

Interview with Martin Bellew  
Interviewed by Maggie Langlinais  
DSNY – Freshkills Park Oral History Project  
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Draper Program Offices, 14 University Place, New York City

ML: All right, I think we're going. Today is March 22<sup>nd</sup>, and we are in Robin Nagle's office at 14 University Place in New York City. My name is Maggie Langlinais, and maybe you could introduce yourself?

MB: Yeah, my name is Martin Bellew. I'm the retired Director of the Bureau of Waste Disposal. I retired in 2005 after working for the department for twenty-two years at various positions. I was in charge of the Bureau of Waste Disposal, the Bureau of Solid Waste Engineering, and for a short time ('99-2002), the Bureau of Recycling—Waste Prevention.

ML: Ok. How about...can you tell me about the falcon, to begin with?

MB: Absolutely. I was charged with the responsibility of the disposal of the material from the World Trade Center, because I was Director of Waste Disposal during that period. So, as you know, the material went out to Fresh Kills Landfill. So on the top of the landfill we had the police department that were kind of doing the screening— that they were screening for any remains that were in the material that was coming, and one of the issues was there was a lot of seagulls that were out there. You know, that were probably left over from landfill days, or whatnot, and so we're very well versed in seagulls and the police, they were going to take care of all the seagulls. They came up with new, innovative ideas— they thought— as time went on. For instance, they had a seagull in distress record that they used to play to try to chase the seagulls, or they had other things that they must have read about and tried. Then one day they came out and they had this gentleman and he brought a falcon with him, and he was going to chase all the seagulls away from the police. So—

ML: How many seagulls was it?

MB: There's a lot. There was a lot. You know, us, from having all the experience, we just said, "ok, well, you can try your falcon, but it's really not going to work, but that's ok." So sure enough, the guy let the falcon loose, it went up in the air, it chased a bunch of seagulls, and then about an hour later we were just driving around the landfill, and we stopped back and we saw the falcon. He was just sitting right in the middle of all the seagulls, just enjoying the day— I guess he'd made friends— and that was the end of the falcon out there, trying to chase the seagulls away.

ML: [laughs]

MB: So.

ML: Were you ever able to get rid of the seagulls, or were they just—

MB: Yeah, during my years of working on the landfill, with all the experience, the only real way to stop seagulls from the landfill is to put wires up. In Fresh Kills when we did it, it worked, but

we were moving so fast and getting high– the I-beams– we couldn't keep up with stringing up these wires. But that did work. And a lot of people today, even today, they use it in the transfer stations to stop the seagulls from coming in.

ML: So when you say 'wire' what, how–

MB: It's just like a thin – it could be a fishing line, or a small wire, and they have, I guess radar, or whatever that perception is, and they won't come near it.

ML: Oh, so it's sending out–

MB: Its just a–

ML: A signal?

MB: It's just a presence there, that when the seagull approaches it, he knows there's a barrier so he won't go under it or try to go through it.

ML: Ok.

MB: You know? So it's just one of the ways to stop them from coming. Like in a transfer station, you know, that's indoors, you don't want seagulls coming down with the refuse all in there.

ML: Do they get stuck indoors?

MB: Sometimes, I guess, mhmm.

ML: Ok, well how about maybe let's back up a little bit. Could you tell me a little bit about where you grew up?

MB: I grew up in the borough of the Bronx in New York City. I was born and raised in New York City. I grew up in what's called the Fordham section, or Arthur Avenue section. You've probably seen it in all the movies. That's kind of the area I grew up. I went to grammar school there, I went to high school by Yankee Stadium, and then I went away to college.

ML: And where did you go to college?

MB: I went down to the University of South Alabama and got a chemical engineering degree.

ML: Ok. And what made you decide to go into sanitation?

MB: Well sanitation...I took the test in 1974, which was two years after high school. I was working construction at the time. I didn't go to college for like six years after high school. And we all took the test, all the neighborhood kids. We just took the test and forgot about it. And as it turned out, there was a freeze on, that they didn't hire anybody from that test– and it was supposed to be like a superman test– until 1979.

ML: That you had taken in '74?

MB: '74. And I ultimately got hired in '83. I was called in '81 but I was in college at the time so I finished college and then when I came out...like every other profession, in order to stay in the

New York area as a chemical engineer there was a shortage of jobs– I could go to California and whatnot. So in the interim, I decided ‘let me take the job at sanitation because they called me, while I’m just waiting,’ and it just so happened that I enjoyed it. I got promoted right away, so I kind of just stayed.

ML: Ok. Why would there be more chemical engineering jobs in California?

MB: Well at that time, there was– you know, it comes in cycles. Its just a function– you know, people graduate as lawyers, and, maybe there’s a certain area that’s deficit, and certain area that isn’t, and if you want to stay in that area...maybe you won’t.

ML: Ok. Could you walk me through– you said you got hired and you were on the trucks initially–

MB: Yes, absolutely.

ML: Could you walk me through the different jobs you had, and when you were promoted to each one?

MB: All right. Well, in 1983 I came on the job, and I worked out of what’s called Bronx 8, which is a sanitation district that’s located, actually in Manhattan, but it services the Kingsbridge and Riverdale sections of the Bronx. So I worked there for, I would say, at least six or eight months, and then they put me into what’s called Bronx NICS, which is Neighborhood Intensive Cleaning Squad. So that would be where we would clean– it was a specialized squad that they were trying at the time to go out and clean areas like streets, lots, different things– it was something new.

So I stayed there probably for another six or eight months and then I got transferred to Waste Disposal in the main office. And one of the reasons I was transferred is, I guess, I was talking to somebody, and I told them I had a chemical engineering degree at the time, which I did when I came on, and so I handed in a resume. The director that was down in Waste Disposal at the time got me transferred downtown, to the main office for Waste Disposal. And after I went down there as a sanitation worker, I worked days for a while, then I went nights, like four to twelve for a year, because I went back to school at Columbia. I never finished graduate school– kids came, money responsibilities...so I couldn’t finish that, but I got promoted right away in 1987 to supervisor and I was in charge of...I worked directly for the Director of Waste Disposal as a supervisor, on special projects, any projects that came along, which could be the Woodbridge Consent Order...there was all sorts of stuff. Closing of landfills, new stuff– like there was a proposal for medical waste– and I worked on all of that.

From ‘87 to 1990 I worked as a supervisor, and in addition they created a planning unit over in engineering, which I was in charge of– that was probably in ‘88 or ‘89– and then I got promoted to General Superintendent Level 1, which was the next level, in 1990. They placed me out in Fresh Kills on the four-to-twelve shifts of Plant 1. So I was in charge of Fresh Kills Plant 1, four-to-twelve, for three years, from 1990 to 1993. That’s at the time...you know, they were taking a lot of waste: 20,000/ 25,000 in the beginning, and then it tapered off. This was after recycling, you know. I mean, during the course of supervisor, superintendent I worked in every location. I worked at MTSSs, (marine transfer stations), I worked at Edgemere Landfill, I’ve been at all the other landfills...

ML: Where was Edgemere?

MB: Edgemere's in Queens.

ML: Ok.

MB: That's in Queens. I worked there as a supervisor. I did the original compost project out at Edgemere. I was in charge of it, when I was a supervisor.

ML: Cool. So there was municipal composting–

MB: Yeah,

ML: –at one point?

MB: We did a test– a pilot– composting out there, which was...front-end loaders were in there and because of that, we opened up citywide composting.

ML: Wow.

MB: So that, yeah, I started all of that. In 1993 I got promoted to Deputy Chief, which is a one star position, and I was put down in the main office, and as a one star was in charge of all operations within Waste Disposal. Ok? And I worked as the one star from '93 to '96, three years. Pretty simple, everything was three years. So then in '96 I was promoted to Chief, which is two star, you know, a borough superintendent on the BCC side. And I stayed right in the same main office until 1999. In March, I was promoted to three star, and stayed in the actual position I was in as a two star. Because when I got promoted to two star, the position they gave me was always a three star chief in it. So they put me in there as a two star, and three years later they made me a three star and kept me in the same position, and six months after that I was made four star, which is Director of the Bureau of Waste Disposal, which is the highest uniformed person in the department.

ML: Ok.

MB: So that kind of sums up what I did for the department.

ML: All right. In your final position, what would your responsibilities have been?

MB: As Director...in 1999 I was promoted to Director of Bureau of Waste Disposal, and at that time we had Commissioner Farrell<sup>1</sup> there, and in addition to Waste Disposal they put the Bureau of Solid Waste Engineering under me. Now, Waste Disposal did all of the operations of the waste that was moving in the city. Essentially what that was, was all of the marine transfer stations, all the landfills, whatever landfills were open, incinerators– that was all under Waste Disposal. So I was in charge of– you could picture it as– the Bureau of Cleaning and Collection, which was the other bureau in the department, they were responsible for picking up the refuse. Once they picked it up, then it was my responsibility to dispose of it. You know? And during that time, I set up all of the...it's called interim plan, the long term plan, of closing Fresh Kills, that

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<sup>1</sup> Commissioner of Sanitation Kevin P. Farrell

was one of my responsibilities– I mean, I closed kind of all the landfills: Edgemere, and Fountain Avenue, and I was there for all of that. So–

ML: Can you–

MB: And all the incinerators–

ML: Can you tell me about that? All the landfills and incinerators that you had to close down?

MB: Yeah, well...I mean it was a function, a lot of it was political, I mean almost all of it was. Like Edgemere wasn't up to capacity, but they got the order to close it. So, in I think 19...when was Edgemere closed? I think Edgemere was closed in '93 or '94, I guess, and I was ABS<sup>2</sup> at the time, you know, or borough super, so I was charged with that responsibility. Fountain Avenue was in the '80s. I was over in the planning unit, so I was doing that, and at the same time– once you closed Fountain Avenue, you opened up what's called Victory Truckfill– which is out in Fresh Kills– which was a truckfill to a lot of trucks to go out and dispose of the waste, you know? They had Muldoon Truckfill out there. They also had Victory Truckfill, to take the overflow of the Brooklyn trucks. So that was all a planning function, to get that done. In addition, being director, I was in charge of the Bureau of Solid Waste Engineering. Solid Waste Engineering was for the closure of the landfill, all the engineering that was necessary to keep the landfill open– that was all under Solid Waste Engineering. Like the cover material, the geotech membrane– if it came late– or all of the contracts for all of that. Doing the drainage, the gas...I negotiated the concession agreement for the gas, the Getty Synthetic Fuel, and changed it, and changed the actual concession agreement in 2003, I guess, to–

ML: What is that? Can you tell me about that?

MB: The concession agreement is– we would collect the methane off of the landfill and we would sell it to a concessionaire, which at the time was Getty Synthetic Fuel. And then they, in turn, would give us a...there would be a negotiated concession with so much percentage of the profits going back to the city.

ML: Mhmm.

MB: So, at one point Getty was saying that they weren't– they were losing money or whatever with it, so I changed the whole concession agreement and as it turned out, the city made a tremendous amount of money.

ML: Wow. Was it–

B- They were getting like, a million or two million a month.

ML: Wow.

MB: In profit.

ML: How much gas were they moving?

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<sup>2</sup> Assistant Borough Superintendent

MB: Well, at that time, there was fourteen million standard cubic feet a day.

ML: Wow!

MB: Which could...in theory, it would heat, probably, at least 20,000 homes.

ML: Whoa.

MB: You know, it was a lot of gas. There was different negotiations that went on, that never paid off, with like Visy Paper, to send the gas to Visy and let them have a boiler to use the methane, but we could never come to terms. So you know, these are different projects I was involved in, over the years.

ML: Mhmm. Could you tell me– you mentioned, earlier on, the Woodbridge Consent Order– can you tell me about that? About what that entailed?

MB: Woodbridge, well, back in...and I would say the critical years for the landfill was probably '87 to '90, when you kind of saw the most change going on in the landfill. There's always change going on, because, to me, I always describe waste disposal as dynamic. And it's dynamic...I mean, even today...I have a meeting in Albany next month about the new Part 360, which is the landfill Bible, and all changes to that. So there's always change going on in waste disposal, but as far as looking back, in retrospect, '87 to '90 were the big years for the New York City Department of Sanitation, in the way waste disposal was handled and disposed of and all. For instance, in '89 was recycling– that appeared, ok? Prior to recycling, the landfill was probably taking 26,000 tons a day, of which probably in the order of, let's see...10,000 was commercial, because at the time– and we don't do it anymore– at that time we accepted commercial refuse. You know, the city is broken down like New York City, the department, only picks up residential, then the commercial used to come in to us.

At that time, which was '87, '88, I think it was, the department chose to raise the prices, per cubic yard, of the waste coming in, and as a result, about a hundred transfer stations opened up in the city. Because the commercials didn't want to pay. It was overpriced, so they did it themselves, and they opened up. So, essentially, in '88, the 10,000 tons that went to Fresh Kills disappeared. In addition, you had recycling– came into the picture. So, recycling, the trucks...they would go to different vendors for that, and there was contracts to negotiate for all of that. That was roughly about 2,500 tons a day. So out of the 26,000/27,000 what happened was 10,000 was commercial, 2,500 was recycling. You got left with 14,000 tons going to Fresh Kills.

So it kind of changed the face of Fresh Kills itself. And in the mean time, there was all water quality issues that started to arise. One of them was Woodbridge, which was that the Fresh Kills Landfill, garbage from the landfill, was going to Woodbridge beaches and various coastlines along Jersey. So, they sued New York, and what it was is, that was another set of changes that occurred. You know, it was called the consent order, that we entered into with Woodbridge, and it was certain things that was done. This was the installation of like...effect protocol for boom locks system for the barges coming into the landfill. One containment boom had to be closed at all times, so no floatable litter would exit the landfill. This was a procedure that was put in place.

ML: Sorry, what is a boom?

MB: A floating boom is kind of– it's buoyant, and it goes across the top, and it has a net underneath it. Some of them had three foot deep, one of them has fifteen foot deep.<sup>3</sup> So that any litter that was floating would stay on the top, up to three feet on a certain one, fifteen feet on another one. We had sweeper boats that were out there and we purchased additional ones that had the conveyor system that would go down in the water and that would drive around and pick up all the litter that was either floatable or might be entrained in the liquid, you know? So, that was one of the procedures.

The unloading of the barges was another thing that changes. We bought hydraulic cranes, which was a change from cable-operated cranes. Cable operated cranes– there's no positive pressure to close the bucket, so there might have been drippage into the waterway. The hydraulic– there was positive pressure to closing the bucket, so that helped. We instituted many different types of what we call spill wagons, which was the area between the barge and the infield– which is where the refuse was unloaded, prior to going to be landfilled. And, you know, that's a vulnerable spot that litter could have dropped, and dropped into the water ultimately. So we tried different things, and we ended up with canvas material that we draped from the barge to the land side, and kept the barge as tight as possible, and that would stop the litter, and we'd clean it up as we'd go along unloading the barge. So that was other things that happened. There was booms installed at all the marine transfer stations, to make sure that any litter that was loaded into barges at these facilities would not enter the water and exit. Then we instituted nets for all the barges. We had to net every barge that left the marine transfer station and came to Fresh Kills. And then there was a procedure on how to unload the barges.

ML: How were they netted? What–

MB: Well, what would happen is the– all MTSs, there's an upper floor where the trucks come in and they dump to the water level, where the barges are, you know? So in the back of the facility, we would cut out a spot in the wall, window, whatever, and put a roll out there that would have a netting material and as you pulled the barge out of the facility, you'd drape it down from one side of the barge, all the way to the other.

ML: Oh, so it completely covered the barge?

MB: It completely covered it, and there was hooks installed on the barges that you'd just wrap them around– little 'L' hooks. And so that would kind of cover the whole barge. And there was rules at the MTSs– you couldn't load a barge more than eight foot draft– you know, sometimes it got a little more, but we had standards that we met that you couldn't have to peak six feet over the coaming rail, I think it was, and you had to stop loading, even though you might not have got the draft. So there was restrictions put on to help with the water quality. And then once it got down to the landfill, you'd unhook the net for like a quarter of the boat, then have the crane pull in that back partially, so that nothing would fly around, and then start unloading that, and then you'd start pulling in that back as time went on to unload the whole boat. So, you know, those are some of the things with the Woodbridge Consent Order. And then, you know, other things– it was shoreline fencing– there were other various things that would result, I mean, I can't remember all– there's a multitude of things, but those are some of the major issues.

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<sup>3</sup> floating boom = a containment net in water held up by a buoyant top

ML: Mhmm.

MB: You know?

ML: At the time of Woodbridge, was it the only landfill in New York City? Or were the others still operational?

MB: At the time of Woodbridge, they were...19...no, Edgemere was still open at that time. Because Edgemere didn't close until I think it was '93/'94 and all of this was occurring in '88/'89.

ML: Ok.

MB: You know, for the start. So roughly...and what happened is, end of '89 going into '90—that's why I said we changed from athey wagons to rubber tire vehicles out at the landfill.

ML: What is the first thing?

MB: Athey wagons are track...unloading material. In other words, you have a bulldozer that's on tracks. These wagons that the bulldozer would pull, they were open bins that the refuse would go in, and they would pull it up to the active face. Now, these are tracks, so there's garbage— open garbage— everywhere that would travel up the athey road, it's called. So now, by installing in asphalt roadways, you kept the open garbage on the landfill to a minimum.

ML: Ok.

MB: So that was other issues that we did. As time went on, you had DEC monitors— that's the Department of Environmental Conservation— so, they were full-time, twenty-four hours on the landfill, they still are. So these independent eyes watching us to make sure that we followed regulations and, you know—

ML: When did they come on the scene?

MB: —various things like that. They came on in...they came on right around '89/'90. And then there was what was called an independent monitor. An independent monitor was the result of the Woodbridge Consent Order. Independent monitor was a consultant, John Lawler— I forget the name of his company— and he was charged, as a result of the consent order, the city paid his fee, but he was an independent guy that would come to the landfill and do inspections, unannounced, and make recommendations on how to stop— if he saw anything that added to— that litter could escape. He would make recommendations and the city would go ahead and just install them or do it. You know? We'd have a discussion and then we'd install them.

ML: Would the DEC do a similar thing, or was their role different?

MB: DEC was more on the landfill operations, to make sure that you did enough compaction that you were supposed to do. There are certain things with litter, and yeah, they did similar— but they weren't primarily focused with litter. Like how do you stop every piece of litter from blowing in the air, you know? But they had other things, like we put in thirty foot high fences in landfill areas that— in case the winds were blowing. I mean...you know, as you went up in the landfill—



the wind is stronger as you go up. So, there's...I've seen the telephone poles can snap, actually, because of the weight from the litter on the fences.

ML: Wow.

MB: Yeah, it gets pretty strong, pretty intense. Yeah.

ML: When...why did the DEC show up? Were they always there, or was there political pressure?

MB: No, that was another concession, I'll call it, that the city made. That the DEC was doing inspections and then they argued, and they wanted a full-time inspector there at all times, just to make sure. Because it's the largest landfill in the world– it was– you know, when I worked out there it was the largest in the world. I don't think until....let's see, '98 or '99 did it leave that status.

ML: Wow. Was it–

MB: That's because we closed.

ML: Because it closed. [Laughs]

B- We closed some of the MTSSs so the tonnage started getting reduced. And then I think a landfill in California passed it out. I forget the name of that one.

ML: Ok. And who were these– the concession, as you call it– who were they made to? Was Staten Island angry? Who...

MB: Which concession?

ML: Having the DEC present.

MB: Oh no, no. Staten Island, I mean...we had an annual meeting every year, so we would go over what was going in the landfill and where we're landfilling, the projection of what we're doing next year on the landfill, and things like that, and explain the monitors are there. I mean, it was a good thing for Staten Island, because then it wasn't like you're running a...landfill that...you know, the Staten Islanders never liked the landfill, let's face it, and so it would be worse if they think nobody's watching it. So these are independent– a lot of different independent groups that are watching the landfills. I would say that they're, you know, are they entirely happy? No, they'll never– they would never be happy. They were happy when it closed, that's when they were happy. But as far as open– you could add as many monitors as you wanted– is Staten Island going to be happy? No, they wanted it closed. The real answer to the question. And I understand that.

ML: What happened with Edgemere? Why did that close?

MB: Well that closed, actually, because there was an issue. One of the issues was– believe it or not– it's on the flight path that goes to LaGuardia. And there may have been bird issues with the planes.

ML: Ohh.

MB: So, that was one of the reasons why they closed Edgemere. You know?

ML: Interesting.

MB: I mean, we were doing small tonnage there. It wasn't many tons per day, that was going out there. So it wasn't a major— so then in '93 or '4, the only disposal site in the city was Fresh Kills, roughly.

ML: Ok. How many incinerators were there, that you closed?

MB: Well, there was...let's see...when I started work, there was three open incinerators: Betts, Greenpoint, and Hamilton Avenue. Oop, no I take that back— Southwest. Southwest, Greenpoint, and Betts. And all three of them closed while I was working.

ML: And where...I know Greenpoint's in Brooklyn, where—

MB: Southwest is in Brooklyn, that one was actually a unique one. That fed into a barge directly.

ML: Oh!

MB: The residue from that ran into a barge, and we took it to Fresh Kills. Greenpoint was truck delivered, that was driven to a barge and dumped in. Betts is in Queens. Its out by the Central Repair Shop, the main repair shop for sanitation. That's where Betts Incinerator is.

ML: And why were they closed?

MB: They were closed as part of an agreement, I believe. Some of the reason was to upgrade them to the environmental controls that needed to be in there as a function of regulations that came about. It would just cost too much. You know? I mean, they were old incinerators that were antiquated to get them totally up to speed...I mean, you might as well build a new one, but they wouldn't let us build any new ones, so that ended that...

ML: You mentioned to me that there was a plan to build one in every borough. Was that around that time?

MB: Yeah, that was prior to that. I mean, resource recovery came into light, and that was in the '80s again— back in '86, '87, '88. And one of the plans for the city was that they would construct an incinerator— a resource recovery facility— in each borough. The one they wanted to start first was over in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. Which politically got shot down, and then ultimately all of them got shot down. So, that was the plan and then, when they announced in 1997— they announced the closure of Fresh Kills, Giuliani and Pataki. In that— they wrote into law that not only they close Fresh Kills by 2001— no incineration in the city.

ML: Same time?

MB: Yeah, that was in the law. So, if anybody had any ideas of closing Fresh Kills and opening an incinerator, it wasn't going to happen. It wasn't one of the alternatives.

ML: Ok. So when they decided that, was it your responsibility to find somewhere to put all the garbage?

MB: Absolutely.

ML: How did you go about doing that?

MB: Absolutely. Well, what we did is we decided to do it in five phases. So, in '97 we started, and each year we would strip an MTS, or more than one MTS, out of the equation, because there would be a manageable amount of tonnage. There was constraints put on how we were going to do this, or how we were going to export all of the refuse. One of the things, because Fresh Kills took the burden of the city for x amount of years, or the majority and ultimately all of the city, over time, was that each solution would be borough based. So in other words, what that meant is we started in '97 with the Bronx. What we did is, we took all of the Bronx tonnage, which was roughly about 2,000 tons– 2,500, somewhere around there– and we let a contract for private waste companies to accept it at transfer stations that were either in the borough, or out of the city. It's important to note– in other words, if you had another facility, say, in Queens, we were not allowing Bronx garbage to go to Queens.

ML: Ok.

MB: So that was borough-based solution. And I'll explain that later. So, as a result, we got proposals for the Bronx. There was a couple of facilities in the Bronx, ultimately now there's one that takes all of the Bronx, but there used to be, like when we first opened, there was a couple of facilities that took Bronx waste. You know, a limited amount. And then at that time, they trucked it out of the city to various landfills. In the beginning, it was going to Virginia. It still is, right now, but a lot of it gets railed now, you know? But we peeled off tonnages as we went along each year, like '97 was some, '98 was some, '99– ultimately in March of 2001, which was nine months early, we closed the landfill. The thing that should be noted is that, for instance, as part of the solution for, say, Queens, there's not enough capacity of transfer stations– private– in Queens to handle all of Queens. So as it turns out, the trucks had to drive. I think now it changed because contracts change over the years– these were three-year contracts, with a renewable two-year– so they were like for five years, and now they're renewing them as we go along. You know, here in 2012. But Queens material would dump in Queens, some of the districts, and then some of the districts would drive through the Bronx to Jersey to unload at transfer stations because they had to be borough-based. You could drive right by their places in the Bronx but you couldn't dump them there. But that was part of it– we didn't want one borough saying, I guess politically, why are they taking another borough's garbage? Because that's what Fresh Kills did. That's the argument, why they actually closed it in Staten Island.

ML: Mhmm. So when you started, peeling off the tonnage, did you have to site any new landfills, or were you able to find–

MB: No, no, no, it was–

ML: ones that were already there?

MB: What it was is– it was an all-inclusive proposal by various private waste haulers. They would accept the garbage at their door, or transfer station, that was either located in the borough or out of the city, and then they would be responsible to dispose of it. So, of course, there was due diligence done, where what happened is whatever landfills, once we award the contract, or were going to award, we would check the landfills to make sure they were not just a hole in the

ground somewhere. You know, the city could be left open. We went down and visited all of the landfills that were proposed in order to make sure that they had the environmental controls that were necessary to operate, like leachate control, and gas emissions, and things like that. And how the landfill was actually run. So we did our due diligence before we awarded the contracts to any vendor that did it. And they would name more than one landfill, so we'd check all of them that were on the proposal, coming in. Because at times, there could have been a problem with one of their landfills and they need to go to another landfill. So they had to propose several landfills, as a solution, you know, just in case they run into a problem. And it was a monetary thing, so the price, per ton, was all-inclusive—once we unloaded at the transfer station to burial, that was the inclusive price they would give us. So they would kind of move it around. As years went on, there was various states that charged—taxed the tonnage that came in, and they were coming back to us to try to change the contract, but we had it written in the contract that you couldn't do that. So they had to eat that, but they made up for it the next time around when the contract went up.

ML: [laughs]

MB: But you had what was called a host community agreement, with most of these places where the landfills were located. That the community that the landfill was located in, they would get a host fee for allowing tonnage that was 'regardless of origin'—that wasn't coming out of their own county. So like, you know that varied from different landfills—could be fifty cents a ton, it could be up to ten dollars a ton—but that was all included in the price. That was all figured, but if somebody asked you what does the host community? It was limited by two ways. One was by permit, and one was by the cost. So permit-wise, you'd see a landfill down south, or anywhere really, and their operating might be 1,000 tons a day of refuse. But the state regulatory agency might say that only thirty percent of that could be 'regardless of origin,' that seven hundred has to come from that individual county, three hundred tons could come regardless of origin. So you had to check all the permits to make sure that the tonnage they were proposing to accept, you know, they had the ability to do that, with the regulatory agencies in their state.

ML: Ok. So, essentially, New York City was giving the garbage to private contractors who'd bring it somewhere, and then—would they in turn have to pay the local communities, for siting it?

MB: Yeah, that was all on them. Because a lot of times, the landfills—like for instance, Waste Management is a large firm. They own the landfill where they go, so they would pay the community. You'd have one of the other vendors at one of the transfer stations, they might not own the landfill, so they negotiated a deal with the landfill they're going to pay, and then that landfill would pay the community. You know? What's seen by the Department of Sanitation is a cost, and it's all-inclusive, and then all of that stuff is wrapped into that cost. You know, that we didn't have to worry about it when the host community says that they want two dollars more a ton...our contract is for five years, and they're locked, but that's why a lot of times they gave us several landfills, because, in case that did happen, they could move the tonnage somewhere else.

ML: Ok.

MB: And then everybody was moving to get tonnage by rail, to avoid the trucks. You know? And that was kind of– these solutions that I’m saying were temporary, they call them interim. This was before the long-term solution would come into effect.

ML: Do you know about how many– like, once Fresh Kills was closed, how many other landfills had to...take New York City’s garbage? Do you have any idea?

MB: Yeah, I mean its in the order of...let’s see...You’ve got eighteen...you had at least eighteen separate contracts for tonnage, with various– because another thing I should mention is, the department had what’s called a model, ok?

ML: Ok.

MB: So the model is, if you had two or three transfer stations bidding on a particular amount of tonnage, there’s some way for the department to figure, could they send it all there in the same shift? Do they have to relay it? Because that costs more money. So the department had its own internal model that, say somebody bid fifty dollars a ton, once you put the model on it to figure out, if you’re going to, you know, hire extra people on overtime to dump it at night and this and that– that cost per ton changes. So the model would determine what’s the cost, and we’d do an adjusted cost before we award the contract. So when you see the lowest cost bidder coming in, he might not win the contract. Because it’s the lowest cost to him, but its not the lowest cost to the department. See, for instance, Manhattan’s a prime example. They start picking up– collecting– in a certain district in Manhattan, and then they have to go to Jersey. Now, a lot of them won’t dump it on shift, so that they would have to dump it at night. So in order to dump it at night, you would need another individual, and that’s a cost on overtime, so you want to calculate that in to figure out– there might be two or three places in Jersey that bid, but when does it become cheaper or not?

ML: For the city itself.

MB: Because you might do four relays to one place in Jersey, and only three to another. So then that differentiates the cost. You know? But that didn’t answer your question. You asked me about...what was the original question? I forget.

ML: [laughs]

MB: I rambled off for a while.

ML: We were talking about where the garbage went. Where it had to go after Fresh Kills.

MB: Right, oh yeah. So there was eighteen contracts, and how many landfills deal with that? I would say the landfills in the beginning– you’d probably have in the order of eighteen landfills to thirty landfills that are available to take the tonnage. And they spread out across many states. They spread out, for instance: Virginia, South Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Jersey, the ash fill– because you go to an incinerator in Jersey. Like Manhattan garbage goes to an incinerator down in Jersey, some of it, and then ultimately that residue goes to a landfill which is in Jersey.

ML: Ok.

MB: So those are the states. I know I've visited landfills in all of them states. So I know they were on the top, you know?

ML: You mentioned to me before that there was one of the communities in Virginia– actually sort of benefitted from having the landfill there.

MB: Yeah, I mean, what happens is essentially– or what I saw was– in 1997 the first landfill from the Bronx was Waverley, Virginia. And Waverley, Virginia is kind of a...for lack of a better choice of words, I would say probably not an affluent county. But as a result of the host/community agreement they were collecting money for taking tonnage regardless of origin. They ended up building new roads, new schools, new police vehicles, new fire vehicles. So, the quality of life in that county actually improved as a result, and it improved dramatically over the years. You know, from '97 to now. They still use that landfill. I mean, do they still want it open? That's a question mark– I don't know. But at the time....I mean...it improved the quality that went on in the county.

ML: Ok. What time have we got? Do you need to check on your car?

MB: Yeah, if you want to just stop for a–

[Interview paused to check on parking space]

ML: Ok, so we're back again. The next thing that I'd like to talk about is...after having closed Fresh Kills, you had to reopen it for 9/11. So I guess to start with, can you tell me about what you were doing that day?

MB: Ok, well, let's see. September 11<sup>th</sup> was on a Tuesday, that was the first day back to work. I happened to be in talking to the first deputy commissioner at the time, early in the morning when we heard a loud explosion, and we kind of– from his office you could actually see the trade center. So we turned around, we saw flames coming out of the building, and then somebody else came in and told us that a plane just crashed into one of the trade centers and we kind of didn't believe him. And we were looking out the window and we saw the other plane go into the other trade center. So at that time, Commissioner Farrell was the commissioner, and the first deputy commissioner was Pete [Peter] Montalbano, and we had a discussion immediately that...you know, when the planes went in that was ok, but then once it collapsed we had a discussion, like what was going to happen, because we knew we'd be charged with removing the debris or at least helping or assisting. So, at that time, as soon as it collapsed, and I forget what time that was, 10 or 11 o'clock in the morning– it was early– we worked towards opening the landfill right away. And, I mean, we weren't violating any law in the landfill at that point because of the order that Mayor Giuliani and Governor Pataki signed in– that by December 31<sup>st</sup> 2001 the landfill would be closed. So even though we closed it early, doesn't matter, we're still within legal rights to just do what we want until December 31<sup>st</sup>. So I explained that to the commissioner, that we could accept whatever. So we also– the marine transfer stations a lot of the personnel was moved into the Bureau of Cleaning and Collection, so one of the first things we did is I grabbed a lot of people back. I knew we'd have to open up a couple of marine transfer stations. As it turned out we opened up 59<sup>th</sup> Street Marine Transfer Station and Hamilton Avenue Marine Transfer Station. And ultimately, as the disposal went we closed them down, for various other reasons, but that was the initial start of the day– it was very hectic. And we accepted loads that night. You know?

And we moved equipment from the landfill down to Ground Zero, we tractor-trailer equipment down there, to help with the recovery.

ML: Mhmm. How did the communication work? Did you, in your department, get orders from anyone, or were you just thinking ‘ok, well I have to do something’?

MB: Yeah, I mean, the commissioner met with the mayor’s office, you know? He kept them informed, and then the first deputy and me would meet all day, and go over different various things— what we’re doing— and then we’d communicate it to the field. It’s easy to say, but I had the best managers in the department so I had no problem. I’d call them up, and things got done. But I’d worked with them for many years. You know, we all kind of got promoted together, we all knew each other, we all knew what we needed to do and we got it done.

I mean, one of the things is, Fresh Kills was at a point, because we closed it earlier— the top of the landfill was relatively flat, which provided a good area for screening all the material, which had to be done afterwards. The other thing is the operating engineers that were in the landfill as of March, we never let them go. So the specialized person to move all of the material, once we went to barges, you know, we wanted to load barges. We changed the operation to barges mostly— no trucks. This way trucks wouldn’t be on the road and it would go by barges but...we had the personnel in place, the cranes, the equipment, and all to unload all of these barges that came. As it turned out, we needed an executive order after December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2001, to keep the landfill open, but initially we didn’t need an executive order. I mean, I’m sure the mayor at the time made Governor Pataki aware of what we’re doing. But there was really no other place in the city that you could bring this material. And you know, they were trying to find out anybody that was alive, that was the first order of business, before it went into total recovery, I think its called. There’s two names for it— recovery and...I forget the other name.

ML: So, it sounds like, fortunately, you had enough men at Fresh Kills already. Did you have enough men...collecting, I guess, at Ground Zero? Or did you have to—

MB: Well no, what happened is...I mean, you’ve got to understand when this happened— our job is to remove refuse off the street so that never missed a beat. We did that day in and day out. This was, for lack of a better description, it was an added job. I still had to worry about where the regular garbage went. That was the regular job. This was just an added job during that period, for a year, of removing that material. We sent trucks down, but at the same time, the coordination was that DDC let out four separate contracts to private carters, ok? And what happened is, they split the trade center into four quadrants, and they assigned these private carters, or private firms, I’ll call them— one in each area and it was to the tune of 250 million dollars, the initial contract for each quadrant.

ML: Wow.

MB: So it was a billion dollar contract

ML: *Wow.*

MB: that the Department of Design and Construction let out.

ML: And how quickly, after that day, was that in place?

MB: They had equipment in, I mean, these contracts got in place after a little while, but initially everybody was down there trying to help and, you know, people would do what they want to do, just to kind of move it but then we got organized. We were meeting down there three times a day, the main individuals: the engineers, the builders, the police, fire. We would meet there everyday, just to go over the plan for the day, and what we're going to do. Like for instance, we started taking steel out right away on tractor-trailers and they would drive to Fresh Kills, and I ended that after a month or two. We'd load it directly into barges at Pier 6, once we got the FBI to clear the beams and the steel, you know. In other words it was kind of crazy to double handle it. We'd put it right in the barge and then we'd sell the barges, you know, we'd bid it out. Different metal places in there could accept barges, and that's how we got rid of the metal.

ML: So rather than bringing all the metal to Fresh Kills, and then selling it to—

MB: Right, right. So as it turned out, we got a limited amount of metal out there, like, steel beams— large beams— that we sold, ultimately, and then there was the metal façade of the building that we pulled out. I had the metal recycler and he took it away from Fresh Kills. But all of the I-beams and all that came after a month or two. That went directly to Vended Metal Management and different other vendors that we bid it out. You know? But I mean...it was all coordination. I mean, we had vehicles down there, DOT had vehicles down there, and then the private firms that got the contracts: there was, Tully, Turner...there was four...AMEC, and...there's one other group that won the contracts. So it was Tully Construction, AMEC, Turner, and...I can't think of the fourth one. It'll come to me.

ML: Ok. So what was your day like in this time period?

MB: Well, my day was...my day was extremely different from a lot of other people. My wife had died on August 25<sup>th</sup>. So. That was my first day back to work. So in one way it was good for me. It kept my mind off of things. You know, it was a bad thing in history, but my day was different than other people at work.

ML: Mhmm.

MB: So. But...you know, we worked twelve hours a day for many, many days. Matter of fact, after a period of time, we had a problem giving people off. In other words, what would happen is they were working so much, they needed time off. We needed to do something. You know? Because, unlike...not to say anything negative or anything...the police and the fire they were screening at the landfill but they had people that came in and changed. But us in sanitation, we were there day in and day out.

ML: There was no one else.

MB: We had nobody, there was nobody to pull from. So I mean, eventually we had to give people off. We had to slow down the operation a little bit just to let people— for peace of mind— because it was just traumatic for everybody, you know?

ML: How many days are we talking about, that people would work before?

MB: People would work thirty, sixty days straight. You know, twelve hours a day or more.



ML: No weekends?

MB: No, no. Straight through. Straight through. So after a while we tried to figure out how to give people off. You know, because you had to, you just couldn't have people working crazy – I mean, just peace of mind. There was– they had to do things– I mean, let's face it– after a certain amount of time you have other obligations you got to take care of, so you do need time off. You know? I mean, we forced them to work in the beginning, but then we needed to give them time off. So that worked. But everybody worked very hard. I mean, it ended up it was nine months or ten months or whatever [before] the whole project was all done. And one of the things that went on is we– as a result of one of the meetings– we set up what's called marine transfer stations down at the site. There was two of them, one at Pier 6 and one at Pier 25 on the west side. And what would happen is the trucks from the site would deliver the material– on Pier 6 was steel, on Pier 25 was regular debris, and that would be loaded into barges by Weeks Marine. And then the barges would go out to Fresh Kills. So as time went on, when we got this all set up below Canal Street, nobody saw a truck coming out of there. So the world itself...by the time they got to see what was going on, all there was was an empty hole because all of the trucks stayed within Canal Street. They were south of Canal Street so it wasn't like trucks of this material was running through the city.

ML: Yeah.

MB: We loaded them out to barges and traveled them out to Fresh Kills. You know? So we set that up and that was good. I mean, the DEC never approved the permit for the transfer stations and I always kidded the head of OEM<sup>4</sup>– God rest his soul, he passed away recently– that we'll share a jail cell because we went ahead and operated it anyway because you're in an emergency. You know? And we couldn't wait for approvals from the state or wherever. So we just filled the paperwork out and we just operated.

ML: So at that time, were people allowed below Canal Street? Or was the entire–

MB: No, people weren't allowed, no. No, it's just that...it's a function of the trucks. You didn't need as many trucks. The area was...I mean, the trade center is a confined area, it's a small area, really, when you think of it, you know? Its not a big area so you don't want all of this equipment going in and out and if you had trucks running from the site, like out of the city or whatever, you'd need a tremendous amount of trucks to maintain that production, you know?

ML: Mhmm.

MB: Whereas they were moving it less than a half a mile, like blocks really, to Pier 25. They were dumping...into these skidpans and then the skidpans would fill the barges and you'd put 600 tons in each barge.

ML: Wow.

MB: Roughly, you know? So then that would go out to Fresh Kills. So we went through thirteen, fourteen hundred barges, or 2,000 barges, I think, during the course of the time. Because

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<sup>4</sup> Office of Emergency Management

ultimately what happened was 1.2 million tons went to Fresh Kills of stuff that was buried. And 200,000 tons of metal was sold from Ground Zero directly to the metal recyclers and 200,000 tons of metal was sold from the landfill to a metal recycler.

ML: Wow.

M: So it's like 1.6 million tons overall, that came out. And that was– and I keep stressing it– that's in addition to doing your normal job everyday.

ML: Mhmm.

MB: That never stopped, you know?

ML: Yeah. So you, I mean, the department really kind of spared the site of that for...everyone, really.

MB: Yeah, I mean, it was through the means. We came up and we recommended the marine transfer stations, and that was a big plus, because that kind of took...a lot of focus away like, that you'd be worrying...you know, you expand your operation you have different issues. Trucks running through the street, how airtight are they, how are this, is it spilling or whatever? I mean...there would have been a multitude of other additional problems that probably went on, you know? We were fortunate that we had an area down there, its right by Chambers Street, that we could set this up, and we had Weeks Marine– they did an excellent job– and they had loaded the barges for us, you know, we took the barges. We'd transport them back and forth to Fresh Kills. And this was in conjunction with the DDC, the Department of Design and Construction, because they had the contracts for the four private vendors that were on site and they had to direct them to the barges and things like that. So it was a tremendous amount of coordination going on.

ML: Mhmm. So once the debris got to Fresh Kills, what had to happen with it?

MB: Well, ok. When it came to Fresh Kills we had a Health and Safety Plan set up, and what's important in that is...it was a lot of concern, even down at Ground Zero, you know, the dust. So the Health and Safety Plan we developed down at Fresh Kills, actually it was done by...let me think of the company...I'll get the company.<sup>5</sup> But we designated certain areas where you need respirators, certain areas you wouldn't need it, and we had police there, as opposed to sanitation, so if we found somebody in violation we would throw them off the landfill, I mean, we were very strict on health and safety. We didn't want people breathing other things that they shouldn't have. The barges were unloaded into a three-sided concrete bin, for lack of a better term– if you saw a picture you'd know what I mean– and then it was loaded onto pay haulers, which are these eighty cubic yard trucks, ok? And the front-end loader that loads them– this was equipment that we used to use to move regular garbage– that's a twenty yard bucket. So just to imagine, a regular collection truck that you see in the street is twenty five yards so these actual buckets that just scoop a bunch of material up they're twenty yards. So they're massive and you can't touch the top of the tire, I mean, this is all massive equipment, you know? You get in the bucket where you see like a little bulldozer bucket...

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<sup>5</sup> Later Note: The Health and Safety Plan was made by Evans Environmental, a subcontractor to Phillips and Jordan.

ML: Mhmm.

MB: I mean, you stand in these buckets you can't touch the top of the bucket. You're like a little– you're like nobody in there, if I showed you a picture. And the pay haulers are eighty cubic yards, so you could put essentially four– almost four– garbage trucks in there.

ML: Wow.

MB: And operationally, we had to make changes as we went. In the beginning, there were steel beams, so we took the tailgates off, which is the dump doors, because they were getting caught up in things we did. So now, once you unloaded on the pile, we brought it up to the top of the landfill, which was a flat area. And it was flat because we didn't bring it to closure yet, you know? It's still, even today, not at final closure yet, they're working towards it. But, it would be stockpiled up there. And what happened is we would take small amounts of it and we'd spread it on the ground, and the police would go through it and search it for any kind of personal effects or personal items and then as time went on we coordinated. We coordinated and we got screen-alls in that would screen the material with conveyors so that the police could be stationed on it and check and look for different things and that's how we did it: we stockpiled all the stuff and then we fed all of these screening operations everywhere up there. Then once it was all screened, it would go get landfilled to another section up there. You know? So that was all coordinated. We had to separate things, like Building 7 had a special interest– that any material from Building 7 we put in separate barges and we screened it separately.

ML: Why is that?

MB: Well, one of the reasons that we were told is that there was a lot of records in that building that they wanted to try to recover. So not only were they looking for the regular items, they were looking for additional items, so that's why they screened it different. You know? Because there was, I think, criminal cases, drug cases that were pending, and they wanted to try to save all the records that were in there.

ML: Was it like a...were the FBI in Building 7? Or...?

MB: Well, I don't know who was actually in it, but I know on the landfill we had Secret Service, FBI, we had a little area that if you walked in there they'd come out with their guns and say 'you're not allowed here'

ML: Wow.

MB: until I told them who I was and said, you know, 'I'll throw all of you off, so what do I care?' So [chuckles] they never bothered me, but they bothered the other people. But yeah, we had out at the landfill, there was a tremendous amount of groups. I mean it was a group effort. You had Red Cross, you had the National Guard, you had everybody out there: Police, Fire, Sanitation, Secret Service, EPA...you know, a whole list, I'd have to pull out the list and read it. You know? Everybody was out there. I mean, in the beginning we had a heliport right on the landfill.

ML: Wow.

MB: And actually took a couple of rides, we'd take a ride down to Ground Zero and a ride back, you know, through the army. And then as time went on, we needed all that space so that all disappeared, and there was no need to be taking rides or anything like that. You know, in the beginning everything came, and then we'd sort it out where we'd need it. There was a gentleman, Ben Turner, and he worked for...I'm trying to think of the firm. He was hired by the Army Corps of Engineers, I think it is, and we used him to coordinate between the different agencies up on top. So he took control of the screen-alls and all—made sure that, you know, they didn't give us fifty screen-alls, we didn't have the area for that. He got the contracts with the different—like Taylor—and all of these screen-alls and set them up for the police so they could do their little investigation. We unloaded the material in sanitation, that's what we always did, you know? Phillips and Jordan was his company and it was a valuable asset to us<sup>6</sup>. I directed him right away to do the Health and Safety Plan, so everybody was on the same page. And then he coordinated with the police—like how many screen-alls—and set that up for them, and things like that. Because otherwise, if you don't have somebody in charge, it gets very confusing.

ML: Mhmm.

MB: And you're dealing with another agency, so there is a little attitude issue, so he was kind of the...referee/ umpire/ mediator/ negotiator. So that worked out well too. You know? Because you don't want the agencies fighting between themselves— who's in charge, and who isn't in charge and things like that.

ML: How many people do you think were sort of 'in charge' of their agencies while they were there?

MB: Well it wasn't so much—like at Fresh Kills, there was one police guy in charge. You know? Jimmy...Allaggi...not Allaggi...Jimmy...I'll think of his name too.<sup>7</sup> It's been twelve years. It's been eleven, ten years. He was in charge of the police. Myself, Mike Mucci, and Dennis Diggins were in charge of sanitation, we were totally in charge. You know, I don't think it's a matter—like you know who's in charge of the agencies. You want to make sure...do the agencies think that they can overstep their charge? And I don't want to be negative in any of this. In the beginning, when everything was hitting the thing...people wanted to park their cars up on the top of the landfill and we don't allow that. I mean that just gets in the way. So of course you'd get the typical 'well I'm a police guy,' 'well we don't care, we'll take your car and throw it away. We really don't care about *who* you are, you're really not allowed up here.' You know what I mean? This isn't your landfill, you can't drive up here. End of story. Because you're just causing safety issues and other issues. Vehicles. But, that got under control right away, and you knew who was in charge: who was in charge of the police, who was in charge of us, and we had Ben Turner there, and all the groups would meet every day and go over it. And, I mean, the basic line was, 'hey you got a job to do, let's get it done. Stop the baby stuff, you know?'

ML: [laughs] So you were at Fresh Kills all the time? For...or...

MB: No, I was at both spots.

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<sup>6</sup> Ben Turner's company

<sup>7</sup> Later Note: Jimmy Luongo was in charge of the Police Department at Fresh Kills.

ML: Ok.

MB: Like it wasn't uncommon as time went on, I would leave the main office and go out to Fresh Kills to see, but I met down at Chambers Street everyday in the beginning. Like, the day it happened– the very next day we went to Queens and from Queens I couldn't get anything done, so I went right back down to Manhattan. So I was one of the first guys into the main office again

ML: Ooh.

MB: in Manhattan.

ML: Oh, because they– had they– cleared out the buildings?

MB: They cleared out but I just went down, I didn't listen to anything. I just went back down there that next day, just to get things done. And then people started coming back, and my people came. You know, because we had to meet every day over at Ground Zero and everything. So we had to be right in the middle of it. And then we'd go out to Fresh Kills. Yeah, I was back and forth, the whole nine months, in between the other stuff that went on.

ML: Mhmm. Wow.

MB: But when you did ask me, and I know I lost it for a minute...it kind of kept my sanity, the work I had to do. You know, because I had two small children at the time. So.

ML: Mhmm.

MB: You know, so it was rough.

ML: Mhmm.

MB: So...

ML: And were you living in the Bronx at the time?

MB: I was living in Yonkers. I was living in the same spot I'm living now. You know.

ML: So you were traveling a lot?

MB: Yeah. The main thing is, they got the call that day that I was fine. You know?

ML: Mhmm. So I guess after nine months, about, it was completed?

MB: Yeah, it was September 11<sup>th</sup> till June, I think June we officially wrapped up the operation out there. And you know there was an executive order issued in December to keep the landfill open for the sake of the trade center so we did. And since that time, which is...2002 that was...till now, they're actually letting out the cover contract to cover 1 and 9, coming up this year. One of the hold ups on that was there was a lawsuit with the families of the victims of 9/11, to remove the material from the landfill, and I think a federal judge ruled on it that it would stay where it is, you know?

ML: Oh wow.

MB: So that went on for many, many years and that's why it's not closed, but they're going to start this year to close it.

ML: Were there human remains in the landfill?

MB: Well I mean, that's one of the arguments. I mean, we did the screening, and the police did the screening to the best of their ability, and they're pretty confident that they got everything, but in theory...I mean, one of the things that I know, when I used to talk to people about it, is you had two hundred-and-ten story buildings. And they both collapsed. And if you think about it, I mean, we're in an office here with furniture, computers, and all– you couldn't see anything.

ML: There was just nothing distinguishable.

MB: You didn't see any tables, you didn't see nothing– it was all dust.

ML: Wow.

MB: Because of the force that it collapsed. You know, the other things, out at Fresh Kills we had the cars. In other words–

ML: Cars?

MB: Yeah, what happened is, you had a lot of the smashed vehicles that were around the trade center. In addition you had a lot of agency vehicles– police, fire, fire trucks, and all that were kind of smashed up. But when they started getting down towards the end, there's like three or four floors underground that are garages. So, some of the cars were driven right out of there. You know? And we took them to Fresh Kills, and one of the issues– and we had to negotiate all of this– was with the insurance companies, whether to let the people get their cars back. You know? So as it turned out, the only people that could get it back is if they get a certified asbestos cleaning of the vehicle, before they take it back. So not too many people did that.

ML: Mhmm.

MB: Because that was a very high cost, I don't know if it was...I mean don't quote me on the number, I mean it was thousands of dollars to get that done. You know, a lot of these cars were probably used cars that nobody worried about and they didn't want to chance it even after it was clean. Maybe some of the people said 'no that's it– just leave it, go.' But we had all the cars, and the people could come out and they could get their...you know if there was any property in the cars, and things like that.

ML: About how– was it many? Many cars?

MB: Yeah it was...total it was 1,400.

ML: Oh wow.

MB: Vehicles, not all cars. You know, vehicles.

ML: What happened to the ones that they didn't claim? That no one claimed?

MB: We got rid of them, as metal.

ML: Oh ok.

MB: You know, we salvaged it, metal recycling. We would take the gas tanks out and, you know, anything, and just get rid of it. That's what we did. I mean, some of them, like in Albany, the state museum, they have one of the crushed fire trucks and there's other places that got a few things– I-beams went someplace, you know, different areas. But most of them just got recycled, you know? Sent out as salvage.

And I guess another thing– Eerie is in the opening days you'd be out there at night, at Fresh Kills, and you'd have all these vehicles out– you know, lined up, whatever we took. And at night you'd start hearing...chatter from the vehicles because there were radios in it that were still working. So you know, it was kind of eerie. You'd be on the top of the hill, and all of a sudden you'd hear all this squawking going on– obviously, you knew where it came from– you didn't know what was going on. So that was kind of...just to make a note, that was a little eerie out there at night in the beginning. So.

ML: Mhmm. I could imagine. I'm trying to think if I have any other questions about that. I don't think so. Do you have anything else you want to say about–

MB: Oh, about the trade center?

ML: Sure.

MB: No, I think, you know, everythin– I mean looking back...look, it was a tragic thing. I mean, there's nothing really good you could say out of it. But, you know, considering what it was...we acted fast enough that any recovery or anything that we needed we did it, you know, efficiently and as fast as possible, and nobody could ever criticize that and...what we did, ultimately– I mean, that's what we did and I don't feel there was anything wrong with what we did. So.

ML: You're proud of your guys?

MB: Oh yeah, absolutely. Absolutely.

ML: All right. I guess just a couple of other things, if you're doing ok?

MB: Yeah. Yeah.

ML: I'm interested to hear about this composting project that you mentioned earlier.

MB: Well yeah, ok, the composting project. Well, that was in 19...89, I think, the years fade away from me. But, it could have been '88. It was out at Edgemere Truckfill, out in Queens, where we took the leaves. We collected leaves from one or two districts in Queens, and we delivered them to the landfill– to the truckfill. That's to say, a landfill and a truckfill are the same thing, its just the landfill is the overall footprint, the truckfill just means its delivered by trucks.

ML: Ok.

MB: You know? So if you hear that, it's the same thing. So we spread them out into windrows and we used...I hired individuals to rip the bags open. Because we were very new at all of this, so all the bags went in the truck, the truck dumped all the bags, and, you know, you can't have

plastic in when you're trying to make compost, so we had this agency supply us with people and they used razors, and they cut– it was very tedious– cut the bags, and ripped them out, then we had a front-end loader that'd start turning the windrows and making compost and yeah, you know, x amount of months later, we made compost.

ML: [laughs]

MB: And because of that we set up, I mean, there's a...I think its rated 50,000 cubic yards per year on Fresh Kills compost facility. And Fresh Kills we'd take landscapers, too. In other words, landscapers go in there for a fee and they're really from Staten Island. You know, they pay x amount of dollars per cubic yard to dump– and that would be tree limbs and all. So as a result of that initial pilot, then they did citywide leaf-collection and citywide tree collection. In the last few years– I think budgetary constraints– they've eliminated some of that.

ML: Ooh.

MB: You know, don't quote me– that's the Bureau of Cleaning and Collection, but, I believe, the last couple of years, they never picked up any leaves in the city, because there was no money. You know, they couldn't run the program. But they ran a program for many, many years and we would make compost out at Fresh Kills. We would sell it off in lots at the end. We would have giveback days where the public could come and take it. There's other compost facilities in Soundview in the Bronx, Queens, and I know when I was in charge of recycling I was moving towards getting permits for them. They could operate, but you could operate them at lower levels, like without a permit you could operate at a certain level. In order to bring a lot of material in there you need a permit. So I was moving towards getting permits, and I couldn't get them while I was in charge of recycling– I don't know if they even got the permits now, so I don't know...

ML: [laughs]

MB: But there's facilities in the city, but they're not really, you know– because of budgetary constraints– they're not composting. We tried out at Fresh Kills, when we designed and built that, we used trommels and scarabs. These are high-tech equipment to do composting more efficiently than what we did at Edgemere. And we did try food waste composting out there. We took a district in Brooklyn, I remember this back in...I guess it was the late '80s – '90...no it was in the '90s– '93 or '4. A district or two districts in Brooklyn, we collected food waste in a separate truck, we took it out to Fresh Kills, there was a certain mixture of what you needed– wood chips per food waste, and you know at that time it was very problematic to take food waste out at the thing, so we never pursued food waste.

ML: Why was it problematic?

MB: Well, you got a vector issue, its kind of...there's odors to it, its sloppy, there's a lot of issues with it. You need five parts wood chips to do food waste, to try to make a blend, you know, to try to get it to compost. I mean, one of the issues back there is because of the design of DEP, nobody could have what's called an 'insinkerator' in their house, in the city. In other words, you couldn't have one of those things under your drain, in the kitchen–

ML: Like a garbage disposal?



MB: Yes, exactly. Its called an insinkerator or whatever, that you could throw your food waste down, and it would go to DEP and then they'd make pellets out of it eventually, you know? That's another way to get rid of food waste. So, but at that year– they only passed it into law a couple of years ago that you could have insinkerators now because they upgraded whatever they needed to do on the DEP program. Sewage treatment plants that they could at that– originally, you couldn't have a disposal unit in the city, it was against the law so...that's taken care of some of the food waste. So like, you could picture that serving the same purpose as, like, the bottle bill. Don't get me wrong, when we collect recycling, we do get the nickel deposit bottles mixed in, but there's not a lot of them. You know what I mean? So that pulls out recyclable materials, just like the insinkerator would be pulling out food waste, you know? These are all waste prevention initiatives that came about either directly with the department or non-direct. You know, that actually reduce waste.

ML: Hmm. I'm curious, what part of Brooklyn, do you know, that started the food–

MB: Brooklyn 6, I believe.

ML: Brooklyn 6.

MB: Wherever Brooklyn 6 is, you'd have to look at the map...6 rings a bell. I think it was...I think it was Park Slope.

ML: [laughs] That's what my guess would be.

MB: Yeah, that's, I believe...I know it was 6, so wherever that encompasses, that's what the food waste was done.<sup>8</sup> You know?

ML: Ok. Is it true that– with the bottle bill in New York City– you have to bring bottles back to where you brought them originally? The same store?

MB: No, not necessarily.

ML: Ok.

MB: You know, you have to bring them to a store that actually sells it. Like a lot of stores, if they don't sell Budweiser beer, and you bring them back a Budweiser bottle, they're not going to take it, because the vendor doesn't come there, you know? But there's no way for a store to know whether you bought it in their store, so there's really no control. You know, a store would like to say they don't want to accept it, but, I mean, you have all of these machines outside a supermarket that any people that live off bottles, that are out there picking up whatever they can get, they go to the machines outside the supermarkets. They take anything, if the store sells it. But most of the bottles they do, unless it's an exotic blend. I mean, I guess the real question is who gets all the nickels that don't go back?

ML: Hmm...[laughs]

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<sup>8</sup> Brooklyn 6 is comprised of the following neighborhoods: Carroll Gardens, Cobble Hill, Columbia Street District, Gowanus, Park Slope, and Red Hook.

MB: That used to be the big question for many of– like, I used to have to give a lot of talks to people that came from Japan and China and all and...when they got to recycling, that was their big question. Well who gets all the money? Because its millions and millions of dollars. In other words, you as a consumer are paying a nickel for the bottle, and you decide to throw it in the regular garbage. Well somebody got that five cents that you paid. You know, who is it? Is it the manufacturer or is it the retailer? You know? And it ends up being the manufacturer– they're the ones that collect it, so that's why a lot of the...when it first started, that's what happened, but then I guess people thought about it a while and that's why they're trying to get some of that money. Like when they passed the new bottle bill– on water bottles– the money that isn't given back, that would fund part of the recycling or something. That was new– people started catching on there's a lot of money out there that somebody's getting, for actually doing nothing.

ML: [Laughs]

MB: You know what I mean? So that's what happens with the bottle bill.

ML: Ok. So in terms of other recycling things in the city, what happens to all the paper, for instance? You mentioned that's a pretty simple–

MB: Yeah, the paper is a commodity where the city, I would say, makes money on it. You know, they sell it. I mean, one of the...back in the '90s, an Australian firm called Visy Paper, they proposed to the city– it was under Giuliani, I think, at the time– that they would build a plant down in Staten Island, very close to the landfill, and they would accept x amount of paper there, and they would make corrugated cardboard out of it. So they'd recycle it and put it back in the system. So, you know, they got some incentives I believe from the city. They ultimately built the plant, and they would accept it by barge. So it was a barge facility and a truck-delivered facility. So 59<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan– all of Manhattan paper goes to 59<sup>th</sup> Street Marine Transfer Station. It gets loaded into barges, those barges go out to Visy, and Visy takes care of it. Staten Island paper goes to Visy. Some Brooklyn districts go to Visy. The Bronx and Queens districts, they go to another paper recycler that pays us x amount of dollars. So, that's essentially how the paper goes and the other vendors– I know Visy makes corrugated cardboard, that's what they make out of the recycled paper and they take all the paper– mixed, you know, its mixed paper and all of that. It's usually, I think its roughly about 1,500 tons a day is collected– daily– in the city, six days a week, of paper.

ML: Wow.

MB: You know, and that's what happens to it. I mean, one of the issues and, I mean, it always happens I guess, is you get a lot of money per ton for paper, so they been catching some people stealing the paper that are on the street, actually, because the vans come by and grab some paper because they go somewhere to sell it.

ML: Oh!

MB: You know, once it's on the street it belongs to the department, so–

ML: So they are legitimately stealing?

MB: Right. Exactly.

ML: Huh. Um, so what happens with the plastic and, uh, glass then?

MB: Metal, plastic and glass. Well that's the other side of the recycling stream. That's all source-separated. So the paper goes out, and it goes in a separate truck, the metal, plastic, and glass goes in another truck. It gets delivered– I mean, they only collect, in New York City, number one and two plastic. I think they're expanding, and that's a function of the vendor they bring it to, that has to expand it to take those materials. But they separate at the facility– when it's delivered– the metal, and the metal makes money. I mean, I'm sure they make money. The glass gets separated into a separate stream for them. I don't believe there's a lot of outlets for glass anymore. When they first did recycling there was lots of outlets, you know– and I mentioned this– you had like 'glassphalt.' People were looking for alternative uses to use the glass again. So they came up. But then, other regulations came in place, so like, for instance glassphalt is DOT– Department of Transportation– they had their own recycling regulations put on them that their plant– their millings, they had to recycle ninety percent of their millings. So now they don't want– it was hard enough for them to recycle the ninety percent, and then they got to add glass to it now. You know, because it would weaken it, and they were just trying to figure out how they could even recycle the millings. So...you know, the uses, the ultimate uses, for glass have deteriorated. You know, there's not a definite, like, you can't say, well, glass makes this– it doesn't. There's always new things coming up because there's no– there's no end answer. Like for instance, paper, it's making corrugated cardboard.

ML: Mhmm.

MB: There's an answer. You know, they could take as much paper as they could get, and keep making it, you know? But on the glass side, its not. They tried alternatives to cover, for the landfills. They would want to use glass– we couldn't use it at Fresh Kills, it was a stability issue with the size of the equipment we had. But a lot of the smaller landfills might use it as some kind of benefit to their cover. It saves them a few dollars or whatever. But that's what happens to glass. The metal, like I said, that gets sold– that's always recyclable. And then the plastic...I mean, that's a light amount of material. It's not a–

ML: It's not that much.

MB: It's not, you know, volume-wise its a lot, but weight-wise it's very light. A plastic bottle that's empty, its very light. And, you know, they do one and two. There's outlets for them. I mean, there's loads of outlets for them. So, plastic gets used. You know, I think glass is the touchy point right now, whether it really gets recycled or not. You know?

ML: Is that why the bottle bill came about? As a way to give it back to manufacturers?

MB: Well that was one way, I mean, I don't know exactly how it came about, the bottle bill. I think it did force some recycling. I mean, because...it separates the actual material, you know? You have a certain type of material. Whereas let's face it, you have human error that's involved with the collection end of it. I mean, you have a little machine out there that takes bottles– it takes bottles. You can't stuff a kid's play set into the little thing whereas, if you left it in the street and the sanitation worker didn't realize that's not a number one, too, and he throws it in the thing, you'll have mixed bags of plastics. So in one way you get more pure material in the bottle bill that you may not get the other way.

ML: Ok, I think...I think that's all I have.

MB: Ok.

ML: So thank you, thank you very much.

MB: You're welcome.