

Interviewee: Joseph Siano
Interviewer: Hilary Crowe
Middle Village, Queens, New York

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Q: Okay. So this is Hilary Crowe, interviewing Joseph Siano on Friday, March 25, 2011, and the time is about 1:15 [p.m.]. Okay. So first let's start off talking about your background, where you were born, and uh...

Okay I was born in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, on November 2, 1946. I went to St. Mary's of the Immaculate Conception grammar school. I went to Boy's High School. I attended Brooklyn College for two years. At that time, I was a non-matriculated student. So I was drafted. I didn't want to be a draftee, so I joined the Army. Let's see, I have a brother, Anthony, who's an undertaker, and I have a sister, Patricia, who was a Registered Nurse. And that's it. I went into the military, I spent three years in the Army, I came back, I worked as a pipefitter for 16 years, we built nuclear power plants, and now, that industry went under, and I became a sanitation worker. I had taken the test 12 years before that.

Q: What year was that?

Oh my God, I came out of the service in '69, so you figure I went on in '84, so '69 back up 12, '79... '84... so it was about 12 years before that I took the test for sanitation. And they froze the list. Then I got called and I went in, and I think I told you there was a Mr. Ross there, very nasty individual, and he said "You fat guys aren't going to make it", and "old," fat and old, which I was a little bit of both at the time. But I made it. And I spent 22 years as a sanitation worker.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about what you studied at Brooklyn College?

I studied, let me remember. Well, I was taking political science, I was taking basically the courses. Language, I studied Italian. I can speak some Italian. I've lost it over the years. When I was a pipe fitter I worked with Italians and, Trinidadians, Jamaicans, and I was able to speak Italian. And now, over the years, I don't use it. So I basically, you know, if you said to something to me "How do you say that?" I have to really think, and I may not even be able to pull it out. But. That was it. I was going for a Bachelor's degree. A Bachelor of Science. So I was taking all the, what are they called...

Q: General Education?

Yeah, just general. You know. I wanted to be a teacher at that point. I figured I'd be good as a teacher; I like people, I like kids. But it never came to be.

Q: Why not?

Well when I came out of the service, I went back for a while. And I just, I couldn't do it. I was working days, going to school at night, and I was sitting next to people who... You know, to them it was a game. It was a joke.

Q: How so?

They were young, and they didn't care. They had money, they were living a good life, and here I was trying to work, you know, working every day, and we worked hard labor. That was hard, physical labor, all day long. And then I'd have to run home, wash up, run to class, and also I had a couple of teachers who were really, or professors as they call themselves, who were really bad. Really, really bad.

Q: How were they bad?

Well, we had one guy who, uh, all he talked about was pot, and that the government was doing experiments on the subways. Through the ventilation system they were putting pot out to see the effects on the traingoers, and I was like "Come on, huh?! This isn't happening."

Q: And when was this? In the early '70s?

Yeah, yeah. Pot and drugs were a big thing then, you know. I had one good class: I had a speech class. So I went and it was, it was very good. She was a young woman, not really young, but, you know, but she was a young woman. And I have a tendency to speak too fast. So she taught me to speak slower, and enunciate my words more. And that was an enjoyable class. We had good times there, because we did demonstration speeches. I brought in a dart gun one time. It was a demonstration speech, so I brought in this dart gun, I stood with my back to the class, I opened up the cover, I loaded the dart gun, I turned around, and I aimed towards her, and I shot a dart. And of the course the dart was going into the wall and not her. She didn't move. She didn't flinch. Other girls were screaming, guys are like "Oh, man!" you know?

Q: Why did you choose a dart gun?

I couldn't think of what else to do. One girl put her contacts in. And she's over there like, you know [motions like putting in contact in his left eye], the guy next to me's going like "Oh my god, oh my god!" I thought he was going to go down. [Laughs] So she gave me an A for the speech. Cause I did grab their attention, you know? Everybody, I stood there with the gun in my hand, everybody was like [opens eyes wide], you know, anything he says we'll go with. [Laughs] But it was good. She really taught me more. But then I had the experience of being a staff sergeant in the Army. I had the experience of commanding men; I had the voice for it. I think that's one of the things that helped me as the president of the Columbia, before I became president I was a soldier in the Columbia. And I was doing a journal. I did our first journal. We really did very well, and when I got up to speak I never needed the microphone. To command. In the service you don't have a microphone. You just belt out your orders. So I did it, and I would get up there and I

would just say, "No I don't need the mic," and believe me or not, the sanitation men would applaud that. You know, that you didn't need the mic, that you were one of the, I don't know. One of the workers, you know, you're one of the guys out there. But, that's basically it. Then I got married.

Q: When'd you get married?

I got married on... April 30 of 1972. And will be married this April 39 years. We dated for three years before I got married. And she's good. She's very good. She really is, I really lucked out, because some of the girls I dated before that, it would not have been—I would've been divorced. Because I could take a lot, I really can, but you can't—in a marriage you really do have to give. You have to give and one has to give. It cannot be your way all the time. It's impossible. And I met a few girls that it was their way or no way. And to be brutally honest, you know, it wasn't worth it, to think about doing 39 years like that. You know, there's that old joke about "I could have killed her and been out of jail in 10 years or 15 years." You know, so.

Q: How did you meet Maria?

I met Maria through her brother-in-law. Her brother-in-law and I we were friends. We had grown up together in Brooklyn. And when I came home from the service he said to me, "I want you to meet my sister-in-law." Everybody wanted me to meet somebody. So, I went with him one day, oh, it was a miserable rainy day. Miserable. I was driving him to his house in Brooklyn, his apartment. And we're driving there and we get to the block, and he says, "Oh, there she is, there she is!" And I look and here's this woman, she's walking with a kid! And I said to myself, "This guy's got to be out of his mind." If I weren't driving I would have jumped out of the car. [Laughs] But, it wasn't her. But then we went upstairs to his house, and we were having dinner, and I was what, I was 23 years old. I had just come out of Vietnam. And to say the least I was a little cocky. You know. And when we met and everything we were talking about my sister, who was like, 24? Or 25, and she was getting married. So I said, "Wow, 'bout time she's getting married, she's old." My wife was actually older. Maria was three years older than me, I was 23, and she was 26. So she said to me, "You must think that I'm ancient." [Laughs] I didn't know what to answer. But then we went out on a few dates and it worked out. Three years later, we ended up getting married, and we had one daughter. In '74. And other than that, I've had a very good life. I really have. I think I told you I know I'm blessed. And I'm not this religious fanatic thing; I know that God watches over me. He watched over me in Vietnam, when I came out of the service and the company I worked for went under...

Q: What company was that?

I worked for a company called Tube Co. It was a pipe company. They were closed because we were bought out by somebody else and they raped the company. We had \$11 million in our checking account, and they took it all and they were charging us rent. That's like me charging, you're my daughter and I'm charging you rent to live here. It's ridiculous. But, that's what they did. Thank God that went under, and I was hired by the

sanitation. My father always said when one door closes another opens. And it was. I left one job; I was out of work for six weeks. I did a couple of side jobs, I've always been a little handy. I can paint, I can do things. I did roofs and everything. So I was working, I was making a few dollars, but it wasn't, there was not medical, there's no pension. And then the sanitation called me. And I think I told you my first days on the sanitation I wanted to leave. I wanted to leave.

Q: Why?

Well. My work was harder than the sanitation. I mean, we moved pipes that were eight feet in diameter. Or, they could be two feet with eight-inch walls. Heavy, heavy, stainless steel, for main steamlines. And when you lay them out, you have to lay them out on the line. And sometimes you had to move that thing just a 16th of an inch to get on line. You use a pry bar. And the work is heavy, it's dirty and it's heavy. And you sling tons over your head, all day long. If something goes you could be dead any minute. We went out to sites, and we'd have to walk out on these gangplanks to check out something. Or one time, we went into Manhattan, we made a water line for Manhattan, eight-foot diameter pipe, and putting it in they said it wasn't round. No eight-foot pipe is round, 'cause the wall is very thin, so the pipe is like this, [makes wobbly circle with hands] and three of us went down there to fix it. And when we got in there, you're putting the boots on, and the guy says to me, "Don't tighten the boots." I said, "Don't tighten them?" "No, there's mud down there." He said, "Well, if something falls and you want to get out of there fast, those boots are going to be in the mud," which is true, I knew that from Vietnam, you hear [Slurps] as they're trying to pull out. So, I didn't tighten them. Thank God nothing happened. We rounded off the pipe; we had our own system. We put in what they call spiders to round it off, and then we would put a piece together, and we had designed this clamp that you put on one, and you put on the other, and you screw this down tight and pull it in, and you tack it, weld it, and then move on to another piece. Keep moving.

But that's what we did. And then they closed, and the sanitation picked me up, but the sanitation was so much different. First of all, you work 12 to eight, eight to four, four to 12s. You work Saturdays. Saturday to me was overtime. This was a regular day, Saturday. You know. You're off on a Monday. Then you're off on a Tuesday. And the following week you're off on a Wednesday. You know, then you're 12 to eight, you come home at eight in the morning. Now I had a small child—the baby wants to play, you want to sleep. It throws off your system. You get up and let's say you go to bed right away if you went in right away, you get up at say... 11, 12, you get a four-hour sleep. You want to have breakfast. People are having lunch. You know. It changes you, it really does. I don't know how the guys do it. I wanted, like, seven to three. Every day. Even six to two. Whatever, as long as it was a steady shift. But that's the way the sanitation is. In the winter they split the shifts. If it's a bad snow storm, you go 12 hours, so you go from seven to seven, then a guy will come in at 7 p.m. 'til seven in the morning. This way there's total coverage all the time. That kills you. That kills you.

Q: So Annmarie was born in '74.

Yeah.

Q: And how old was she when you started working in sanitation then?

She was, let's see... She was born '74, I started in '84. I started 10 years later.

Q: Okay.

So she was 10 years old when I went into the sanitation. So it wasn't too bad, because, she was older. Like if I was working 12 to eight, I would come home and take her to school. I'd drive her to school, then I'd go pick her up. Instead of my wife having to do it. But it was still not the, for me it was not what I wanted. And, I was ready to leave in the very beginning.

Q: Did she ever, did Annmarie ever tell you that she wished her father wasn't a sanitation worker? Did she give any indication how...

No. She didn't care. It meant nothing to her. Whatever I did, I did. I mean, thank God for the sanitation, like I told you I think before, we never got laid off. Twenty-two years without missing a day, you know. Unless you wanted to miss the day, unless you were sick or something, but other than that you were working. And I met some wonderful people in the sanitation. I met some jerks. But I met some really wonderful people. And it was good. And now I'm retired, and my life is still good. My daughter's going to have a baby. My poor wife is going through a lot with her leg, because we went last Monday to take the wires out, and then Wednesday, we went to take the staples out, she had 25 staples in her knee. And that hurts. You know, when they start [makes sound and motions of removing and cutting staples]. [Laughs] But she was, she's a trooper, she went through it. And it was funny, because when we went in it was Wednesday. Wednesday was a nasty day. It was nasty. We went in and it was misty, you know, it was crappy. We walked out of there; my God it was like a full-blown snowstorm on the island, I said, "Look at this! God!" [Laughs] But we got home and she rested. But she's really good.

Q: And she's doing well enough to get her nails done today? [Laughs]

And her hair. I took her this morning, she got her hair done, and tomorrow's the baby shower. And she's all ready, you know. We're buying the baby's furniture. You know, I didn't think furniture was that expensive. It's like \$3,500. [Laughs] I don't know what this stuff is made out of. But now, today—when I was a kid, they didn't go through all these regulations. I could stick my head through the crib, I remember going like that [demonstrates grabbing crib railings and peeking through] and now you can't. They make it so the kid can't get their head through, they can't get stuck. There's all kinds of rules now. The seats. I don't know where I sat when I was a child in the car [Laughs] I mean, I don't remember! Somebody held me or something. Today you have to have a baby seat for them when they're infants all the way up, and now they're recommending, I heard on the news, up until like, 12 years of age or something. I don't think you're going to put a

12-year-old in a child's seat. You're going to have a lot of backtalk. I knew when I was 12 years old, you weren't strapping me in no baby seat.

Q: What did your parents do?

My father worked for the, well my father was a professional painter. That was his main thing. He was unbelievable. That's, I never used a roller in my life. I don't paint with a roller like most people. I use a brush. Everything I do is, I did this place with a brush. You know, I don't use a roller. I did the ceiling with a brush. I don't use a roller. It doesn't feel comfortable, because he taught me with a brush. He did that, and then he worked for the White Rock soda company. They're still around, but they're very small now.

Q: What are some of their products?

White Rock Soda. There's a girl, her name is Psyche supposedly. She's standing on a rock, or kneeling on a rock or something. I don't know, supposed to be purity. Pure water and everything. And he worked there for...wow... I guess about 25 years. He had a small pension from them, when he retired. And uh, he lived to be 90. He died at 90 years of age. My mom who was always a housewife, or what they say now is a stay at home mom? Okay. That's what she was. She was always there for us; there were three of us. And she took us to school; she fed us our breakfast, made our lunches. I mean, I even joke—my wife is wonderful. But I remember when I was living home, you'd get up in the morning, me and my father were working together, and your lunch was set. It was there. And my father didn't eat sandwiches for lunch. He didn't have a sandwich, like a little bologna—oh, no. He had lunch. See, me, you could give me a sandwich. I was happy. But him, he had lunch. He'd have potatoes and eggs, with Italian bread. You know, I mean she would make this. You'd get up, the coffee would be on the table, a buttered roll or whatever. Now, you know, you get married today, the girl tells you, "Listen, the coffee pot's on the stove, and you want cold cuts? They're in the refrigerator." But uh-uh. It was different then. And uh, that's it. He passed away.

He was messed up—he was in the Italian Air Force. And the American Navy. He was born here in America, but he went back to Italy when he was three years of age. So my father had an accent—he came back when he was 21—my father spoke with an accent. He would say he was Italian. He was born—he was an American. But he spent his whole life there, so you know, he was Italian. And he fought in the Italian Air Force in Abyssinia. And the planes they flew when he was, the planes were canvas. So if the plane got shot at, the bullet would go right through one side and out the other. And he was a tail gunner. And they had one guy's job was to patch the holes. That was your job on the plane, [Laughs] I don't know how he would do it, but he'd patch all the holes right away. I guess she'd lose altitude or something. So, that's what he did. Then he came into America because he went to the Italian Air Force at 16.

Q: Young!

Yeah he was very young. And he was in Tripoli and Benghazi, and all these places—Libya—that they're fighting now— and Egypt. So he came in and he joined the American Navy. And he spent the...wow, three years over seas. In those days you went in for the duration. In World War II. You didn't go in and, see I went in for one year. I served my time. I ended up getting out at that point; my time was up in the military. I guess if I stood in I could have went back to Vietnam, but my point, I was out. When you joined in those days, you were in. You had to have points. They had some kind of a point system. And he finally got enough points, and he was transferred back home. But he had been shot. When he was in Italy, he was bayoneted in the hand, in the raid one night. He was shot in Benghazi or something. They were taking him to the hospital, the ambulance flipped over. He ended up under the ambulance. He came back to some California, some hospital, some doctor told him, "You're not going to live. You'll never walk if you live." Well, he was wrong, because my father lived and walked.

Q: It's amazing that he went through all that and managed to do a very physical job, too.

Yeah, he was a—you know what? They were really tough men. I mean it. I saw my father one time hit his thumb with a hammer. The nail came off. Now me, it happened to me once. I didn't even lose the nail, and I was ruined. [Laughs] You know. But, he did it, he came upstairs, he took a bottle of alcohol, and he poured it on. And now me, you could have never—you would have done that to me, I would have killed you right then and there. He taped it up, and he went back to work.

I was doing a roof, by myself. When I came home from the service, I got a job; a friend needed a roof done. I was doing a roof, I hit my thumb. I took a little of the turpentine on a rag, just, I wanted to see how bad it was, just to do this. [makes motion of delicate touching thumb] I almost jumped off the roof, to tell the truth. [Laughs] I wrapped it up, I put everything away, and I went home for the day. [Laughs] And it was like, "Why'd you come home?" "This thing was throbbing, my god it was throbbing!" "So? You keep working, you forget about it." "Forget about what?! That was pain!" He was, they were a lot tougher than I ever was. I always thought I was tough, but he was much tougher than me.

Q: So where did you learn how to build roofs?

He did it, he taught me. He knew how to do anything. He could run electrical wiring, he was very good doing plaster. I was never that good at that; you really got to have a straight arm. When you go like that [makes a sweeping motion], you really got to—I mean mine, if you look down [Laughs] it was like a snake. His was dead straight. It was amazing, you know. But I didn't have to—thank God—I didn't have to do that. I did do it when I got laid off from Tube Co. and they closed the plant. Well what happened was they closed it. And they hired me back. But I couldn't go back into the union, I don't know why, they didn't want the guy in front of me, that's what it was. So they hired me back and I went into quality control. And I would check pipes, and do dye tests and everything. But, like I said, that's it.

Q: And where did you learn pipefitting from?

Same way, honey. I had an uncle who was the foreman in the company, and I was a kid, I was 16. I wanted to work. So I went in there, he gave me a job as a helper. Just sweeping floors, painting pipe, you know, simple things. And gradually, you see guys doing things. I met a nice old fella there by the name of Coleman Lustic. And I had a shirt on that was my father's shirt—in those days I was a lot thinner. And it said "White Rock" but the "White" fell off, or wore off, and it said "Rock," so this guy called me Rock for years. Thought my name was Rock. [Laughs] But it was an experience. I mean, you would go inside these huge pipes. You're inside it. And you'd have to cut it from the inside—you can't possibly cut it from the outside, it's too large. And you'd set up this thing with the points, and you'd have to hit all four, five, six points, whatever you made. And then somebody would come by with a hammer, just rap the pipe hard, and you're in there and your ears are just, ugh. And it was like a rite of passage.

But from there I became a Class B fitter. Which, I did simple things. And then I graduated to a Class A fitter, and I was working on the big stuff. But they had guys who were really, I mean so much better than me. Hey had guys who were really good—we had a couple Jamaican fellas that were unbelievable. I mean, I was good, but not like these guys. They would really get the more difficult stuff. I would get difficult, but you know, not so difficult. I could do their work, but they made it look so easy it was sinful. If I did theirs it would have been like "Oh, God!" [Laughs] They made it look easy. But I learned a lot.

Q: And you were doing this pipe fitting and going to school?

Yeah.

Q: Wow.

I was working as a pipe fitter, and then I was going to school at night. And like I said, I just, with this nut guy over there, and doing drug tests in the, I just said, "Oh God." And, I said, "What am I doing here? You know really, what am I doing here?" I'm earning six, eight credits. It'll take me 30 years to finish. So after two years I just said that was it. I went back for a couple of computer classes. In those days, computers had languages. Pascal, they were teaching us how to write programs. I didn't want to write programs, I want to know how to turn it on, and do something. But we did that.

Q: And then I'm curious about why, specifically, you stuck with sanitation. Because last time we talked Maria said that you were called up for police officer, but then she wouldn't let you.

Yeah, I was called up to be a police. I had taken the same test. When I came out of the military, I went back to work as a pipe fitter. But everybody said, "You know, you should take the test." The city jobs, you're going to get a good pension. So I said, "Okay." So I went and I did it. I took all the tests. I'd been always able to take tests. In fact, I took a

test for a guy who was becoming a major in the reserves. They would send the test home, and he was too busy, so I took it for him. And he passed; he became a major in the reserves. And I was only a staff sergeant, but I was good at tests. I could always take a test and come out. So I did it. And I took the test for the police—I wanted to be a police officer.

Q: Why?

I just came out of the Army. I was still what they call gung-ho or something. But it didn't work out. 'Cause Maria wouldn't let me because they were killing cops in I think it was in Greenwich Village. They shot two cops in the back. And Maria said to me, "You would get in there, and you would end up in a firefight or something." And you know, again, I was cocky. I said, "I been in firefights, I'll get out, don't worry about it." But you know, that's bull. You never know. So then I went into the sanitation. And I stood with it because I had a child. And I needed the security of the sanitation or any job. The job had to be secure. I had to know that 20 years later—or when I started it was 30 years later, we had a 30-year pension. I knew I couldn't make 30 years. I started at 38; I would be 68 years old. There was no way. I figured I would go to 65, and claim my pension. And that was it, and I'd get Social Security. But that was the reason. I wanted the security to know that I would always have an income. The pipe industry died with Three Mile Island. The company bought us out, they closed us down. I think I told you, I could've followed a pipeline, I could have got a job with—I forget the name of the company now, but going down to North Carolina. They were running a gas line. That'd take about two years. After that you go find something else to do. I didn't want that. I didn't want to be away from my family, I didn't want to be, "Okay, things are going great now, I'm making good money, but in a year, I don't have a job." I didn't want that. I took the sanitation; it paid. I think I took a \$10,000 cut in pay from the pipe industry. But, the way I looked at it is, I didn't have any money. I was laid off. So, yeah, you took a \$10,000 cut in pay, but you weren't working at that time. I got the job. I think I was getting \$23,000 when I started, and I left at \$69,000. Something like that. But then we had much more in benefits. When I started we were getting a dollar a day annuity. When I left we were getting \$5.25 a day annuity. And I never got laid off. I worked for 22 years. Nobody ever said, "Hey, we're closing the doors tomorrow." There was always work. And that's why I did it, that's why I stood with it.

Did I like it? You know what one guy said, and I'm going to quote this. When he retired they said, "You miss it?" And the guy said, "I miss the circus, I don't miss the clowns." That's the truth. I liked the job, I like dealing with the public, I'm not afraid of hard labor. But they took the simplest job in the world and made it difficult: There's that white truck, put the can in the back of that truck. That's the job. The truck goes down the block, you walk behind it, you dump all the cans. That's it, that's the job! But now they made it so difficult. You have to make a certain tonnage, they have recycling—which we need. We did need recycling. I mean we're wasting our whole world. There's no doubt about it. I don't care what people think. You're parents want you to go to college. If you have brothers or sisters, they want them to go to college. All of us can't go to college. Because if all of us did go to college, a college degree would be worth nothing.

Q: That's kind of where we are now. [Laughs]

Yeah. I know. But, you have to have some laborers out there. You do. And the sanitation is, I think, the best job in the city. You're not a police officer; you're not being shot at constantly. There's sanitation men that get shot at in the Bronx. You're not a fireman; you're not running into burning buildings, thank God. But our guys go in, if they're the only ones there. Plenty of our guys have gone into burning buildings and saved people.

You're not given any respect. That's the God's honest truth. The only time that people need you is when it's snowing. Other than that, you're a garbage man. But, you know what? Every week, you get a check. And every week you bring that check home, and you could pay your bills, and send your daughter to school, or your son, or your children. And live. Are you living the best life? In my estimation, yeah. This is the life that I'm supposed to be living. I'm not a doctor, so I'm not going to have an \$80,000—I mean an \$80 million mansion somewhere, and boats and things. It's not going to be. But I have a very good life. I have a beautiful home; I had a pool in my yard years ago when Annmarie was a baby. I don't have it now, because I'm not going to go in it. But I have what I want in life. Some people want more, they have to have more. God bless them. I wish them all to get what they want. But I feel that my life? My life, I don't think too many people have my life. I got a great life. I have a wonderful wife. A wonderful girl, we're married 39 years. My parents were married 64—well I don't think we're going to make 64 with the age, but. You know. We don't—I met a guy the other day, in fact. A friend of mine. From the job. I was outside—we had that little bit of snow the other day. Pain. So I was out there, and I met him, and we were talking and he said, “Yeah, I'm going over there to this club, because, you know,” he said, “I can't stay home with my wife. I can't.” His wife had cancer. And I said to him, “How's your wife?” “I... I just can't, Joey, I can't stay home anymore. I just can't, I...” I said, “She okay?” “Yeah, yeah, she's fine,” he said, “but,” he says, “Since I retired, we're killing each other.” To be honest, and I swear, put my hand to God, we don't fight. I like her. I like her as a person. I love her, but I like her as a person. I don't mind doing things with her; I enjoy doing things with her. So, I can't see—my mom being with Alzheimer's, 'cause I think you heard her in the hall. If you listen, she's always “[moans].” It's the way it is. But other than that, jeez, I got a good life. And it's all because, thank God, I was able to work with the sanitation. And had that steady income.

You know, you could get a job where they're going to pay you—“Hilary, we're going to give you \$200,000.” But after that, you got nothing for a while. And you may not have anything for a long time. Think of these kids who are actors and actresses on Broadway. You see these kids, they're amazing, some of them. They are absolutely amazing. Then they don't work for a year or two. 'Cause nobody wants their specialty. There's so many young singers. Kids who can really belt out a song. Nothing. They're not doing anything. They're working as waiters and waitresses. Not that that's a bad job—make some nice tips. But come on, it's not the same. This job was steady every week. And I think we're still the only city agency to get paid weekly. Sanitation men still get paid weekly, which is a wonderful thing. I used to get paid when I was back at Tube Co. we used to get paid

every other week. And yeah, that first week you get two week's pay, you're rich. You have to make that thing stretch out. In the Army was the same way. Got paid once a month. So in the beginning of the month, nobody was in the mess hall, when I was in Germany. 'Cause every body had money, every body went out to eat. Towards the end of the month, the mess hall was full, because you didn't have any money left. And it's the same in civilian life. You know. The first week, boy you got money. Then the bills are coming in, so. I really thank, I thank the Lord first, and then I thank people like Harry Nespoli [Union President, Local 831] and that union for being there to get me a job like that.

But also, you have to do your job every day. There's guys that mess up all the time.

Q: Like how so?

There was a guy when I was there, he was this Spanish fella. We worked 261 days a year. Okay. If this guy worked 61 days a year, it was a lot. And I used to say to people, "How can you do that?" How can you work—you come in on Monday, and you're off the rest of the week. The next week you come in two days, then you're off again. You're faking sick or whatever it is. How can you do this? This is ridiculous. And someone sad to me, "Do you think he lives the life you live, Joe? Do you think he's worried about paying his bills, and taking care of things?" No. He gets his money, he gets his case of *cerveza*, and he sits on the stoop, and that's it. He doesn't live the life you live. He's not worried about paying the ConEd bill. He's not worried about his daughter going into a better high school, or a better college. When Annmarie went to medical school, I couldn't even do everything. She had to take loans. I mean, they were talking phenomenal figures; they were talking telephone numbers! [Laughs] These people are crazy! And I did what I could for her. But some of these people they don't care.

I had other guys, the same thing. We're not allowed to—you cannot be drunk. Because that truck is huge. That truck, on a good day, even though you get so used to driving it becomes second nature, but even on a good day, it's a big piece of machinery. And then you put a plow in front of it? Oh. Honey, you're driving 25 and you got 35 tons. I hit you, you're dead. It's not a matter of I dent your car. You're dead. And guys would come in drunk.

Q: Can you give me a specific incident, where...?

We had a Russian guy—I won't even give you his name—was pulled over by the police. Because they were coming down—he was working in Jackson Heights—he's coming down and he's going like this, [holds hands in front as if steering the truck, shakily] he's swaying. So the cop car's watching him, so when they got close enough they put their lights on, they pulled him over. This guy was drunk! He argued with them, started to get nasty. So, they locked him up. They called in, and we had to send somebody out to bring the truck in. And do the route—they had to send somebody out to finish the route and everything. But people are like that.

Q: What are the consequences of that?

Well, the consequences, the first time you're sent to what they call the farm. And it's not really a farm. But you're sent for drug rehabilitation. Okay. Or alcohol rehabilitation, depending on whatever you're on.

Q: And where is that?

It's anywhere. It's just we call it the farm, "You're at the farm."

Q: Oh.

So, okay, now that's good. You do it a second time. Now your license is taken away from you. Your first time your license is taken away also, but after your first offense I think you lose your license for 90 days or something. You cannot work. The second time your license is gone for a year. Which means the job gets rid of you after a while. But even if they could keep you, the third offense, you're out completely. And that's the way it should be. A lot of guys when they started the PAP, which is, I don't know what they—a PAP 9505, is urinary testing. And they have a bus that goes around. And they'll come into a garage in the morning—early in the morning—and they'll say, "Okay. Joey Siano, Hilary Crowe, Mikey, Bill, John, you all have to pee. Okay?" And you go into this vehicle, and they give you bottles of water. Because God bless some of these young guys, they could hold on all day. Guys like me, no. But they give you a little bottle of water to drink, and then you'd go in, and they have a toilet that doesn't flush, actually. It just goes into a tank. They give you the little cup—very nasty thing. Yuck. But you'd pee in the little cup; you'd bring it out. First you have to wash your hands. You go and you pee, you come out, you wash your hands, hand the bottle over. They seal it, you write your name on it, and it's got to be this much [makes gesture with thumb and index finger], it's got to be a certain level, it's got to be a certain temperature. Because there's ways of always cheating. If guys think that they're on drugs, they could keep a bottle of pee under their arm. And then if they go in there—you're in there alone—just take it out, put it in there. Well it's, now it's too hot. It's got to come out your body temperature. Or if it comes out too cold. But they would try that. They'd take two samples, you sign both of them, they sign both of them. And then you blow a little, uh, device that tells if you're on alcohol or not. And then you go back to work. If you come up dirty, is what we used to call it, "coming up dirty," then they would send you to the clinic and tell you—

[Maria comes in to say hello, interview stops for a minute or two.]

—I believe in it. A lot of guys like, "Oh God, man, this is bull blahblah blah blah." Listen. I believe in it. Because I don't come home and drink. And I don't do drugs. So, when they called me, I would go, Okay this is what you have to do, you have to urinate into this cup." "Okay." So I would do it. Uh. You know, then you'd come out and you'd say, "Blow through the thing," "Okay." "You're okay, zero." And that was it, and you'd go to work. I never had a worry that that's not good today. I saw guys stall. They'd come in early, early in the morning and some guys would have a—they'd see that truck in the

neighborhood, they'd go emergency. And you knew that they were, there was no emergency. They saw that truck. Now the thing is, where I worked out of Queens West here, the truck stayed there all the time, they parked it there at night. So, you always saw it there. You never knew who they were going to hit. And they hit what they call randomly. Today they could be in Queens, tomorrow the Bronx, Brooklyn, Staten Island. The federal government said you had to do, I forgot how many people. Percentage of the number of men you have. Now, you could get hit twice, three times a year, where another guy doesn't get hit at all. And it's just random. But I agreed with that.

Q: What are the screening, I guess the screening protocols? Say someone calls in sick, or someone says emergency. Do you guys do anything to check and make sure?

Oh sure. If I called in sick, you have—Well, I was in category A. They have different categories. If you're in category A, you very rarely go sick.

Q: What's category A?

Under three or four times sick a year. So if you called in in category A, you tell them, "Listen, I ain't feeling' good today, I'm not coming in." All they say is, "Okay, what do you got?" "I got diarrhea, I got upper respiratory, I don't know what it is I'm not a doctor." And that's it. And they wouldn't bother you. Within three days you must go to the doctor or come back to work. But they wouldn't really hassle you. B category, now what they'll do during the day is they'll call you up. You're home, 'cause you have to remain home when you're sick. If you do go to the doctor, you have to call for permission to leave the house. You call for permission to leave, and let's say at the, I forget the lady's name I called when I had my bypass, but she said, you know, "Blah, blah, blah," and a number. And you would get that. Then you'd go out. Then you'd return and you'd call back in again. Now, if the supervisor or sick control checked you, they would leave a paper in your mailbox saying that, "I came to your house, you were not home." You're liable for a complaint. But then you would call in and say, "Hey listen. I got a letter here from the clinic saying that I'm liable for a complaint, but I have a—this is my number, I was out." And everything would be just thrown away. If you're in C category, they can, they can come up to nine at night, ring your doorbell. See if you're home. They can literally park outside and watch you.

Q: And how many absences is C category?

Oh, that's like that guy I was telling you about. You're a total disaster. Either you're really, really ill and you're going to die anyway, or you're not and you're just a faker. So, you know, everybody does different things. If you're a good worker, then you have no problem with the system. We have unlimited sick. People complain. I think we need unlimited sick. You are out in the rain; you are out in the sun. You're out in the snow. There is no, what do you say...there is no... I don't even know what I'm trying to say with that. But, you can't tell when you're going to be hurt. In other words, I'm out there for three months, strong as a bull. And then one day, something happens. I've seen guys where they put a couch into the truck, and when it breaks it falls out, hits a guy in the leg,

breaks his leg. You don't know this is going to happen. I've seen guys get things splashed on them. They're out for a week or two. Other guys—when you start the job when you're like you in your twenties, you could work all day long every day. Nothing bothers you. You get older, it bothers you. I one time grabbed a bundle of branches, I threw it under my arm and I grabbed two more. I got stung by a bee. In the armpit. And I said to the foreman, "Ah, I got stung by a bee!" And he said, "So what?" I said, "So what?" He said, "Does it hurt you that bad?" I said, "Sure, it hurts! I got stung, I mean it's swelling." He says, "Keep going." But things like that do happen. Guys get hurt. So you need that unlimited sick. You know, it's not like—I remember one night I was working, and I came home and my father said to me, "What'd you do during the rain?" It rained heavy. I said, "I worked, what do you think I did during the rain?" [Laughs] I said, "What do you think, 'Oh God, it's raining lets take a break?'" No! You keep going, you got a route to do. So you need unlimited sick.

Q: Well thinking about that, and I guess the reason why Maria didn't want you to be a police officer is 'cause it's dangerous, do you really think sanitation is less dangerous?

I think that sanitation is very dangerous, 'cause you're working in the street all the time. You're working with tremendous weights at times. You pick up pails, you don't realize that you're putting that strain on your back, on your discs. The wrong lift, it can really injure you. I told you we do lose people. Hit by a car behind the truck, or that girl that was almost cut in half on top of the truck. There's injuries all the time. I've seen guys have their foot run over. But is it as dangerous as a cop? I think today it might not be.

Q: Why?

Because there's no respect for the law. Today, being a police officer is no joy. People don't like them. And they don't have respect for the law. And I think one of the reasons is—I think that women belong on the sanitation. Because in all honesty, if you could hoist that can as well as me, you belong there. I can tell you the truth, if you're a pretty little girl like you, you ain't hoisting cans.

Q: Why?

'Cause they'll take you right downtown. You'll be out there in the very beginning. And some chief will notice you, and say, "Oh, she's cute." You're going down town. You're not going to be behind that white elephant all day long.

Q: What do you do downtown then?

Well, you be a clerk. They have to have clerks. But, if you're, like, one of the big girls, you're working. You're doing the truck. [Laughs] But you need women on the job. It's not bad. I think that's very good. I don't think you need them on the police force. You need some women, but let's face reality. If I was a person who had no respect for the law, I'm definitely not going to respect you. And the only thing that you can do is shoot me. And you can't shoot. Police can't shoot you. They go through so much if God forbid they

fire that weapon. I just find it that, to me, it's—you want protection, then you have to have big, ugly guys. That when he walks in on you, you have to look at him and say, "Oh my God." You know. Women on the street, in the police, I don't see. Same thing as—and maybe I'm wrong. I'm not prejudiced. Like I said, women on the sanitation is great. Firewomen. Do you really think if there's a fire you can carry me out of this building? You have 109 pounds of gear on you, plus I'm 230 pounds. You're not taking me out of here. If you tried, both of us would probably die here. So, again. One of my daughter's ex-boyfriends became a fireman. And this kid was a bull. And when they take that two-inch hose, and they open it up, he said it almost lifts you off the ground. There was a girl in their class. It lifted her off the ground. It literally lifted her up. She was up in the air with the hose. They had to just tell her, yell, "Shut it! Shut it!" She became a fireman, or a firewoman. Or a fire person whatever they want to say. But I don't say they don't have a right. I just say that you're endangering the public. See, you're not endangering the public by a girl driving the truck down the block, getting out, throwing cans. You're endangering her, because your body—and I don't care what people say—your body was not made to do what my body can do. Look at the size of my arms compared to yours, look at the size. My bones are made—men were made to do the physical end of it. Now, I agree, women want it, come on. But I still can't see women as police officers.

There was an incident years ago when there was a bank robbery in the city. And this girl was in the shoot out with the bank robbers, a policewoman. And she panicked. She just knelt behind the car. A sanitation police officer was going by, and he jumped out of his car and he got into the shoot out with the police, on their side of course. And they thanked him. Because she was panicked. And it's no—Listen, not that a guy can't panic, believe me. A guy can panic just as much as a girl. But for some reason, I don't know, even if we are panicked, we don't panic like that.

Q: What do you mean "like that"?

Like I was scared shitless in Vietnam. But I never ran. You know, I never just cowered down there like I couldn't even think. Because I'm so frightened. I was frightened as hell. Sometimes I wouldn't even stick my head up, but I didn't, like, panic to a point that I became so unable to maintain myself, to control myself. And it's not—I wasn't any braver than anybody, believe me. I don't have this, this bravery gene in me that makes me [laughs] I don't have that. It's just that guys are, you know, when we're little kids we run around we're cowboys and Indians. You were the girl Indian; we didn't shoot you. But that was then. Today, it's a lot different.

Q: And when did they, I think that they started putting women behind the truck in like the mid-'80s?

Yeah, it was after I came on.

Q: Okay. So what can you tell me about the difference in work dynamic?

Well, at first it was like, “What the hell are they putting women on this job for? Come on!” You had to make a special locker room. You know, and then there was always the joke, “Yeah, they want to work with us, let them change with us.” Okay. But it’s, you had to do so many things. A locker room is exactly that, a locker room. And we had all kinds of things. Guys would put up pictures and they were offensive, I’m not going to say they weren’t, but it was only guys in there. Now, suddenly, you can’t have that. So all the pictures and all the stuff had to come down. Okay, that’s no big deal. But it’s—you’re coming into this realm of men. And now we have to make the adjustment. In the very beginning they were changing in the—supers usually have their own office and a bathroom. They were changing—if it was one girl in the district, they weren’t going to make a locker room for her. So she would change in the district super’s bathroom. It just, it changed the whole dynamic that way.

The work, some of them easily did the work. Easily. There was a young—she became a supervisor. Very nice girl, very pretty young girl. She could back up a truck just as good as any of us. Even better than most of us. I don’t know why, she just had the knack. Boy, she’d take that truck, and they’d say, “Put it there,” and she’d just [makes motion like backing up truck with steering wheel] and she’d go right in, while the rest of us are like, “Oh, uh...” She was a good worker, too. It’s just that it was totally different for us now. I don’t think it really changed the dynamic of the job. I mean, unless, like, if it was me and you on the truck, and we’re supposed to do a route and that route we’ll say is 15 tons, or 12 tons, and you can’t do your part. You see, we would be out every—every district has different ways of doing it. Some districts say you do three blocks. And then I’m out for three blocks. And you’re out for three blocks. Sometimes, years ago, they used to do it everybody’s out for a half hour. But the thing with that is, I’m driving, I’m watching you in the mirror. In your half hour we’re covering one block or one and a half blocks. In my half hour we’re covering three blocks. Somehow that’s no good. Now, we’re going to do three blocks. And then I’m going to do three blocks. Some of the girls were able to keep up, some of them just weren’t. And it was no disrespect to them, but they really didn’t belong on that job. They really didn’t. And I felt bad for them. There’s guys would come in, and you know you sign in, and after the guys would say, “I’m not working with her, I don’t give a damn.” “If I got to work with her, I’ll go sick. I’m not putting up with that. I’m doing nine out of the 12 tons.” Which is right, it’s not fair. But then there were other girls that’d come in and she’d say, “I’m not working with him anymore.”

Also guys are pigs. We are. It’s, it’s a natural thing. You know, you’re with a girl and you start being stupid. You suddenly think that she’s in love with you or she’s fascinated by you. That’s the way guys are. And you can’t. You have to remember you’re dealing with a girl now. She’s not a guy next to you anymore. She’s your partner—you don’t drop your hand on her leg, you don’t touch her. And you try not to use foul language, even though some of those girls could curse with the best of us. But you try not to. We had a girl in Q9. One day, I don’t know—[Phone rings.]

Q: Okay, so we were talking about women...

Yeah. And, and again, like I said, they do belong on the job, there's no doubt in my mind. It's going to take many years, I think, before they're really integrated into the job. I mean, I don't know how many there are now—I've been out for a couple of years at least. When I was there, there were like 100 throughout the city. And that's nothing compared to five, 6,000 men. I have a very good friend of mine, Rosa Rizzo, she's a superintendent. Rosa is a very tough girl. I'd rather go up against some guys before I go up against Rosa. She has that ability. She's a tough girl. She's just—pretty girl—but she's a tough girl, you know? Some people have it, other women don't have that. And it's no disrespect. My wife does not have it. My wife worked for the Metropolitan Museum of Art. She worked for an idiot. And he made her cry one day. I don't know what he did, but he made her—I ran there. I didn't even walk. I wanted to kill him, I wanted to just pick him up and rip him apart. And she grabbed me at the door and said, "No." And I said, "There's no—no boss should ever make you cry." Nobody should ever make you cry. For what, a job? Come on. You know? And that's what happened. But she stopped me, I wouldn't do it. I could have picked him up and just ripped him in half that day. I thought I was a good—she was a real good worker. Me, I was good but [Laughs] you'd only get so much.

So, I think a lot of the girls, if you were to really push them—You have to realize we have some really big, ugly guys on this job. Physically big and physically ugly. And mentally ugly. So, I think if they were really pushed to shove, some of these guys are ridiculous. I mean, they think that every woman on the job wants them. And it's ridiculous. Just because you're a girl, it doesn't mean that you want every man you see. And it doesn't mean that because you're friendly that you're infatuated with someone. You're not. It's just you're being nice. That's all. But that's the way some of the guys are. That's one of the difficulties I see with the job. Now, again, with the police officer, you take two little girls in a car—this neighborhood, yeah, they'll get away with it. Because people in this neighborhood basically are very respectful. Kew Gardens, very respectful. They get stopped by a girl, they're not going to say nothing. You were driving, you passed the light, you were speeding—whatever, they'll take it. "Yeah, okay." Imagine some of these people that don't care. You know, they shoot police officers. A little girl is going—I hate saying "little girl"—a girl is going to... I don't know. They're going worry about her?

I came from a time when women were given a great deal more respect. I just came from that time. The guys today, it's different. I see guys, they're walking down the block with a girl, the F-word comes out of their mouth five times in five feet. We never cursed in front of a woman.

Q: Have there been any like serious incidents of sexual harassment that you can recall?

We had one in Q9. This girl, the foreman went to check her. It was the foreman, like if I'm out sick, the foreman would come here, ring your doorbell, come in. "Hey Joey, how you doing?" "Yeah, I got a sore throat or something," you know. "Okay, sign this," that he was there. So he went into this one house—this girl was a wacko. She bragged that she killed her first husband with giving him too much sex. Okay? That was her thing, she told everybody, "Oh I killed him, I," you know, "To death." So this guy went there to check

her out, and her boyfriend said, “Yeah she’s in the bedroom.” The guy figures she’s in bed. He knocks on the bedroom door, she says, “Come in.” She’s topless. The guy runs out of there. He’s on the radio. He’s nervous. He’s shook up. He comes in; he’s got to make a whole report now, this poor guy. Takes him an hour off his regular duties just to say that, “Yeah I walked in, they said it was okay, she told me to enter the room,” because he’s afraid she’s going to bring him up on charges. So it does make some difficulty. In fact, we had to send her to New York one day to be evaluated. And we sent her with our—we have a mailman. We had a mailman. And he was a very nice, young Spanish fella. He was married, but, good, big boy, strong boy. [Laughs] And he said to me, “If she touches me, I’m getting out of the truck.” [Laughs] He had this little truck to pick up the mail and equipment and stuff. And I said, “Georgie, big Spanish guy like you?” “I’m telling you Joey,” he said, “I’m getting out. I’m leaving the truck and her.” [Laughs] So I said, “Okay, take it easy.” But that’s all I heard of. There probably were other things in other boroughs that you didn’t hear about. Any time you put men and women in any place, you’re going to have sexual tension. And that’s all there is to it.

Q: Can you explain what MLP is?

Yeah, motorized litter patrol. You would take this little love truck, and you’d have a route. And you would go out, and let’s say you’d start on Roosevelt Avenue and 72nd Street. And you would sweep. And you pick it up, and you’d throw it in a can into the back of the truck. And you’d go on. And every block is supposed to get out, empty the basket, clean the block. The stuff on the sidewalk, you’d sweep it into the street, you just clean up. It’s litter patrol. You would pick up litter.

Sometimes it was good. Sometimes it wouldn’t work out. I was on litter patrol when I was younger on Roosevelt Avenue. I was supposed to be on Baxter Street and Roosevelt. I got there, police told me, “Get out of here.” I said, “No, I got this thing, my route.” “Get out of here.” So I drove—In those days we didn’t have cell phones. I drove to a phone, I called in and I said, “Hey listen, the police told me not to be there, I don’t know what’s going on.” And they said, “Just, okay, don’t—Start on, where are you now?” I said, “I’m on Northern.” “Do Northern Boulevard. We’ll pick you up later.” I said, “Okay.” So I was working Northern. About three hours later, I said, “I have to see what’s going on over there.” So I cleaned up, I got back in the truck and I drove over there. They had a raid on some bar over there. They had people all over the place. So I drove through. That was motorized litter patrol.

Then I went on to—I made collection sometimes. We didn’t even have recycling then. It was just garbage. You took everything. The first load on whatever your day is, your first day of the week was regular garbage. The second day we would take wood—everything—metal, couches, mattresses. Everything. Can’t believe some of the filthy things you have to touch in your life.

Q: Like what?

Some of the mattresses. Things. You'd say to yourself, "Come on, eh?" But. You get used to it. You do your job. From there, I went to the mechanical sweepers. And I think I told you last time, I liked that. 'Cause mechanical sweeper was good. You were your own boss. You never worried about anybody else. You left in the morning, you had your route, you knew you had to do this, until 11, and then from 11, 11:30 to this, and that was it. You cleaned your route, was never a problem. And I cleaned my route—99.9 percent of the time, I would do my route. I didn't want to be bothered. You know? After that, then, when I was in the broom garage we had a great ABS—in those days we used to call them ABS or Assistant Borough Superintendents. His name was Al Giangrande. He passed away since. And he was in charge of the brooms, also. That was one of his things. As an ABS, you're given certain districts. And one of his was the broom garage. And he would come in and he realized that I had a little bit of brains, and I told you, I had the only pen. There was an opening in the borough 'cause somebody went sick. And I went up for a couple of—about a week or two. They brought me up there. In those days it was much easier than today. They would say, "Okay, I need that guy up here," and you went up. I stood there two weeks and then this person came back, so I went back to the brooms again.

Q: Can you tell me about dealing with the public?

Dealing with the public is very difficult. For anyone, I don't care if you're in the office or the kid in the street. I mean, I walked down the streets many days, and people will ask you some of the most ridiculous questions.

Q: Like what?

"My brother-in-law said you didn't pick up his house yesterday." "Where's his house, ma'am?" "He's in Brooklyn." "Ma'am, this is Queens. We don't go to Brooklyn, we only work Queens." "Oh. But he said he didn't get picked up." "Ma'am you have to call Brooklyn and see why."

Other things were, you know, "I got two tons of concrete." [Laughs] Yeah. I ain't taking it! [Laughs] You're killing me. People, they don't understand what your job is. A lot of people feel that you're overpaid. They would basically tell you.

Q: Have they told you that?

Oh, people told me that all the time. All the time. Friends tell me I was overpaid.

Q: What do you say to them?

Well, you know what? I have friends who were teachers, and they'd say to me, "Do you think it's right that you make the same—almost the same—money that I do?" And I would always tell them, "No, it's not right. I should make more money than you do." Number one, because, you see, when I finish at the end of the day, I've cleaned up the city. You're turning out idiots. Some of these kids can't read. Look what's happening. At

least me, you could see what I did. I went down that block, and now there's no more cans. I picked up the garbage. You're sending out garbage. And it's the truth. I mean with this—what was it? Social promotion? You know, “Aw, listen he's 18 we got—” That's ridiculous. We don't say, “Ah, I don't like that block, I ain't taking it.” You do your job. So, they would get very angry. But that's their life.

Q: Would you ever bring up issues of—health and safety issues?

Sure, I would tell them. First of all I would tell them, “Listen, you guys work 180 days a year. I work 261 days a year. Okay? You don't work all summer long. July and August you're home. You don't go back until September. You get every holiday that was ever made. You get a week off for the Jewish holidays, a week off for Christian holidays. Then you get snow days.” “Oh, it's snowing they cancelled school.” I understand that, I really believe that, you should cancel school. For the kids. But the teachers should have to go in. Why does he have to stay home? Let him go in and set up books in the classroom or something. They don't say to me, “Joe, you know what? We had a 95 score card on the clean, you don't have to sweep this week.” You're still out there doing your job. “Oh, you know what? We picked up 85 tons yesterday. We're only supposed to pick up 80, so leave five tons out there.” No! You went out and did your job. I've always had that; it used to bother me.

Q: What did they say after you told them that?

Ah, we're friends, so they really don't get too mad. And I love when they tell me, “Why did you want to become a teacher?” “Well I want to improve young minds.” Baloney! You got the weekends off. You got summer off. You got Christian holidays off, Jewish holidays off. Now you're getting Muslim holidays off. Come on. Can you imagine, we don't work two months and you get a paycheck?!

Q: My mom's a teacher, so...

Yeah, I mean, God bless her. But I'm saying... And you don't work two months and you get a paycheck.

Q: That's why she became a teacher, she wanted to spend time—

But if you're honest, yes, you tell the truth. See, my friend Joe said to me, “You know why I became a teacher?” “No, Joe.” “I get two months off, I get—” [Laughs] True. Don't tell me you're—Maybe when you really started out, when you first started out it was to help young minds, but... Not really. And why did I become a san man? Because it was a good job. Like I said, it's going to pay the bills.

I couldn't be a teacher; I never finished college. To go back, I mean, one guy offered me a position teaching pipefitting. In a trade school. But I had to go and get teaching credits. Had to get 30 teaching credits—Is that what it is? Thirty or something? I don't know, but I had to go get teaching credits and I told him, “Listen, let me tell you something. I know

how to fit pipe. I know how to fit it because I did it. Okay? I can do all the facets. If I go get 30 teaching credits, will I know anymore about pipefitting? No. 'Cause they're not teaching pipefitting. I am not an English teacher. I am not a history, I'm not a math teacher. I want to teach them what I know: pipefitting. So, why do I have to have all these other credits?" You're not going to take me and say, "Ms. Crowe's not in today, teach the history class." I'm not going to do it! I can't do it. I'm a pipefitter. That's what I would have taught. If you said to me today, "What can you teach?" I can teach a young guy how to load the truck. That's all I could do. I can't teach him math. I'm not going to—I know math, I know about history, I know some language, but I'm not a teacher of that stuff. To me it's so ridiculous. God bless them. If they can make it work 180 days a year, it's a wonderful thing.

Q: But did say you got to teach, when you got to sanitation you taught people...

I taught how to drive the broom. 'Cause the broom is a specialized piece of equipment. And you have to really keep your head about you because you're sniping in and out constantly. You very rarely get a block that nobody's on, that you could just drive down. And we drove from the right in those days. Now they make you drive from the center. But you're very rarely—I guess in anything, things are never perfect. You know. If it was perfect, all the streets would be open on your side where you had to sweep, and you'd make a beautiful clean job. But there's always somebody parked here, and another guy there. You have to snipe in and come out again. So you have to watch. When you're coming back out again, you have to make sure there's no traffic coming against you or anything. It's, you know, a specialized piece of equipment. You have a water flow in front of you. Wetting the street. You have the gutter brooms working this way. You have a pick up broom going this way, putting the garbage into the hopper. You have your mirrors on both sides—every car and everything—but you have many more things to control. And it's a learned thing.

So, I liked teaching people. I would take them out. I mean I've been with them when the guy would go up on the sidewalk. 'Cause he'd cut in and forget to cut back out again. And there're two—Thank God the sanitation always had dual steering. I would grab the other wheel and pull us back into the street again. But I did it, too, when I—When I was trying out, it wasn't that I knew. I was trying out; I had an old timer teach me. And it was something that you learned. The only way you learn is through experience.

Q: Well last time we talked you said that sanitation work was unskilled labor.

It, it's not a skilled labor, like, you're not a teacher. I don't have to make a lesson plan everyday. Once you learn to drive the broom, once you learn to drive the front-end loader. Once you learn to drive the truck—and I don't mean on Floyd Bennett Field. In my day it was Randall's Island. That going around that thing didn't teach you to drive the truck, believe me. It's like the same thing with a car; you go down, you get your license. You could drive now. You really can't drive yet. Have you been in the snow? Have you been in wind? Have you been in rain? Have you, traffic 'til you couldn't stand anybody when you were sitting in it? Car gets banged up. It happens. But you need experience.

That's why I say it's not skilled. I'm not a teacher. I'm not sitting up in front of the class and you're asking me questions, and I'm answering you, for knowledge that I have. All you could ask me is, "How am I doing driving?" And I could tell you, "The worst I ever had," or, "You're good, just take it easy. Slow down." A lot of guys have a tendency to go too fast. Even on the broom. You have to go slow. 'Cause you got—If you're not picking up the garbage, you're blowing it all over the place. So that's what I mean, it's not skilled in that respect. You haven't gone to school. You went to sanitation school, which is, you know. "Pick up with your knees, not your back." It's not—that's not a skill.

But, what I meant was it is unskilled labor. It is. But it's a labor that needs to be done. Everyday it needs to be done. Eventually I think, if the society ever got really... complacent, you could probably do with less cops. Eventually, I think they'll even do with less firemen, because there are less and less fires every year. But the sanitation has to be out there. Everyday of your life, as much as you don't want to, you create garbage. People who smoke. Their cigarettes are always in the street, the packs. People smoke, they always throw them in the street for some reason. I don't know why they can't throw them in the house, but they... ugh. We create garbage. Our nation, we're a disposable nation. You know that. I mean, razors are disposable today. When I was a young man, you had one razor. Used to put new blades in it, that's all. Now, everybody uses disposable razors. This thing you're taping with, if it goes bad, you're throwing it away. They don't repair them. They just dump things today. Cell phones. You change your cell phone, what happens to it? Gets thrown away. Disposable society. We throw everything away. They throw babies away. So, imagine. It's really bad. But, garbage will always be there. We will always have garbage.

I'm very glad we got into recycling. I really am. It annoys me sometimes, 'cause I have to take out the cans, and the bottles, and I have to take out the paper, then the trash. But you know what? If we could really do something to save this planet—But I'm dead. It ain't going to be my lifetime. I'll be long gone. And even you. But somebody's going to be here. And if we don't start thinking... this pollution in the air. It's going to be over one day. My time will be long gone, so it won't matter.

Q: How did you see tonnage change at all—?

Well tonnage went up. Oh, don't forget years ago we had the M truck. When I came on, they even had a smaller truck. When I was a young kid, I think I mentioned there was a sanitation section on my corner. And it would park all the trucks on the block. Those trucks held three tons. They had three men. Today you do 12 tons, two men. Trucks are much larger, there's a lot more garbage out there. Because of the disposable society. In those days, nobody disposed of anything. I mean, things were—In an Italian family, we didn't throw food out because we ate it today. You ate leftovers. By the time it went out, it was very little, and it was rancid. So you got rid of it. But today, I know people, "It's a leftover, I won't eat that." It's chicken man! [Laughs] Chicken, come on! So, they won't eat it.

Again we're a disposable society, we throw everything away. No matter what we do, we don't consider anything down the road. You know, the materials we use today are all plastics and everything.

Q: What's the most, like, I guess the most pristine thing you found in the trash that you couldn't believe was thrown away?

I found a pump one day. The guy was putting it out for collection, and what it was was a sump pump.

Q: What is that?

A sump pump. Well, like I have a pond in the yard. So you put the sump pump in the pond, and usually what it is is in your basement. You make a trap in the corner of the basement in case you get water. And you make it lower than everything so if the water comes in, it'll go into the trap. And this pump will kick on automatically. And push the water out.

And a gentleman was throwing it away. We were on collection, and I said to him, "What's wrong with it?" "Nothing." "So why you throwing it out?" "I don't want it." So instead of hoisting it into the truck, which we're supposed to do, we put it on the side. And I brought it home. And I stuck it in a five-gallon pail of water and turned it on. And it emptied that pail, it almost [makes noise sucking up water fast]. And I still have it in the shed outside. And what I do is, when I had the pool in the yard, one time I needed to empty the pool because they were going to put a new liner in it. And what I did was I set it into the pool, and just turned it on. And it pumped out all the water, or at least everything but one inch. So that was the most pristine thing, but I saw guys pick up stuff that, my God, Hilary, you wouldn't want in your house. Old aluminum chairs, and they'd re-web them. It was like, Come on, fellas. When I came on the job, a guy said to me, "You're on the sanitation now?" "I think so, yeah." "You'll never have to buy anything." "Really?" "Yeah, you just wait. Somebody will throw it out." Well, I never [Laughs] I never felt like that.

Q: Isn't it against the rules of your job?

It is. Yeah, it is against the rules. But, you know what? I knew that night it was against the rule, but it was a good pump. I couldn't see throwing it in the back of the truck. It was just so stupid. It was a waste of money. So we put it on the side. And when we got back to the garage, I pulled it out and I put it in my trunk. Was it wrong? Technically yes, 'cause when you put it outside, it belongs to the city. But it was a good item. It wasn't a piece of garbage. I mean like, if you put out an aluminum chair, I'm not taking it. I have a shed full of aluminum chairs over the years. I'm just throwing it in. People would throw out whole sets of dishes. They changed them. "I don't want them anymore." I felt bad throwing it into the truck. Give it to someone. But then I found later on that, you know...

When my mother in law went into the home we had her hospital bed. And I called the company up. They said, “We don’t want it back.” I understand you don’t want the mattress. I’ll dispose of the mattress. But the hospital bed? You know, it goes up and down, and this, all these things. “No, we don’t want it.” So I called a couple of nursing homes. “No, we don’t want it.” I ended up having to throw it away. So again, we’re back to that thing, we’re a disposable society. To me it was ridiculous. If I was a sanitation man and I got—well I was at the time—but if I got to that house, and I saw that bed there, before I picked it up, I’d say, “What’s wrong with it?” And if they would say, “Nothing,” if I had a use for it, I would try to store it on the side. I mean the bed was huge, you know, couldn’t do it, but. Ridiculous.

Q: Is there a protocol at all within, I guess, within DSNY for saying, like, “This is a very pristine thing can we,” like...

No. What’s ever out on the street goes in the garbage.

Q: Okay.

A guy might take it, take something. I’ve seen people, older people, throw out shoes. “Oh, my husband died.” You know. I never needed them. First of all, I got a very small foot, so. But to me it was like, “Why are you throwing it away? Can’t you give it away to the Salvation Army, or St. Jude’s Society, or St. Vincent DePaul or something?” And a lot of times they would say, “I called them, they don’t want it.” “Okay.”

Q: Have you seen any reduction in waste when they implemented recycling?

Yes. Not as much as they thought they were going to have. But, it’s very hard to get people to recycle.

Q: Why?

They just don’t want to. And they’re not used to it. They’re not used to recycling. We never recycled years ago. So they’re not used to recycling. They don’t want to recycle. They just want to throw it out. They want it out of here: “I want it out of my house, I don’t care what you do with it.” How many times I’ve gone down Woodhaven Boulevard here, and there’s—to go to Home Depot—there’s a turn around. In there, every time I’m there, even when I was on the job: boxes, cardboard, a piece of furniture. Why? Put it out in front of your house, we’ll take it. No. They rather go there at night and dump it off. It’s so ridiculous. Because they—Number one, they don’t care. They really don’t care. And they feel that, we’ll pick it up anyway. No matter where they throw it, we’ll get it. And that’s not right.

I’ve seen people—but I myself, like I said, we called all the societies, “I got a hospital bed,” you know. “No.” I mean, the landlord came back to me after a while, said, “Listen, you got to get it out of here.” You know, which is only right. He’s renting the apartment. I said, “Alright, if that’s the case, then throw it out.” And we put it out on the recycling

day and the metal truck just ate it up. But it was a sin. But I couldn't store it here. I don't need a hospital bed. In fact, what I did was I bought one of those Craftmatic jobs that goes up and down and everything. But, it's just that every—it's the way it is today. Again, I'll go back to that point I said before, they throw babies away. They put them in the trash. If you could put a child in the trash, what do you care about a chair or anything?

Q: Have any sanitation workers come across—

Oh yeah, many of the guys. Found babies. Yeah.

Q: What do you do?

You call the police. You call in right away to your section, to your job. They call the police. Police come. You know. I mean, our guys find everything. They find bodies every once in a while. One time we found a snake. It was a big snake, and the superintendent said, "I got this, this huge snake here! And it's laying there!" So somebody said, "Well go poke it, see if it moves." "I ain't poking anything!" [Laughs] "The hell with you! I'm not doing it!" [Laughs] And finally somebody went over and grabbed the tail. And shook it and ran. It was dead. But it was a huge boa constrictor, probably about ten foot long. It's a big snake. You know? [Laughs] They find all kinds of things.

Some guys found a counterfeit—You know that, oh, what is it? Clearinghouse? Publisher's Clearinghouse? By the railroad tracks, they found a bag of all the people that sent in that, "I do not want to buy anything, but I want to be in the drawing." They found a bag of the tickets. The Publisher Clearinghouse said it was a mistake on their part. It was put away and somebody did it. I think they just threw them out. You ain't buying nothing, you're not in the drawing, you know? But you find it.

Some guys found counterfeit money. One time. The money was yellow. I guess the batch didn't run right, so they just threw it away.

Q: What do you do when you find that?

You call the police. The FBI comes in. Then every once in a while, the FBI would call us and say, "Okay, listen. You got to go down 71st Street and pick up this house. Just put it in the hopper, don't cycle the hopper. Just come around the corner." And then they would take the bags. 'Cause they're watching somebody. And the guys do that, then they go back and do the rest of the route. But you'd go right to this house, stop, put his cans in the truck, no cycling, just leave it lay there. Drive a block away, the cops would meet you there, the FBI, they take the bags.

You know what? It's very interesting some of the things that happen. We had a guy that lost his job. And he was a dirtbag anyway. But he lost his job because he was driving this clerk home. Which he wasn't supposed to be doing. And he had the city car. And her two cousins were drug addicts. Or drug dealers. And she asked him, "Could you just take

them somewhere real quick?” And these two guys get in the car with suitcases. He drove them, he let them out, and that was it. Well, the FBI was watching it. So the FBI called the Department and said, “Hey, listen. I don’t know if this guy’s got anything to do with them, we’re checking it out, but this car number on this day at this time dropped a girl off then picked up two guys and drove him over here. So now it’s up to you—he’s not involved in the drugs, we know that. But. Do what you got to do.” Guy got brought up on charges. So, it’s amazing the things that happen.

Q: What’s the most amazing thing that you’ve had to do on the job?

Me? Oh, just the dead animals, I told you.

Q: Can you tell me about that again for the—

Oh, that was horrible. That was horrible. I was brand new. And the foreman came over and said to me, “Did you ever pick up a dead animal?” I said, “No.” And I didn’t want to, I just kept going and said, “[makes noises of shuffling off and avoiding the issue].” [Laughs] And he said, “Get in the truck with this guy,” and the other guy got out. And he said, “You stay here and make piles until they come back.” So, we went and I told you, a block away I knew something died. I didn’t care. I had to take a deep breath, not to, you know. So we go up to this thing. This bag was huge, Hilary. God, it was as long as you, honey. And I’m just. And I had to run back a half a block to get a breath of air again, to come back. I’m ready to throw it in the truck, I’m just, “Throw it in, throw it in!” And the foreman says, “How do you know a dog is in there?” I said, “It doesn’t—it’s too late. It’s too late.” I mean, I did spend a year in Vietnam. It’s too late. Whatever’s in there is dead, it don’t matter. So the old man goes back, he takes what they call the hopper knife. He opens it up, he slices the bag. My God. Hilary. Maggots, and—oh. I was ready to die. I had to run back a whole block now to get a breath of air, come back, grab the bag—one, two, three—in the hopper, close the hopper. Still stunk. Take the dog to, what the heck was the dump in those days? It was in Queens East. I forget names now. So, we go down there—I’m driving, I have to get practice how to drive. I’m on line. Guy behind me comes out, I told you. He had a tear in his eye, this guy. “What do you got in the truck?” “I got a dead dog back there.” “Go to the front of the line.” “Oh, I can’t go to the front of the line, I’m brand new. I got 30 days on the job. They’ll fire me.” [Whistles] Everybody could whistle but me in the sanitation, I don’t know why. Guy does [whistles], does something with his hand. The guy waves me up. Get on the scale, weigh the truck. The truck weighed, like, you know, whatever it’s supposed—the tier weight, plus the dead animal. And me. Get up there, back the truck up, dump the dog, come back out. They check to make sure you dumped your load. All I had was a dead dog, but they checked. Okay. Go back and bring the truck back and they went on MLP and I went back making little piles again. Worst thing.

A friend of mine by the name of Murphy—what a gentleman this kid was, what a good boy. It was a cat in the street, one day, dead. I was on the broom. I went around him. See, you’re not supposed to. But I wasn’t picking up that cat, ‘cause I had to spend all day in that broom. And I didn’t need a dead cat in the front, smelling. So Murphy says to me,

“You missed the cat.” Then this guy comes out of his house, “Oh, [makes whining noises]!” Oh man. Alright. So I pull up. I park the broom. And you could open the hopper in front of the broom and throw the cat in. Said, “Murphy. Go get the cat.” So Murphy puts his gloves on, he goes over there. He grabs the cat—my hand to God—he grabs the cat by the tail. All the fur comes off the bone.

Q: [Gasp]

I was a block away. [Laughs] So now Murphy gets a box—the guy gives him a box and a shovel—and he puts him in, he throws it in. [Laughs] I’m still down the block. Between laughing and the smell, it was killing me. [Laughs] Like I couldn’t believe it. So now I get back in the broom, and there’s poor Murphy, you know. And he’s very serious, and I’m like hysterical. And I told him, “See? That’s why you don’t pick up dead cats!” The whole damn thing, oh! And he’s like, “Just—we did it, don’t worry.” Oh God, it was disgusting.

But other than that, you know—One time I was a little heroic. There was a fire, and my foreman told me, “Pull the truck up on the sidewalk and block the”—it was two-story, couldn’t get in. So he jumped up on top of the truck and he ran in the house. But it was nobody there. And then the fire department got there, they told me, “Just back out and block the street for us, okay? Don’t let anybody in but fire vehicles.” And I did that. I backed up, they went in. Then they told me after a while, “Okay we got enough here. The fire’s out,” or whatever it was. And I went back to work. But, then you know, there’s nothing heroic. We did our jobs. Everyday.

Q: Can you tell me about removing the German shepherd?

Oh that one, yeah, that little old lady’s house. That was a sin. We went in—the foreman told us—‘cause you’re not allowed to enter somebody’s property—but the foreman told us, “Go in there,” which he’s not allowed to even tell you. But, you know what? Again, you cannot go strictly by the book everyday. You’re out there, something is there. The house, he had a recliner that was a, I guess, leather, red, old leather. It was all broken, had tape on it. And you could see they had nothing, these two old people. The house was—I don’t think the walls were painted in 15 years. The ceiling had cracks in it. It was really. Touching. ‘Cause I always felt for old people. So, we went in and we put this big German shepherd—my God—on the sheet. And we bring him outside; we throw the whole thing right in the hopper. Just flip it right in. And the old lady’s yelling at us, and we go back. “What’s the matter?” “I need the sheet, I need the sheet!” Now, first of all, the dog was dead, he was on the sheet. Second of all, you know the stuff that’s in that hopper? And they always offer you money. And we would, I’d, you know, the foreman said, “I don’t want you guys taking anything.” Taking? I wanted to give them a few dollars, I felt so bad. I really did. But they wouldn’t take nothing either. They were crying, because of the dog. It was horrible, bad. Horrible day.

Q: Was that your hardest day on the job, do you think?

No, my hardest day was lifting seven tons. No, I mean, I just think that—You get out of the service, and you think you seen everything. You think you've done everything. And you realize that you haven't. And then you see things that really hurt you, like those two old people. And you realize how life is that—They could've been wealthy at one point, or at least making it. And now here they are like that. I was very touched by it. It bothered me, it really did.

In fact my daughter told me one time she worked in Pilgrim State and this guy came over to her and said to her, "Can I have a cookie? I'm hungry." Now, what does that mean, "Can I have a cookie I'm hungry?" That doesn't mean anything. But I say to myself, "This is the United States of America. Nobody should ever be hungry." I mean, we're the greatest nation in the world. Why should people go hungry at night? We're giving money away everyday, millions! Millions of dollars everyday. We started bombing Libya now. I forgot how many millions of dollars it costs per bomb that we're dropping on Libya. Take that money. There's people that need it to live. I don't say Welfare, I don't agree with Welfare. Unless you're old and disabled. Then, God, you deserve it. There's too many young people who don't want to work on Welfare. But, for the elderly, they shouldn't have to worry about—It's either eat, or buy your medicine. That's ridiculous. They should get their medicine for free. As far as eating, you know what? You want steak every night? They should have steak every night. They should have whatever they want. It's ridiculous. I think I told you the other day, it's the greatest country in the world 'til you get old. And then they don't want to know you anymore. And I saw those people—right down here, 'cause I was working in this neighborhood that day, right down there. It was horrible. And all it was was a dog. And I had dogs died. You know, I mean I had pets, they died. But it just bothered me that day. It really bothered me to see these two old people, and I knew that night they were not sitting down to a grand dinner. They were eating whatever scraps they had. It was just really horrible.

Q: I think a lot of people probably don't know that's something you guys have to deal with, and so I'm thinking about sanitation work more and more, and what do you think is the most misunderstood element of your work?

The most misunderstood element is that we perform a necessary evil. We're out there everyday, picking up garbage. We're—the rats in the city are bad. Imagine if we didn't pick up garbage. And we don't get any respect.

Q: Why do you think?

Because we're garbage men. You see? You're a police officer. You're somebody. You carry a gun. You're a fireman—You ever see a commercial with a fireman he wasn't carrying a baby out of a fire? No! They all carry babies out of fires, it's amazing. What do they bring these kids in when they have the fires, you know, to bring them out? Listen, they do a great job. And, and they die in fires. And they did die at the World Trade. No doubt about it. You know, and it, it takes a lot of moxy to run into a building when you know you may not come out. It does. But I also fought in Vietnam, so I know the moxy it takes to do things. You were scared, but you still did it. Okay? But my thing is that we

don't get respect. And I don't think that the Department fights for us. I think that we should go around to schools, and teach the children about recycling. And not officers. Of course there should be an officer there, but there should be sanitation men there. Because the officer, he hasn't been behind the truck in ten years. It should be garbage men there. To teach the kids, and to show them that we're not dirty. We're not filthy. Our uniform can be clean. I mean, we do pick up garbage, and sometimes it does, it spills on you. Sometimes you rip, you get a tear or something. But we should be there, teaching people about it. And I never see that. They have some things—they go around, they have a coloring book with the truck on it. That's nothing. That's nothing. We should be there. Ann Marie never—I don't remember her ever having bringing your dad to work day, what he does. They never had that in St. Margaret's. But I would have went. And I would have went in my uniform. You know, I didn't care that I didn't have the brass on it like the police or the firemen.

But I always said we should have a dress uniform. Sanitation men should have a dress uniform. That when there's a parade, you don't march just in your work uniform, which is ripped or dirty. You march in the dress uniform. And they gave me two ribbons. In the Army you wore your ribbons here. Okay. Well, I got two ribbons from the Sanitation for whatever—Sanitation Worker of the Quarter, Sanitation Worker of the—you know, whatever. I should have a dress uniform to wear them on, but you can't wear them on your regular uniform. They're not made to fit on it, you know. But, the union said that they will never do that because who's going to buy the dress uniform? You have to buy it. And the guys aren't going to spend the money. So, we're basically, you know, we're our own worst enemies, too. It's just the way it is. But I think that if people would really be educated to what we do—you know, you don't realize it. Even I never realized before I went on. What you do every day. You're cleaning the city. You're picking up tons and, oh my God, I guess we pick well over a hundred tons a day. Hundred thousand tons a day. I don't know what it is now. You're recycling. These trucks are on the road constantly. These men are working long hours, physical hours. The only thing people see is when somebody's sitting down on the side of the road or something. They don't care that maybe your truck is broken down. They don't care that maybe you're on your break. People don't want to know that.

The day I graduated. There was me and another fella, we graduated from sanitation school. The next day we had to report to our districts. But the commissioner, who was Commissioner Dougherty even at that time, he gave us the rest of the day off. They had the little ceremony in the morning, and after—was over about ten or 11—the commissioner said, "I'm giving all the new sanitation men off. Everybody else you got to get back to work." It was a joke. So we were on the train coming home. And there was an old couple sitting there. And the guy said to his wife, "See? I told you they don't work." Now. I wanted to jump up and say, "Listen, you stupid, old—" But I couldn't. So I just sat there. And that's the way it is. There's no respect for the sanitation man.

There's no respect for the foreman, either. That poor kid has got to go out and give summonses out. He's got no way of protecting himself.

Q: From what?

Irate citizens. Years ago they had—they were not police officers, but they had police. I forget what they used to call it, something status. Peace officer status. So that if you hit one of them, that was like hitting an officer of the law. Today they don't have that anymore. They took it away for some stupid reason. So now, I come up to your establishment, and you would accept it, you'd take the ticket. And you'd say, "Okay, I'll try to get it done." There's places they'll tell you, "I'll kill you first." So, these guys—I'm not going to give them the summons. I'm not going to put myself in danger. For what? So the city gets another \$100? No way. But, if we have sanitation police, who carry guns, now they can go out and issue summonses. Because you're not going to start—You can yell at me. But you're not going to threaten me when I have a gun on my side. Even though they're not allowed to shoot either.

Q: What's the function of sanitation police officers?

The sanitation police officers they enforce the sanitation rules and regulations. Stores are supposed to have—each store is supposed to be swept up by a certain time of the day. They issue summonses, they go after these guys, they'll go on stakeouts. And catch people dumping refrigerators and things. There's no reason to dump it, like I said before. Years ago was much more. Now people call up, 'cause of the CFC's in there. We come in and remove them. See, that's another function of the sanitation that people don't realize. You put a refrigerator out, the CFC's, if they're released into the air, they destroy part of the Ozone Layer. Now is it only the CFC's? No. Not at all. It's emissions from your cars, the factories, even the houses. You're burning stuff. But, you can't stop factories from working. You can fight with them to put scrubbers on their smoke stacks, but come on. You're fighting, and you're fighting industries that have millions of dollars. They'll fight you rather than do it.

But taking those CFC's out of a refrigerator, so that they don't get into the atmosphere, that's a good thing. A lot of people don't care. They don't want to be bothered. You know what they do? They cut the line. So now it all just goes out into the air anyway. So when you find it in the street, the sanitation man finds it, turns it over, the line's cut. So now he calls the foreman. The foreman puts a tag on it that says "No CFC's," and we just pick it up. But that's the way it is. People do not have the knowledge; they don't understand what we do. They don't understand why we're doing it. Except when you don't do it for day or two. Especially in the summer. In the winter, you could leave things out there for a couple of days. You get a day in July, and that can start to ripen readily. And see how fast people want you there. But they're not respectful of you being there. You're just there. You're just like the roach out in the street, or the rat. You're there. That's all. Least that's the way I see it.

Q: Well, last time we talked you said, I said that we talk a lot about invisibility being a problem of sanitation.

It is.

Q: But you also said something interesting, that sometimes it's good to be invisible.

Well it is good to be invisible, because the poor police officer today, he's walking down the block, and whatever he's doing there's people snapping pictures. It's good to be invisible sometimes. 'Cause people see you walking down, they don't even recognize you. You're nobody to them. You're just there. Like I said, you're like that rat in the street, like "Ewww," you know? You just walk by picking up your garbage.

But, there are times when you need to be visible. And I really think that the department should put a hell of a load of money into getting us out there. Getting teams of sanitation men and an officer and sending them around to all of these schools, from the first grades on up. Old age centers. Let the people understand that you're not garbage men, that you are somebody. The old people, they're pretty good. Most of them recycle. The young don't recycle. I mean, I recycle. I have a place for paper; I have a place for metal and glass. And I try to stay up with all the rules and regulations. But most people just don't care.

And so, sometimes, it pays to be invisible. You walk down the block, nobody even cares about you there, and you do your job and you go home. But, there are certain people on the job that should be visible. Not just when they have a problem. Like this microburst that hit here. Who cleaned the streets? The sanitation did. Did anybody care? No. Did anybody go on the TV and say, "Look what the sanitation did in Forest Hills, in Middle Village, in Glendale?" Nobody. And I told you that the reason we didn't get any recognition at the World Trade is nobody died. What a ridiculous thing. You have to have someone die to get recognition? Nobody said that after it fell our trucks were the first ones in to widen the streets so that the other equipment that was going in could get there. Nobody talked about the hundreds of men that were down there, assigned down there, who have the same possibility of getting cancer that the firemen that were down there. Or the policemen that were down there. Nobody talks about them. Nobody talks about the fact that, like Dr. Nagle said, she saw us coming down the next day and said, "Why, things can't be that bad if these guys are still out there doing their job." Nobody talks about the tons of dead fish they had to pick up from restaurants around there. That stinks, hun. That really stinks. Again, is it the fault of the commissioner? I don't know, maybe he's under certain wraps that he's told not to do things. I don't know. But I think that this job could be advertised more. Did you ever see the TV, they tell you, "Oh tomorrow is St. Paddy's day, this is what's going to happen blah blah blah?" But they never tell you that collection's cancelled. Where do they say there's no collection? I mean, I sit here every morning watching Channel One. They say, "Alternate side of the street parking is in effect." They never say, "Collection is in effect, recycling is in effect." Even after the snowstorm, I had to call the borough. I said, "What are you guys doing? Are you back on collection yet?" "Well, we got a little bit out there, you could put it out if you want to, but it'll be a couple of days." "Well, if it's going to be a couple of days I'll wait." Why don't they get out there and say it? Put it on the news. What are they afraid of? People are going to put garbage out? That's your job. You finished plowing. After a while you can't

plow any more, there's nothing there. Put the garbage out, we'll start collecting. Even if it's not all of it. Put it out there.

We'll put—Let's say there's 25 trucks in a certain zone. But you only have ten. Put out the ten. Let them get what they can. But put it on the television. Put it on the radio. Let people know, let them hear "sanitation." 'Til it's drummed into their heads. Not just, "The police are going this." "Oh the ambulances couldn't get down the blocks." Then they knew us. Then it was our fault the police couldn't get through, or the firemen couldn't get through. The ambulances—A woman died because we didn't clear the street. Then they knew our names. But they never said anything after that, when we cleaned everything up. It's amazing.

Q: Well you said you were, like, on snow clerk duty for a little bit.

Yeah.

Q: Can you tell me about how your experience working in sanitation might have changed your experience of the most recent blizzards and snow removal?

This blizzard. I don't know what happened. But somebody dropped the ball. They blew it. They totally blew it. I don't know if it's this new deputy mayor they have, I mean, I don't know the man. I can't say he did it. But somebody did something wrong. I mean, I can't—Commissioner Dougherty has fought more snowstorms than I got hairs on my head. So, it couldn't have been him. I mean, he's fought snowstorms—Ninety-five and '96 we had 80 inches or 75 inches of snow. The streets were always open. Commissioner Dougherty was the commissioner. Why would he suddenly not know what to do now? It's impossible. The man has been in the sanitation 40 years. If he knew nothing, just being here for 40 years he had to know how to fight it. But he is an intelligent man. So, somewhere above him, somebody was holding back. I don't know if it was the mayor, I don't know if it was—I don't know who it was. But they dropped the ball on this one. They really did.

We didn't drop them in those days. We got the jobs done somehow. I'm not saying it was perfect. Did we forget streets? Yeah, there was always problems. You come to a block—this block in fact; some idiot took his car, came up the middle of the block, got stuck in the snow and left it. Now, the plow turns down the block, he sees he can't do it. So he backs out. Now you have to wait for this guy, well, he's in the middle of this block. You can't get a tow truck in. They can't pull him all the way up to the block. So you have to get the sanitation to come in with a front-end loader. And go up to him digging out the snow, making a mountain somewhere. Then the tow truck could pull him out. So this block got lost for a while. Some of the tertiary streets, in a major, major snowstorm, get lost. Because it's a dead-end street. They do. It's a horrible thing to say, but it happens. Even when we—The commissioner challenged us, at one point in '95, he said, "I challenge the men and women of the sanitation to have every street plowed within the next 24 hours." And we did it. Okay, were there ten streets we missed? Oh yeah, I'd say

so. But, if you can get 99 percent—Now, I forget how many streets, how many miles we have in this city. If you can get 99 percent, you did a good job.

But this last storm, I don't know what happened. They said that the sanitation men were told by the supervisors not to work. Listen to me. Sanitation men never listen to their supervisors. Because we feel that you left us. You moved up. Now. You're told to do your route, the guys go out and do their job. Sometimes there's problems? Agreed. Sometimes you have a good supervisor and you do what you want for the guy, you'll help him out. But, he's not telling me to go out and not plow. When I know that I have to plow. The first thing that would happen is, I would call the union and say, "Hey, Joey Siano told me not to do something. So, just so he knows, I'm plowing. I'm doing my job today." So if he tries to bang me later on, saying that I was doing something, it's because he's pissed at me. Not because I did anything wrong.

Do I feel bad for these guys? They're busting guys back? I think that's wrong. I really think that's wrong. And I do feel bad. But you know, Hilary? It's like anything else: You try to do something, if it doesn't work out, is it my fault? You were one of us. You stepped out and went somewhere else. Now, you're an officer now. You don't have to plow, you don't have to pick up. You drive around in a car, make sure I do it. So, why should I be worried that you are not being treated right by the mayor? I don't care what he's doing to you. I worry about the guys I'm with. Like the union. What is my union supposed to do? Tell us not to do that? That'd be ridiculous. So that was a lie. That councilman who said that three guys told him that? Hilary, let me tell you something. You got a major snowstorm out in the front of you. You have every piece of equipment that is drivable has a plow on it. There's no trucks just sitting in the garage doing nothing. Even the—Years ago we used to have the flushers. We used to flush the street with water. They had plows in front of them, if there was a major snowstorm. Every workable piece of equipment had a plow on it. Do you think that we would roll out the door and leave those blades up in the air? No way. No way. And let's say three guys decided not to do it. Out of 6,000 sanitation men. You think anybody would know? It couldn't be. You know? My point is, there were times you would lose more than three men in the day. The routes still got done; they assigned other people to them. So, that councilman, I don't know who told him that. I don't know if he wanted his 15 minutes of fame, you know? I think that if my union ever found those three guys, they'd crucify them. Because they made us look bad. That's the whole thing they were saying. "The sanitation men are not doing their job." That's baloney! That's bull! Because three guys said somebody told them not to do it? Come on. That's hideous.

Q: I'm interested in when—you're talking I'm hearing that, seems like officers are more beholden to the mayor than...

No, they're not more beholding, but there's—They moved up. They became supervisors, and God bless them. I have some of my best friends are supervisors. Superintendents. But if they turned to me and say, "Joey, don't do this." I'm not going to listen to them. I have a job to do. I'm going to do my job. Now, see, what's happening is this new mayor, the deputy mayor, he wants to cut the budget. And what he wants to do is, we have young

men are beginning foremen. He wants to bring them back to sanitation man. Now, the city has the right to do that. So that's it. But, the problem we're having is, they want to come back and say, "Well, here I am, I'm Joe Siano. I been a supervisor for five years, I want to come back with the same seniority." You can't. You stepped out. We didn't leave you, you left us. You come back now, you come back without seniority. And you start from the bottom again. That's the point. I don't think it's fair. It's not fair to them, but it is right. If I'm a sanitation man, why should you come back? You left this garage years ago. You became a supervisor. Now suddenly, because the mayor wants to cut your slots, he's bringing you back as a san man, now suddenly you have me beat? And I'm going to lose my route? Because everything is seniority. I told you that. I'm going lose my route because you left. I didn't leave, I've been here for five years doing this. So, it's a very bad thing.

This deputy mayor, in my estimation, is not very good. He's attacking things where he shouldn't attack. I understand he comes from Indiana. And in Indiana he crushed the sanitation union. Put them out of business. I don't think he could ever do that here.

Q: Why?

Because our union is very strong. And in Indiana, the sanitation men just pick up garbage. We pick up garbage and we plow the streets. We switch back and forth, in a matter of hours. And no other city does that. We have a workforce that, you come in in the morning and, "Okay, you and Hilary, Joey go out, do your route." We're out there, half an hour later, starts to snow. Eh, we're still working. An hour later, really starts to get bad. Foreman finds you, "Go in." We go in, they take the truck, boom. They throw a plow on the truck, I'm the first one up, I take the truck out and plow. The next available truck, you're out plowing. You could switch back and forth. If three hours later they didn't need us again on plows, you'd bring that truck in, within a half-hour, that plow would be changed, your truck could be in changed, and we'd be on the road again picking up garbage. No other city agency can swing back and forth like we do. It's impossible. The police can't switch back and forth, they're police. The firemen can't switch back and forth. We have the greatest productivity of any city agency. We have the less men and women of any city agency. There's 30,000 police officers. I don't know how many firemen. But, we produce more than they do.

I mean, it's hard, because how do you tell a cop, "You guys have to stop five bank robberies a day." Can't. There may not be five bank robberies a day. You can't tell a fireman, "You have to save three babies today." There's no fire, he ain't doing it. But we're out there constantly.

Q: Can you tell me the... authority that sanitation workers feel from the union versus the mayor? Like, who do you see as...

I wouldn't even say "versus the mayor." You know. You listen to your union. That is your authority. No one else. You have to realize that the mayor's sole job is to coordinate everything throughout the city and save as much money as he can. And the mayor doesn't

care. The mayor doesn't know Hilary. He doesn't know Joey. So, if this guy, this deputy mayor, comes in and says, "I could cut 500 people and save all that money." And it's not only your salary, don't forget, it's your benefits, it's your pension. It's everything. He's going to try to do it. Your union is the only one in front of him saying, "You're not going to hurt my people." They're the only ones who'll stand up for you. The public isn't going to. 'Cause the public doesn't like sanitation anyway, like I said. You tell a citizen that you're making, I don't know what the guys make today anymore, but that kind of money, for picking up garbage? They look at you like, "You're crazy! You don't deserve that." So, I don't think it's between us and the mayor. But our union is our leadership. And as long as we stay tight with our leadership, I don't think they can do anything.

I told you, when I was working they had a lay off. They laid off 200 or 250 men. And they were telling the mayor and—well not the mayor, but you know—the word coming down was, "Listen, if you guys give up this, this, and this, we won't lay anybody off." And the union said, "No. We do not give back what we earned. You want to lay them off? Lay them off. I will get everyone of them back." Which is exactly what happened. They laid them off. Within six months, eight months to a year, all those men were brought back on the job. Okay? Now, was it tough on them? For six, eight months, sure it was. But they all came back to the job, and then they gave them the opportunity to buy back that year. So, you know. You have to listen to your union.

Q: When was that, what mayor was that?

Oh. Was it under Bloomberg? It might have been under Bloomberg, 'cause he's been here quite a while. I don't think it was under Dinkins. No, I think it was under Bloomberg. You know, but there—no, maybe Giuliani. There's always those threats coming down. "If you guys give up unlimited sick, we'll give you 12 days a year, and we won't even check you. We won't care where you go." Oh, sounds great. Twelve days, I could go anywhere I want, I could take another two-weeks vacation. What happens when you break your leg? And you can't work for two, three months? Now what are you getting? You're getting disability from the state. Nowhere near your salary. What happens when you get old? I mean, guys get old. We can't pick up like we used to. You know, years ago if you hurt your shoulder you'd go home, you'd put some liniment on it and the next day you're fine again. Now, I'm taking a lot more than liniment to fix my shoulders. You know? So, you need those things. But that was always the threats brought down to us. And my union stood firm. You want to lay them off? Lay them off. Harry Nespoli, who was the president of the union, said, they came down one time and they said, "We're not going to do anything, we're not laying anybody off." The next day he said the Teletype ran for 20 minutes. He says, "And my name was on there." He got laid off. The other president, whoever was there, think it was Eddie Estrowski, said, "Lay them off, I'll get everyone of them back." And he did. And that has always been the attitude.

Q: I'm curious about... You said, the last time we talked you said you encourage everyone to take the test.

Whoever you are, you should take every city test there is. Absolutely.

Q: And what would you think if you're grandchild grew up and decided they wanted to work—

Become a sanitation worker? If the kid showed no other ability, then he should be a sanitation worker. Again, I say, we can't all go to college. Now, my daughter's a physician. She definitely wants her kid to go to college. And I pray to god he does. I pray that, but you have to be—Whatever you do in life, you have to want to do it. Here you are, you're a young girl, I don't know what you're aspiring to be. But what happens if down the road, it doesn't come? For some reason? You take the test. A year later you get called by the department of sanitation. You say, "No, I don't want it." And that's it. Or you say, "You know what? I got my teaching degree, I got all this and I can't get a job." My brother has a daughter who's a licensed teacher. Can't get a job. They got her working on Long Island as a teacher's aide, paying her a third of the money she should be making. That's the way it is. But my point is that, why not? Why not take these tests? What is it? Fifty-five dollars and a Saturday? The test is simple. Believe me, they are. The sanitation test, if you can't pass the sanitation test, you should go to an Army-Navy store, buy a gun, put it in your mouth, and blow your head off. That's honest. The other tests, I don't believe they're that hard either. Maybe a little more, but they're not. But I think everyone should take the test; it's a good thing to have behind you. God forbid your plans don't work out.

Not only that. Let's say that you got nothing going on right now. So you take it. You become a sanitation worker. Five years down the road, they need people with your expertise. You quit. You vest out. When you're whatever age, you claim your pension. It's going to be nothing, but you got something there. I retired from Tube Co., I told you, but I didn't retire they shut down the place. Okay. I got a \$94.96-a-month pension. Now, what would you do with that? You couldn't buy cigarettes today. But you know what? I'm claiming my pension from them. That's almost \$1,200 a year. Which I didn't have before. Which I can turn over to this, what do they call them, a 529 account? It's for your child's—grandchild or your child's education. So every year I will put \$1,200 into that.

I'm going down this summer—I never claimed veteran's benefits. I have diabetes, and I have other problems. I never went down. This summer I'm going to go down and I'm going to see what they will give me. I know because of diabetes I get an automatic, I think it's a ten percent disability. Years ago you had to fight for it. And I just never went down because I always felt that—Listen, I went into the service and I did, at that time, what I felt was right for my nation. Was it right? Was it wrong? You know what, I don't want to make those moral judgments. At that time, I really—and even at this time—I have a strong feeling for my country. So, they needed me, I went. So I never claimed anything. But now I understand all I have to do is go down and tell them, "Here, these are my papers. I was Vietnam at this time. I have diabetes." Boom, ten percent automatically. I don't care if it's \$40 a month. I will take that \$40 a month and put it in the kid's education. So, I don't know if I answered your question, but. That's the way I feel.

Q: Do you see any parallels or did you learn anything in the military that you then—

Oh yeah. The sanitation is paramilitary. The military is military. I mean, you learn. I learned how to take orders. I learned to be respectful to my superior officers. I never yelled at people. You know, I was always very good. I mean, I called people by their rank. If you were an assistant borough super, I would call you Chief. I would call you Boss. Did I argue with people? Yeah, at times I argued. 'Cause I got a strong head myself. And when I think I'm doing something right, I'm going to let you know it. But I do have respect. I was taught that in the military. I was taught to follow orders, also. Even if you think it's stupid. You followed orders. And if I did something—like when I was on the broom. I was sweeping, I came down a street, I swept it. I got pulled over by a foreman, I don't know, three or four blocks later. He said to me, "Mrs. So and So on Blah Blah Street back there said that you didn't do a good job." I said, "What? I did a good job." "Well, she said that you didn't." So I showed the foreman. I said, "See that little mirror out there?" See, we drove from the right. So when you're doing the right side, you're like this [Looks straight down on right side]. When you do the left side, you can't really tell. So I hooked a mirror up that showed me the left side. So when I was driving on the left side, from the right, I just look in my mirror, and my gutter brooms stood right along the curb. And I knew I did a good job. He said to me, "Go back and do it again." Now, my feeling was to tell him, "Go stick it up your ying-yang, pal." But I followed my orders. I went back, I went down the street again. I didn't argue. I was right, 'cause when I hit that street again, there was nothing there. Now, who this woman was, I don't know. Was she a personal friend of his? Was she some big shot in the neighborhood? I don't know. I knew I did the right job. But I didn't argue, I did my job and went in.

So the military taught me that. The military also taught me to think for myself. I been out in the street where the broom broke. And you think a minute. You look at it, you say, "Well you know what, I got a shackle in here. I could put this up and it'll still work and I could finish the day." You become more resourceful. And I think the military in some cases makes a man out of you. I went in as a kid. I mean, I was living at home. I had a little girlfriend. I had a little job. Life was good. It changed. Not when I first went in. I went to basic training, which I thought was hell. Oh God, I thought that was hell. That was nothing; I went to advanced infantry training, which made that look good! I was like, "I can't be doing this." I was a good boy. I didn't need this. But, you learn. And a lot of the things they teach you, which you say to yourself, "I'll never use that." You don't use it, but you can apply it to other things in life. You learn to push forward when you're in pain sometimes. You learn to evaluate a situation, not just—you can't always just think of yourself. You have to look around and see what's going on. I thought it made me a man. I think I was a bit of a man when I went in. 'Cause I was always a little more independent.

But then again it ruined a lot of guys, too. Ended up in jail. And the sanitation too. I met guys that came on, and they're all doing drugs. And they got canned right away. You know that room I was in with the, I don't know how many guys were there that last day, but 75 guys? Half of them got canned. You had to go pee in the bottle, you know, in the

little cup. I never saw them again. So, it wasn't that they just suddenly, "Oh, I got a better job now." Because they were on drugs.

I think it makes you a stronger person. If nothing else. I've always found myself to be stronger.

Q: Of all the jobs that you've held even within sanitation, which was your favorite?

In sanitation? Throughout everything?

Q: Yeah.

When I was a pipefitter.

Q: Pipefitter.

Yeah. Because you see, you would build these huge things. And you'd put them together in piece. I'd put this piece and that piece and that piece together. Then I'd send it to the welders; they would weld it up and send it back to me. Then I'd add another piece. Or I'd add this, or I'd add that. And at the end of the day, or the end of the two, three days, depending on how long it took you to assemble everything, you'd see it right there. I made that. And now it would go out to a site. And it would fit. And some of the pieces were very intricate. I mean, it was—I had one, you used to bend a wire. That's how you take it. You get your blueprint, and you get a piece of wire, and you bend it. To match the blueprint, so you know what you're doing. And the foreman came over, and I had the wire there, the blueprint there, and I was doing some. So he picked up the wire. Now, this guy's the foreman. He's going [Pantomimes foreman scrutinizing small wire model]. Now, I'm watching him, but I ain't saying anything, I keep working [Laughs]. And finally he said to me, "Is this right?" "Yeah," I said, "Come here, look." And I held it a certain way and it matched. "Damn," he said. And he walked away. So, at the end of the day, you feel like you've done something. But then they canned me. They closed down. If they didn't, I'd have become an assistant foreman when I was there. I would have rose up in the company. I would have really gone higher in the company. They had profit sharing and everything, those guys. I would have went up. Because I enjoyed it. I really did.

I enjoyed the sanitation. But the sanitation didn't challenge your mind. It never challenged your mind. You did step after step after step after step. I mean, I used my brain sometimes. But I always joked, I said, "When I leave the job, I'm suing them. They're making me go brain dead." But you do have to think. But the foremen don't even think. Especially if they're not good foremen. You got a good foreman, he's thinking. Because, you go to him with a problem that, you know, so and so's giving you upper lip for something. I was out one time when we pulled up in front of a stop. At night, four to twelve we were working. This guy must have had, I can't tell you, it looked like he emptied every room of the house out. "We can't take all that." Oh, he went off on me. Got in the truck, drove away. Screaming at us, cursing at us, throwing rocks at us. I

grabbed the foreman. I said, "Listen, you have to go to this address. This guy's got, if we take that, forget it. That's our load for the night. We're finished." "No problem," he said. The foreman went there, called us on the radio. "Come back." We came back. He said, "Take that, that, that, that, that, and that." Looked at the guy and said, "You better get the rest of that back inside." See, that's when foremen were really gutsy. But see, he knew. If we would have taken all of that stuff—which we could have, the truck would have taken it—but we were done then. The rest of the block, the rest of the people would not have had service. A good foreman thought about that. A bad foreman would have said, "Yeah, take it. I don't care." So they do think, I mean, there's no doubt.

I met a guy when I was out there. Richie Del Giorno was his name. Pulls me over one day on the broom and says, "Come here, I want to talk to you." Now, I didn't do anything wrong. I said, "Yeah, what?" On the car he puts out a big map. I'm looking at it. He says, "Okay." He says, "This is your route here, this is his route, this is the other guy's route, this is the other guy's route." "Okay." "What do you think if we do this, that, I move you over a little bit more." And he was thinking. He was consolidating us better so that we would all end up doing the same amount of work. And all the work would be done. Instead of me carrying more than this guy. But most guys didn't do that. They would just say, "Here. Here's your card. Go do your work."

The superintendents, you're in charge of a whole district. Very smart men, some of them. Some of them? Sanitation men with a badge. That's all they are. But, you know, the job get's done. They think. They have to go to meetings and things. You know, some of them are good. Some are. I know bosses that are horrible. Horrible.

Q: What makes a bad boss?

A bad sanitation worker. When you're a bad sanitation worker, you're a bad boss. Because you can't shake what's in you. I had an argument one time with this guy, Jack Lorenzo. We used to argue. This guy was too much. And I said something to somebody; the guy said to me, "It's not him Joe. Who are you Joey?" I said, "What do you mean?" "Who are you?" "I said I'm Joe Siano." "That's right," he said. "You're Joe Siano if you were a san man, a supervisor, or whatever. He's not. He's Jack Lorenzo Borough Superintendent. You see?" So, that's the difference. If you are the kind of person you are, it's going to carry on. You'll be a good boss 'cause you were a good worker to start with. But if you were a lousy worker, and a half-assed foreman, you're going to be a lousy boss, too. And that's just the way it goes. On any job, not just this job.

You say your mom's a teacher. If she's a good teacher, she's a good teacher. If she's not a good teacher, she's not going to get better as the years go on. It doesn't. You get worse.

Q: So which job in sanitation would you say you like the best?

I guess sanitation worker. I liked being a sanitation worker. I had no qualms. I had no fears. I told you, I turned down foreman and Chief Jackson took me on the side and said, "Hey, S-eye-ano"—that's what he always said, S-EYE-ano—"Why you don't want to be

the foreman for, you afraid?" I led men in Vietnam. I wasn't afraid. At that point in my life, it isn't what I wanted. It wasn't there for me. Should I have moved up? Yeah, I should have. But I didn't want it.

You don't come in every day, perfect. And I don't—You as a teacher, or what are you going to be anyway?

Q: I want to make documentary films.

Okay. Beautiful. You are not going to come in everyday, bright eyed and bushy tailed. Because maybe today you were going to do this and they didn't do it right. And you're annoyed. So, you're not coming in tomorrow with a big smile on your face. Down the road, you'll be engaged and married. You don't know what's going to happen. So, everybody's not the same everyday. People, at times, need somebody to talk to. And not to judge them. Just somebody to, "You know what, man? I can't take this anymore. My wife is doing this to me," or "My husband is this, and everything," and I just sit and listen. I say, "Alright, you know. You can't give up right away, I mean, you know. Everybody has arguments." And just talk to people, you'd be surprised what it does. The person, in half an hour, goes back to work.

We had a wonderful woman with us, Angie Prodo. Her husband had cluster headaches. He would actually bang his head into the wall his head would hurt so much. And one time he got sick, I took a city car and I drove him to St. John's Hospital. And I mean I drove like a maniac that day. And she's telling me, "Slow down! Slow down! Take it easy!" I got him there, and I pulled up and they went in and I left. And I told her, "Call me when you're ready." I came home, she never called. About six o'clock at night, I call the house. No answer. So I figure, "Well they admitted him." At seven o'clock she called me back, says, "We just got out of there." Said, "Ang, I dropped you off at twelve-thirty." She said, "I know. But we just got out of there." I said, "Are you okay? Take tomorrow off." "No, no," she said. "I'm coming in." So when she got in, I said, "Angie, why'd you come in? Why did you come in, honey?" She said, "Joey I have to get out of there. At least here I got things keeping me busy."

So, you know, you have to understand it. To me, that's horrible. You should be there. But this man had these headaches for years. So it wasn't like, for a week he's been doing this. It's been years and years and years. I don't care how good you are, after a while it wears on you. And you just want to get out of there. So her refuge was work. She would come to work, and that would be it. And we joke.

I listened to people. I learned that from the military. Listen. You know, and I talk too much anyway, but have to listen.

Q: So what was it like when you retired, like your last day on the job?

My last day on the job? My hand to God, I took the order myself, like an idiot. "Oh, oh I'm gone?" "Yeah Joey, that's it." "Okay." [Makes writing motion on table] Filled out

the book, took everything, put it in the center of the drawer, closed the drawer, told my boss, "Listen I'm out, that's it. I'm off, see there's the order." "Okay." "I'll be back in a couple of days to take my stuff." And I left.

I have this ability to—When I was in Vietnam it was this period of time, it's over. I do talk about it, but I will never talk truly about all the bad times. That's something in my heart that'll stay with me 'til I die. My own wife doesn't know about a lot of them. I always tell people that when I die, I'm going to go to—I don't know what religion you are—but I'm going to purgatory for about a thousand years. 'Cause I've done things that I'm not proud of. I did them because I had to do them to stay alive. So, I'm going to purgatory at least for a thousand years. I'm trying to work it off taking care of my mother, you know? I figure the Lord will look at me and figure, "Oh, the guy's good." [Laughs] Trying to get rid of it, but I'll be in purgatory for a heck of a long time.

But that's over now. I was a pipefitter for years. That's over now. I was a sanitation worker for 22 years. That's over now. Now, I'm a retired guy who has his daughter who's going to have a baby. And that's my life now. I love being retired. I always say that they waste retirement on the elderly. They should let people your age retire. When you hit 62, you come back. They've already proven that older people are more reliable. They come to work on time. They do all their duties. They don't have too many distractions because their children are already grown and everything, so it's not like, "I can't come in today, the babysitter didn't come." They don't have that. They do have a little bit more health problems, but the majority, it's better. Let us retire when we're 25. We'll come back when we're 55. That's the way to do it. Here I am, I'm retired. I'm an old man. I go to doctors. That's no good. And I never thought I would, but I see all these people and they're old like me. Some of them a lot older than me. And you say to them, "So what was yesterday, what'd you do?" "Oh I went to Dr. So and So." You know. I hate doctors. I hate them. I go only if and when I have to. 'Cause, I really—it's stupid, but I don't want to go and you tell me something else is wrong with me. I don't want to know. See, right now I don't think anything's wrong. So I go through it. I have to go to you and you have to tell me, "Joe, you got this." Then I have to worry about it. If I don't know it, it don't bother me.

We had a young girl that, she was here most of her life with us. She'd go home at night to her mother. And I went with her to buy her first car. Her own father didn't go. And when she went to college, my daughter started in Iona. Both of them. And my daughter was put into this one dorm where it was mixed, boys 'n' girls. Because of the fact that she had very good grades. The other kid's grades weren't as good so they put her in this building, like, about two miles away. With all girls. She wanted to quit. She came and she was crying. I told her, "You don't quit. You don't let them win. You turn around now, improve your grades. You improve your grades 'til you could be put in that building." What ended up happening is that Annmarie came to me and said, "Dad I don't want to be in Iona." She had a full scholarship to Iona. I said, "Why not?" She said, "They don't really teach the sciences. I want to be a doctor." So she went to St. John's. Where she was only given a half scholarship. So whatever it was it was. The other girl transferred to St. John's also. 'Cause they're that close together. But my point was that, I was always there

for them. For both of them. And now my daughter's having the baby in May. The other girl is pregnant, she'll have it in September. And I'll be there for both of them again. They always tell me, "You're going to be the ultimate grandfather. You were the ultimate dad, you're going to be the ultimate grandfather." Because me and my wife, you know. Annmarie had to go to Bar Harbor to some friend's house. We would drive her. I'd go over friends' houses, and I'd, "Okay I have to leave, it's nine o'clock, I have to go pick up my daughter, I'll be right back." And I'd go wherever she is, pick her up—and this other kid Jessica—bring them home. I went to the park one night to pick my daughter up, and it was funny. I said, "Jessie, you might as well come to, because you have to go home." So this little boy stood up. I said, "Son, sit down. Sit down before you embarrass yourself." I said, "Jessica, get in the car." I guess he was going to, you know, tell me, "Hey, she's my girl." I said, "Sit down before you embarrass yourself." But I was always that way; I'm like a protector. I want to protect my mother, my family, my sister, all my family members. My friends.

Q: So, now I want to talk to you about Columbia Association. Can you just start off by telling me when you were president?

Okay, I was president of the Columbia Association—let's see, it's been five years I'm retired, so this is 2011. Go back to 2000 what, four? Yeah, about that. [2004] And I was about four-and-a-half, five years, back to about 2000, basically, is when I took over the presidency.

Q: Okay. And who was your predecessor?

My predecessor was Dino Russo. He was the person that was president at that time.

Q: And you said last time that you made a lot of improvements.

Well, what happened was we ended up voting against Dino and removing him from the presidency. He wasn't a bad person—I still would like to see him—but he wouldn't have nothing to do with me. But, he just was going down the wrong path. Is what we all felt. I always felt that, no matter who the president is, you have to hold yourself at a higher standard than everyone else. He ended up having some kind of problems, which none of it was ever proven. So he's right to say that, "You guys got rid of me and I never did anything really wrong." But my thing is, as the president, you shouldn't even have charges brought against you for anything. You have to be squeaky clean. The other things—he had personal charges brought against him from females, and we can't operate like that. So.

I took over after him. I became the interim president for about six months or so, and then there was an election. And I won the election. Basically because nobody wanted it, I have to be honest with you.

Q: Why not?

Why not? Because it's a lot of work. It is a tremendous amount of work, and it takes away from your family. Many, many hours away from your family. In fact, when I became president, Commissioner Dougherty said to my wife, "Say goodbye to him." And we then looked—but he was right. Because if I wasn't at a meeting of our own, I was at a meeting for somebody else. I was attending a function for somebody. And I said that if my daughter had been a baby, I would not have taken it. She was already, by that time, a teenager. I think she was just starting college, so she was on her own. But if Annmarie was like, five years old, I would have never taken it. Because it was, I would have taken too much time from my family.

And then I ended up having one problem: I picked Ronnie Cohen as my Vice President. And I was given a lot of opposition from within and without. "You can't pick him, he's a Jew." So, I spoke to Ronnie. And I said, "Ron, you have to be honest with me, are you Jewish?" He reached in and he pulled a cross from around his neck. Now I don't even wear a cross, but he pulled a cross from around his neck. He said, "No." He said, "I'm Catholic, my children are Catholic. I raised them Catholic." He said, "I was raised Catholic." His father happened to be Jewish. But they follow the Catholic religion. So, I think I told you last time, we have a rule that you have to have at least half Italian in you. And he is. His mother is Italian. His father—he took his father's name, like you should, and ended up being Cohen.

In a lot of ways Ronnie was more Italian than me.

Q: How so?

Well he—You know, like I told you; I'm an American. I'm from Italian descent. Ronnie is more Italian because all his life he was hanging out with Italians. And having that name Cohen, you always had that stigma around your neck. "Ah, the Jew boy." You know? Which is wrong. And I got a tremendous amount of opposition. Tremendous amount of opposition. And that's where I think all your training over the years—I stood my ground and I said, "Listen to me. I'm the new sheriff in town. And that's what we're doing." So I picked Ronnie as my Vice President. In fact, the whole board was changed. Two of the men on the board who are still—one of them is still on the job. Nice guys. I'm still friendly with them. Both. But they were put on by the past president. And I felt they could stay. That night when we voted him out, I told them. I don't want a board of yes men. I'd rather have guys who challenge me. I would rather be challenged. Like, I say we're going to do this, and you could turn to me and say, "You're going the wrong way, pal." You know? Challenge me. I don't want, "Yes, yes, Mr. President. Yes, yes." I don't want that. But they both felt that they couldn't stay. So they stepped down. So I basically had to rebuild the board.

So, my next thing was to get a treasurer. And I picked a very nice, wonderful person, Michael Bonacorsa. He's a chief on the job now. And I picked him not because he was an accountant or anything—He was totally honest. I mean, I would—If you had a million dollars and left it there, and you came back, the million dollars would be there with interest. He's that honest. He's that good a person. I mean, I knew him, but I checked him

out. It's a sin to say, but I did, because I wasn't just going to pick somebody 'cause I like your face. This man gives blood to children who have leukemia. He's part of this church; his wife is a wonderful girl. Wonderful girl. What a nice couple they are. You know? But I didn't pick him because of his wife. I picked him because of him.

Then I had to pick the chairman of the board. And we picked another nice guy, Dennis Bove. And we made Dennis our chairman. And we told Dennis what we expected of him. I myself, I would have rather had remained as chairman of the board. The chairman of the board is very, very, very powerful. He's actually more powerful than the president. Years before that, when I was a young kid going to meetings, the chairman of the board was a really powerful guy. Be that as it may, it didn't matter.

I picked a recording secretary, I picked a sergeant at arms—Joey Calvacca was my sergeant at arms. Joey's one of the best soldiers you could ever have out there. Little wacky, but one of the best soldiers you could ever have out there. And the recording secretary, I picked—jeez I don't even remember. Oh, Vinny Palozola. Good man. And that was it.

And we started from the bottom. Because without his meaning it, he did a lot of damage to us. When I took over the Columbia, we would have a general meeting once a month. We had 75 people, and 20 of them were us. You can't have that. So, we went to the other organizations, and we sat with them, and we said, "Listen," I said, "First of all I'm not apologizing for anything that happened prior to me. I'm not here to apologize. We have a captive audience, sanitation. That's it. You want to have a dinner dance. I want to have a dinner dance, he wants to have a dinner dance. You want to have a golf outing, I want a golf outing. Why, we can't step on each other's toes. You can't have your dinner dance the same time I'm having mine. Because what's going to happen is we're both going to get hurt." So what we did is we sat down and we pull out the calendar and we said, "When do you plan on having your golf outing?" "Well, I plan on this date." "Okay," and we pencil it in. So now, as the—I've always felt that the Columbia—which it is—it's the strongest one in the department. We let them say what they had to say. "Well, you know we want this here." And then they had other problems, like one guy said to us we didn't pay them for something. I said, "Okay, if it's true, you'll have a check. But you have to give me time to research it." You said you were not paid for something, I have to make sure. That's all. And we did that.

And then we started building the organization. As the president, I greeted every person that came through that door. I never greeted you as chief—I called everyone chief at one point in my life. The porter, I used to call him chief sometimes. But I would meet you at the door. I told you about the kissing. We do a lot of kissing. First time it happened I was like, "Oh my God, the hell is this? I got to get out of this organization." But I learned. And I would meet you at the door. And I'd hug you and I'd give you a kiss on your cheek. And I couldn't remember your name. But I knew your face and I'd say, "How is your family? What's going on?" And, I guess, what do you want to say? The love got out there. People said, "Hey, you know, let's go to a meeting." And actually our meetings are great. I mean, number one, we give you somebody, like the commissioner speaking, or

the union reps speaking, you know? Or—and we eat! God bless us we eat. We have sausage and peppers, we have all kinds of things. And for \$10 dues, you can't go wrong. 'Cause you could come to a meeting of the Columbia Association—We have, we're off in July and August, and we have a big dinner dance in October, we still have a meeting, in December we don't do anything I think, but. Nine months a year, you could eat, drink, and be happy. For ten bucks. You can't beat it.

So we did that, but the organization always did that. What I did when I took over is I said, "Listen, the guys before us, they had a great organization. So we don't have to reinvent the wheel. What we got to do is do what they were doing all this time. And follow it. And stay within that." And we did. And we brought people back. When I took over, the first dance we had there was only 500 people. You could say, "Ah, 500 people, that ain't bad." When I left, we had over a thousand people. We had to tell people not to come. 'Cause we couldn't fit them in the room. Now the dances, 700 people easily. You know what the coordination is to put 700 people in a room? I mean, it's unbelievable. The logistics is unbelievable. But I had a very good Vice President. Ronnie is very good. And he would make sure everything—we worked out fine. But there were many nights that me and him were somewhere—The governor is going to have a dinner, a hundred dollars a plate somewhere. We went. You know. We had to go to this dinner, we had to go to that dinner. The Emerald Society had a Halloween party, which, I tell you, was the greatest. Absolute greatest. I had more fun there—They have a Halloween party, and some people come in costume and everything, it was really great. They started out with a nice hero, a circular hero on the table. Which was beautiful. All the beer you could—You could drown, you could take a bath if you had to. Then they brought in hot food. You know, it wasn't good. There's—Italian food standard, was not good. But it was good. And the party was so much fun. I tell you, I had the greatest time when I was there.

But, other times we had two dinners in one night to attend. And I would meet Ronnie in Staten Island, and we'd go to one dinner in Staten Island, and then we'd have to come to another dinner here in Queens. So, I mean, we were out constantly. First of all it was bad for my diabetes. My weight was always the same though, so I had problems with that. But that's not why I stepped down. I felt that when I retired, I no longer had the right to be there. As the president. And that's the way it should be. You shouldn't carry on beyond your term with the Department. So I stepped down at that point. 'Cause I told you, I was with the Community Mayors, with the National Council. So we had two meetings a month. We had our board meeting and our general meeting. The Community Mayors had a meeting every month. The National Council has a meeting every month. So one night a week, every week, I was out for a meeting. Then you had all the other things that came up. On Saturday nights we had the Hispanic dinner, we had the African American dinner in November.

Which was very nice, I actually liked it. They do it differently than we did it.

Q: How did they?

They started it off, like—First of all, I tell you something. If I invite you to our dinner, it starts at seven o'clock, we expect you to be there between seven, seven-thirty. They don't get there 'til eight. The food is out. They do a buffet. We're there for a couple of hours already, before they start. Which was different. I mean us, it's like, you have an hour-and-a-half cocktail hour, you moved into the room, you sat down, we go through the speeches—Which we try to get out of the way as fast as possible, but you could never do it. Could never do it. But they don't. They're doing all the other stuff first. You're eating, the cake is served! [Laughs] It's like. I'm going home? You know, and you're still—And then they start their party. Because where we, by 11, 12, by one in the morning, we're going home. They're partying. They're partying! I love it! They're unbelievable. Don't park in the lot. 'Cause your car is the first in, you'll never get out of there. Fourteen guys behind you, it's really tough.

The Emerald, they didn't have the dances that much. We always had good times. We always enjoyed each other's company. And I think that's what I brought back, was the fraternalism. Cause that's what we are, we're a fraternal organization. Do I push for Italian-Americans, or did I push? Absolutely. But I wouldn't deny anybody the right to do something. There were times I felt that we didn't get our fair share. And I would talk to the Commissioner. And that's it. It was no hard feelings; it was that I felt that I needed to express my feelings as the leader of an organization. And he as the Commissioner of the job has his responsibilities. So, I really, I always like Commissioner Dougherty. I really did. I still do. He's a lot easier to deal with at times, you know, when he's not the Commissioner. We go to dinners, and we would laugh, and he'd smoke cigars also. So we would smoke a cigar together, and you realize that he's just a guy. He's a guy with many more years of experience in the sanitation than I ever had. But he's a guy. That's all he is. We would joke, we would laugh together. I always said this, he always gave me the respect. Anytime I called his office, for whatever reason, he'd call me back within an hour or so. And he was always cordial. Did he always do what I asked? No. But he never denied me to say, "No!" It was always, "Joe, I can't do that, you know?" Him and my wife, they liked each other. God, they were talking all the time. I liked him. I still like him. I think that the man has more knowledge—That's why I said the snowstorm, we lost it. Because his knowledge is unbelievable.

What else can I say? Then the organization started to come back. And I built it up and we had about 2,000 or 2,500 members again. Then we were back on top. And I don't mean on top to say that, well—I wanted to be the lead organization. Just to put Italian-American out there.

Q: Why is that important to you?

Because I am Italian-American.

Q: Is that it?

No. I felt that we—If you're looking at all the other organizations, we really had it. And no disrespect to anybody, but we really had a lot of the brighter guys. Or guys that would

come together. I had a good friend; he's with the Emerald Society. And Danny said to me one time, "We could do the same thing you do, Joe." I said, "I know you can." He said, "But you know what? They will not come together. They will not." He said, "It's always a battle to get anything done." See, I would say, "Well, you know, we always had our dinner dance." Our dinner dance was always the biggest. So we had to keep that. We had to keep that going somehow. And we did. Because I would get you, and him, and him, and someone else and say, "Listen, this is what we got to get done." These guys get it done. The city called us in one day, 'cause they were having family day and they wanted us to sell these raffle tickets. And I think, I forgot what they gave us, but, "Sell them, and you could keep anything above \$1,500," that we had to give back to the city. Okay? So we all went out, all the heads of the organizations, we went back to our people. We sold all ours. See? The president of the African American said, "I just wrote him a check. My guys weren't going to go out there and sell those tickets. I wrote him a check." The Emerald Society said the same thing, "We sold what we could. I wrote a check for the balance." We sold them. We actually sold more. So we actually made something on it. 'Cause my guys would go out there and do it.

Now, they didn't do it for fear. They did it because I asked them to do it. And they would do anything they could, because I always started out with the premise that everybody on that board can be president. I mean, I started out—I was invited to a meeting one time. And I went. And I sat there and I didn't talk. See? And now the young guys, I have to tell them, "Shut up, you don't have a say." But, I didn't say anything. I sat there. With two other guys. And we just sat there and listened the whole night. And we ate. And then we left. And then another meeting. And then I was asked to do a journal. And we did it, and it came out, and the president told me—at that time, his name was Tony De Santis. Tony said to me, "You do a good job, I'm going to pat you on the back." He said, "You do a bad job, I'm going to kick you in the ass." He said we did a good job. And then you become a board member. And I said to them, at the time Joey Calvacca was there and I was there, and I was made a board member before him. And I said to William Jelly, he was the chairman of the board, I said, "Billy, he's been here a year or two more than me, at least. It's not right." And Billy said to me, "Joey, he will get, when it's his turn. Right now you're being put on the board. Okay?"

We had weekends that we would go to. We had a weekend every year. Now, to be honest, the truth? When we first started out, it was only \$400. My daughter was in school, and to be totally honest—And I told them, every dollar I have is earmarked. It's not that I can't spend the money. Am I going to say, "No, I don't have \$400?" You know I'm a liar. But every dollar I had was being put for a reason. We had a budget. So, this one weekend, they said to me, "You're coming." And I said, "No, no, no I'm not, I have to—" And they said to me, "You're coming, but you're our guest." Which was very nice of them. And they covered the cost of my room. Which I thought was something else, and I felt a little funny. And I said to them, "I feel bad being here." They said, "Why?" I said, "Well, these other people paid," and Tony said to me, "Joey, listen to me. See him? He didn't pay. See him? He didn't pay. Don't worry about it." So that's how we started out. And then I ran weekends. And I learned. When you have a dinner, you don't charge the Commissioner for being there. The certain dignitaries that are there. If I honor you, I tell

you to bring a table of friends. You're not paying for them. So, you absorb the cost of these things.

But the Columbia has always done it right. I mean, if we honor a guy—which we usually do—we'll present his wife with flowers. If we honor a man, I mean a woman, we'll present her with the flowers. I'm not going to give them to your husband. Or your boyfriend; it looks a little weird. We've always been innovative in everything we've done. I retired at the dinner dance. Which was never done before. But I got up and I read—I was actually the emcee for most of the dinner dances after they realized I was able to read and speak and chew gum. So, I got up there and my voice would be powerful, and the other thing I'd do is I would speak rapidly. Now, you have to name the organization and the president of every organization that's there. Not only in sanitation. We have the PD there, we had the Fire there, we had the Taxi and Limousine. We had Customs. We had all these other people. The union heads that are there, not only your union, which I always did first. You're not supposed to because—but I did my union first. And I would get that list in front of me, and I would just go ba, ba, ba, ba, ba, ba, ba, up and down the line.

In fact, one time, and I asked not to have anyone clap until I finished. So I started reading and someone clapped. And I looked and I said, "I asked you not to clap." And then, so at the end of it, later on I was talking to the Commissioner, and he said to me, "You know Joe," he said, "When you finished I was like this, can I clap now?" You know. [Laughs] So it was really good. And then, the night I retired, most people I think had an idea. Because you can't hold a secret in the sanitation. Someone's going to leak it, and it goes all around like wildfire. But I got up, and I had another guy, this kid who called me forward—Stephen Ciminio and Ronnie were my emcees—and then I got up and said, "Now ladies and gentlemen, I'm retiring. I want you to meet the new president of the Columbia Association," and then I always had this thing where I'd say, "He's my president, he's your president." And I brought Ronnie up and even the Commissioner said to me, "Wow, I never—" 'cause we always make the Commissioner speak—and he said, "Wow I was never at a point where the guy retired from the job and the organization at the same time." But it was nice, you know, it was very nice. And that's how we're going to keep it from now on. But like I said, we're always innovative. We always tried. I don't know what else. What else?

Q: Well, I want to know what you are most proud of, of your tenure as president?

That I brought the organization back, honey. That's it. That I brought the organization back from having 80 people at a meeting to 300 people at a meeting; that we we're able to put the organization on the path it should have always been on. Fraternalism, and that's what everybody—not just the Italian-Americans, it's for everyone. I had the utmost respect for Tommy Doyle in the Emerald. It used to be Hans Banderson in the African American, now it's Vinny Murdoch. The Holy Name was John Livingston. I have the most respect for these men. I felt that we weren't against each other. We were fraternal organizations. And that's it. So if I was able to help someone in the Emerald Society or someone in the African American society, I would do it. I didn't just say, "I am not

helping him, he's Irish" or something. I did it. Anytime I could help anyone, we did it. Now, would I help an Italian-American first? Yeah, probably. If there were two slots and both of us were applying for it, and I think I could get my man in there, I would try it. If the other guy went in, be whatever, I'm not going to be mad at him. I'm not going to disrespect him.

Q: So why, it seems to me in DSNY, where you kind of need to work as a whole or be cooperative, why do you think these fraternal societies that are fragmented are important?

I think that you can't just have one big guy in charge of everything. You can't. Everybody has to keep their—you know, your ethnicity, you have to say, "I'm an Italian-American." The Irish kid has to say, "I'm an Irish American." The African American, he's an African American. The Holy Name, that's general, they're Catholic. You know. But, you have to have something. Now, somebody, in anything in life, is going to rise above someone else. It's life. So, we rose up above. You have to realize, back in the day, the job was Italian. It was the Italian Army. So, who had more members? We did. Who got more promotions? Italians. Because there was more to the Italians. So, our people were up on top for a long time. And the organization grew because of that. I'm very proud of the fact that I was a san man. I think there was only one other guy, and I'm not even sure what his name was. I have a name in my mind, but I don't know if it was really him, so I don't want to use it. But, I took over from people who were chiefs. And you have to realize something; in the Department, your base group is sanitation men. There's six, 700 officers. Maybe 100 superintendents. The higher up you go, the less and less people there are. So your base is sanitation men.

And it was an achievement. Now you have a sanitation man in charge of the biggest organization in the Department. And I was told many times, you know, "You don't know the power you wield." Well, you know what? I didn't need to have the power. See, I never had to come to anyone and say, "You know who I am?" Because that's baloney. You know who I am. So I never had to push that fact on anyone. I never had to say that. People knew me. I was respected within the Department. And I was respected as the president of the Columbia. It was just the way it was.

And you have to have the smaller organizations. We have organizations now—they started something I was a little against, but. We have the Hispanic Society, and now they have the Latino Society. See, I think that's fragmenting. All these guys are Hispanic. You could say you're Latino. We have, like if you were in the sanitation right now, you say your Polish and Puerto Rican. Okay? So you would join the Polish society. You'd also join the Hispanic. Does that mean that you're doing something wrong? That's only adding to their membership. I told you, when I first came on, you could only join what you were. You were Italian, you join the Italians. You were Irish, you join the Irish. The African American guy told me, "You got no African American in you, pal." [Laughs] Which he doesn't really know, how does he know? This isn't very light, this skin color of mine. But, that was it. Today, we all join each other. Especially as a president. As a president you hold a membership in everybody's organization. I held a membership in the Hebrew Spiritual Society. I am not Hebrew. Some of my best friends are. I had great

times with them. There was a German society—it was the Steuben Society, one time. They shrunk down so small that I think they're out now. They were good. Commissioner Dougherty was honored one time, for something.

One time all the societies decided we were going to buy this thousand-dollar page. So, of course, we're going to divide it up. Now, okay, you're the African American, you have to give us so much. Steuben Society said, "Are you kidding me, I don't have that kind of money." So we said, "Okay." Now, you have to pay that much more. And we all absorbed it. That's the fraternalism. You see, we wouldn't have that page without their name on it, even though they gave us nothing for it. The people before me, they would have said, "Blank them! Who cares?" But I wouldn't do that. And Tommy Doyle, Hans Banderson. But, whatever it was, we all put our names on it. From the organizations. So that's what the fraternalism does.

Q: And do you have any interaction with the Columbia Association for, say, the police department or the fire department?

Yes.

Q: What is the relationship like that with them?

We're fraternal organizations, we try to help each other. If I had a kid who got a job as a fireman, I would reach out to the Columbia in the Fire Department and say, "Hey, I got a friend of mine, he's coming on the job, can you, you know, watch out for him?" I did it for a guy in the Corrections. We used to go to a diner. And he owned it with his father. Or his father owned it and he worked there. And he told me he took the test for the corrections. When he got called, I called the president of the Italian-American Society for the Columbia for the Corrections office—then was Joe Carbone—and I said, "Joe, he's coming down to you, would you watch out for him? And if you can, if he asks for a, you know, a jail around here, could you help him?" And Joe did. Did whatever he could for him. And I told the guy, "You're Greek. You're not Italian. Join the Columbia Association." I don't think they even had a Greek association, so. But that's what you did, you leaned on each other.

The Taxi and Limousine was the same way. We would go to them and say, "Okay, there's their dinner dance." And we would go. The horrible thing—Their president lost a four-year-old daughter. It was horrible. And we made sure we were there for them. It's just the fraternalism. Do we really need them? No. We're so big, you know. We're under the National Council of Columbia Associations in Civil Service. There's a hundred thousand members. But they were a small organization. They didn't have—like us, we'd have 3,000 members. They don't have 3,000 people on the job. But, you still, you carry them. You help them whenever you can.

That was the original thing about the dinner dances. You see, you would go to my dinner dance, and it was \$80 a ticket. And you'd give me \$800. And a month later, I'd go to yours and give you \$800 back. And you'd say, "Well, that's stupid. [Laughs] This is

idiotic.” But you got a few dollars in. And then I’d have a few dollars in, and then the Emerald would have a few dollars in. And this way it went around. So we were able to maintain ourselves in that respect. Now, some of the guys were going crazy. A hundred dollars, \$90, you know. We’re still at \$75 in my organization. And we still put on one of the best parties. I wish you would come next year to our dinner dance. But you probably couldn’t eat anything we eat. [Speaking to interviewer, who is regrettably allergic to dairy.] It would be horrible. We have a cocktail hour to die for. It lasts for an hour-and-a-half. We have, I can’t tell you how many items. It’s amazing. It amazes me, and I’ve done it. And then we have the dinner. And we have the DJ with the screens. And of course he’s—that DJ is ours. He’s the Vice President. So we’d pay, but we’re not paying what we would have to pay if we wanted all these things. We have it filmed by the Department. All these things is something that the Columbia instituted. We got all this done. And now the other organizations benefit by it also.

When Hans had the African American party, he was supposed to be honored by the Community Mayors. But Hans got very upset because he told them that this is when his party is. That’s why we had that calendar. You know, it’s going to be on this date. Now, they set their dance on the same date. So I went to theirs, because I was on the board of directors, and I took Hans’—I’ll show you the statue before you leave—I took it, and I went to the African American. As soon as the speeches and everything were over, I jumped in my car with the statue, my wife, and another friend and his wife, and we drove to the African American. And I presented it to him. Now, the Commissioner was up there. So I said to the Commissioner, “Come on—” “No, no, Joe,” he said, “This is your time.” After he finished he stepped back, and I got up and presented Hans with the statue. And Hans was very grateful. Very grateful. He’s one of my best friends now. And he felt very hurt by other people in my organization that don’t realize, you know? Like, Hans buys a table every year. Ten people at the dinner. Two other black people walked in. So the past president said, “Oh, sit them over there with Hans.” And Hans turned around and said, “What makes you think because they’re black that they have to sit with me? I don’t even know who the hell they are. I don’t like them! You think I go by color?” And he was right. And, I corrected all those things.

I went to a dance one time when I was president. Now like I said, Joey Calvacca was the lead man for us. What a good soldier. He comes over to me, he says to me, “Joe, I always have that table right over there.” “Yeah.” “Well, it’s not my table now. My table’s over here.” “Oh, okay. Give me a second.” I went over, I took the number from this table, and the number from that table, and I put that there and I put that there. I said, “Joey, you got your table back.” The other guys would have said, “Aw, come on it’s a table, what the hell do you care?” You don’t do that to people. You don’t. You treat people with respect. With caring. He was happy the rest of the night. The other guy, I don’t even know who he was. So, he sat where we put him.

I’ve gone to dinner dance where I sat so far back, one of them I snuck out of. We were in the place, couldn’t take what was going on. I saw the door. Took my coat, out the door. I thought I was good; I’m in the parking lot, there’s other guys getting in their car. I said, “Where’d you guys go?” “Aw, I went to the bathroom, man. I’m getting’ out of here.”

You have to treat people with respect. That's what it all boils down to. You give someone respect, and they'll give it back to you.

I could've asked Joey that night to rip somebody's head off. He would have done it for me. Because he was pleased, he was happy again. And it took me 12 seconds to move the two signs. That's all it took. And he was right. He always had that table. He had a table of 20 people, and they always sat there. And that's what they expected. When they walked in and they saw it wasn't there, "What's going on here? We don't sit there we sit here." Now, did it really mean that much? Not really. But it made him happy. And if you could do that and keep people happy, show respect.

And then we were—like I said, we were innovative. We found this singer; my God this guy could belt in Italian. Oh, the operas and everything. He had some voice, this man. So, we honored one of our guys, Renzo Ferrari, that dearly departed now. I knew he had his mother with him. I had his mother come out with him. And I had this guy sing "Mama." People were crying, I'm looking around. This guy came over to me said, "You son of bitch." Said, "What are you cursing at me for?" He said, "You made me cry!" "I didn't make you cry, he sung it." And then I would sing with him. 'Cause I know a little Italian, so I would sing with him. You know, thank God he sung it because if they heard my voice alone they would have. We were always different. We always made sure things were different. And again, fraternalism. Fraternalism and respect. Give everybody respect, treat everybody equally.

Q: Well when you talk about that, I wonder outside of fraternal associations, how race is a factor on the job, or what personal politics are?

I think there's race problems on the job. I mean, you can never get rid of all of it. There are always people who are going to be racists. I was never a racist. I was never racist because I lived in Brooklyn, which was very mixed. Middle Village is racist. Middle Village is very—Kew Gardens, very racist. When I was a pipefitter, there were all different kinds of guys—Jamaicans, Trinidad, the islands. Used to work side by side with all of them. The sanitation, you're all equal, honey. You're all in the same spot. There's always racism on any job. I don't care what anyone says. It's the way it is. I never had it, because like I said, I was pipefitter, I worked with all races. I didn't care what you were. We worked together. And again, in the military or on this job, you're all in the same boat. That, fella sitting next to you, be he black, be he Hispanic, he's the same as you; he's picking up garbage with you. He's not any better. He's not any worse. He has a family, he's trying to make ends meet; you have a family, you're trying to make ends meet. During my reign as president I helped hundreds of Irish fellas, hundreds of African American. Jewish society, the Hebrew Spiritual. And I was friends with everyone.

Q: Have there been any like, not sexual harassment charges, but say harassment charges brought by anyone?

No, not against us. Not for that, no. Not even any sexual harassment or anything, I mean we joke around a lot. Like I told you, I joked around tremendously. They couldn't bring

me up on charges because I insulted everybody once a day; it was just the way I am. I joke with people. I just get very comfortable. But no one would ever say, as the president of the Columbia Association, "He said something about my society." I would never allow it. In fact, if any of my guys said it I would stop them right then and there and tell them, "Hey, stop it."

One time when they started the affirmative action, I wasn't the president, I was just a member. And they said, "There's going to be affirmative action, and these guys are going to be promoted over you." That's the way it was. And a lot of guys were like, "I'll kill them!" And one guy on the board before was like, "Yeah, hit him in the head with a bat." And thank God there were cooler heads that said, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. You worked with this guy for 15 years. You're going to attack him now because he's different than you? You had breakfast with him for 15 years. You went to his kid's baptism; you went to his kid's communion. He came to your kid's wedding. And now you're going to say something to the guy because he's African American? Are you crazy? This guy's like a brother to you!" And that's the way I always felt. And maybe it was easy to feel that way because we had the biggest organization. We were the leaders.

Q: So what's your involvement today?

I am now the, what do they call me now? The Advisor to the President.

Q: So what are you doing now?

Supposedly advise the president. He don't listen to me most of the time. But I advise the president. I can tell him what I think. One time, we had a gentleman from the Emerald Society come to one of our meetings. He's a chief. So I said to them, "Sit him at the deus." And they said, "He's Irish." I said, "Yeah, but you know what? He was always Irish. He didn't turn Irish walking through the door." I said, "And it's only out of respect, because he was on the board of the Emerald." Tommy Doyle, who was the president, came to one of our meetings. And I wanted him to sit at the deus. He wouldn't do it. Because, I wouldn't do it either. I went to the African American meetings. And I wouldn't sit at the deus with them. I would sit in the back of the room with everybody else, and be one of the guys. It never bothered me. I'm not afraid because, "Look man, they're all black."

I go to Hispanic Society dinners. I mean, I'm there—nine other Italians. Whole room is full of Spanish people. What, are they going to pull knives on me? Come on, this is a dream. This is a dream. We're all brothers, we all work together; I know everyone of them. I hug every one of them when I see them. So, I'm not afraid of anything. The racism is in your mind.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about Community Mayors?

Community Mayors is an organization that helps handicapped children. It's a wonderful organization. We hold, I think it may be seven, eight events during the year for these

children. One of the hardest things I've ever had to do, I told you. You see these children that are totally deformed. Their legs are twisted, they're dribbling, they wear helmets, and it's horrible. It's horrible. But you do it. You do it because they need that.

And again, there's your fraternalism again. Our association reaches out to other people who can't do for themselves. Not for any other reason. Sure, they gave plaques, they gave me awards. I don't need that. I really didn't. I received them because I was the president of the organization, so somebody's got to stand up for the organization. And each and every time I received an award, I would tell the guys, "This is yours. I'm not giving it back to you; I'm taking it home with me. But this is yours." And that's the way it is. But we help handicapped children.

We have events. We used to have the circus, now they don't want us to have the circus—Well they don't, it's the Ringling Brothers is doing it. Ringling Brothers is not doing it. They're doing it in Jersey, so we're not going to be part of that. We go to what the heck is the name of that place, it's not Adventure Land. It used to be Nelly Bly years ago, but now it's the Adventurer's Family Entertainment Center or something. And the guy is very nice; he gives us the place for the day. And we bring the kids in there about ten, and they have to be out of there about one-thirty, 'cause they have to get back to school. But for those couple of hours that they're there, every ride is available to them. Some of them we do shut down purposely. They have a water slide, which you have to climb really way up, and we shut that down purposely. We don't want anybody falling. We open the bumper cars. And I think I told you, one of my friends said, "Oh I'll be on the bumper car with the kids." He got off at the end of the day, he said, "My God, everything is hurting." I was the chairman of that event.

And then we did Deno's Wonderwheel, in Coney Island, which is very nice. And Deno is—his name isn't Deno it's Dennis—is a wonderful man. Really. And we work with the police department at that time. I went down there and I met with the police in the area and I told them, I said, "Listen, listen, you guys are cops. You control the street. You tell us to park somewhere, we'll park there. I'm not telling you how to do your job; it's not my job. I'm not going to argue." My job was to put kids on rides, take them off the rides, and let them enjoy themselves for the day. We have 30 buses. You know where to park them. You know? I don't want my guys standing out in the middle of the street. They have no authority; they don't have badges. And I left it to them. And it worked out beautifully. There was another place down there, now it's Luna Park? Well, it wasn't fully built then. So they made a turn—they brought the buses in, turned the buses around, loaded the kids, and out again. It was really nice. They did a great thing.

So if you give respect—again, it all goes back to the same thing. If you give respect to them and tell them you guys are in charge, it's your positions, you tell me what you want, and they'd say, "Okay." And they'd do it. And it was wonderful. The two events went off great. I mean you see these faces on these kids. And I told you about the aquarium. I mean, we load the kids into the stands, and the people walk around. And I'm amazed that they taught this mammal here, this dolphin, to do these things. I mean amazes me. Imagine these poor children. You know? It's unbelievable. It really is. And you're happy.

And when you leave you say to yourself, “Hey you know, I did something good today.” And then of course we’d walk over to Nathan’s and make pigs of ourselves, but that’s not part of it.

And that’s another thing the other organizations wouldn’t do. When I was there, and even with Ronnie, we turn around and get all the volunteers and say, “Listen, we’re going over to Nathan’s now. Everybody’s welcome. It’s on us.” And I never said, “Well you’re African American you can’t come, and you’re Emerald Society.” That’s bull. Everybody comes. And everybody orders—everybody would get like two frankfurters or so, whatever, and that would be it. And we would pick up the bill. Even the Community Mayors would be picked up by us, because most of those guys that come out to those events were Columbia members. Because we are the largest. The Emerald, they send a few guys. The African American always sends fellas over. But they don’t have the body that we have. We send 70 guys, they send five. But they’re there. Their five men are there. And we can joke with them—we know them, you know, I know all of them. Like I said, we hug everybody, we kiss. And it’s the way it is. The Hispanic Society sends guys. When we go to eat something, I’m not going to say, “Oh you can’t come with us, I’m only taking my little group.” That’s baloney. You take everybody.

Q: What’s the origin of your relationship with Community Mayors?

I got into the Community Mayors because I was the President of the Columbia. It started out—I wasn’t even the president, and Tony De Santis was the president and he asked me to come to some of the meetings of the Community Mayors. Which again, is another meeting you’re not coming home, you know, you’re not home. And I went and I sat and kept my mouth shut. And then I saw what they did. And then, when Tony retired from the Department, Dino became the Mayor. And we were at our first dinner then, and I’m sitting with them, and everybody’s getting’ awards. Everybody’s getting these little awards. He says to me, “You see, we don’t get nothing.” I said, “I don’t know.” The next name called was his. And he got this huge plaque. So when he came back, I said, “See, you got it.” And then the next thing was mine. And I got a huge plaque.

Then when he left, I automatically took over as the president representative from the Columbia Association. And I was made the Humanitarian of the Year after that, which was very nice. And I was always been for the organization. Now, I said the last two events I did almost killed me. You know, I’ve had a bypass, I have diabetes, I have hypertension. And I was standing that day. For, I can’t tell you for how long. At Coney Island. And when it came time to leave, my legs were locking up. Like I couldn’t do it. And I got into the car and I had to jump out because my legs were locking it was horrible. So I told them that I would have to step down. And let somebody better, younger. And also, I’m representing the Department of Sanitation; I’m retired. So, if they needed, you know, something from the Department—like, we have a big Christmas party at the airport. It’s tremendous. Four thousand children, and all my guys are there setting up chairs and everything. And then you need—they’re bringing tons of toys and you need trucks to do this. And they don’t want to spend the money to hire a truck to do it, so we

asked the sanitation. I can't speak for the sanitation. I can't say, "Yeah, I'll give you three trucks." I'm not even with them anymore.

So I said, "I have to step down." Let Ronnie speak for the sanitation. Now, again, I think I told you last time, if I called Commissioner Dougherty, who is an honorary member, and said, "Commissioner, this is Joey, and I need three trucks on this date," I fully believe the commissioner would say, "Okay, take them, you got them." But I wouldn't do that, 'cause I'm not going to put him in that position where he's going to have to tell me, "I can't do it. You're not on the job, Joe. How can I authorize you to do things?" You know? And I was getting tired, too. It's a lot of work. And now that my daughter's having a baby, I'll have less time to be there. But I will go. I will, I'll go and I'll help out like everybody else does. But let somebody who's in better shape than me be the guy responsible for it.

Q: Did Tony De Santis start the partnership with Community Mayors?

I believe so. Yeah, I believe Tony De Santis started it. Tony was I think the greatest president we ever had. He was president for 11 years.

Q: Wow.

That's a long time. I was president for five. Now, the way we work it is, you're president for two years, and then you can be voted—we can run somebody against you. No one ever wanted to run against Tony, 'cause they'd never win. Number one. When Tony stepped down, he made Dino the president. Then we had a little bit of problems. And then, because I was Vice President under Dino, I stepped up. I became interim president and then I became president.

But between me, Ronnie, Mikey, Joe Calvacca, Dennis, Vinny, we built the organization back up again. 'Til it became back to what it was: the top organization within the Department.

Q: And I guess, I don't really have anymore questions, but I do want to ask you since you're so happy in your retirement and you're so happy with your life now, do you think that would be possible if you didn't work in sanitation?

Yes.

Q: Really.

Yeah. Because I told you, I went to Vietnam; it's over. I was a pipefitter; it's over. I was a sanitation man; now it's over. And I go forward with the next part of my life. The next part of my life is going to be being a grandfather. Taking care of my grandchild, and things like that. I would have been happy from whatever job I retired. I actually never liked to work. I really never liked it. I did it because I enjoy eating, I enjoy eating and I really like some of the, you know, nicer—not the better things in life, but you know, I

like to be able to have a car and maintain a house. Things like that. If I didn't need to, in fact, after this Friday I'm never going to, 'cause I'm going to win that \$312 million, I'm not going to have to work again. Never. And I don't work now. But then I'll really never have to work.

Q: And I have one more question, just—This is going to be on the records, if you consent to it after you see the transcript. What do you want someone who looks at this or listens to it years from now to know about working in sanitation when you worked? Or to know about, I guess, how sanitation affected your life?

I want them to realize that there is no job below anyone. That labor that we did, the picking up of the garbage, didn't make us any lower than anyone else. You know, we labored with our hands, true. But it doesn't make us any less than anyone else in this world. It doesn't make me any less than Dr. DeBakey. I mean, he invented the artificial heart, and he was a genius, the man. And God bless him. But he's still a man. Gets up in the morning like I do. Puts his pants on the same way I do. He walks the same way I do. So, anybody coming on this job should never feel that, "Oh, man, I'm only a garbage man." No. I never felt that way. I'm her husband, I'm my daughter's father, I'm my mother's son. That's who I am. There's nothing to do with what I decide to do with my life.

Did I make the right choice? I think so. People could say, "No, you didn't. You should have been something else." I told you, I wanted to teach at one point. I made these other choices. So that's the way it is. But that's all. Let them realize if they ever listen to this—First of all, they're very bored. [Laughs] But let them realize that no matter what you decide to do, be the best you can at it.

But, there's no shame in anything. Picking up refuse, as long as you're making it honestly. You don't have—I never had the intelligence to go all the way through college and become anything. But I have a lot of knowledge from the streets, from the military, that people will never have in their lifetime. And just because I chose to work with these [holds up hands] rather than with my pen and pencil and my mind, doesn't make me any less than anyone else. You know, someday I'm going to die and everybody's going to die; we're all going to be together somewhere. They ain't going to put the doctors in one area and the lawyers in—the lawyers, they may. They may put them in another area, but doctors are not going to be—No one's going to know, when I get to heaven, He ain't going to hand me a truck to load. He's not going to say, "There's your truck, start picking up clouds," or something. [Laughs] So we're all the same. We're all equals. That's all.

And be happy in your life. You have to be happy, hun. I don't care what you do, where you do it, when you do it—Be happy. 'Cause if you're not happy, you could have that three-point-something billion dollars that thing's giving away, you won't be happy. Even with that, you'll want more. You have to be happy. And you have to marry good, like I did. Forty years.

[END TRANSCRIPTION]