

Interview with Frank Zito (FZ)
Interviewed by CO Olson (CO)
Sanitation-Freshkills Park Oral History Project
April 3, 2012 / Frank Zito's House, Staten Island, New York

[0:00:00.0]

CO: This is Christine Olson, I'm at Frank Zito's house to conduct an interview on April 3. It's around 10:15 in the morning, and here's Frank.

FZ: Good morning, my name is Frank Zito, I retired from the Department of Sanitation as a supervisor and a marine dispatcher and we're going to go over my career today.

CO: Great. Okay, so I'd like to start with just learning a little about you, if you wouldn't mind telling me where you were born and raised.

FZ: Oh, right here on Staten Island.

CO: Oh, great, oh, so you're a native Staten Islander.

FZ: Yes.

CO: And have you always lived, did you move around as a kid on Staten Island, or did you live...?

FZ: No not really. When I got married I moved into this neighborhood, and I've been in this same house since 1983.

CO: Wow, and what does your wife do?

FZ: My wife works for a construction company, Signature Construction in Brooklyn. By the Gowanus Canal, that's where her office is.

CO: Great, and do you have any children?

FZ: I have a son, who's 25 years old. He just returned from California, he was out there for his Master's degree and he went to the Academy of Arts University in San Francisco.

CO: Great, so I'm going to switch to talking about your career now. So, when you first started working for the DSNY what were the circumstances under which that happened?

FZ: I got hired as a sanitation worker in 1990, and I was stationed in East New York, in Brooklyn East 17. I did various jobs there, driving trucks and emptying trucks at the dumps, so I was pretty familiar with most of Brooklyn.

[0:01:59.5]

CO: And what motivated you to take the test and join the DSNY? I know that some people wait a really long time to get...

FZ: Well, I did because I joined the job at 34 years old. I was working for Manufacturer's Hanover Trust which became Chemical, which became Chase, so it was a very turbulent time for me in the banking industry. So I figured, "Let me take the sanitation test," which was a godsend because it had the twenty-year retirement.

CO: Yeah, and did you have to wait long before you were called, after you took the test?

FZ: I took the test and it was 6 years later that I got called. I thought the list had expired, but I was pretty lucky.

CO: Yeah, that's amazing. So you said that your first position was as a sanitation worker in Brooklyn, and then after that, how did you move through the department?

FZ: Well, I transferred to the Fresh Kills Landfill and in 1996 I was promoted to Supervisor. I was placed in the tower, and at the time no one even believed me when I told them that my job was going to be in Fresh Kills as a marine dispatcher working in the tower.

CO: Was that because people were unfamiliar with that position even existing, or just...?

FZ: Oh, definitely. I didn't even realize that they had this position within the Sanitation Department, it was fantastic!

CO: So you went straight from being a sanitation worker in Brooklyn to the marine dispatcher position, is that correct, or did you move...?

FZ: Oh, I worked in the landfill for a couple of years, for 4 years, as a super, a san worker working on the docks with the barges.

[0:04:01.4]

CO: Oh, I see. So you were already kind of familiar, a little bit, with that by then.

FZ: Yeah, oh definitely, definitely.

CO: Cool. So and you said that was in 1996?

FZ: Yes, I was promoted in '96.

CO: Okay. And when you changed jobs was there anything that you missed about being a san worker, or were you...?

FZ: I just enjoyed it because I worked in the banking industry, so I enjoyed being outside, and I enjoyed working on the docks; it was physical work. But then when I went into the tower as a dispatcher/supervisor, I didn't mind it at all because I had already worked 12 years in an office job, so I was back to the office once again.

CO: Uh-huh. And were there things that you were happy to leave behind when you moved into the tower, or were you...?

FZ: Not really. I was excited because the tower was a three story building that you had to walk up so you could hear people coming up the stairs and when you worked in the tower you knew someone was coming. But I worked in this three story tower with a huge antenna – a radio antenna – on top of it, that was like a magnet for when you had a thunderstorm. Yeah, it always knocked out the radio.

CO: Wow! And was there any training that the Department gave you to start that job?

FZ: Extensive training, it was nine weeks of training. I worked on each shift, evenings and day shift, with the supervisors for 2 weeks. And then I worked a week by myself, with someone looking over my shoulder, and then I went live after nine weeks of working in the tower.

CO: Wow, so it sounds like there were more experienced folks that you were able to learn from?

[0:06:05.0]

FZ: Oh, definitely. My coworkers, they were doing the job a long time and they were very knowledgeable with explaining to me about the tides, and this is something that was all new to me. But I learned from them how to work around the tides and things like that in the landfill.

CO: Cool. And were there pretty set protocols in place that you were brought into, to follow, or did you have to figure a lot of things out for yourself when you first started?

FZ: Oh no, everything-, we had forms on top of forms, checks on top of checks. Every time you moved a barge it was tracked, every time, you tracked the weather you tracked the wind speed, and the hourly windspeed and direction. Like I said, you tracked every tug that came into the landfill, what they brought in barge-wise, and what they went out with.

CO: Wow, and was there anything that you felt like, when you started, you had not been trained to do, or had not been prepared for?

FZ: Not at all.

CO: No surprises?

FZ: Not at all.

CO: That's great, that would be really stressful I can imagine. Were there any instances when you first started that there were any problems or mistakes, or things in the learning curve? Or was everything pretty well...?

FZ: The only thing that was frightening was when someone left. I used to try to get into work an hour ahead of time so I could go over what the previous dispatcher had done, and then I used to stay an hour later, after my shift, to go over what I had done with the supervisor coming on, to see if he would do anything differently.

[0:08:02.2]

CO: I see, oh that's great. Did you feel like, when you were in that position, there was anything that you were able to improve about the way that they were doing things? Or did you feel like you contributed any fresh insights?

FZ: Well basically, everything that I was taught was strictly to be adhered to as far as the forms and what they did. The only thing I brought to the job, I think, was just my attitude with the workers: with the people in the marine transfer stations, letting everyone know that I was on duty, and that type of thing.

CO: I see. Okay, so now we're going to move to the more day-to-day aspects of the job, once you were up and running. I was wondering if you could walk me through a day at work. I know that every day is different there, because of circumstances, but if you were to go in there this morning, what would a typical day be like?

FZ: Well, a typical day... Today's a beautiful day, so the weather would not be a factor. But the weather could be a factor when there's rain, when there's wind, when there's fog. All the elements that would affect the tug going, you'd have to be careful of. A typical day would be, like I said, just going in and saying hello to all the supervisors in the MTSs, letting them know that I was working on the job; the people in the landfill, letting them know that I was on the job; and that included the launch boat operators that worked in the landfill also.

[0:10:01.8]

CO: Okay, and then once you had made it known that you were there, what were you doing throughout the shift?

FZ: Well what I was doing, it was like a big crossword puzzle and you had eight hours to complete it. When you went in you would follow up on whatever the previous dispatcher was doing and you would plot out the course of the day: what MTSs needed barges, how you were going to get them there, what tugs were coming into the landfill and what they were going to leave with.

CO: I see, and was it all that immediate day-to-day management or were there also longer term systems or projects that you were responsible for?

FZ: The longer term projects would have been if there was a barge that was damaged that needed to go to the shipyard; we made arrangements on certain days to hire a tug to take the barge to the shipyard.

CO: I see. So you would fit that stuff in the interims between the other... Okay, and then, how long was a shift?

FZ: It was eight hours.

CO: Eight hours, Okay. And were there dispatchers in the tower around the clock, or was it a...?

FZ: Oh yes, it was 24/7. And like I said, once the person you relieved was gone, you were in the tower for eight hours on your own, so whatever decisions you made you had to live with.

CO: Wow. So that means that there were three shifts per day, is that correct?

FZ: Yes.

CO: Okay, and how many did you work per week? How many shifts?

FZ: You worked a forty hour week, and so you usually worked-. Well, you could work up to six days a week; sometimes when you worked a day off and also Sundays, so you would work Sundays once and awhile.

[0:12:09.4]

CO: Mmm-hmm. Now I know with the sanitation workers, their chart day, or their day off, is rotating. Is that also the case for you, in the tower?

FZ: Yes it was, for the officers. I'd just like to add that during this time period, I was like an extra officer in the tower so I would go out to all the MTSs. So I was very knowledgeable about all the different MTSs and their needs and whatnot, from working in them.¹

CO: Oh, that's great. Did you always work the same shifts? Or was it variable through the week?

FZ: No, I worked three shifts a week, and I worked in the entire five boroughs every week.

CO: I see. When you were doing the dispatching, just so I have this correct, you would work five days a week, or six if you wanted to get some time off later or get some overtime? And then when you'd go in would you always be at the same time of day? So for one week, would you always go in from 8 o'clock in the morning, or...?

FZ: It seemed to work out so that I used to work 3:00 to 11:00 the day before my day off and then I would work 11:00 to 7:00 the day after my day off. So actually, when I came home at 1:00 in the morning I went to bed and I had a day off, but I was going right back in for a night shift.

CO: Oh I see, Okay. And then what would you have to do to transition the shifts when a new person would come in?

[0:13:55.2]

FZ: Once your relief came you would basically just update them on what you had done in the past hour or two, as far as what was coming into the Kills and what you had going out.

CO: I see, and then did you take breaks during that eight hours? I imagine you must have.

FZ: We had a coffee pot and you brought whatever you had to eat, and basically once you were in the tower you were locked in, because you were listening to all different radios. You had the marine radio, which the Coast Guard monitored, you had the radio for the launch boat operators in Fresh Kills, you had the radio for the plant supervisors that knew what was going on within the plant, and you had Nextel radios for direct contact with the tugboats.

CO: Oh wow. So, I had some questions about the people you were working with. I know that you were the only dispatcher there at a time. Who was your immediate supervisor? Like, who did you answer to?

¹ The DSNY had three regular marine dispatchers, each of whom worked the same shift each of the five days they were scheduled. Frank and another supervisor were extras, or "fill-ins," meaning that they took over in the tower on the regular dispatchers' days off. The rest of the week, they would fill in as supervisors at various MTSs or the Barge Maintenance Unit. This was taxing because Frank's schedule and commute were never regular, but the familiarity he gained with the people and operations at each MTS helped him in his work in the tower.

FZ: Well my immediate supervisor would have been Eddie Olson, who ran the Marine Transportation Unit. Really I was on my own. I really didn't hear from anybody unless there was a problem.

CO: A problem, Okay. And did you have anybody working under you? Were you in a management position, or just coordinating with all of the...?

FZ: No, just coordinating with New York, with the office in Manhattan, with all the supervisors in the eight MTSSs, and with the supervisors that were working within the plant.

CO: Okay. I had some questions about organizations within the department. I understand that there are many, many unions represented in the DSNY, so which were you a part of?

[0:16:03.3]

FZ: I was a part of Local 444, the sanitation officers' union.

CO: Okay, and did that change when you switched the job, switched from being a san worker?

FZ: Yes, because the san worker was Local 813, the san workers' union.

CO: Okay, and were you very active in the union, in terms of organizing or anything?

FZ: Yes, when I first came on the job I was involved with the Columbia Association, and they were very active in the Democratic Party and we went around to various fundraisers, election fundraisers.

CO: Okay, and I was wondering if you could describe what the Columbia Association is, just for the...?

FZ: The Columbia Association is the organization of Italians and they do various charity works. One of them was Kennedy Airport, for the kids, the children; they would run something for them.

CO: I see, and how did you join the Association, was that early on in your career?

FZ: Oh, well yes. When you came on the job all the associations would come and talk. But that's not the only one I was involved with because I was involved with the Holy Name and the Emerald Society also.

CO: Oh, okay, and what are those?

FZ: The Emerald Society is the Irish Americans, and the Holy Name is the Catholic Americans.

CO: Okay, great. And did you feel like your membership in these associations made your work more enjoyable?

FZ: I got to meet people within the Department, so in that respect they were really good.

[0:17:59.9]

CO: Ah, uh-huh. I was wondering about other social aspects of the job: were there people in the Department that you became friends with outside of work, or that you would see socially during your free time?

FZ: Well not really because I was so involved with different shifts. And I was really running ragged when I first came on as a supervisor, so I didn't have much free time and any free time that I did have was spent with my son and his schoolwork.

CO: Yeah, I see. I was also kind of wondering if there was any camaraderie amongst the many people who were working out at the landfill, because I know it's kind of isolated from the rest of the Department.

FZ: Well when I worked in the tower, like I said, the first thing I did when I went to work was find out who was working that day, and just say hello. I just said hello to everybody because you never knew, within the eight-hour shift, who you were going to have to touch base with. So I wanted to make sure I knew who was on, where they were working, and also [let them know] that I was up in the tower.

CO: Got it. And then I kind of wanted to talk about the equipment and the different kinds of vessels and things that you were in charge of. I was wondering if you wouldn't mind running down all the different types of boats that were involved in the operations?

FZ: Well, in the operation we had over one-hundred-twenty barges that we used to go out and collect the garbage in, and Fresh Kills was where we offloaded those barges. We had five tugboats that were running for us; every shift, there were five different tugs. And we had launch boats, which were sweepers to clean any garbage that was in the water, and we had a boom boat that used to go out and open the boom so that the ships could come in.

[0:20:17.0]

CO: Yeah. That's five different tugs, so in terms of the people there're five different tug captains...

FZ: Yeah, there's a captain and a mate on each tug.

CO: Uh-huh, a mate on each tug...

FZ: And then, like I said, you have your launch boat operators, you had your supervisors, and your superintendent that ran the plants. There were two plants in the landfill, Plant 1 and Plant 2, so that structure was the same. And then you had your san workers.

CO: Got it. How many of each of these vessels were on water at any given time, would you say?

FZ: Well, like I said, the five tugboats were always operating, and then you had a sweeper in Plant 1, you had a sweeper in Plant 2, and you had a sweeper outside in the boom boat.

CO: Okay got it, that's quite a few. One hundred and twenty barges is quite a few barges. Were they all in circulation all the time, or did you have some of them stored somewhere for...

FZ: Oh well, we had a lot of them stored at Fresh Kills and 52nd Street in Brooklyn, our Barge Maintenance Unit; we used to leave a lot of barges stored there. At the beginning of the shift you had to make sure you had all your barges, and at the end of the shift also, so we had the tracking down to a science as far as the tug logs, and what the tug boats took in and out.

CO: Right, okay. So when you'd come in the morning each MTS would have some number of barges that were some percentage full, you'd have barges probably en route going to replace those, and then you'd have barges at Fresh Kills also being unloaded, is that...?

[0:22:18.4]

FZ: That's correct. We had a condition sheet for the eight MTSs and that was updated three times a day with what barges they had, if they were loaded, and when they were going to get ready to sail those barges.

CO: Got it. And then, what kind of equipment was used to unload the barges at Fresh Kills?

FZ: Oh we had these cranes, enormous cranes that would unload the barges.

CO: Okay, and were those managed by the plant manager or plant supervisors? Or was it...?

FZ: The superintendent oversaw all the work in the plants.

CO: Uh-huh.

FZ: So he was well aware when they had a problem with the cranes, or if there was a problem with any of the equipment that they used, like the trucks that used to empty the garbage out up on the hill.

CO: Yeah. And so when the barges were docked at the plant you were out, basically, until they needed you to take them out again? Or I mean, you would stay in touch but...

FZ: We would keep in touch because we had a shifting tug in Fresh Kills, so we had to set up the plants with the necessary barges for them to work.

CO: Got it. Okay, and you've already mentioned the many different radios that you used, and different people that you were in communication with, and I was just wondering: in addition to the tug operators, the plant supers, the supervisors at the MTSs, and launch boat operators...

FZ: Yes.

CO: Those were the people that you were...?

FZ: Right.

[0:24:19.6]

CO: Okay, great. And other than radio, what methods of communication were you using?

FZ: Well, the telephone. Up in the tower, you were by yourself up there so you had to make sure that, like I said, you knew who was working in all the MTSs, and you'd want to touch base with them to see what their conditions were, let them know when the tug was going to arrive, and those types of things. If they needed your help, you wanted to make sure that they knew that you would help them in any way you could.

CO: Got it. And how was the paperwork sent back and forth, was that by fax or by email? You were saying that the MTS would send you a condition update and...

FZ: Oh no, that was strictly by phone.

CO: Oh that was all verbal.

FZ: Yes, that was verbal.

CO: Oh I see, great. Do you know if any of that has changed since you left? Do you know if more is being done by email or by internet in any way?

FZ: Well since I left, you know, I was involved in uh, the last barge going to Fresh Kills. So as far as Fresh Kills, you know they closed the place down for garbage. So I was involved with that, and the most memorable day that I had as a marine dispatcher was when Captain Jerry Joyce on the James Turecamo brought the last garbage barge into Fresh Kills from North Shore, so now the Landfill is inactive as far as garbage.

[0:26:10.9]

CO: Right, Okay. So were there certain people that you would have to talk with more frequently during the day than others? Were there some people that you would just check in with at the beginning, check in with when you left, and then other people you were constantly...?

FZ: Well, the marine transfer stations, like I said, we did a check three times a day to see what their conditions were. We kept touch with the tugs constantly. Remember, the trip from North Shore to Fresh Kills took six hours. So you would talk to the tug captain when he left and then maybe you just touch base with him on his way down, and an hour or two before he reached the landfill to make sure everything was going well.

CO: Got it. You said that it was sort of like a big crossword puzzle, keeping track of everything. I was wondering if there was any sorts of mental checklists, or things that you were constantly... I know when I did – this is a totally different kind of logistics – somebody would come and say “I need this box to go out today,” and then I would know there were all these things that would have to happen in order for that to happen, and I’d kind of run down “are there the people in the warehouse, what about this, what about this?” I was wondering if you had any kind of similar thing, like what were the tides...?

FZ: Well, just when you thought things were going well you’d get a call from the tugboat saying there was a mechanical problem, whether he’d have to be replaced with another tug, how long that was going to take. So you had a reroute your-, start from scratch rather. You always had to have a plan B for every tug that was out there and every scenario that occurred.

[0:28:11.9]

CO: I see. Were there tugs that you could use that could get somewhere more quickly? Or was it going to be another six hours if something like that happened?

FZ: Well, if you had to replace a tug usually they called their office when they knew it was a big problem. Most of the time mechanical problems on the tug could be solved within the hour. When they had larger problems, like a clogged oil filter, something stuck in the wheel – maybe a rope or something – and they had replace the whole tug, then they basically took care of that. They would call you and say, “Listen, we’re going to be down for the rest of the day and we have another tug coming to replace us.”

CO: Got it. How many barges were at an MTS at a given time?

FZ: Well, every MTS had a different set of rules as far as what they could store and what you could keep there. I think the most barges we could store was at Greenpoint because they had a section called Newtown Creek where we could store barges.

CO: Right, okay. I have a question about the MTS's barges: would they get a full set of light barges at once and then you would take a full set of heavy barges from them? Or were they [replaced] one-by-one as needed?

[0:30:01.3]

FZ: No because the only MTSs that couldn't shift on their own – that needed a tug assist – was the Southwest MTS in Brooklyn, which was in the shadow of Verrazano Narrows Bridge. Because the current was very strong there, they would use a shifting tug to help them shift. Also, the 91st Street MTS, the East 91st Street: we would use a tug to shift them because at the end of the day – they only had the one shift, a day shift – we would run up a crew to go and shift the barges.

CO: Uh-huh, I see. So they would be all ready for the morning then?

FZ: Yes, yes.

CO: Okay. How long would it take to fill up the barges at an MTS? Did that vary depending on the...?

FZ: It varied. The South Bronx MTS and the North Shore MTS were very busy so you would go through a barge or two a shift.

CO: Oh wow.

FZ: Yeah, those two were very busy.

CO: I see. Was there a flow, like you would know “at this MTS, in this many hours they're going to go through three barges, in this many hours they're going to...” or was that something that was always changing?

FZ: Well you would know that, like North Shore and the South Bronx would go through barges constantly. The [tug]boat could carry up to four barges so you would go up there and leave two barges at the South Bronx and two barges at North Shore, and then pick up four full barges and come back to Fresh Kills. That was a six-hour trip to, and a six-hour trip from those MTSs, so you knew that when that tug left the landfill it had better have the right amount of barges to go up there, and you certainly would've made sure that you had the room for the barges.

[0:32:25.7]

CO: Uh-huh, so for those MTSs you'd almost always have barges coming and going constantly in a shift because it's six hours' transit, right? So you'd have to think ahead: "in six hours they're going to need this..."

FZ: And over in Greenpoint they had room to store barges so it wasn't that critical if you made a mistake and brought them one too many barges or whatever.

CO: You could bring it and stash it in Newtown Creek? And were those barges in Newtown Creek, were those ever used for other MTSs as well, or was that just a resting place in case you needed something quick?

FZ: Basically, you could use the barges. We had the place at 52nd Street in Brooklyn and that could service 91st Street on the east side of Manhattan, and that could service Hamilton Avenue and Greenpoint also, if you needed something really quick.

CO: I see. Okay, great. How many barges would be at Fresh Kills at any given time?

FZ: Oh, at Fresh Kills, we stored barges on the West Catwalk. Fresh Kills was basically where we kept the bulk of the barges because we had a lot of storage area on the West Catwalk.

[0:33:57.8]

CO: Okay, and then what about full barges being unloaded?

FZ: Same thing. At Fresh Kills we would store the full barges. Sometimes the West Catwalk was loaded up with barges; you'd have maybe twenty loaded barges out there at Fresh Kills, all waiting to be offloaded.

CO: Oh wow, Okay, so that was because they just couldn't be offloaded as fast as they were coming in?

FZ: You might've had to wait for the super boom. Remember I told you about the super boom? That ran with the tides, and that was to contain the garbage from flowing out of the landfill, so there might be times when you had to wait six hours before that super boom opened and you could get those loaded barges inside.

CO: I see, okay. Would there be any problem getting empty barges out if that happened, as well?

FZ: Most of the time there was enough room on the West Catwalk that didn't interfere with the opening and the closing of the super boom, so a tug could come in, drop the four loaded barges that he was carrying, and move away with four light barges without the super boom ever opening.

CO: I see. And then once it opened – once it was able to be opened – you would coordinate with the launch boat operators, and the shifting tug?

FZ: Oh we had to shift; we would coordinate with the shifting tug to bring in all heavy barges and set up all the pads and landfill, and bring out all the empty barges.

CO: Wow, yeah. And so there are, I recall there are three pads?

FZ: There are four pads, so two in each plant.

CO: Got it, got it. And how long would it take for a barge to be unloaded at the plant once it was there?

FZ: At the plant, on an eight-hour shift they did three barges.

CO: Oh, Okay.

[0:35:57.1]

FZ: So you had to make sure that you were set up for each shift and you had to anticipate what you needed for the following shift.

CO: Yeah, it's almost like a chess game; you have to be so many steps ahead in your mind.

FZ: And then, you had to worry about the super boom and getting the barges in and out in enough time. You have to remember one thing as far as moving these barges: it's not like a truck, where you get in the truck and you move it and it's no problem. With these barges, it could take a half an hour up to an hour just to move the barges from the plants to outside the plant.

CO: Wow, and how far is that in terms of distance? Just to get a sense...

FZ: I don't know, maybe two-hundred yards? From the plant – from the pads – to outside, to the West Catwalk.

CO: So definitely well under a mile; that's not very far.

FZ: Yes, yes.

CO: Okay, cool. I was wondering if we could go over some of the terminology that we discussed in the last meeting. I think it would be nice to have a record of this. So, we've been using the terms "light" and "heavy" already, but I was wondering if you could give a description of those, or a definition.

FZ: Well, a “light” barge is an empty barge, and a “heavy” barge is a full barge of garbage, which was about, on average, six-hundred-twenty tons.

[0:38:03.8]

CO: Wow. So that’s actually not that much compared to what a truck can carry, correct? Or, it’s my understanding that the collection trucks can carry more than that?

FZ: No, well, the collection trucks, probably on average fifteen tons.

CO: Oh Okay, I see. So that’s quite a bit.

FZ: Yeah, the barge is six-hundred-twenty tons.

CO: Right, okay. Yeah, so that’s quite a bit more. And then I was wondering if you could define “staging.”

FZ: Well, “staging” is just an area that you kept the barges in. Whether it be the light barges or the heavy barges, the staging area was just a spot, either it would be on the West Catwalk or we had staging areas within the plant where the heavy boats and the light boats were kept.

CO: I see. And then “shifting,” we’ve already used that term but I was wondering if you could describe that term, “shifting the barges.”

FZ: Shifting the barges at most of the MTSs could be done by the san workers there. They would use the wench lines to shift the barges out of the slips and to move them around outside to store them. That was a very lengthy process, to do that, and also it was a very dangerous process. If you were fighting the weather and the elements at the same time – in the wintertime, if it were raining – it was quite a dangerous thing to do.

CO: I see. And that’s why the Brooklyn MTS required a tug? Assistance?

FZ: Yes, that MTS required a tug because, like I said, the currents were very strong and if a boat got away on the san workers, then we’d be in trouble.

[0:40:08.8]

CO: Yeah, clearly. And then, what is “BWD?”

FZ: The Bureau of Waste Disposal.

CO: Okay, and that was what you were a part of when you were a dispatcher?

FZ: Yes, that is right.

CO: Okay, and what about “BCC?”

FZ: The Bureau of Cleaning and Collection.

CO: Okay, and that’s who the MTSs fell under? Or were the MTSs part of BWD?

FZ: No, the Bureau of Cleaning and Collection are the trucks that were dumping at the MTSs.

CO: Oh Okay, but the MTS is BWD?

FZ: Yes.

CO: Oh okay, that’s interesting, I didn’t know that.

FZ: Down at Fresh Kills they have the waste disposal building that they dump in, and all of the waste disposal sites that we use today are under BWD.

CO: Got it. Okay, and then what about BMU?

FZ: That’s the Barge Maintenance Unit. That used to be in Brooklyn, at 52nd Street. That was a pretty elite group of guys that used to: put together the eyes on the lines; they would be called if there was an emergency to maybe stop a leak in a barge; put tires on the barges; and maintain the barges at the Barge Maintenance Unit. They would also be called as extra men to shift barges, so that group was pretty much all over the place.

CO: Yeah. That’s critical though, that’s really important. And then, “MTS,” we’ve been using a lot but if you wouldn’t mind just to...

FZ: That’s the marine transfer station.

[0:42:06.8]

CO: Right, Okay. And its my understanding that there’s only one of those operational right now. Is that correct?

FZ: Yes, that’s the 59th Street MTS. It’s operational for paper.

CO: Got it.

FZ: You know, that MTS underwent a transition because there was a time when, in the slip, you could fit two barges and one barge would load garbage and one barge would would load paper.

CO: Okay. And I'm sorry, could you define slip for me? I've not heard of that one.

FZ: At the marine transfer station the slip was where you could put the barge in and most places would hold up to two barges per slip.

CO: Okay. What is the difference between a line tug and a shifting tug?

FZ: The shifting tugs were quite a bit smaller than the line tugs and those tugs were just used to shift barges. The line tugs would be the tugs that serviced North Shore, the South Bronx, Brooklyn, and Manhattan.

CO: Okay, got it. What is the boom, or the super boom? Are those the same thing? Or are the boom and the super boom different?

FZ: In Fresh Kills and also at all the MTSs, we had booms. Floatable booms so that garbage wouldn't escape: from the MTSs, from the slips where they were loading garbage; and down in Fresh Kills they had booms which were containment so no garbage would go out into the Kill van Kull.

[0:44:03.6]

CO: Got it. Okay, and then the super boom was a...

FZ: That was a big mechanical boom that, in a sense, was the same principle as the flexible booms but it was massive. It had turbines that opened and closed the boom and it was all mechanical, run by the dispatcher in the tower. So you were in charge of opening and closing that boom.

CO: Oh wow, okay. How long would it take to get it open?

FZ: It could take a few minutes to open the boom, and the same thing on closing. It depends on when you opened the boom, and the currents that you were dealing with. Most of the time it would take a few minutes to open and close the boom.

CO: And that had to be opened and closed at low tide? Or at high tide?

FZ: It had to be closed- Well you didn't want garbage leaving the landfill, so on low tide you didn't want to open that boom because that's when the garbage could leave the landfill.

CO: Because the water is going out?

FZ: Right, the water's going out, so that was when it was closed. On high tide, that's when you could open the boom.

CO: I see, and the sweeper boat?

FZ: The sweeper boat, within the plant, they usually stayed around the pads in case any garbage fell from the cranes into the water. Out in the boom area, the outer area of the landfill, that's where they opened and closed the outer boom and they swept it. They used to sweep the boom before the opening and they used to sweep before the super boom opened.

[0:46:15.0]

CO: Mm-hmm, okay. So you would have to stay in touch with them to let them know when you were going to be bringing barges in and opening...

FZ: Oh yeah, I would stay in touch with them to let them know when a boat was going to be entering the landfill. And because this was all a process, when a boat was going to come into the landfill you knew up to a half an hour or so, or an hour before the boat was going to come into the landfill because you had to allow time for those fellows to get on their boom boat and go out there and open up the boom for the tug to come in.

CO: Got it, okay. And then the net team, that was one.

FZ: We had a net team that was comprised of san workers that would go and assist different MTSs that maybe didn't have enough men to shift a barge. We would coordinate with the net team when we were going to shift a barge, and what MTSs for them to go to.

CO: Okay, and for those san workers on the net team, was that their full-time [job]? That was what they were always doing, or were they also doing collections and other stuff?

FZ: Well, no, they were assigned to certain MTSs and then they had extra men there. That would comprise the net team.

CO: Okay. I know that the department worked with a few third-party companies in all of this, and I was wondering if you could tell me about which companies were involved and what they were in charge of? Like I know the tug boats...

FZ: Yeah, the tug boats were one company that was outside of the Sanitation Department. The other companies would be for if you had a problem: maybe with oil in the water, you would call a company for containment and cleanup of the oil. And then they had companies assigned to get in touch with, should they have an emergency.

[0:48:31.6]

CO: Okay and what was the company that owned and operated the tugboats?

FZ: We used a company, Moran Towing.² They're pretty popular in the New York area.

CO: Oh, Okay. And can you spell that for me?

FZ: It's M-O-R-A-N.

CO: Oh okay. That's what I thought, I just wanted to make sure. And then as far as geography goes – I've been studying the map of the harbor quite a bit recently because of all of this – I was wondering if you could just outline for me again the location of all of the MTSs.

FZ: Okay. We had North Shore in Queens, and the South Bronx. In Manhattan you had East 91st Street, on the west side you had West 135th Street and West 59th Street. In Brooklyn, you had Greenpoint, there was an MTS located in Hamilton, the Southwest MTS, and the Barge Maintenance Unit. As far as landmarks, like you were saying, you got to learn- Naturally you grew up knowing different places on the map, but the tugboat operator used to tell you he was at Grant's Tomb when he was approaching 135th Street. When the tug was approaching 59th St. they would tell you they're at the Intrepid, the Statue of Liberty was another landmark, the Verrazano Bridge was another landmark. The boat that used to go to the South Bronx and North Shore used to go through a place called Hell's Gate, so that was another landmark.

[0:50:29.7]

CO: Oh that's interesting. I know that the trip to the South Bronx required timing with the tides, could you explain that a little bit?

FZ: Well, Hell's Gate was a narrow opening for the tug to go in and the current is very strong.³ So that the boat could make it through Hell's Gate, you had to time it with the tide, going with the tide. That's one [tug] that you always had to keep on tide; we called it the gate boat. You always had to keep that on tide because if he was off he might need an assist to get through there; you might need two tugs to take that tow through, to get into that area.

CO: And it would have to go in with the "coming-in" tide or the "leaving" tide?

FZ: Yeah, the same thing. You would have to know the high tide so he could get up there, and you'd have to know the low tide for him to come back out.

CO: Oh okay. So would the tugs have to hang out there in between?

² 2015 Richmond Terrace, Staten Island, New York 10302, www.morantug.com

³ Hell Gate is located in the East River between Astoria, Queens and Randall's Island.

[0:52:03.3]

FZ: The way I thought of it is like a big hourglass. So when you turn the hourglass you could see all the water coming down and that would be your high tide. When you turned it back over you could see the-. That's how I always looked at the tides, it's like an hourglass.

CO: I see. So would it be the ideal scenario to have it going through the Hell Gate like right at the end of high tide, right when they were about to switch, so that you could get out?

FZ: No, just as long as he was running with the tide, just as long as he wasn't going against the tide.

CO: I see.

FZ: You know.

CO: Right. Alright, I was wondering if there are any significant changes over time, like through the course of your career at the DSNY? I know you were after this, but a lot of the workers in last year's interviews noted when women came on the job, that really changed things for them. Or I know, again that came into this position after the Woodbridge Consent Order, but I know that changed a lot of things at Fresh Kills. Was there anything similar to that in magnitude, or were things pretty constant?

FZ: No, not really. When I worked in Brooklyn, when I first started on the job, I worked with a woman on the truck. No one wanted to go out and work with her because they told me, "you either you work with her or you go home," but I didn't even mind because she did her job. She was very good, the only thing that was difficult for her was driving so I would have to get out of the truck and help her when it came to an intersection, to drive the truck. Otherwise we did good, we had a blast.

[0:54:01.7]

CO: Oh good. And was there anything in the marine transport operations, or changes that affected your job as a dispatcher through the time that you were at Fresh Kills?

FZ: Well, the only thing was the closing of the landfill, naturally. I went to work in Manhattan after that.

CO: How long was that in the works? How long did that transition take to closing, did you know, like, a year in advance that it was going to close?

FZ: Oh, yeah. We knew that the landfill was [scheduled to close] in 2001. And the only other significant thing that I want to tell you is what happened to me on 9/11.

CO: Right.

FZ: You know, witnessing the destruction of the buildings and going out to Fresh Kills the next day and working at the landfill, after 9/11...

CO: Okay, I actually have a number of questions about 9/11 and maybe this is a good time to skip ahead [to those]. If any of this makes you uncomfortable or you prefer not to talk about it, just ask me to move on. It's my understanding that when 9/11 happened you were working in Manhattan, correct?

FZ: Yes I was.

CO: Okay, and how long had you been working in Manhattan at that point?

FZ: I went to Manhattan in 2000, so I was there a year.

CO: Okay, and what exactly was your role in the clean up effort when they moved you back out to Fresh Kills?

FZ: Well, in Fresh Kills they started taking a lot of debris by barge. Naturally, I had the expertise in the barges and I knew all of the different tugboat operators, so it really helped as far as setting up the barges again, you know?

[0:56:02.7]

CO: Yeah, and how quickly was Fresh Kills reopened after 9/11?

FZ: Oh, the next day.

CO: Oh, immediately. Oh, okay, wow.

FZ: Yeah, the next day.

CO: Wow. So within twenty-four hours you were in the tower?

FZ: No, I was working in Manhattan at that time, so one day I was working in Manhattan and the next day I was back out at Fresh Kills.

CO: Wow, wow. That's...

FZ: But Fresh Kills had [only] been closed since March, so they were, how can I say it, they were prepared to take all of this debris.

CO: And what MTSs were they using for that?

FZ: Well actually, they were using 59th Street, they were using Hamilton, and they had set up a dock by the Heliport on the West Side of Manhattan, downtown, they actually built a dock to load some of the steel beams and whatnot that they had.

CO: How long did it take to do that?

FZ: I don't know, I can't tell you exactly how long it took for them to build that dock, but I know we were immediately taking-. In fact, it seemed like people were just scrambling then, to clean up that area. We had barges being loaded with cars that still had gasoline in them, and they were loading steel beams into barges, and everybody had to finally get on the same page and say, "You know, we can't take this type of material in a barge."

CO: Yeah, that's obviously quite dangerous.

[0:58:01.1]

FZ: Yeah. Yeah, so...

CO: So there was sort of an immediate reaction, and then there were administrative processes that followed organize it a little better, is that correct?

FZ: Mm-hmm.

CO: Okay. Were you involved in any of that planning, or were you just back out at the tower?

FZ: Oh everything in the landfill, as far as the debris coming in, the tracking of the barges, the tonnage that we were taking into the landfill, that type of thing.

CO: Were you also still in charge of your regular duties at that time, or were you 100% on the 9/11 cleanup at that point? Because I know collection continued...

FZ: Yeah, the people that worked in the landfill were strictly [working on] the cleanup. We had other people, supervisors out in the field that were working with the private places to bring the garbage.

CO: I see, okay. And then did the DSNY have to bring on additional marine dispatchers, because at that point I don't know what your other...

FZ: No. Basically, whoever worked in the landfill, we were working twelve-hour shifts. We weren't too far, as far as having somebody that knew marine transportation, that could handle it.

CO: Yeah, it seems in some ways the timing was – this is a bad thing to say, but you know – it was kind of serendipitous that it happened at that time because there were people still in the Department who knew how to do this stuff.

[1:00:06.2]

FZ: Yeah, everybody. There were tractor operators that worked in the landfill that had to be-. I believe they called a lot of guys back to work for that. There were crane operators, I mean the department went into full swing down in the landfill.

CO: Yeah, it's incredible, I was listening to an interview with Marty Bellew about that, that had taken place a couple years ago, and it sounds like it was amazing how quickly you guys were able to mobilize and really get everything going.

FZ: Yeah, we just did our job down there, you know. I mean, naturally you're thinking about what was going on, but we just organized the cleanup and moved as quickly as we could down there.

CO: Did you have to reopen contracts with all the tugboat operators to get that, or were they kind of...?

FZ: No, because at that time we still had a tug that was operating at 59th Street. It was easy enough just to call Moran and say, "We need another tug for this operation."

CO: Right, and they're a local company so obviously they were aware of the situation. That was kind of the extent of my questioning about 9/11, unless there's anything else that you would like to add, or thoughts that you had that I haven't touched on?

FZ: No that's about it. That's about it.

CO: I mean was it hard, was it hard to stay in the game with all the trauma?

[1:01:46.8]

FZ: Well 9/11, you know, I witnessed it downtown. I witnessed people that were coming from downtown, uptown, covered with debris. And I witnessed going out to the landfill and seeing all the vehicles, the police and fire department vehicles that were-. You've got to remember, we had taken a lot of vehicles in the landfill and separated them. And the debris, I remember after a week or so going up on the mountain and looking at this debris, and I just couldn't fathom-, you

couldn't recognize a single thing. I thought I was going to see desks and office furniture, but you went up there and you couldn't recognize anything.

CO: Was it because it was all burnt? Or, what was...?

FZ: It just was pulverized, you know? And like I said, you couldn't recognize a thing.

CO: Wow, that's amazing. How much space did it take? It...massive, right?

FZ: It was just incredible, yeah it was incredible driving around and seeing the rubble. That they were once the buildings and now they were just piles of rubble in the landfill.

CO: That's amazing.

FZ: Also, they had cleared out downtown as far as the vehicles in the area of the World Trade Center, and all of those vehicles came to Staten Island.

CO: Yeah, I see.

FZ: So we had those on Staten Island.

CO: I see. Well, my next series of questions has to do with the kinds of problems and issues, and confounding circumstances that you had, and I'm wondering if maybe now would might be a good time to take a little break and have a drink of water.

FZ: Yes.

CO: Okay, great.

FZ: Thank you.

[1:04:08.7]

CO: Okay, so we're back after a short break. So like I said, this next line of questioning is going to be about the sorts of confounding circumstances that might arise. The first set of questions I have is about human error. With so many complicated procedures and so many people involved, it's sort of inevitable that somebody is going to make a mistake at some point. So, I was wondering what kinds of mistakes were most common, from you or from other people that you were coordinating with?

FZ: We didn't really have mistakes. What we had were weather issues and mechanical issues, like I said, with the tug. If you got through your shift without too much occurring and the phones weren't ringing, then you did your job for the eight hours.

CO: I see, got it. Okay, I was wondering if there were any consequences if you were to make a mistake too many times, or if you had any kind of leeway for things that might go wrong, you know, things under your control that...

FZ: Well, there wasn't really that much room for error. Like I said, once your gate boat left the landfill he had to have the right number of barges to go up to Queens or the Bronx, a six-hour trip. There wasn't really a lot of room for error as far as bringing down what was loaded to the landfill, because you had to make your quota of boats. You had to have enough barges rather, for the workforce in Fresh Kills, because the consequences of you not bringing down what you needed, or making that circle and bringing down the heavy boats, was that you weren't going to have enough for the shift. Then they would have a problem, if they had so many guys coming into work and you didn't have the boats for them to work on.

[1:06:29.1]

CO: I see, I see. Alright, as far as weather is concerned: what weather conditions caused the greatest problems, would you say?

FZ: The greatest problems were caused by fog. The fog was different – when they say “patchy fog,” it could be foggy down in Fresh Kills and clear as a bell in Brooklyn, or it could be foggy in Manhattan and clear as a bell on Staten Island – so you had to deal with whatever you could at the time. But once you had fog and the barges were, so to speak, “socked in,” the coast guard would step in and tell you that was enough, nothing was going to be able to move until the fog lifted.

CO: Oh, and then what would happen? Would they have to just drop anchor and wait?

FZ: Yes, they would have to tie up wherever they could. Sometimes they would call you and say, “You know, if I left the landfill maybe I could make it to Brooklyn and then I'll stay in Brooklyn until the fog lifts, or until its safe to move again.” Another thing was wind because when the barges left the landfill, if there was thirty mile-an-hour winds these tug captains didn't want to go with four light barges. You've got to remember, when the barges are empty they sit up higher in the water, so they're affected by the wind. Not so much when they're loaded; then they sit lower in the water and the tugs can take them when there's thirty mile-an-hour wind.

[1:08:26.1]

CO: I see. Obviously inclement weather is sort of just a fact of life here – we don't live in Southern California – we have wind and fog and rain, and snow, and I was wondering: were

there back-up systems or protocols in place to deal with it? Or it was just that you had to take it as it came?

FZ: No, you took it as it came, day by day. If there was fog and the tugs weren't running for a couple of hours – and most of the time it was that way, when there was fog the tugs wouldn't run for hours – as soon as that fog lifted you had to know where you needed boats. You had to hire tugs; it was a scramble to hire additional tugs and get them in the spots where you needed them.

CO: I see. What kind of weather reports were you checking? Were you checking those constantly through the day? Or was it the kind of thing where...?

FZ: We had the most excellent weather reports you can get because we had the Coast Guard, the weather station, so you knew exactly what was coming and what was happening. Plus, like I told you, we checked the weather every hour on the hour. You wrote down where the wind was coming from and how many miles-an-hour the wind was circulating.

CO: I see, I see. Was there anything that you could do if you knew, like, "Okay, these next three days are going to be stormy, that's in the forecast?" Were there things you could do prepare for that? Or would you just have to deal with it at the moment?

[1:10:10.6]

FZ: Well, you know what? You went in on your eight-hour shift and when the guy left ahead of you, you were on your own. Whether you had to hire tugs, whether you might have to pull a tug from one place to another, that was all up to you. As long as you got your boats into the landfill they didn't really care how you did it – just get it done.

CO: I see, so the bottom line is to make sure there are always heavy barges in the landfill and always light barges at the MTSSs.

FZ: Because the worst thing that could happen was if BCC, Cleaning and Collection, wouldn't be able to empty their trucks. Then they wouldn't be able to get set up for the next shift, so you always wanted to minimize delays in the marine transfer stations.

CO: Yeah, I've heard stories of long lines and things of that nature. Would they be able to continue collecting if there was a delay? Or would they have to stop everything in BCC?

FZ: Well if you ran out of trucks out in the field, I don't know how they would account for that. But like I said, most of the time it was just a matter of maybe hiring an additional tug to go to different locations and clear up the backlog. I mean, where you normally had five tugs running, you could have up to eight tugs. So it got very hectic. It got very hectic up there.

CO: Yeah, I'm sure. And Moran was always prepared to be able to supply you with additional tugs if you needed them?

FZ: Well we had a contract where they had up to three hours, for any type of delay, for them to replace a boat, or if we hired a boat they would give you a three-hour window.

CO: Oh okay, got it. It's like the cable guy.

[1:12:24.4]

FZ: Yeah, yeah. But there was no guarantee that even that three-hour window... Like I said, after a fog condition we weren't the only ones looking to hire boats – there are private people out there looking, that Moran deals with – and you just had to scramble after that. Whatever currents there were, you had to deal with at the time.

CO: Yeah, yeah.

FZ: There were mechanical breakdowns where you had to hire tugs, or there may have been, in the landfill, a problem with cranes. You dealt with every situation that arose, you know?

CO: And I'm sure it was never just one situation at a time either. It's like, there's a breakdown here and there's fog over here, and there's...

FZ: Right! Like I said, no matter what, you always had a plan B because you didn't know what was going to happen next.

CO: Yeah, okay. And then I was wondering, was the Coast Guard report also giving you the information about the tides, or was that [from somewhere else]?

FZ: No, we had a tide book that Moran put out that gave you the tides. And on our master sheet we always had the tides written down, the highs and the lows, and when you could open and close the super boom. We had a log [that showed] when the super boom was open and the time it closed, so everything was under watch. We had cameras out on the West Catwalk for when the tugs came in and what barges they took out, and you could see what was on the Catwalk. That was collected on-, I'm pretty sure whenever the tape ran out, whether that was on a twenty-four hour basis, or what...

[1:14:34.4]

CO: I see, wow. What about the Coast Guard? I know you mentioned that they could make a call on the weather or things like that. Are there other ways that they could interfere with the operations?

FZ: Yes. The Coast Guard could pull inspection on a tug at any given time. The tug would call you and say, "Listen, the Coast Guard just boarded the vessel and they're going to be a couple hours." They'll go from head to toe and inspect everything on that tug, so that might delay whatever your plans were. The tug might be delayed for an hour or two.

CO: I see. And what were they inspecting for? Do you know?

FZ: Oh, just like a car inspection. They would go through everything, they would go through the engine room. I guess for safety issues.

CO: Yeah, I see. And did you have to stay in touch with the coast guard throughout, to let them know what you were doing?

[1:15:58.2]

FZ: If you had a problem, such as an oil spill, you had to report it to the Coast Guard. If you had a problem with the tug, naturally they would report it first, you know, if there was a fire on a tug or if they had security zones set up too. After 9/11 they had security zones set up, and I believe they had security zones set up prior to 9/11 where they could freeze the zone and whatever tugs were in that area would get inspected.

CO: I see. But every time you sent a vessel out you didn't have to alert the Coast Guard, "Okay, I'm sending out this many tugs, this is..."

FZ: No, we only alerted the Coast Guard if there was an issue, with oil in the water or-, that's about it.

CO: Okay, great. And were there ever other kinds of encounters with law enforcement that you had? Other offices, like the NYPD?

FZ: Well, yes. We had encounters with NYPD if they were investigating a body in the landfill, if [there was] something that they were looking for, weapons in the landfill. We would have to start from scratch, when they thought they were loaded into the barge, whatever truck they loaded them on. And we did a very good job of tracking because we could track where the barge was loaded, where the barge was offloaded, and where it was in the landfill. And this is maybe a month after the barge was offloaded in the landfill, so we could track down specifically where that six-hundred-twenty tons of garbage was buried in the landfill.

[1:18:05.0]

CO: Yeah, I've heard some incredible stories from one my classmates who is interviewing Dave Henderson. He was telling her a story about locating a couple's wedding ring that, they said the gentleman had accidentally thrown it away.

FZ: Yeah, I did a couple of those. They call them lost valuable searches. But what I was talking about in the tower was something so large – an entire boat – if they were looking for, let's say, a body or weapons. You'd have to track down when the boat came in [to the MTS], when it was loaded, when it came in [to Fresh Kills], when it was offloaded, and where it was buried. And it might not be for a month or so later that they're looking for this. That that was exciting, trying to pinpoint where exactly the barge was.

CO: Yeah, and that's why, I mean I'm sure that all of that documentation came in helpful at those instances, because you had it all...

FZ: Yes, because we could pinpoint where that boat was offloaded and where it was in the landfill.

CO: Huh. Did you have any legal requirements that you had to comply with? Or laws and regulations that applied to the marine...? I'm sure that there's traffic laws for the waterways?

FZ: Well, when you were training you were actually going for a license to use the radio because you had to know exactly what you were doing with the on the radio. Plus, as a dispatcher I'm pretty sure that they had to file for a license to use the marine radio, so we were licensed in that.

CO: Got it. Okay, and then let's see, I think we might have covered some of the stuff about the MTSs. And I was wondering if you ever had any vessels that capsized, or any serious problems like that?

[1:20:18.7]

FZ: Fortunately I got through. I didn't. Prior to me getting promoted I think there was an issue with a barge at the Greenpoint MTS. In fact, I remember seeing a video tape on a barge that came out of the slip and then it sunk up there, and they were involved in the clean up and everything. We used to dump millings on the barges – millings are when they rip up a street outside, the DOT, when they take that top layer off the street – they would deposit that in barges. So a lot of times if you were a supervisor at an MTS that was loading millings you had to be very careful about how that barge was being loaded so you didn't overload it and sink it.

CO: Yeah, cause the weight was so...?

FZ: I had barges where they went well over the six-hundred and – they were like eight-hundred tons. And thank God we didn't have an issue with those.

CO: Was that something that you'd realize only after they came back to the...?

FZ: That was something that we'd realize when we sailed the barge because they had to tell you how many tons were on that barge. So you would say to the captain, "Uh listen, I have a barge with eight hundred tons of millings and you be very cautious about towing this, and when it comes into the landfill let me know right away." Because there were certain boats that you wanted to get – if there was water, or if they were overloaded – you wanted to get those offloaded as quickly as you could.

[1:22:19.7]

CO: I see, I see. And if there were ever any problems to occur because of that would that be sort of on the MTS? Would that be their fault, their responsibility?

FZ: Yes, an overloaded boat would be the responsibility of the supervisor that was in charge at the MTS at the time. A boat that maybe capsized or whatever, that was everybody's problem! Right from the top down. But thank God we never had that. What I did have happen to me was a paper barge that went on fire. That was scary. Or there were instances where a regular garbage barge came in smoldering and on fire, that had to be [put out]. We had to get special permission to open up the super boom and all that had to be documented, if the super boom was opened for an emergency, and the boat would be placed under the digger right away. You might've had to call the fire department; there were instances where the fire department had to come in and put out the fire.

CO: Wow. So how quickly could you actually deal with that stuff, if it takes thirty minutes to get a barge [into the plant]? You would just have to sit there biting your nails and hope that everything...?

FZ: Yeah, yeah. I'd sit there in the tower with my binoculars and watch the barge come in and watch the barge, it was on fire and you did your best to alert everybody and get it under the digger right away, and get the fire department in there to knock down the fire in the barge. So it was exciting.

[1:24:17.9]

CO: Yeah, so you'd have to shift the-, if there was a barge being offloaded at the time you'd have to get that out and...wow, that's...

FZ: There were times where it was in between shifts where you had to try and scrape together an emergency crew to get down there and get the barge dug.

CO: Yeah, wow that's intense. Were there ever any problems with personnel, not in terms of individuals making mistakes but you know, absences, illnesses, things like that? Like, if somebody was sick and couldn't come in for their shift, that kind of stuff?

FZ: Well that was dealt with by the supervisors at the locations. The only time it would affect me in the tower is if they couldn't shift a barge because they didn't have sufficient personnel. Then I would have to, I don't know, either pull somebody from Fresh Kills to go to a certain location or go from location to location to try to make up for the shortfall. Either that or have the supervisor try to get ahold of somebody that worked at the location to come in.

CO: I see, yeah. And then what about for the other dispatchers? Like if somebody who's supposed to be on the next shift was sick, or can't make it?

FZ: Oh then you just stayed. You stayed four hours so that-. That didn't happen too often, but if it did, then you worked twelve hours. You know, you wanted to kill yourself because you had to stay there another four hours. It wasn't bad though.

CO: I'm sure, yeah I'm sure it's stressful enough that you're ready to get out of there when the day's done.

FZ: Yeah, yeah.

[1:26:06.9]

CO: Yeah. Were there ever any labor disputes or strikes? I heard tell that there was a tug operators' strike at some point in the past, but maybe not while you were working?

FZ: They never really affected me when I worked there, in the tower. I never had a problem with personnel on the tugs.

CO: Cool. And then I was wondering if you could go over what happened on Sundays. Getting ready on Saturday and then coming back in on Monday, I was wondering if you could explain that to me.

FZ: Well, it was awkward for me being that I was an extra guy. A lot of times I would go into the tower on a Sunday not knowing really what happened Saturday or Friday. I would go into the tower to work Sunday and have to set up things for Monday, as far as calling out the tug at a certain location, and that was tough, that was tough just getting the callouts straightened out.

CO: Cause the MTSs were closed on Sundays?

FZ: Yeah, they were closed on Sunday so Monday you had to have your tugs in a certain spot. You had to start from scratch: Who needed what? Who needed things picked up? Maybe there were loaded boats that weren't picked up on a Saturday. You were starting fresh. You had to get the tides down for the gate boat, get him back on tide, so there were a lot of things to [do]. You know to get your five tugs ready for Monday morning, well Monday at midnight, not Monday morning but...

[1:28:08.0]

CO: So you guys would work on Sundays, or was Sunday a day off?

FZ: Sunday was like, just an emergency basis. If they needed you to do something you know?

CO: Mm-hmm. And that would be determined by the person who had left, who had done the last Saturday shift, they would say, “Oh, I really need somebody here to...,” or how would that be [determined]?

FZ: No, no. If you worked Sunday 3:00pm-11:00pm you had to make sure that everything was going to go square for Monday morning. But most of the time the tugs all had their callouts and everything because they used to come into the landfill on Saturday at 3:00, 4:00 Sunday morning, so when you released the tug you told him when you would start again.

CO: I see, so you would get them en route on Sunday so that everybody would be...

FZ: Yeah, on Saturday basically you try to tell him what he was going to do on Monday.

CO: I see.

FZ: You know?

CO: Cool. And were you working with the same tug captains in the same boats – like, the same actual boats – or was it always different people from Moran?

FZ: The tugs were always the same. We had a set of tugs from Moran Towing Company with names like: the Eugene, the Diana Moran, the Nancy, the Cedar Point, the Hinton was a shifting tug that we used, the Girls, the James Turecamo.^{4,5,6} So basically, you know...

[1:30:09.4]

CO: That’s kind of cool, you have kind of a relationship with the specific...

⁴ The “Diane Moran,” accessed May 2012, http://www.morantug.com/site/#/tug_fleet_list

⁵ The “Turecamo Girls,” accessed May 2012, http://www.morantug.com/site/#/tug_fleet_list

⁶ The Eugene, the Nancy, the Cedar Point and the Hinton are not listed on Moran’s current tug fleet list. Accessed May 2012, http://www.morantug.com/site/#/tug_fleet_list.

FZ: You knew the captains and you knew the mates. I had an experience down in Fresh Kills: one of the captain's name was Gator, he was a fellow from down South, and I never met anybody named Gator before. So it was quite interesting.

CO: That's cool. Now this is just one last disaster question. I heard about an instance when a truck backed into the barge, I think it was at the South Bronx because there was a concern with the tides and the levels...

FZ: I never had a problem with a truck that went in, thank God, but I did have a problem where I was on the phone one day at 59th Street with the supervisor, Frank Fenney, and he said to me over the phone, "Frank hold on, I'll be right back, a guy just fell in the boat." Luckily the boat was almost loaded and he wasn't hurt, because that's a long fall from the tipping floor to the bottom of the barge if it's empty. So thank God for that.

CO: Wow, that's crazy.

FZ: Like I said, you had to be prepared for everything.

CO: Yeah, that's intense.

FZ: One day I had an instance where they called and told me that there was a tugboat on fire at 135th Street. They said, "Can you please call them and make sure, you know, see what's going on?" I said, "If you were on a boat that was on fire, would you stop to answer the phone?" I said, "You let me know, you're there, you let me know if the Coast Guard shows up and if everybody's alright, I'm not calling." Like I said, you went in and every day there was a different setup. You never knew what was going to happen.

[1:32:19.6]

CO: Yeah. Was it hard for you to leave the stress behind when you came home? Or did you feel like you were having anxiety or anything?

FZ: No, I wanted to go back! I couldn't wait! God forbid like if I had... Today, you know, I'm retired but on my computer at home I have the New York Harbor Webcam so I'm watching the Statue of Liberty, I'm watching the harbor, they show you the tankers that are out there, they give you their dimensions, they show you pictures of them, the tugboats, everything.⁷ I feel I'm at home. You can track boats, its unbelievable. There's a lot of technology that we didn't have back then when I was working. That's why my communication with the people that were on the job and working my shift [was important]. It was very important for me to know names and where they were.

⁷ New York Harbor Webcam, accessed May 2012, <http://www.nyharborwebcam.com/>

CO: Yeah, and I can imagine and you don't want to have a bad relationship with anybody because you're relying on everybody.

FZ: No, everybody was fine. I never had a problem with anyone. It's all a part of being prepared, doing your job, and you don't want the phone to ring. I lucked out, I did my job well.

CO: Were there ever any times where there were dispatchers who couldn't take it, or were not as successful as you were?

[1:34:08.0]

FZ: Those guys that I... There was a fellow, Eddie Thaisz, that worked the midnight shift. He was seasoned, he was there for many years and he was great to learn by. The day supervisor, Frank Ozello, he had a lot of years under his belt, and the 3:00pm to 11:00pm supervisor, Billy Meany, he was fantastic! I used to love going to work and just watching him work, it was great.

CO: That's awesome. Did you ever get the opportunity to train anybody?

FZ: No, because I was the last guy into the tower before it closed; no one came in after me.

CO: That's crazy. Okay, I want to start talking a little bit about after you moved to Manhattan, and so I was wondering if you could just describe the circumstances that prompted your move, when it was, and that kind of thing.

FZ: Well I moved into Manhattan in 2000 and at that time they were phasing out the supervisors in the tower. When I went into the [office], I had office experience because I already worked ten years for a bank – I was a bank officer – so I had a lot of skills for the office. Marty Bellew was in charge of Waste Disposal and he was the fellow that got me up in the office. Basically, whatever we did with the MTSs was being done with the private transfer stations so we were tracking trucks and tracking and keeping information. It's like the same thing except it's not involving tugboats anymore. The one place, 59th Street, we kept a tug on there, and it's still an active paper dump. But I still had a little marine transportation in me when I went up to the office, because we always had that place open and it's still open today.

[1:36:41.2]

CO: Yeah. Was there a learning curve? Because the timing and all the kinds of extenuating circumstances that you were dealing with on the water were very tied to the water, you know the marine aspect of it, the weather, the tides, the fog, things like that. And with trucks, those obviously aren't the same; there's a different set of issues with trucks, and then everything's quicker...

FZ: What we're doing now up there at 59th Street, when I went up to Manhattan 59th Street was undergoing major renovations: they were dredging the slips. Visy Paper had a couple of instances of fires where the place was closed down for weeks and we had allocated fifteen Department of Sanitation barges, that we used to use for garbage, to Visy Paper.⁸ So there were extenuating circumstances when I went up to Manhattan that we had to deal with, I think the first year I went up there the weather was so bad in the winter that we had to keep a tug on for ice breaking purposes – just 24/7, to break ice.

[1:38:11.0]

CO: Wow.

FZ: So that the tug bringing light barges would be able to go into 59th Street.

CO: Wow. Did you have a different title after you changed?

FZ: Oh no, no. Supervisor.

CO: So your title was always Supervisor, even though it was a specific kind of...

FZ: Since '96.

CO: Yeah, yeah yeah. Got it. Okay, and was there a different seniority structure at Worth Street, because I know that in the tower you were kind of on your own.

FZ: Well, in the tower you shut the door and you did your work. You put your head down and for eight hours you didn't pick your head up. In Manhattan there's so many chiefs and so many people responsible for so many things that you really had to get to know who did what. You were more involved with the Bureau of Cleaning and Collection because if there were problems at the weigh stations then they came to you and they let you know.

CO: I see, I see. And then do you know, can you explain how the transport operations changed after Fresh Kills closed? Like, did the marine transfer stations all just become "land transfer stations," or what happened?

[1:39:46.4]

FZ: No, no. Right now, half of them are falling into the water and crumbling: North Shore and the South Bronx have fallen into the sea. Well, North Shore, I shouldn't say that because they're reconstructing that. That's the one by LaGuardia Airport, that's the one that they're trying to say

⁸ An Australian company whose United States division is called Pratt Industries. The plant is located at 4435 Victory Boulevard, Staten Island, New York, 10314. For more information, see Pratt Industries' Brochure, accessed May 2012, <http://www.prattindustries.com/PrattBrochure11x17.pdf>, 21.

they don't want built there because of the seagulls interfering with the planes. That was where, what's his name, Sully Sullenberger took off from, from LaGuardia Airport, and he had the problem with the birds. It [didn't have] anything to do with Sanitation, but it could be. Also there's a big controversy with the 91st Street MTS on the east side of Manhattan. People don't want a dump there; they don't want the garbage dumped there. Because all of the garbage in Manhattan gets exported out of Manhattan, there are no transfer stations in Manhattan.

CO: What do the trucks do when they unload? Are they unloading into containers, is that how it works now, do you know?

FZ: Different places have different methods of getting rid of the garbage. Staten Island has the rail transfer, the rail station, so the garbage is being dumped on a tipping floor, it's compacted and put into containers to go out on the rail. They do the same thing in the Bronx: they load the trucks right into the containers and then they're shipped out by train, by rail. In Queens they dump at transfer stations, not at marine transfer stations, but they dump at transfer stations and this is the same thing with the, with the other boroughs. So [the garbage is] getting put into containers and getting driven out of there.

[1:42:12.1]

CO: I see. So when you switched to Manhattan were you overseeing all of those different stations and different dumping points?

FZ: Manhattan, Manhattan was the center for-, the hub for the dumping of garbage all over. Whether it be Staten Island in the Staten Island transfer station, all the five boroughs were being monitored through the New York Office.

CO: Got it. And this is part of borough self-sufficiency, is that correct? The trash has to be collected directly from...?

FZ: Yes, Yes.

CO: Okay, so did that mean that you had a lot of additional-? Instead of having those five or eight tugs that you knew like the back of your hand, all of a sudden you have all these different trucks and rail, all these different things. Was that hard for you to get accustomed to, or was it just a new thing?

FZ: No, no, it wasn't. It was just a new way to get rid of the garbage. So Manhattan monitors the supervisors out in the field, and they have supervisors for each borough, so they monitor a certain number of dumps and they do their checks. In other words, it's not a supervisor that's calling you from a certain marine transfer station like it was years ago. Our supervisors are now more mobile because they have to visit the private entities. We're in charge of the trucks and the

dumping, but we're dumping on private soil. They're involved with ordering trucks and getting rid of containers.

[1:44:08.9]

CO: Yeah, so part of the job is no longer within the Department anymore, kind of.

FZ: Right, right as far as that.

CO: I see, that's interesting. Is there anything else that you feel like I haven't talked about, as far as changes that happened after you moved to Worth Street, or anything else in particular?

FZ: No, just that, like I said, if anybody told me that I was going to be a supervisor in the marine transportation I would've told them, "You're crazy," when I first came on the job. Even though the landfill existed on Staten Island I was never even aware of it, because I was going to work in Manhattan everyday, I was never aware of how the garbage was being disposed of. It was really like a dream come true to work in there. And the only other thing I can say is, that when you had a massive thunder and lightning storm and you were sitting up in that tower it was frightening because, like I said, that antenna for the radio was like an attraction for the lightning.

CO: Did you have like a nice view from up there? Or were you just looking at the landfill? What did you see?

FZ: You were looking at the landfill because naturally the piles, the mounds, the years before obstructed your view. But you had a nice view of the tugs coming in and where they were digging the barges.

CO: That's interesting. And then I was just wondering if you could talk a little bit about your retirement. When did you retire from the department?

[1:46:05.3]

FZ: I retired officially in December of 2010 – [that] was my close of business – but actually, my last day of work was August 31. And I retired from the department due to an illness. I had worked in Worth Street for eight years in a wheelchair and was very proud of the fact that I was able to do that, but it was just time, after I got my twenty years, to retire.

CO: Yeah. So once you were at your twenty years it was...

FZ: Yeah, the traveling was too much for me.

CO: Yeah, I can imagine. I was also wondering: do you think that if you had been able to continue getting out there you would have kept working past your twenty years? Or would you have taken the opportunity to...?

FZ: I don't know. There were a lot of factors for me as far as staying on the job. I thank God everyday that I had the twenty-year retirement because if I didn't have that I don't know what I would do. But I managed to make it-, like I said, my last eight years were in a wheelchair, so I overcame that.

CO: Yeah, that's incredible. And then – oh, sorry I lost my place here...

FZ: And I just wanted to make note that the Columbia Society, which we talked about before, honored me as the very first supervisor to receive the Chief Renzo Ferrari Award for public service. I got that award when I left.

[1:48:12.1]

CO: Great. How often is that award given out?

FZ: It's annual, and I was the first fellow to receive it. Renzo Farrari was a chief that passed away – he passed away of cancer – and I was the first one to receive the honor of getting his award.

CO: That's quite an honor. And you were given that award after your retirement?

FZ: Yeah, because I officially left in August and they have their dinner in October, so it was good. It was nice to see everybody again.

CO: Yeah, was there a big party and everything?

FZ: It was their annual dinner, so I got to see whoever went to the dinner, and I was honored at the dinner.

CO: Yeah, that's great. What would you say you miss most about working? Is there anything that you miss about it?

FZ: I miss the people. We still had the same thing as far as keeping in touch with all the supervisors out in the field, getting them to report back if there are problems. I would say what I miss most is the problem solving. Yeah, if I could put my finger on it that's the word. To be able to face a problem, and that's what the tower brought because you faced a problem whether it was weather, whether it was mechanical, whether it was a fire, it was something new every day. Basically, the same problems arise out in the field today – you have problems with traffic, you have problems with accidents – and those have to be addressed.

[1:50:21.7]

CO: It seems like that's very satisfying, to sort out the mess, get it...

FZ: Yeah, well, I used to love that. What would you call that, problem solving I guess, I don't know.

CO: Yeah, I think it's like a logistics puzzle.

FZ: Yeah, on the fly, you know? Because you have to know what to do if somebody calls you and says that a barge is on fire or there's a problem, you have to know what to do, right.

CO: Yeah, you just have to figure it out.

FZ: Right.

CO: Yeah.

FZ: And like I said before, the thing I liked about the tower is that it was like a big crossword puzzle that you had to go in and complete in the eight hours. Naturally, you wanted to do a good job and you wanted to turn over your shift to the next guy with the least amount of problems. You don't want to have a guy walk in and you say, "Uh, I wasn't sure what to do so you figure it out." You wanted to be able to say, "This is what I did, this is the problem I had, this is how I solved it."

CO: "And here's where things stand, take it."

FZ: That was the most satisfying thing about the job in the tower.

CO: Do you think that you were inclined to enjoy that kind of thing before you worked, in different ways? Like, did you like doing puzzles in before, like logic games or things like that? Or is that something that you learned about yourself?

FZ: Now I find that I'm enjoying myself reading. I love to read, so in the morning I get up and with the help of the internet I read everything that I can.

[1:52:03.5]

CO: Wow, yeah. Yeah. That's great. And do you stay in touch with former colleagues and coworkers, and people in the department at all?

FZ: Yes I do. Marty Bellew came to my house with another fellow, Little Lee that retired from the job, I keep in touch with a supervisor in OCO, Lori Lyons, and I keep in touch with some san workers up in OCO, Robert Jantz. I've got to say that the people I worked with at OCO really stepped up and helped me out in my time of need, because if you could imagine someone being in a wheelchair... They brought me lunch, they brought me breakfast, they made sure that I wanted for nothing, the whole building. When I pulled up on Access-a-Ride the Sanitation police officer that was stationed at Worth Street, Hector, used to come running over and made sure that I got across the street, and in the building they had security guards and they used to make sure that I was fine inside the building. I mean, the whole day... I can't say more for the people that helped me during the day.⁹

CO: That's amazing, it's almost like a family.

FZ: Yeah, yeah it was.

CO: And OCO is...

FZ: That's the Operations Control Office. And I was helped by everyone in the building. In the building, because it was the Department of Health they had their own security within the building so they used to watch out for me.

[1:54:02.6]

CO: Got it. Um, okay well I'm pretty close to wrapping up here but there's just a couple more sort of general things that I wanted to know. I was wondering how would you explain your job to people that you knew outside of the Department: friends, or your wife's family, or people like that. What would you say that you did and how would you describe your work to them?

FZ: I would just say that my job was [being] a problem solver and whatever happened, whatever emergency arose, I had to know how to get out of it. That's all, that's what I would wrap everything up and say. That's what working in the tower brought: the excitement and the joy of doing your best to get out of it when your back is to the wall.

CO: Yeah. I have a couple questions about Fresh Kills, actually. I know that Fresh Kills was a very contentious issue on Staten Island when it was open and there are a lot of hard feelings about that, so I was wondering how that affected you as somebody that was working there and also a longtime Staten Island resident, or a lifetime Staten Island resident.

FZ: I was sorry to see the closing of the tower but in the same token, I'm an avid bird watcher so I'm happy that the landfill is going back to nature, so to speak.

⁹ health and hospital police - Patty Pierce

CO: Yeah. Was it ever a source of tension with you and people that you were acquainted with?

FZ: Let me just take care of a little...

CO: Sure.

[1:55:58.1]

[1:55:58.9]

CO: Okay, we are picking up after a brief break. I was wondering if your working out at the landfill was ever a source of tension with people that you were acquainted with socially, in your neighborhood or on the Island? Or politically, anything like that?

FZ: I was only approached one time about working in the landfill. I just refused to answer any questions because I wanted to stay neutral. But as far as the landfill closing, I think it's wonderful. I mean, it's not wonderful because I lost my job here on Staten Island, but I think it's wonderful for Staten Island. I live across the street from New Creek Blue Belt and there's nothing but wonderful things [that are] going to happen to that, and I hope that the Parks Department gets into the landfill and does everything that they say they're going to do.

CO: Yeah. Have you been following that process at all?

FZ: I follow it on the computer because they usually have updates on what they're doing out in the landfill. So I do, I watch. And also, with the GPS on the computer you can actually see the barges in the landfill, all lined up on the West Catwalk, and I say to myself, "You know, I used to work there," and I can't believe the transformation that's being done with the landfill.

CO: Yeah. Have you been out there at all since it closed?

[1:57:55.7]

FZ: No. Listen, since my retirement I've been home. I'm just enjoying life at home. Because of my medical condition I try to do everything I can to read now; I bird watch. I try to keep busy as far as that.

CO: Yeah, yeah.

FZ: So...

CO: That's great. That's all of my prepared questions, but I guess if there's anything else that you feel like you'd like to add, or any incredible stories that I haven't touched on or anything like that...

FZ: No, not really. Like I said, the only thing with working up in the tower, it taught you to be prepared for any situation. I mean, someone could call you at the spur of a moment and say, "The tug is on fire," "The barge is on fire," "The barge is sinking," "There's a hole in the boat." You have to be prepared for all of these type of things. You don't have to today because everything is closing up, but we had a good group of guys. There was five fellows that worked over there, myself and there's another fellow Richie Romano that was extra in the tower, that didn't have a specific time...

CO: Like a set shift?

FZ: Yeah, a shift. So we bounced around, but it was nice bouncing around too because we got to meet everybody in the marine transfer stations. All these people that we talk to on the phone, you could finally put a face to. Because there were times during my training period and when I started working that I never met these people. I talked to them everyday but I never actually met them, and that same thing went for the launch boat operators. A lot of them I never met, and the tugboat operators. But what was nice, every once in a while a tugboat operator would come and visit me in the tower, whether he brought me something scrumptious to eat-, so that was good. Those guys were fantastic.

[2:00:33.2]

CO: Yeah, it seems like that's a nice thing about all the associations too is you get an opportunity to see people in the Department that you don't work with.

FZ: Yeah. Unfortunately, because of my situation I was a member of a lot of organizations but I never really got to enjoy them like I could have. But it's still good being a member of them.

CO: Yeah, I can imagine. Alright, and then I actually thought of one last thing that I had meant to ask you, which is: do you know what happened with all of the barges after Fresh Kills closed? Does the Department still own them?

FZ: Well, after Fresh Kills closed we used a lot of the barges in the dredging operation. They were dredging the Kill van Kull and using this material to put up on the landfill, to close the landfill. And then those barges, they didn't use anymore at all because they were contaminated with the material from the dredge. Plus, we didn't need them anymore. We just didn't need them. I know that Ed Olson was involved with selling a lot of the barges. Right now, like I said, we're down to fifteen barges that they allocated for Visy. God forbid – there was another example. Visy had a massive fire in their plant, so they were down. Their operation was down for a week or so with the fire. Also, sometimes Visy goes down for maintenance and they'll be down for a week,

or they have to repair the dock. Like I said, there are a hundred scenarios and you just have to be prepared and deal with it.

CO: Yeah. And what kind of advice might you have for the people that are doing that now? Is there...or has that job changed significantly since you left?

FZ: The only advice I can give to somebody that's coming on this job is you never know where you're going to wind up. Who knew in their wildest dreams that they even had a marine dispatcher in the Sanitation? I was fortunate that I went that route and that I got a chance to work it.

CO: Great. All right, well I think that I've exhausted all of my questions, so unless there is anything else you feel like is necessary to get on the record, we can kind of wrap it up.

FZ: All right, no that's about it. I'm satisfied with it.

CO: Yeah, that was quite an interview. Thank you so much for your time, I really appreciate it.

FZ: Oh you're welcome, you're welcome.

[2:03:29.3]