cause you don't call it.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: It's true. Um. So, I guess if that's the kind of stuff you find, how have you seen the neighborhood—I know you mentioned you see the kids grow up over the years, and how have you kind of seen like, the neighborhood, like the West Village change over the course of...since you've started here.

EDWIN NIEVES: Well...now it seems like, you know...before, it seemed like a lot of more people were living here. You know, I think they were able to afford it. Now, I just think, um, people just getting out priced. You just, just can't afford to live in uh, Manhattan. They're going to like Greenpoint, Williamsburg, Williams—you know, the North side. 'Cause it's cheaper. Peop-so uh, I see um, like I said, it's getting lighter. The weight's getting lighter, the recycle's getting lighter, so it has the—it's gotta be less people livin' in Manhattan now, then it was, eight, seven-eight years ago. We used to do like 13-14 tons, 15 tons, on a Monday. Now we're down like, 12, 13, so...garbage hasn't-something had to happen. I would just think that people are movin' out, and not coming back. And...and they're building more. So I don't, you know, there's a lot more buildings, but nobody's moving in.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Yeah. Especially down here, it's very...

EDWIN NIEVES: Yeah.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Very expensive. Um. Let me see what else we can do...what do you...would you want to tell people about your work, if...

EDWIN NIEVES: Well, I'd say it's one of the best jobs in the city, you know. I'm glad I took the job, I'm glad my friend got me out of bed to go take the test, 'cause if it wasn't for him, I'd

prob—you know, when you're 19 years old, you ain't thinkin' about work, I don't think. *(Laughs)* I wasn't. So I've got to give him credit, you know, for making me go take the job. And it's one of the best jobs in the city. It's good, money's good—the benefit's good, you're outdoors. You're workin', the people you work with, 95% of them, are good, you know, everybody. You can't get along with everybody. And um, that's one of the best things I ever did. One of the best things in my life is to take this job. And I got a funny story, and, when I was—I went to Catholic grammar school. And you know, the nuns—nuns used to, they would get arrested for what they do, you know, at that time, anyway. So one nun said, "If you don't do your homework, you're gonna grow up to become a garbage man." Little did she know. 'Til this time, I still remember it, and that was like...40 years ago, when she said that. So...that's one of the funniest things I remember, about growin' up and the job. It's a great job. It's good.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: So um...how did you feel when you got the—I mean, 11 years later...to look back.

EDWIN NIEVES: Well uh, I was very lucky, because uh, we did move, you know, the address I had...we did a big move. We moved from 260 to 262 so you know, it wasn't like-you know, we moved one door. So um, my um, my card telling me I got the job got delivered to next door, where somebody knew where, you know, where I lived and they brought me the thing, and it was one of the best thing...you know, good news, cause we-that year, my daughter got born-with-got born, so it was good to know I had a good job, a job with decent benefits to-to start off with, so. That was one of the best news I had. First, my daughter, and then the job. *(Laughter)*

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: In that order.

EDWIN NIEVES: Yes.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Yup. Um. Do you feel like, there's anything kind of misunderstood about sanitation work?

EDWIN NIEVES: Well, some people—you know what it is, I-I think some people, some people get offended when um, they call you the garbage man. You know. We're not garbage, you know. You know, garbage man, yeah, we pick up the trash...uh, we're sanitation workers. So, when people call you garbage man, it could, you know, some people get offended. That's about-you know, besides that, everything, nobody really is bothering ya. They're glad to see ya, I'll tell ya, at times, especially after the snow, they-they don't know, you run out of places to put the garbage, or the recycle. So, you know, when they see ya, you're the best sight they see in awhile. Besides, you know, after seeing the snow, we're the best-next best thing they can see. So...they enjoy, you know, when we come down the block, they're waiting for you.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Um. How has kind of working in this department changed over the years?

EDWIN NIEVES: Well, when I started, there were no ladies on the job. So I started in '85, so ladies on the job came on at, I think it was '87. So when they came on, they changed the test, um, the physical, made it easier. Which...which good for them but it was hard for the, the guys because now everybody gets a hundred, so now, it's like a lottery. Where then, it was actually was physical work, so you had to, you got graded by what you could do. But now, with the women, they made it-they made it good, 'cause now they can't ask the guys to do more than the women. So, you got it-it's good. And um, that's one of the ways it changed. And you're getting a lot of, you know, younger kids on the job now. Where, like I said, they

froze the list for ten years, so when I got on, I took it at nineteen, and um, I got called. I was 30 years old, so basically, at that point, there was a big age difference. Everybody that was on the job, was either, over-you know, over 30 years old. Where now, you can get kids coming out of—18 years old on the job. Still live at home. So that's one of the differences. And...that's about. That's about it for that.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: So. Um..totally lost my train of thought, what I was gonna say. Um. Is it break time right now? Between shifts?

EDWIN NIEVES: They're gonna sign out, they're gonna sign out, so there's...too loud?

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: No, no, no. I was just wondering what.

EDWIN NIEVES: Yeah. Um, what else...

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: I had something, I just...well let's stop for a minute.

RECORDING PAUSES.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Ok, so.

EDWIN NIEVES: Ok. When I started in '85, the best thing to do is to try to learn all the equipment, so you can...they could teach ya. Because, this way it'll help you in the long run. So I—they asked me if I wanted to learn how to do the mechanical broom, and I said sure. I had a great teacher, and um, Brewington is his, was his name, so, he taught me how to do the mechanical broom, and uh, for the first five years on the job, I was doing the mechanical brooms, which was good. 'Cause they- my seniority didn't mean nothing then, so nobody could bounce me outta the position, where I was doin'. So, I was, I was working nights, it was steady nights, and it was good. And um, then after awhile I started training people on the mechanical brooms, which was, it was hard, because, you know—I'm a bad passenger, so here ya—you know you try to teach somebody how to use mechanical brooms, hopefully not hittin' the car or nothing, so...it was fun learning the mechanical brooms, and then uh, I worked in the garage, so they taught ya how to do the front-end loader, they said you just—to load up the spreaders. To uh—and they only thing I really didn't learn is the wrecker. And that's when the trucks break down, cause it's what they send to get the trucks. And, one reason I didn't want to learn that, is cause when I started, one time I broke down, and it must have been ten below, and this poor guy had to come with the truck, and get me started, and—when I see what he had to go through, I said I would never wanna—I'm never gonna do that. So...that's one thing I didn't wanna learn, was the wrecker. But the more equipment you learn, the better off you are, because then you—you have something to fall back on. And um, Bedford-Stuyvesant was a little rough, because like I said there was a lot of drugs there, so you had to be careful what you—you grabbed a bag, the needles. And...shootings. One time I broke down on the mechanical broom at three in the morning, on Fulton Street and Nostrand. At three in the morning it looked like midtown at twelve o'clock in the afternoon. And I didn't get out of that broom until a cop came out, came around, to-cause at that time, there was no cell phones, so if you broke down you had to go look for a phone that worked. I said, I'm not looking for no phone. They're either gonna come lookin' for me, or a cop's comin' by, and that's how I got outta there. *(Laughs)*

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Oh wow.

EDWIN NIEVES: I had to-had to wait for the cops to come so I could call, you know, the garage. But um, the people working-the people that lived there, they're really down to earth, you

know. They appreciate ya. It's like Manhattan, they know, people are people, they're...Manhattan, Bedford-Stuyvesant, they're all good people.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: So um. What year was that, with the car breaking down, and um...

EDWIN NIEVES: Well it had to be-I started, it had to be, like, two years on the job, during like, '87, and there was...it was rough at that point down there.

EDWIN NIEVES: Yeah. So that was, I think, when did...so, would you say that, doing sanitation in New York in the '80's was a lot different from when like, maybe, Giuliani started in '94 and started...

EDWIN NIEVES: Well, in the '80's it was rough, like we said. There was a-there was always a lot of drugs and all that, but Bedford-Stuyvesant was pretty one-one of the roughest areas at that time, because there was no work. People were just hanging out, so...it was, you know, the people around...the grown-ups, they were very nice. And I enjoyed working with—like three-quarters of the garage was black, and um, there were-they were the nicest people to work for, you know, we-so, you know, you can't judge people by their cover, just so you know. Everybody starts off in the same line, you know. That's how I-that's the way I look at it. So...that's about it over there...

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Ok. And then...people kinda...start um, you have to work your way up, to be supervisor right, you have to go through all the ranks...

EDWIN NIEVES: Well, um, not, really, um, you know, you get on the job, and then every few years, they give out the supervisor's test, so, you know, you can take the test, you don't really need to have 10 years on the job to take the supervisor's test, you take the supervisor's test, you do good, and you get on the list, and they can call ya. There was-for instance, I think this one lady got on the job in '87, took the test like six months after she was on the job and got-got the job. But, that's hard, because, she could be book smart, but ain't job smart. And, you know, it's hard to have somebody, that hasn't two years on the job trying to tell somebody that has 20 years on the job what to do. So, you know, it's rough that-in that, that sense, you know. It's good that, you know, they can get their feet wet first and then tell ya what to do. But um, all in all, all the supervisors, you, you get along with everybody.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Mhm. What do you think makes a really good supervisor?

EDWIN NIEVES: A good supervisor is um, usually one, one that came that-that did what you did, you know, so, like, got their hands dirty. And um...communicating...you know, as long as they communicate with ya, and they come down, they tell you what they expect from you, and...a supervisor's job is rough, because you gotta deal with the community board, every-everything goes, starts from the top down, so...supervisor's job, I wouldn't wanna do now, to tell you the truth, nah. 'Cause it's just too much responsibility. So...with me, right, you know, we do something wrong, it's on us. If we do something wrong, he gets in trouble-he gets blamed for it, so...but um, all in all everybody gets along, you know, there hasn't been no problems, especially in this garage. This garage is good.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Is it-better than ones you've worked in the past, or?

EDWIN NIEVES: Um...it's, it's a smaller garage, like it-Bedford-Stuyvesant, it was a big garage, so like you really didn't get to work with everybody. Where here, it's like 78 people on the job, so you get to work with everybody, and it's close, you know-it's smaller, so the smaller...you get to communicate a little better, and see what everybody does. Where as a

big garage, it's, everybody has all their cliques, and all that, where here everybody's basically the same.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: That's good. Do you ever, um, see each other after work and stuff, or...?

EDWIN NIEVES: Well, to tell you the truth, um...like I said I live upstate, so I don't really see so many people, but a lot of the people working, from in this garage, working, you know live in Staten Island. So they get to, you know, hang out. As a matter of fact here we got a uncle, a nephew here, everybody, you know, they hang-they hang out, we hang out sometimes, during work. *(Laughs)* Sometimes you finish a little early, but um-sometimes stayin', there's a weight room inside here. And...but I really, me personally don't really hang out too many-too much with people from the job, after work. I just like to get home. *(Laughs)*

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Yeah. That makes sense. And you had mentioned briefly when we were talking earlier, about not having seniority when you're on the broom, that you couldn't get pushed off?

EDWIN NIEVES: Well, ok. When you get—when you become on, when you get on the broom instead of your route then you got like a broom tissue. A broom tissue is like, no, you know, say somebody with more seniority wants to do that broom, they can't bump me off because I got a tissue, so, that's you know, that's what saves you from people with more seniority, they couldn't bump me off nights, because I had the broom tissue. That's about the only, you know, reason--

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: So how-sorry, go on.

EDWIN NIEVES: So...that's, that's one of the reasons why, to try to get the broom tissue for me. Because this way I knew I had a steady route, and I'd work steady nights, where my seniority didn't really mean nothing.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Mhm. So if you were on like, truck instead, you would be able to get pushed.

EDWIN NIEVES: Yes, Um, like, basically, on the truck, the more seniority you got, the better a route you got. And if you, you didn't have enough seniority-you'd make more money workin' on the truck, then doing the corner baskets, so people would take the truck, so. Everything's money. So, the mechanical broom, there's no money involved, but, like I said, when you're starting new, on a job, it's something good. This way you don't get bumped around.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: So you would say that it's a good way to kind of build seniority?

EDWIN NIEVES: It's a good way...to have a steady shift, like, you know, like, for me, with nights, so it-it worked for me.

RECORDING PAUSES.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Ok. So I-cause I wanna be clear, um, so if you were on the-the broom, and that carry-like the seniority from that would carry over into starting on the truck or would you have to start new?

EDWIN NIEVES: Well, your seniority starts when you get on the job.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Ok.

EDWIN NIEVES: And...I, when you become a-you get a tissue, your senior-seniority, it don't really play any part. Cause if you got the broom tissue, and you have a broom route, it's-I can't-a guy with 10 years on the job can't bump me off my route.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Ok. So how would you kinda describe the term tissue? To someone who..

EDWIN NIEVES: Tissue, tissue...is something you cry right now, and uh, um, each job, like, they got a wrecker tissue. It's like...all you do is wreckers, you know. You gotta G. U. tissue...it's just-it's just the type of job you do. G. U. is garage utility. Wrecker is you got out on wrecker calls. Broom tissue, you drive the mechanical broom. That's about all the tissues that are all around...

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: 'Cause from my understanding...maybe this was wrong, I thought it was an office job. But it just is really for if...you're...it's on the field?

EDWIN NIEVES: No, it's uh, it's on the field, yeah. On the field. The tissue don't mean no-office job. They-sometimes, say ya hurt, and you be-you go on a tissue, there is-there is a tissue like that, but that's uh, medical tissue. So.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Oh, ok. So that's what you would call it.

EDWIN NIEVES: Yeah.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Did that ever happen to you, did you get hurt on the job ever? Or, no?

EDWIN NIEVES: (*Knocks on wooden table*) I've been lucky, yeah.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: That's good.

EDWIN NIEVES: But people have got hurt. Especially...with the snow plow, when ya doin'; with the plows, doin', puttin' them on, one time in Brooklyn one of the plows wedged against a guy's finger and cut-chopped his finger-you know, finger off right under the knuckle. I happen to be, I wasn't there that day. So...and then, another time, people get run over, they're foot get run over by the truck tire, um, glass. A lot of-glass is a lot-people get hurt with a lot of glass. Rubbin' and...stickin' outta the bag, and you're drawn, swinging' the bag and it rubs against ya leg. So, glass is a pretty much one of the ways people get hurt a lot. On the job...and you gotta watch the way you lift, too. I mean you could pull out-you know, pull out your back. So...

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Is it...is it tough getting used to when you first start, like, lifting? Is that, really...

EDWIN NIEVES: When you go, uh, when you start the job they send you to Randall's Island. And they try to teach you how to lift 'em, you know, that's where you go basically for a week before you start the job, they try to give you hint—you know, tips on how to lift the bags and all that. Um. The one thing about this job is, if the bag is too heavy, you can leave it. You know, usually you try to pick it up, it's usually like, you know, a hundred pounds, you know, between two of youse you can usually lift a hundred pounds but some-sometimes these bags in the projects and all that, they can be like two or three hundred pounds, they

look like body bags, you know so-if it's just too heavy, you-try-nicely tell that guy that bags are- can you cut it in half, you know, and that's usually, it-usually, if you leave them once, they'll fix-they'll make it lighter. It's good to tell 'em, you know, to make it lighter. They usually will, 'cause you know, all they gotta do is bring one of, you know, them bags that day, we gotta do the whole route, pick up the whole route, so...but um, most of them bags in Manhattan are pretty, you know, pretty easy to pick up. And the people are good, they use the black bags, they tie it, and they usually give you a little handle on, you know, basically a little handle on the top, to-that's where you grab it. You grab the garbage from the top, never from the bottom.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Oh, really?

EDWIN NIEVES: Usually,-yes.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: 'Cause why is that, 'cause I would have thought-sorry, I don't know, I would have thought you would not want it to spill?

EDWIN NIEVES: Well, it's usually in the black bag, and the black bags, they tie it up, they're very heavy black bags, usually, and it's when you grab it from the top and you throw it in, it won't spill. The other way, you're putting your hand under there, you don't know what's in there, in that bag, so, you try to avoid as much contact as possible, just grab it where you can. And the really long bags, usually they give you a little handle, a little area to grab. Usually. So that's how you basically lift the garbage. 'Cause now, there's really not many-not many places have cans anymore. And they basically put it all in a black bags. Which is-better for us.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Do you know when that kind of started, the use of black bags instead of cans, or?

EDWIN NIEVES: It probably started with recycle. Because um, with recycle, they used to have, the clear bags are like for the paper, the blue bags are for bottles, and that-basically, the black bags are for garbage, so it's...it's a way to identify what's in the bags, so you don't have to go through every bag. And with the cans, they used to put stickers on, they gave you-to put stickers on 'em, but after awhile, they stopped giving out stickers, so...it was easier for them to just buy the blue bags for the bottles, the clear bags, for the paper, and the black bags for the garbage. So...makes it easier for us. So you don't have to go through every bag, to-you know, to see what's in what.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Mhm. Would you have to do that with the recycling if there was no..?

EDWIN NIEVES: Well, with the recycling, usually...I can...they put in a blue can —you know, blue can, a blue, plastic, can, that's usually for the recycle. And, they used to try to put in a green can, for paper, and so basically youse open it, and look, and most of the times they oblige by it.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Mhm. If it doesn't-like if it's not sorted properly, does it just go in the trash?

EDWIN NIEVES: It just goes in the regular garbage, yes.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Ok. Ok. I don't they sort properly in my building.

EDWIN NIEVES: Yeah?

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: I might bring that to my super's attention.

EDWIN NIEVES: Because um...usually on a recycle day too, they have supervisors, so, enforcement, they go around, and they, you know, they check to see if the people are recycling.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: And is that...how many times a week?

EDWIN NIEVES: Um, over here we get recycling Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday...cause usually recycle every day, but it used to be...like on a Saturday only run, you know, one paper truck. But recycling, in other districts, probably every day, you know. Each area has one-one day.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Oh, ok.

EDWIN NIEVES: Like um...Manhatt-our garage, it's divided between the East and West side. 6th Avenue's our cut-off side. So everything on Sixth avenue to the Bowery, it's like, you called it, east side. Everything on Sixth' this side of, is the west side. Like Monday, Wednesday, Friday, you're working on the east side, and um, Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday's the west side. So you don't have to do too much drivin' around.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: (Laughs) And so when you're um, doing the driving, do you kinda switch on and off the driving and the lifting, with your partner?

EDWIN NIEVES: Yes, yes. You-a good partner usually takes turns, you know, it's only fair. (Laughs). Like um, I'm a driver, my partner's, Murphy's a loader. But, that's only a name-that don't-you don't, you don't do it that way, you know, you-you get tired, he'll, he'll work for five-you-some might, some garage work for 20 minutes up, 20 minutes down. Over here, it's whoever's closest to the wheel. One day, he could come in tired, I'll do the-ya know, vica-versa. You work it-you work it out with your partner.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Yeah. Have you ever had a partner in the past that was not a good partner, or?

EDWIN NIEVES: Uhh. Yes. Yes, you know. It's hard. And especially, when you're on the truck all day, you get a partner that you can't talk to, so...it's bad enough liftin' the garbage, so when can't get along with a partner, that makes it even worse. But uh, very rarely, that happens.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Is it easy to switch if that happens? Or, is it...

EDWIN NIEVES: Not really, you know. I could, say-if you don't, if you can't get along with the partner you work-then you could go on baskets, which is no money involved. So, that's a way-that's a way out, but...I'd rather, I'd rather make the money. I can deal with it for a few hours-you know, eight hours.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: So in that case, like, would you, do you change partners, just when someone retires, or...?

EDWIN NIEVES: When somebody retires, they change partners, and um, usually, when transfer periods come, which is every, you know, once in a while, whoever has more seniority that transfers in there, they should make the truck, before, you know-the more seniority you have, the more choice you have what for what route, you know-collection route, you could get. So, like, my partner's a shop steward, so I'm lucky, you know, I'll have him-they can't

bump him off.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: So what is a shop steward?

EDWIN NIEVES: Shop steward is um, each section-our garage has three sections, and the garage section. Him, shop steward's more for really, when, uh, we used to have sections out in the field? And that's where the shop steward would go there, tell the men what's goin' on, and what's that. With this garage, everything's coming out of one-one spot. So, like, we-shop steward, their job is to go to union meetings. Let's you-keep you updated with what's goin' on with the union. And, so, for him been' a shop steward, the union says he's guaranteed a route. So you-you know, no matter how much seniority he has, he's guaranteed a route-collection route. So, that's-Angelo was a shop steward, and now Murphy's a shop steward. Usually...right now there ain't that many transfers periods, so...you usually...you're usually good on your route for a year. It's, you know. Maybe longer. But I've been on the same route, for...eight years.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Do you have a good route, as far as routes go, do you think, or?

EDWIN NIEVES: Um, I like it. Yeah. I'm in a good section. I got like, by NYU, I got Bleecker Street, I-the people on the route's nice, the route's good. It's clean, not that bad. I like it. Chinatown, it's a little harder. It's heavier. And then you got...23 section is big, you know, from Eighth street to Fourteenth street so there's more big buildings there, so...it's heavier work, but less driving. Where in Chinatown, is heavy, and a lotta driving, and a lotta traffic, so. I like where I'm at.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Ok. Um...

EDWIN NIEVES: Anything else? I don't really know..

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Um, alright. I—we can finish up soon. Um, I guess I wanna know, because, you can retire, after, 20 years? But you've been on the-I would esti-26 years, about?

EDWIN NIEVES: Um, end of July it'll be 26 years. Yeah. You can retire-when I started, I started, um, it was 30 years, retiring, and they gave you a choice-I forgot what year. They gave you a choice to buy in to 20 years, so, some people-majority of the perks, people, bought into the 20-year pension, and, but there were the few that decided not to buy in, and what that meant was, that you would start paying-that they would start taking out more money, each week, to cover the ten years that you're gonna retire earlier, for your pension, so-I did it just to give myself a choice to leave earlier at 20 years. But um, right now, I'm looking, maybe one more year. My wife can't retire, my mortgage ain't paid off yet, I got one more year so...eh, I don't know what I wanna do after this. Eh, you know. I like what I'm doin', so. If the body hold out...(Laughs)

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Just keep goin'?

EDWIN NIEVES: As of now, I'm think...27'll probably be...my retirement. Hopefully.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: See how it goes?

EDWIN NIEVES: Yeah.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Well...if there's anything else that you'd like..

EDWIN NIEVES: I'm trying, I'm trying to get that...funniest or strangest thing...

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: The strangest thing?

EDWIN NIEVES: Well, it wasn't the strangest thing, one of the worst things I hadda do is uh, pick up dead dogs on the route one time, y'know. We were in um, East New York, I was outta town, it was like the dead dog detail, I don't know, there was a lotta dogs there. So our job was to go ride-ride around, there musta been like around-somebody was killin' dogs, I don't know. Musta been like ten dogs, we had to pick up. And, I was with one lady, which, I'll tell ya, thank God she was with me, because, I-I threw up, I couldn't pick 'em up, yeah. She went in and-she, she threw the dog in the truck. I was in the side-I was on the side pukin'. So that was, uh, I guess the strangest thing I've had happen to me.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Yeah. When was that, do you know?

EDWIN NIEVES: That was in around, uh, about '87, '88. I was outta town, I was in um—East New York area. Sometimes you go to other zones, which is what's called out of town. For like, you know, your garage might have enough guys for that day, another garage might need some more people, so, you, you- go outta town. And if you go out like-if you go from Manhattan to Brooklyn, you get like four hours in the books, where you can use to take a day off. Every eight hours you can take a day off. You can accumulate, so...that was probably the strangest thing I had to do.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: So they just sent you out to specifically like get the dogs?

EDWIN NIEVES: Well, yeah, they write down, you know, the supervisor, musta had, you know, they told us where to go, so...there's, usually, there was some dogs around there. Sometimes you get there, it ain't there, so, I don't know what happened, but...that was probably the worst thing I ever, probably the worst details I had to do. And being behind a horse on Thanksgiving.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Oh, during the parade?

EDWIN NIEVES: During the parade, yes. Picking up the...horse crap.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: You do that in the truck, or you're just out...

EDWIN NIEVES: You're out-you're out and just walkin', with a big can carrier, so...you gotta do it! You gotta do what you gotta do. So, uh...that was probably one of the...smelliest jobs I had to do.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: (*Laughs*) How often do you get, kind of...like, something like that, they pull you off your route, and say you have to, do the horse for the day, or...?

EDWIN NIEVES: Well, a lot of times you go there, when you don't have too much seniority, and, um, they send-when they you know, parades like that, they need so many people, so they- each garage has to send so many people, so, you know...sometimes it ain't by your choice, that you get there, so...eh, so, like, Manhattan sees how many people they need in their garage, and they, so they just take from each garage. And I think then...I think, um, Yank-the parades, like uh, the ticker-tape parades, they ask for volunteers, like when the Yankees win. A lot of people want to do that, so they can't just-everybody in Manhattan can't do it, so they take people from Brooklyn, all over. 'Cause then they won't have nobody in Manhattan to work.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: That's true. Is that like a good shift, is that something you would volunteer for?

EDWIN NIEVES: Yes. And you know, Yankee fans, it's fun. 'Cause you get to see them, you know, in front of the crowd. You ain't behind the crowd, you're on the side, waitin' til they go by, and then you do the cleaning up. So you get to see them better. And...you take their pictures, too. That's about it, I guess.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: I guess so.

EDWIN NIEVES: I don't know, you got anything else?

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: I don't know. I'm thinkin'...I mean what is..I guess is we kind of covered this but if you wanna talk about what, it means to you, to do this job...

EDWIN NIEVES: Well. To me, I get, you know, you get a nice satisfaction when you...go out on the route, and you see, all you see is piles of black bags. And then when you get to the end, there's nothin' left. So, you know, it's good to see, that, you know, it's clean, 'cause um...people appreciate it. And um, you look back, and it-you're like a magician, makin' it all disappear. So, that's you know, that's one of the good things. And um, clearin' the roads in the snow. It's... 'cause you know people need to get to where you're gonna do. The one thing bad is when you're plowin' is, you got no choice but, you're plowin' to the right all the time. And there's somebody trying to get their car out, you know. And they're shovelin', shovelin', and I gotta go through. That's...you know, it's hard. A lot of times, I'll, if he don't have much more to shovel, I'll wait. But you really can't. You gotta keep clearin' the streets, so...that's one of the hardest things, though, seein' them shoveling and then you just push it back on 'em. A lot of times you try to lift it up, and it, you know, you gotta clear the street, that's the first job, so...that's one of the harder, you know—that's for me, I hate to do that. 'Cause I can't see, puttin' in an hour, shoveling the car out and then, have some truck come and push it back. That's what's hard about in Manhattan. You know, upstate, your cars are off that streets, so that's-Manhattan, you know, in the city, it's hard, because there's nowhere to put the snow. And people, you know, they go, "Why you doing this?" That's my job. What can you say? I try not to look but...you gotta look. You know, cause you hit...in the Village, it's a little hard, because it's narrow. You got a lot of narrow streets. I would imagine the Bronx is hard because you got a lot of hills. The snow ain't the problem, the worst thing is the ice. You can deal with 12 inches of snow, but you put two inches of ice, and it's a different ballgame. I had a spreader that, it was just sliding. I'm in the spreader with, all that salt, all that weight, and the truck is sliding. 'Cause the streets are slanted to the curb. And you have to drop your plow, so you don't hit the car. So, that's the worst thing, you know. The hardest thing is when it's, well, when it's ice. The snow ain't no problem.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: And then, um, are there any streets...I know we're talking about the Village and they're really narrow, are there any streets that spreaders or plows just can't get down?

EDWIN NIEVES: Um, we got a few streets, that um, spreaders are the big ones, what, there's a few streets that um, they call it the insert, it's like a small spreader. It's uh, it's like a pick-up truck with the salt on the back on it. So, those are the ones, you know, usually they'll go into them streets. You know, I got for instance, I got Gay Street, which is-it's very narrow. And it's...the...you can get in, it's, the problem is, when you're coming out of the street, when you're turning, if there's a car over there, you can't get out. And um, Chinatown, it gets very narrow, so they use, like the, what they call the insert, send down there. Or they send the spreader without a plow, they used to, but now they got the little plow, what they

call, for them little streets. Which...we don't have enough.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: And then what happens if it gets stuck, do you just leave it there, or? Do you back up...?

EDWIN NIEVES: Yeah, well basically, like this past snowstorm was the first time trucks were getting really stuck so, you have a radio, and you call on the radio. Usually a guy with a front-end loader will come and give you a push. Basically all you need is a push, so, they usually, uh, they'll get you unstuck, but...this is the first time, it was you know, 'cause of the blizzard it was very bad. I was stuck...with a plow, truck. Even with the small spreader. But um, they sent the front-end loader which is...like the fork, you know...FEL, they call it. And they would just give you a little push, and you would get goin', but...that's about it, I think I only got stuck maybe two or three times in 26 years.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: That's pretty good, good odds.

EDWIN NIEVES: Yeah. And um, you know what blocks not to go down. Like Charles Street is narrow, by the police department. You try to look, because if you don't think you can get through, it's hard to back out. Once you get there, you know, you got...so you know which blocks are narrow, so you try to...if you have to avoid them, you avoid them. And let the supervisor know. He usually knows because, they're always driving around. Usually all the blocks get hit pretty good.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Um...I think I can wrap up, if um, unless there's more you wanna...

EDWIN NIEVES: I'm lost, I don't...I need questions...(Laughs) 'Cause it's, you know, the main thing,...the people appreciate ya, you know, that's one thing I like and seein' the kids growin' up. You're seein' the lady when-you know-she's walkin' down the street with the belly and then a few months, later, the kids walkin', um, six months later, you see a little kid walkin' with—not walkin', um, bein' pushed in a stroller...she's walking him, imagine. It's a miracle. But um, seein' the kids growin' up, seein' people get old...yeah, they all, they all appreciate ya.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Yeah, yeah definitely. Ok. Thank you very much...

EDWIN NIEVES: Is that enough for ya?

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: I think so. It's been about an hour and ten, so...

EDWIN NIEVES: Whatever ya, you have any more questions, I can't, I'm-I'm going blank.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Yeah. I mean we covered everything—let's stop for now.

RECORDING PAUSES.

EDWIN NIEVES: The funniest thing, that was happening, is when my partner was telling people that he was gonna retire, right, Angelo. And um, so, once, the day he was, I guess the day he was retiring, we were going down the route, he was saying good-bye to people. The people were crying, he was crying, and I was crying because they were crying. So, eh, you know, everybody was crying. So, they didn't want him to leave, because he's been there—he was doing the route like 25 years. And there were people, sayin', why are you leavin'? Why? One lady-block we went six blocks, and the people—six people tell 'em your crazy for retiring...but, after 30 years, your body starts taking its toll, so...he was startin' to hurt. So it was time to retire. And, we were lucky we were in—we got into one movie, *Made of*

Honor. Me and Angelo were in it.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Is that the one that was made by the...

EDWIN NIEVES: No, this one was with uh, Patrick Dempsey? It was in uh, Soho.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Oh, you, oh—oh you, I've seen that movie!

EDWIN NIEVES: It's like in the first five minutes. You're gonna see a mechanical broom, and then you're gonna see two people throwin' garbage in there, and that was me and my partner, yeah.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Oh and that's you and Angelo?

EDWIN NIEVES: It was like within the first five minutes. It was fun. And then they did a few other things with us, um, something green? I don't even know. It was really him. Angelo, whenever the department, needed, somebody needed a tape, they came to Angelo. And I just happened to be with him. It's, it's good to-good partner.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Mhm. Is that your favorite, or your best partner? Or?

EDWIN NIEVES: I learned—well, well yeah, he was probably my best partner. You know, I learned a lot from him. And, you think you know everything, but you don't. And, I just hope I can—Murphy learns from me, from what I learned from Angelo, you know, you pass it down. But the hardest part of the job is sometimes, is getting in from me. I come from upstate, it's an hour ride.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Oh, that's far.

EDWIN NIEVES: By Woodbury Commons?

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: Oh that's really far.

EDWIN NIEVES: That ain't that far, probably an hour ride. *(Laughs)*

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: That's far.

EDWIN NIEVES: So...that's about it.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: OK.

EDWIN NIEVES: Anything else you need?

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: I think that's it.

EDWIN NIEVES: That's all I remember that's fun.

JACQUELINE COLOGNESI: If um, if I think of anything, maybe I'll, I'll let you know, but...thank you very much.

EDWIN NIEVES: Yeah, I hope, ya, I hope you get an A.