

**AFC 2021/010: Rural Free Delivery: Mail Carriers in Central Appalachia / Emily Hilliard
Interview with James Ebersbach– 5/7/22**

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James Ebersbach

Where: Fairfield County District Library

Date: May 7, 2022

Location: Lancaster, OH

Interviewer: Emily Hilliard

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James Ebersbach (b. 1980, Lancaster, OH) was a part-time non-career track rural mail carrier for 8 years, delivering for 6 years out of the Pleasantville, Ohio Post Office, and 2 years out of the Bremen, Ohio Post Office. He delivered the Pleasantville route in his own right-hand drive Jeep, and the Bremen route in a Postal Service-issued Long Life Vehicle (LLV). Ebersbach previously worked in law enforcement, and now works in HR for the state of Ohio. In this interview, he speaks about the experience and challenges of being a part-time rural mail carrier, an accident he experienced on the job, his customers (one of which included an exotic animal zoo where a kangaroo got loose while he was on his route), his role as a union steward with the NRLCA, and his relationship with management.

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James Ebersbach
May 7, 2022
Lancaster, Ohio Public Library

JE: James Ebersbach
EH: Emily Hilliard

00:00

EH: Alright, so why don't you introduce yourself and tell me your name, the year you were born and where you're from and I'll just say it's May 7th [2022] and we are in Lancaster, Ohio.

JE: My name is James Ebersbach. I was born in 1980 and born actually in Lancaster. Lived the majority of my life in a town north of here, about 10 miles--Baltimore, Ohio.

EH: Tell me how you got started or how you got interested in being a rural mail carrier.

JE: I had worked 15 years in law enforcement and I had my daughter, was born, and I was a single dad and about that time it was being in law enforcement was getting to be crazy and I figured it was time for a change, something that was more safe, more schedule-oriented where I could spend some time at home. And the Postal Service seemed to be a good option for me. And I applied, took the test and within 4 months I was hired!

EH: Did you start full-time or as a sub?

JE: The majority of people to my understand start as what they call non-career, which I'm included. I, the route that come open for me was a route out of the Bremen Post Office, but it was actually delivering in the community of Pleasantville. And the...whenever I got that route it was for as a sub, delivering on Saturdays, and anytime the regular wanted time off.

EH: How long ago was that?

JE: About 8 years ago.

EH: And then did you eventually get hired on full-time?

JE: No. That's one of the things with the Post Office--I was there for 8 years and there was no hope in site of becoming full-time. In my office, just my office alone, there's one carrier there now, currently that's been over 20 years and still not full time. There's one that's been there 25 and just converted here within the last year and a half.

EH: Wow. Do you think that has changed from how it used to be?

JE: I guess depending on the size of the office you work at and the turnover rate I guess would obviously have a factor in it, but for my office, it was consolidated. There was 3 different offices put together and that plays havoc with seniority and you know, here currently they've been having an extremely hard time keeping subs, so turnover rate's at an all-time high.

EH: And was it consolidated about the time when all of these rural post offices got consolidated--like 2008 or so?

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JE: Well let's see here, it's 2022--I've been there for 8 year so what did I start in 20, what does that work out to be--2016-ish? Whenever I started, it would have been within that 6 month period that they had consolidated my office.

EH: Okay. Why don't you talk me through a typical day on the job from when you would get to the post office and when you would get home at the end of the day.

JE: That question can vary depending on the time of year and you know, weather conditions, etc., but on an average, I would arrive at the post office anywhere between 7, 7:15 in the morning on a normal day. The first thing that would happen is you would come in, you would go to your mail case and see if the clerks have left any notes for you for the previous day, trying to resolve any issues you've got. While this is, while you're doing that, the clerks are in the process of sorting mail. The truck comes in, if it's on time, anywhere between 6 and 6:10 at my particular office. And they break the truck down, they sort the flats, sort the letters, and sort the packages. Sometimes not in the right order. It just depends on you know, what the problems are for the morning. And we start putting mail up. Typically you put flats up first, letters, then marked packages last. It doesn't always happen that way, but there's different styles to casing mail. Some people case all their mail, some people case only their flats and loose letters. Some people don't case anything, it's just you know, some offices have what they call DPS which is sorted, delivery point mail. Some of them have FFS which is the same thing for flats, like magazines and newspapers and so on and so forth. Some offices don't. So mine had DPS but no FFS, so we sorted, case all our flats, I cased all my flats. And I've done it both ways. I cased all my letter mail and I've not cased all my letter mail. Getting, if you want to get technical, they call it a one-bundle system or two-bundle system. (clears throat) After the mail is cased, you take your packages and some people mark 'em, some people don't. I don't have that good a memory so I marked all mine. I take a plastic card that says "parcel" on it. If you have, if the office would buy you the cards. If not, some people would buy you their own. Some people would take old trash forward cards or hold cards from the post office and cut 'em up and use those to mark packages. My typical pattern was anything that was small to fit in a mailbox would get marked a certain way. Anything that required me to pull in the driveway and get out was marked a different way. Put all your mail up. On the original route that I had, working the Pleasantville route, there was almost 600 stops on it. After you get all your mail up, it can take you anywhere from half hour, 45 minutes to 2 hours depending on what the day's volume was. A lot of people think that the mail comes in pre-sorted and you just deliver it--that's not the case.

06:24

You know, so usually anywhere from I don't know, 10, 10:00 usually, I would start pulling my mail down and the way the case is set up, it's set up in a spiral fashion. You start at the top left and work your way around right in a spiral pattern all the way to the bottom so whenever you pull your mail down you would start at the lower right and pull it down backwards so whenever you delivered your mail it was in order. And after the mail is pulled down, we would have carts, roughly the size of this table here. Sometimes we'd have 2, sometimes we'd have 3 and we'd wheel it out the back, back of the door and out the dock, down a big old ramp, through a pothole covered parking lot with you know, cracks and holes everywhere to your vehicle that you've got pulled up there. Some people use private vehicles, their own personal vehicle to deliver the mail, some routes are assigned a postal vehicle, it just depends on how the Postal Service decided to assign the route whenever they assigned the route. You load your vehicle up and everybody has their own specific manner. You try to be, you have to be, I shouldn't say you try to be--you have to be as organized as possible or you'll spend hours looking for a package or you'll miss it and it's happened, you know, that the new people struggle. You have to stay organized. And you load your

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vehicle a specific way and you, if you're in a postal vehicle, you load up and check your equipment. If it's cold, you're gonna freeze, if it's warm you're gonna roast. There's no air conditioning, most of the time there's no heat, and you take off for the day!

08:07

EH: And were you in a personal vehicle or an LLV?

JE: I've done it both ways. I guess I should have mentioned when I carried the Pleasantville route, I was in my personal vehicle and I had a little Jeep Wrangler X that would be busting at the seams most of the times with mail. And I would drive that. Later on, there became an aux route which, what an aux route is, it's a route that is less than full-time. It can be, it can vary in hours. It's a 6 day a week assignment. Mine happened to be a 3 hour assignment for each day for 6 days a week, and that route was assigned an LLV.

EH: Did you sit in the middle in your Jeep or was it right hand drive?

JE: I, whenever I started this job, the first, whenever I went through my training, I had a Ford F250, super duty diesel that had a bench seat in it and I drove in the middle of that thing for my training for 2 days, delivering the mail route, and my right side was all black and blue and beat up and it was horrible. So I decided this wasn't gonna happen. I got online and found on eBay, found a right hand drive Jeep out of Waverly, Ohio and that was actually a previous mail carrier down there was selling it and I bought it and it was a godsend. So...

EH: (laughs) Nice. What maybe--how did it compare to working in law enforcement? Or were there skills from law enforcement that translated to being a good rural mail carrier?

10:00

JE: I would say that the most important thing in being a mail carrier is having a good memory and being organized. And in law enforcement those are also good traits. Other than that there's not really a whole lot of transfer there. Later on while working at the Postal Service, I became involved in the NRLCA, rural union, and I was elected as the office union steward. So in doing that there were some similarities in investigations and looking into personnel issues, so and so forth. But delivering mail is being able to read, being able to be quick, being efficient, be organized.

EH: And so did the union experience transfer over to your current job?

JE: Actually it did. I'm currently working for the state doing investigations for the state of Ohio in matters of discrimination, accommodations, disabilities for employment and that was pretty much, whenever I worked for the union, that was some of the issues that we handled in the Postal Service.

EH: Tell me a little bit more about the union. Was that something you were interested in from the start or attracted to the job because it was a union job? Yeah, tell me about your interest in getting involved there.

JE: Whenever I first started the postmaster that was there, he was, his name was David Barrel (sp?). David was looking forward to retirement. David was a good boss. He was very personable. He would help you, he helped me a lot, taught me a lot. And even you know, got to know him a little bit outside of work and I thought highly of David. David whenever he was going through retirement, approaching his

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retirement date, we had a lot of conversations. I sat with him whenever they would have the telecom meetings with the management, the high-up management--the POOMS--and so on and so forth.

EH: What's the POOMS?

JE: POOM is an acronym, some call them MPOO. It is the Postal [Office] Operations Manager. It is the person that manages all the postmasters in a specific region of the United States.

EH: Got it.

JE: I would listen to some of these conversations and hear the things that they would quote un-quote gripe to the postmasters about for them to correct in their office. The Postal Service is very much about statistics and entering data even redundant times. The data half the time is wrong. They don't train very well. They expect you to do the sheet and they just send out a new sheet, here it is, do it, and they've never told you what it is. So and I mean the data could be right, it could be wrong, it just depends. They would have, we would call them gripe sessions and the gripe sessions would be on a specific topic that would last a week, maybe 2 depending what it is. Anywhere from anything about carriers leaving the building by a specific time to carriers backing up too much to carriers being stationary for too long. The list is infinite. And I'm hearing what my boss is being told and he relayed to me, hey I'm, it's you know, it rolls downhill and I'm just passing along the message, I'm not the bad guy here. And I saw it firsthand and I told him, I said, "Well, I mean you want to, they want to, they want to make an issue out of carriers backing up too much, well there's times where you don't have a choice." And he goes, "Well most of the people that are up there making these rules and looking at this data, they've never carried mail before in their life." And I said, you know, he goes, and then he said this and it stuck with me. He said, "Your just lucky I'm as nice as what I am because there's other postmasters out there that would make this your problem." And I said, "Well, good thing we've got a union." And he made a comment about it, he said, "Yeah, maybe you should look at getting involved in that." So I thought it was a good idea and made some phone calls and lo and behold I was given the instructions of how to do it and we had to have an election in our office and I won!

EH: Nice! Seems pretty rare for a postmaster to encourage you to join the union.

JE: Well, David is one of a kind. He was truly in it for I mean, you know, postmasters make good money but he wasn't necessarily in it entirely for the money. He was a good person. He cared about doing the job right and he cared about the people that worked for him and he did his best to keep the balance between keeping his employees happy and providing them with what they needed versus keeping his management you know, off of him and keeping his office off the radar.

15:33

EH: So most of the people I've talked to, they subbed for a little while and then became full-time. So I'm curious if you could talk about the experience of being a part-time employee, part-time carrier and what's specific about that, what's difficult about that?

JE: Being a, I guess, I mean that's a pretty large question. Being a regular carrier means that you get, depending on the Postal Service during a union contract arbitration, they created what they call a Table 1 and a Table 2 employee. All the old-timers as we call them were all Table 1 and those guys made pretty good money. I mean you can, even know a days with the way things are, you could raise a family comfortably on it. The new employees that go regular, I don't remember the date. After a certain date, are

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Table 2 employees and the money is not as good. With that being said, being a sub you obviously make less an hour, but a lot of the work you do is not necessarily hourly. Whenever you work a route, the route is evaluated at a certain amount of time. Excuse me. Like I mentioned before, my route, my aux route was a 3-hour route. The route that I carried that was the Pleasantville route started at an 8.2 and at some point, made it to an 8.8 hour route a day. The regulars--there's no obligation for them to carry any other route. They don't have to learn multiple routes. They carry their route only. Imagine the advantages of doing the same thing every day for 20 years, I mean you get good at it. And you know people and you're not gonna make as many mistakes. As a sub, you don't necessarily know what you're gonna do. You might, you might be on 10 different routes over a week period depending on you know, you might have a route split with another sub, you might be in another office, you might be a place you've never worked before. You might not even be carrying mail. You could be running packages for somebody that has too many packages for an Amazon delivery that couldn't fit them all in their truck. They're allowed to send you anywhere within a 50-mile radius of your home office, so for our area here, that includes Columbus. And I mean there's people that have refused to drive in Columbus for the traffic and they don't know their way around and I mean they get sent up there and it's a completely different--it's not the country atmosphere, it's big city. And some people don't like that. And if they're forced to do that some people won't do it. And there's no limitation on, at least in my area, how many days you can work. They can work you 7 days in a row for 6 months straight. You're not seeing your family, you're not going to your kid's soccer game. You're missing a birthday party. You're you know, you're missing church in the morning on Sunday because you're delivering an Amazon Day on Sunday because nobody else does it, it's what the subs do. They can work you up to 12 hours, so if you come in at 7 in the morning, that doesn't count your drive time into work depending on if you're 50 miles away, and then you're driving 50 miles home after working 'til 7 at night, that's your day! And there's some subs that are working 70, 80, 90 hours a pay period. Some love it. Some love the money. Some miss their family and don't want to do it. The Postal Service cares about getting the mail out. They will tell you what they gotta tell you to get you to take the job. I've got a friend currently that just started here within the last 2 weeks at the office, Circleville, it's just the next bigger town south of here, and she told me that, "Oh this is what they told me in the interview and this is what they told me they'll be doing." I had to sit back and chuckle because I remember that and that's you know, "Oh you're only gonna be working Saturdays, and those doctor's appointments you've got scheduled, that isn't gonna be a problem," and it turns out that it is. I guess it depends on if you're a single guy or single gal that is looking to make some money because you're 18 and fresh out of high school and don't want to go to college, don't know what you want to do, this job could be for you! If you're 40 years old and you need the retirement and you've got a family and you've got kids in soccer, it might be different. It's just, it depends.

EH: Yeah. Yeah. Well, I think one of the things that a lot of people talk about who are full-time, they do express concern for the RCAs and the part-time, I think because they see, especially long-time carriers who have done it for 30 years just see these people can't make a living doing this anymore. Did you feel like you were able to develop relationships with customers on your job as a part-time?

21:08

JE: I think I was fortunate. I did work the Pleasantville route for several years, I want to say it was 5 maybe 6 years of my, while I was at the post office. Ironically enough whenever I got that position, Pleasantville is actually not too far away from where I grew up so it was the next school district over and I knew a lot of people and a lot of families from my time in school and living in the area. So I knew a lot of people, I could stop and call people by their name and they would remember me from sports and school and so on and so forth. That was pretty nice. There was other mail carriers that lived on my route that understood what was going on. "Hey, it's summertime, you want to stop in and grab a bottle of water,

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you know, feel free and yeah, if you need to go to the bathroom, don't be looking for a tree to go behind, you can stop in here." Whenever I went to Bremen, I wasn't as familiar with the people as being a little further away. But when I worked that route I worked it 6 days a week, so you got to know people, you got to meet people and I remember in particular there was this one couple--he was a firefighter and she was a stay at home mom, had 3 kids and she was trying to start a business and she started doing like screen printing on shirts and stuff like that and she did a lot of it online and mail order and stuff like that and as her business started picking up I started seeing her every day, package pickups and it started you know, 2, 3, 10, 20, and you know 1 day a week to 3 days a week to 6 days a week. So yeah, you get to meet a lot of people, not all the customers are as eager to see you as others. Some, on the flip side, there's one lady on the mail route that she, she felt that the Postal Service was out to get here and there was always an issue with her mail if it was, she would call in and complain, "Hey, my mail is wet today." And, well it's raining, you know. "Hey, my mailbox lid didn't stay shut." Well, I mean you've been told to service your mailbox for 6 months, but we're still delivering you mail for you. "Hey, my package isn't on my front porch." Well, you've got a dog that likes to bite people and you've been told to put him up and you won't do it, so. There's all kinds and you get to meet, you get to meet a lot of different people out there.

EH: And you probably learn a lot about them too carrying their mail.

JE: That was, whenever we were, whenever I was in law enforcement it was one of the things they told us, if you're in a neighborhood investigating a case, you can talk to the mailman and the mailman knows everything. And coming over to this side, they were right. You would be surprised what your mailman knows about you. And I mean, they don't, not even opening your mail, but they see, not even intentionally, certified letters, certified letters come in all the time and they require special handling and whenever you have to fill out the paperwork, you have to write who it was from and even just in daily, they know if somebody graduated high school, in your house, because they're delivering a diploma, or graduated college, or you know, somebody retired. Just from the mail, you know a lot about people.

24:46

EH: What about gifts? Did customers leave you gifts in the mailbox?

JE: Yes. That was, depending on where you were at that was a controversial thing. According to the postal ethics you're not supposed to collect any money, no money whatsoever. If somebody left you a gift, like a gift card or something like that, the value was 20-25 dollars, that happened on occasion, especially if it was somebody that you knew that you'd had, built a relationship with over the years or whatever. During Christmastime people would leave gift cards or cookies or something of that nature. It was a fairly common thing.

EH: What about some unusual days on the job? The sort of stories like the tall tales, not that it's not true, but the kind of fantastic, weird days, weird occurrences?

JE: The weirdest day, I guess I had a couple but they all revolved around the same house. And I think I mentioned to you before, we had a house that was out on my mail route, it was on a secluded gravel road, Avalon Road. And that road is not paved, it never gets plowed, if it snows, you're probably not making it. If it rains, the road's gonna wash out. It's pretty secluded. There sat a nice ranch style house on a wooded lot with a big barn and it was a pretty nice looking house. You get up there and you find out, they've got animals! They've got cows and your typical stuff like that, and next thing you know, there's a kangaroo, bouncing by you and am I seeing things, or what happened? They had kangaroos and lemurs and all kind

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of different animals out there and one day, their kangaroo got loose and it made the news all over the area here. Everybody was looking for a loose kangaroo. And by the time the news story had gotten to me, I'm like, oh that's on my mail route, I know exactly where that kangaroo is! People were videotaping it hoping down the road and I mean it was all over the place. And I was, I made it a mission one day, I was like I'm gonna find that kangaroo. Gave it 3 days and I never did. Somebody did find it and it did make its way back home, but they would always have some kind of animal that would get out. I saw lemurs running across the street. You'd think it was a cat and you'd do a double take and I've got a couple pictures on my phone that I can show you if you want. I saw some animals that look like a cross between a rabbit and a...a rabbit, a small dog and I'm not even sure what it was. I had never seen it before.

EH: Like a jackalope or something like that?

JE: I mean it didn't have the antlers, but it was something similar to that and it was fairly big and I had to stop and snap a picture of it and next thing you know there's 2 or 3 of 'em and they're hopping around and I got a little closer and snapped some pictures of it, even to the point where I stopped in the middle of the road to get out and try to walk up to this thing, and it hopped off. I'd never seen such an animal before. And I sent it around, "Does anybody know what this is?" And lo and behold somebody somewhere along the way said it was an animal from either, it was either South America or Australia, I don't remember and they give me the name, they called it a... if I can remember, it was a Patagonia Mara. And I was like, I've never heard of such a thing. I googled this thing and sure enough, that's what it was. And you know, what it was doing out there, I have no idea, but it was, it got to be, a joke around the office of what are you gonna see today?

EH: Wow. So this was--there was also a case of a guy in this area who had an exotic animal zoo--this was not...it was that?

JE: It was that, yeah.

EH: Okay.

JE: I believe. I'm not sure exactly what one you're referring to, but this guy had an exotic animal.

EH: Okay, it might be. My friend was doing a podcast about this person. It might be the same one, I'm not sure. But I think at one point he set them all free? Anyway. I'll have to look into this. (laughs) [These are two separate cases. Hilliard is referring to an exotic animal zoo in Zanesville, Ohio in 2011; Ebersbach is referring to a kangaroo escape from Paws and Claws Animal Encounters in Bremen, Ohio in 2021.]

JE: It's, we could be talking about the same thing, but I don't know that he set them all free, but I don't think their cages were very well maintained and whatnot so I don't know if it was intentional or not, but they...

EH: Doesn't sound like they were well-maintained! Let's see, what else, any other animal encounters like wild or domesticated or livestock?

29:42

JE: I mean, you know the old saying, dogs and the Postal Service. That's a fairly common occurrence. There were some dogs that you built relationships that were friendly and would come over and jump in the car and want to go for a ride. There are some that didn't want you around. When I worked the Pleasantville route, there was a big chocolate lab that was up there that sounded mean and vicious and I guess according to the owner he didn't like a whole lot of people and these people happened to order packages quite a bit so I spent a lot of time delivering to the house there. They were gone a lot but this dog had a door somewhere he could get out of the house and get outside and though we weren't supposed to do it, when I first started I carried dog treats with me to try to make nice and from that day, he kept running out there mean, I started chucking dog treats and after that before I figured out he had a door he could get out, you know, whenever I pulled up he remembered that first day and from then on he was, he would jump in the car and want to go for a ride and ironically his name was James also.

EH: (laughs)

JE: There was, being where I was at down in Bremen, you see a lot of weird things. There was guineas. There was a lot of guineas you'd just see walking the road wild. I never did encounter anything, I never seen any bear or anything crazy like that, but kangaroo pretty much tops the list on that!

EH: Are there any occasions when you helped a customer along when you were delivering or a customer helped you?

JE: Yeah. So those LLVs that we were talking about, not having any heat, and not having any air conditioning and they also don't do well in the snow. They're built out of aluminum and the tires on those things are not meant to be driven on back rural roads. And especially unpaved and in the snow and whatnot. I've gotten that thing stuck on a flat, wet road 'cause it just wouldn't go nowhere. When the snow snows out here, I mean you know, if we're getting more than a couple inches, these roads don't get treated. Even the main state routes out here, whenever they treat those, the boxes sit far enough off of the state route that they throw the snow right into them and the road might be clear but you've got 4 foot of snow by the box you can't get to. Excuse me. Needless to say, I've gotten that LLV stuck more than once. And being out here especially if the weather is in that condition, getting a tow truck, I mean you're waiting, even if you wait an hour, you're not getting your mail done that day. Especially not on time. Definitely not within your 12 hour limits. It's a problem. And more than once I've had people that see you stuck and will volunteer to come out, try to push you out, grab a truck, and pull you out and I mean gotta keep the mail moving somehow!

33:08

EH: What are things that you would make sure to bring along with you whether that's jumper cables, I don't know if you ever put chains or anything on your tires, clothes you would wear, snacks, stuff like that?

JE: So when it comes for equipment, we were not allowed to put any equipment on an LLV. It's the Postal Service's. If we wanted chains, we could request them. 95% of the time they would say no--cost money. Jumper cables you're not allowed to do anything like that because you cause damage to it, you're in trouble, so when it comes to equipment for postal vehicles, that's on them. And as I said, 95% of the time, you're not getting it. The rule of thumb that the union told us was it's management's job to maintain vehicles and if you can't drive down a road safely, you don't go. So there was several days where especially last year whenever we had a couple bad snowstorms that the mail just isn't gonna run and people would be upset, "Oh I can drive down my road," well, you've got a 4-wheel drive Jeep, and you know, I'm getting stuck on a flat, wet road, so. As for your dress, you need to, there is no heat in the majority of these vehicles so if you're not dressing warm, you're cold. And not only are you cold, you're driving around with the window down, so you're really cold. There's days out there it was you know, negative 30 windchill and you're driving around with no heat. There's a, on the Postal Service the management can go into a website called E-buys where they can request equipment and buy it and they had window coverings to where the big window on the LLVs you know, 2-foot by 2-foot and it's a big old gaping hole, 30 degree sub-zero windchills and they could put a covering over this window where it's got a little slot in the bottom of it where you slide your hand out to try to keep what heat you've got in there and we requested those a couple of times and were told no, that wasn't essential. So if you want to stay warm, that's up to you. You better dress for the weather. I've even seen people bring electric blankets to plug in to keep themselves warm in the vehicle. In the summertime, water, you've got to make sure you've got something to drink or I mean you're sitting in an aluminum box that's essentially an oven and if it's 100 degrees outside, you know it's 130 in the LLV. There was a picture going around, I don't know if it was true or not, but I could see it being that a carrier somewhere in Arizona cooked a steak on his dash on a piece of aluminum foil, driving around one day just to show the heat that he was dealing with.

36:18

EH: What are the things like that that rural mail carriers share with each other or when you get together, what are the stories you tell to each other? Is there any kind of particular language or jokes, slang terms that the general public wouldn't know?

JE: The Postal Service uses a lot of, I'll use the word jargon and a lot of it is numerical. They have a number for everything: Postal Form 1234 or "Did you fill out your 3849?" or "Your 1056, did you get that right today?" The general public wouldn't know what that is, but a lot of it is form numbers and stuff like that. There's not really, you have your, I mentioned earlier there's DPS or FFS or even if you say the word flats--does it come up, does the public know what a flat is? I don't know. I don't know, I guess it's not, in my days of law enforcement, I could literally have a conversation with another officer and nobody would know, standing next to you, what you were talking about. I don't know that the Postal Service is quite to that level, but there is definitely some jargon that goes around that people discuss.

EH: Did you feel like you developed relationships with your coworkers? Sounds like you did with your former postmaster.

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JE: Yeah. The coworkers that I worked with I mean you're seeing these people every day, 6 days a week, you're spending, though whenever you get on the route you might not be with them. I mean, you still might run into them out there crossing paths or phone calls are made asking questions about this that and whatever. Inside the building is where you spend, in the morning everybody's sorting mail and everybody's within talking distance of each other. My former postmaster, like I said he was pretty good. The new guy that replaced him, I told you that he said you know, I'm not a typical postmaster, I'm a nice guy and he doesn't know how right he was.

EH: (laughs)

JE: The new guy that come in, it was, to say it was a nightmare would be putting it mildly and I'm extremely glad that I went through the union training that I did because it became essential for the job down the road. You want to talk about building relationships I guess with other coworkers, believe it or not, it's where I met my wife.

EH: (laughs) Nice!

JE: Yep!

EH: Is she a rural carrier as well?

JE: She was not. She was a clerk. She worked in a small southern Ohio town called Union Furnace. It was an office that didn't have any carriers and it was all PO Boxes. She was a clerk and for extra hours she would come to our office and would clean a couple days a week and that's how I met her and started talking to her. Eventually she ended up transferring to our office as a clerk and after we got married, she had to transfer out. There was times that she would be in charge and they wouldn't allow her to be in charge of me since we were married and nepotism and whatnot, which they, sidenote, that's another story. But she transferred out to actually my hometown, Baltimore [Ohio], She's a clerk in my hometown currently.

EH: That's cool. Yeah, I've interviewed a few people who have met their spouse through the mail. Or one was a woman delivered to her now husband and they met because he was complaining! (laughs)

JE: I could see that! I could totally see that.

EH: Why don't you describe the landscape along your route, or the route you would generally deliver to, especially for people who have never been to southern Ohio.

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JE: Southern Ohio's unique. I remember learning back in 7th grade, we had an awesome teacher that taught Ohio history and it'd go all the way back to when the glaciers came through and central-northern Ohio is pretty flat, like you can see for miles. Southern Ohio is not that way.

EH: Yeah! (laughs)

JE: And according to him, the reason for this was when the glaciers came, they came to about this area here and pushed all the dirt with them and then they melted away. That's why northern Ohio is flat and southern Ohio is hilly. It's not quite as bad as West Virginia but there are some rolling hills here. Actually here in Lancaster we've got Mt. Pleasant over here, I don't know if you saw it. There's one big hump that sticks up in the middle of a flat town here.

EH: Wow.

JE: So whenever I delivered my Pleasantville route it fell on the northern part of the area which was generally flat and you could see for miles farmland as far as the eye could see. Some days it was great, you know, whenever they're spreading the manure it's not so good. The Bremen route is completely different. It's definitely hilly and rocky and definitely roads less traveled whenever it comes time to, it comes to travel down through there. There's natural springs everywhere. There would be, at one spot on my route, my Bremen route that people would stop by, you'd see people every day stopping and filling up milk jugs or water jugs or whatever, collecting water out of a natural spring. There's some driveways there that if it rains, you're not getting up it because they're washed out and the landscapes beautiful. It's wooded, but in my working with other agencies, the UPS, United Parcel Service, there was a carrier that carried for them, carried in my area and he made a comment about wanting the Baltimore route because it's easier for them to deliver mail for pulling in driveways and whatnot, to get those trucks in there and Bremen nobody wants to do it because you're packing packages for quite some distance 'cause you can't get in the driveways. In particular there's one, I should say there's more than one, but there's one incident I remember on one specific address that so the Postal Service has rules about turning left. You're not to turn left if you can, if it can be avoided because left hand turns cause accidents. And there was a driveway on the left-hand side of my road that went up, it looked like a mountainside and kinda as the road as I'm traveling would be south on this road, the driveway would be on the east side and kinda angled back to the north behind me, so I kinda had to turn left and come up and go backwards. And these people, there was 2 houses set back there that were brothers and they both ordered tremendous amounts of packages that wouldn't fit in the mailbox and a lot of 'em were, one guy was from the VA and a lot of them were medicine and I tried to make sure, make an effort to get his packages to him, it's medicine. And he's counting on this stuff. And I would try to get up that driveway the best I could and one day his driveway wasn't well maintained, it was washed out and I got stuck and it just so happened the way the contour of the road was, as you would pass his driveway, there was a curve off to the left so if somebody's coming the opposite direction, they're coming around the curve and they don't see you until they're right there and the tail end of my LLV was hanging out where I got stuck on like a high center on his driveway trying to get back up there and how I was missed, I don't know. It was within inches of hitting me and it was, it's you know, it's a backroad where people just, there isn't a lot of traffic, people fly down those roads and how he missed me I have no idea, but delivering his mail became an issue.

EH: Yeah, yeah. Did you ever have any other safety concerns?

45:09

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JE: Safety concerns? I can tell you that there was...I guess I need to clarify. What do you mean by safety concerns? Was there any other like close calls I had for accidents?

EH: Accidents, or you know, sometimes people are threatened by customers, any kind of that sort of thing.

JE: Can I take those two separate?

EH: Yes, yes.

JE: Okay. So while I was delivering the Pleasantville route in my Jeep, I was telling you about, this is kinda what brought my delivering the Pleasantville route to an end. The Bremen route was open at this time but I was doing the Bremen route through the week but then on Saturday whenever the regular sub was off on the Pleasantville route, I would deliver the Pleasantville route and the Bremen route together. And I had left one morning, loaded up all my stuff and left, was headed up State Route 664, heading towards Pleasantville and I was coming out of the area that we were talking about, windy, hilly, and curvy to the flat area, excuse me, I was going around a couple sets of S-curves that were coming, I was actually going up the hill, the car that was coming at me was coming down the hills, around curves and I don't know if he had fallen asleep or was on his phone, regardless, he drifted left of center and there was a car, I don't know, maybe 50 yards ahead of me. He missed that car--that car got over off the side of the road and he missed that car and he continued left of center and was coming at me head-on and I swerved to avoid a head-on collision, rolled off the side of I'm not gonna call it a cliff, I'll say it was a very deep ditch, and I went off the side of the ditch and it was steep enough that there was a telephone that was sitting upright and another pole leading up against it like this to hold it upright. This pole that was down, it was wedged in the ground. I hit the edge of that pole with my right front tire and it sent my Jeep into a roll and I went end over end and it threw mail all over the highway, into the ditch, I mean there was mail scattered for a hundred yards everywhere. And the lady in front of me stopped and just so happened there was a lady behind me that saw it that avoided the crash and she stopped, she happened to be a nurse and they called 911 and ironically that whole scenario was the first day my old postmaster David had retired that Friday. This was a Saturday morning and my, well, wasn't my wife at the time, but my soon-to-be wife, that was her first day in charge of the office and I had a rollover accident that scattered mail for yards. Hundreds of yards everywhere. And needless to say, it totaled my vehicle and I had to go to the hospital. Ended up no broken bones, I was fine, was stoved up pretty good, but as part of that story I learned that another thing the Postal Service, whenever you go through the academy, they tell you that the Postal Service insures your vehicle for you if you use your private vehicle during the Postal day if you hit a mailbox, you're covered, this, that, whatever. Well come to find out, that's partially true. If I hit your mailbox, the Postal Service will cover it, but they don't cover any damage to my vehicle. And with that being said and not knowing it, my insurance company told me that I did not carry a commercial policy and that was considered commercial use, so my \$12,000 thank goodness, paid-for Jeep at the time, they weren't gonna cover the damages and the Postal Service wouldn't cover the damages, so I was out \$12,000 out of my pocket for my damaged vehicle for a crash that wasn't my fault. And the guy left the scene. I forgot to mention that. He left the scene, they couldn't find him, nobody got a plate. So...

EH: That's awful.

JE: So I was out. So you wanna talk about accidents and stuff like that, that's my accident story there. Obviously at that point I no longer had a vehicle, private vehicle, and I'm out \$12,000 with no way to recover it. The Postal Service was no help. I filed a grievance, I talked to this person, I talked to that person, I talked to the president of the union, I talked to the POOM, the postmasters, and they wouldn't do

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anything. I guess that it was, I mean, without pretty much saying it, they pretty much said, you should have known better and that's your fault. So at that point, being an RCA, you were required to provide your own vehicle. And at this point I'm out! And I don't know about you, but I couldn't afford to run right out and buy another one, so I told them, I said, look, I'll continue to deliver the mail but I'm gonna need an LLV and at the time it wasn't a problem because since I was carrying the Bremen route that was assigned one, and the Pleasantville route, it was, I would just use that one, it wasn't a big deal, but later on it became an issue because they you know, if I'm carrying the Pleasantville route with an LLV and you know, somebody else you know, another route, Route 1's LLV breaks down, we got a problem here. And it becomes a money issue because the Postal Service, they assign you a vehicle, they're responsible to get you a vehicle. It's not your responsibility to provide one. So if we got Route 1 sitting without, with a blown transmission, then we don't have another LLV and the only way we can get one is to call Columbus and you know, they take 4 hours to get here. We already talked about how heavy the mail is. It's a problem! And so, long story short I ended up, I thought it was best, not only for me but for the post office to quit carrying the Pleasantville route and just carry the Bremen route. And that's what I did!

EH: Yeah, yeah. Oh yeah, the safety with a customer.

51:57

JE: So safety with customers, never did I have the occasion where I felt you know, threatened or uncomfortable or anything like that with any particular customers. Like I said, there was your people that were, we'll call 'em complainers that you know, had any issues, but I never once had anybody walk out and threaten me, bring a gun, nothing like that ever happened I mean the worst thing that ever happened is you know, somebody might turn their dog out, but with customers it was never really an issue. However, I will tell you that, and it was not an experience directed at me but it was an experience that I was involved in, safety within the post office itself at times can be an issue. I had, so after David had left and my soon to be wife then, OIC'ed (Officer In Charge) for a few weeks, maybe a month or two, they brought another OIC down from Columbus. And that was the beginning of the end for me. He was, like I said putting it mildly, it was a nightmare. And a specific event that occurred, it burns in me deep, even still now. I had left the office to start carrying my route and there was a situation that occurred inside the office. The postmaster wanted to speak to another rural carrier in the office, he wanted to call her in the office. It was the one I told you that had been there for 20 years and still wasn't full-time yet. So she's been around. This postmaster was at the time, was about 24, 25 years old, so she's been carrying mail about as long as he's been alive. And he's you know, calling her in the office to read her the riot act and this is also a carrier that is prideful in her job, she goes above and beyond to make sure things are right. Never, and I mean never, has a complaint. In public service, you never have a person that never has a complaint.

EH: (laughs)

JE: This lady, she's a phenomenal carrier. I'm gonna go ahead and say she's the best carrier in the office. And he calls her into the office to talk and he's being hostile and aggressive and of course this happens right at me being the union rep, this is my domain. And I don't know if he did it on purpose, I can't prove that but ironically, I went out of the office for 5 minutes and this occurs. He tried to pull her in the office and shut the door. She told him no that she didn't feel comfortable and at that point all hell broke loose. He flung, he kicked the door, threw mail equipment, kicked stuff across the floor, the back door is a metal door inside of a metal frame inside of a brick wall that he kicked open, broke the door, the door flew open and hit the brick wall making a hole in the brick wall and breaking the metal handle of the door.

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EH: Wow.

JE: To the dock. Took her out back and began screaming at her in her face on the dock to the point to where when I did my investigation I went and talked to the neighbor across the alley that witnessed the whole thing. Whenever I talked to her, she said spit was coming out of his mouth, hitting her in the face, he was so close to her and screaming so violently, flailing his arms. One of the other clerks came outside to tell him to calm down and he wouldn't. All the carriers in the building heard it. Finally a male carrier had to step in and tell him to knock it off. Unbeknownst to me at the time, she previously in her life had been involved in an abusive relationship and during my investigation of the case, she told me that all those memories just come flying right back and she was terrified. Absolutely terrified. She was like when I talked to her, this was 2 hours later, I could still barely understand, and mind you to say like, this lady's not dramatic. She's a farmer. She's tough, you know. She gets right in there with the guys and shows them what's up. She can carry the mail with the best of them. She's not a fragile flower and she's whimpering like a little kid. And I was taken back by seeing her in that condition. And long story short, I got a written statement of her as to the details of what had happened--it was pages long. Talked to the neighbor, talked to every carrier in the building that was present for it to happen. Got statements from everybody. And turned this in. And reported it to the postmaster's boss. A grievance was filed. Went to the president of, they call him the district representative for the state of Ohio, Kathy Funderbert. At step 2 for the union where they meet with the district person from the Postal Service in HR and mind you, at this point we had already had 3 prior investigations in the office from where people had come down from even from the national level to interview people. That's how big of a problem it had become. And as this case went forward, the postmaster was never pulled out of the office. The Postal Service has a 0 tolerance policy for violence and what happens if and I've seen it happen to carriers before, if there's a threat, Jim Bob talks to Joe Blow over here and threatens him, "I'm gonna kick your ass." Immediately at that point, that carrier's pulled from service, they call it EP, Emergency Placement. And he is pulled out and he is taken out of the scene immediately removed from the situation. That did not happen. Our postmaster was there for 6 months with this carrier every day.

EH: Wow.

JE: She was forced to work with him, you know with him right there every day. When this case was resolved, and I've got a copy of it for you if you want to look at it, the case was resolved with the union and the Postal Service copied the 0 tolerance violence policy into their settlement and said this is our policy, if it happens again, this is what we will enforce. And that was the end of it.

EH: Wow. Sounds awful.

JE: It was absolutely atrocious.

EH: And is that postmaster still there?

59:27

JE: Yes.

EH: Wow.

JE: He (sighs) he has other issues that, I mean I don't know how much digging you've done on the Postal Service, but falsifying of time is a fairly common event and I don't mean that rural carriers come in and

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falsify their time, I mean that management enters their time in incorrectly to avoid paying overtime and avoid. They have things called 2080 issues and 2240 issues. If a rural carrier goes over 2080 actual hours worked in a year, all of the time that they work is paid in overtime. And I told you earlier that the Post Office is all about statistics so just because your route's evaluated at 8.8 hours, you know, on June 5th of, it's sunny out, the roads are in good shape, the mail volume's down, you could be done by noon. You could be done by 1:00. But you know, in December 24, that's a completely different story. You could be out there for 12 hours only getting paid for 8, so it washes out in the end, but you know, it's, I don't know. It's, I forgot where I was going with that, but...

EH: (laughs) Right. So that was sort of the beginning of the end for you?

JE: Yes. Like I said, oh the falsifying of the time sheets. You know, he whenever a sub, an RCA, or even a PTF would work, I would work my route, let's say I get called early before I come in to work, "Hey we've got mail up at Hebron, can you go pick it up?" Sure, I'll go pick it up and bring it down so we can run it that day. Those hours would not be entered. My mileage would disappear. And it was a common thing. He was very anti-union. Even when I told you, "Hey, I've got this lady interested coming in." He was absolutely having no part of that whatsoever. I mean to the point to where it was, I mean even he was derogatory about it. "I don't trust the union. They've never done anything good to me. We want no part of this." Even whenever he knew what the project [this Archie Green project] was about, you know, he was completely against it. Me being the union rep, I've got my nose in everything that goes on in the office and it wasn't 2 much, there was about 3 or 4 different things in a row that lead up to this. Kay---you said you'll talk to her tomorrow--you can ask her about this. She had a, her route, so whenever we were talking about DPS earlier, so much of your route has to be in sequenced order. Whenever they did your last mail count, say 95% of your mail was correct. At that point, that is the standard. If the standards 96, you're getting bonus. If the standard is 90, you're below what it needs to be. Kay's was low and she had complained and complained and complained and complained and this postmaster didn't do anything about it. I think maybe 4 grievances later after those had been taken, we even pulled out the rules and told them what the rules were and they didn't care. They completely blew us off. We had to take our steps that we needed to take to get it done. Grievances were filed, told you have to do this, and they ignored it. Long story short, her route was found to be substandard and she was below what her DPS volume was so at that point the remedy for the case was that route is no longer credited with DPS mail. It is counted all as raw mail and whenever you drop the DPS standard of mail to raw mail, you're adding hours, and I mean substantial hours to your evaluation. Not only did this affect her from just this immediate time, it went clear back to 2018 when her mail was counted. So she got paid I don't want to say how much money, but I'm gonna go ahead and say it was a substantial amount of money that she was paid to compensate her for all of this mail when all that had to be done was the postmaster had to do a count himself, verify that it was substandard, and correct the issue. He didn't do it and not only did he didn't do it, he didn't do it 4 times. And it cost the Postal Service, I mean it could be a year's worth of pay for some people. So you know, that was one of the occasions. Of course you know, it's not his fault. It was somebody else's fault. So that then you move up to the issue with the violence in the office and we had a couple situations involving, they were fairly minor offences but you know, little things here or there that I would spend some time on and he would forget to pay me. Even I when I would write, it would be clearly written on the sheet and "Oh I didn't see that." Or there was always some big excuse. The falsifying of the time sheets, the violence issue and him trying to coerce some other carriers to write--he typed out a statement on the violence issue and for himself, and made another carrier in the office sign it under penalty of discipline if she didn't.

EH: Wow.

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1:05:36

JE: There was and the 4th one I said in there. That one actually didn't involve me but there was a clerk that was in there that the postmaster was falsifying his own time, claiming he was there when he wasn't. You know, they he was reported, he was found out, he was forced to clock in and out but of course he was being discriminated against because he was being forced to clock in and out when nobody else had to was his claim. It didn't have anything to do with the fact that he was actually stealing time. The falsifying of documents for him was, again I've got copies of them, it was rampant and falsifying OSHA reports, falsifying timesheets, falsifying his own timesheets, falsifying general reports and general making us falsify delivery scans on packages that weren't delivered that he wanted them to be cleared so they showed delivered even though they weren't. I mean it was, the list goes on and on and on. As I told you before, there was, we had at least 4 that I can think of, people coming in from higher offices, district managers, national people would come in and interview us carriers and they (sighs) whenever we would try to tell them the details of what was wrong and what was going on, they didn't want to hear it. We have a forum called the Postal Pulse, which is mailed out to all the employees that they ask questions of, you know, what is your work environment like, do you have a friend in the office, do you feel like your supervisor cares about you as a person--stuff like that. And those letters they generate statistics off of, and they cared more about the statistics on those forms than what the actual issues were.

EH: That sounds bad! (laughs)

JE: Well I mean, as long as we're moving the mail and we're doing what they think we need to do, they don't care if you miss your kid's soccer game. They don't care about...all they care about is did Susie down the street get her TV Guide today and if she didn't and she's calling in complaining, it's your fault that you didn't deliver it. It doesn't matter that that route has sat undelivered for 7 days because that carrier's been sick and they have so much turnover they don't have anybody to do it and the postmaster was sitting eating his Twinkie in his office playing Tetris and he didn't do it. They just want to know why you didn't deliver Susie's TV Guide.

EH: Oof, well yeah, we should wrap up soon, but just on the positive side of things, what do you miss about carrying the mail?

1:08:29

JE: The people. The people I worked with. There was a pretty good, for the most part, a pretty good camaraderie. There was you know, you know whenever we would have a birthday in the office, they had a birthday list and everybody in the office gets you a card. My wife's dad passed away here a few months back and everybody went together and got flowers and you know, Kay even showed up at the funeral, missing out on some of her family events to go. And stuff like that. Even the customers. There was some out there like, the lady I was telling you about--her husband's a firefighter. They, I'm interested to see how her business grew! You know, I mean, not only was I delivering her packages for her and taking her stuff in, it was like I got to step back and watch this thing start from the beginning and take off. There was a couple on the route that was trying to start getting into that stuff, were starting to do really well, and you know, I left in the middle of some of that and I'm just kinda curious to see how it went. There's the stories, what animal's gonna escape next and stuff like that. I mean, there was always, every day was an adventure. There was always something to tell. There was always good with the bad. But obviously the good is what I miss.

EH: Yeah, yeah. Well is there anything else we haven't talked about that you would like to share?

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JE: Not that I can think of. I just you know, I think that the Postal Service needs to be a, it was once upon a time, it was a place where people could go to work and take pride in what they do and deliver the mail and go home feeling satisfied that they did something, and I think those days are long gone. I think that the mismanagement of the Postal Service, the management in general is so poor and you know, they've taken a good job, a good job for the American person and they've trashed it and in doing so not only does it affect the people that work there, it effects the service that the customers are receiving on the other end. At one point to say that you worked for the Postal Service was a point of pride, and you know, everybody had faith that my mail's gonna be delivered and I'm gonna get my medicine and nowadays saying you work for the Postal Service, you throw your hands up because you don't want somebody to throw something at you. The perception of the Postal Service both internally and externally is down and it's a shame. There needs to be, there needs to be massive postal reform. And I've even talked to legislators. Mike Carey's office from Ohio, I've been in constant conversation with them about some of the events that have occurred and I'm not gonna say he's not doing anything, but at the same time I haven't heard anything back either and it's no secret, I think the public knows that the Postal Service is not what it was. And it's a shame. It's an essential function. It's in the constitution that the Postal Service is a service that the government will provide and I guess it doesn't say how well they'll provide it. And it's a shame because it's...something needs to be done.

EH: And you know, like we were saying especially for rural communities who really rely on it and medication and all of that.

JE: Yep.

EH: Well thank you so much!

JE: You're welcome!

1:12:32

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END OF INTERVIEW