

GRTC

Interview: Julio Vidal

Laura Browder: Good. I'm gonna start hitting you with questions. The first one is, tell me all about... growing up. Where'd you grow up, how was it--

Julio Vidal: You want me to tell you about...

LB: Your childhood.

JV: My childhood.

LB: Yeah.

JV: Ok. I born... in the beautiful of the Dominican Republic. I been... stay there until I was twenty years old. Living with a, you know... good family. My father was a business man. On the, uh... I finish high school. Then I went to college in Puerto Rico. Then--

LB: At the University of Puerto Rico?

JV: No, I went to... it's... my--my mom raised us on the adventis religion? Seventh-day adventis?

LB: Mm hmm. Oh, yeah, yeah.

JV: They have a college in Puerto Rico. They calling Antillean College. It's in the... west part? Maya West? That was located. That was when I came, uh, in January 1971. Then in my first semester, I want to make some more money. I came to United States, I have all my aunts who live here. And my... girlfriend from my country. She was in United States before me. So come to United States and I stayed. [Laughing] I never went back to college.

LB: [Laughs.]

JV: We have a nice, uh... when I grew up, it was nice because I grew up in that religion... atmosphere.

LB: Mm hmm.

JV: You know, my childhood was beautiful. It's different-like now. You know why I mean. I'm sixty-two years old. And, uh... that's about... since... I may not have stayed forty-two years. Forty... two year.s

LB: Are you still a seventh-day Adventist?

JV: No. I changed since I came here. When I came to United States, I went different way. You see, I was twenty years old. I have to live on my own. Cuz I stay with my aunt... maybe two or

three months. I have to go by my own. Because she have a problem with--her house and stuff. I don't--cannot stay there with them. They--[I?] have a lot of friends from my country, they live in, uh, Brooklyn?

LB: Mm hmm.

JV: They help me out a lot. You know, they give me good...

LB: Oh, fun.

JV: ...start-up [?]. Yeah. Mm hmm. Then I... two years later, in 1973... I got a job with the transportation department in, uh, New Jersey. Was the New Jersey Transit. I work in New Jersey Transit from 1973 until 1989.

LB: That's a very different system, isn't it?

JV: Of course! [?] this was mass transit. It's different This is a local transit.

LB: Yeah.

JV: We have a mass transit over there. All over the state. We are twenty-three garage. In the state of New Jersey. And, uh... but there I was a mechanic. Was mechanic. Then... I stayed there until 1989, then I went to... my... went to live with my mother in Massachusetts for one year. Then I came here because I had two brother here... that was living here, they told me to come around to see--soon I come here, the first thing I did was looking for the transit company. Because that's what I've been doing all my life. I mean, not my life, but sixteen years. Then I come here, and I apply in October 1990. I apply. That's the first thing I did. They call me in March 1991, about six months later. I'm here since then.

LB: [Laughs.]

JV: I love my job. I like what I'm doing [laughs]. I'm ready to retire but I don't wanna go [laughs].

LB: [Laughs.] So tell me--tell me about the training you got here and your first impressions when you started working.

JV: Well... my... also I'm gonna tell you. I was excited because I was the first Spanish-speaking driver ever.

LB: That's... totally shocking.

JV: Yes. I was. When I find out, that was--you know what I mean? Exciting. I was the only one. We don't have no many at that time. We don't have no many Spanish-speaking people. In the area. Now we--it's booming. And we--I got a--a good training with the training department. We got a--all us--New Jersey--I mean, Jersey... GRTC always have a good training department.

They taking care, they know what you do before they let you go. They training the right train. They do good. On those time, we have... uh, line instructor. That's what they call them.

LB: Mm hmm.

JV: People been with the company so many years--they select the people. To train you... to... they've been here for long time. So I--I learn a lot, I got in for (?)--you know... on the training... department that, uh... helped me out a lot. Yeah. One was the first thing I learned: how treat people. Because that was my first time that I--I have to... dealing directly with the public. And I find out also, it's all kind of people. I never experienced that before. I mean, it's... with the time, I learned. Start liking--people liked me. Maybe, I don't know why, they say... some people, they like my accent, some people like my hair or something [laughs]--

LB: [Laughs.]

JV: Never have problem with people, and they... never have no problem. Always do what I supposed to do. Yeah.

LB: So what are the--typically, in a day, what are the best and worst parts of your job?

JV: My worst part of my job is to get up in the morning [laughs].

LB: [Laughs.]

JV: See, me? My job is like a challenge. Every day I come here, I leave my problem at home. I don't bring it with me. Because... with the time here? I know what I'm gonna face out there. So... I have to deal... with these people. I don't bring my problem to them. My problem with then (?). So I try to take care. You know what I mean?

LB: Mm hmm.

JV: But the hard part is, like I told you, get up in the morning. Soon I get up, I'm ok. I work a lot, I've been working... I mean...

LB: And you're very active in the union, you're the vice president.

JV: Yes, I'm the vice president of the union.

LB: So tell me all about that.

JV: That was a sudden part with my--I try, uh--I never wanted be--I've been in the union since I was in New Jersey. The same union. And we have, you know--I always like... I'm tell you this true. I always like companies that [union into?]. Because... it's... I feel like they protect our job. [Laughing] They do... you know what I mean. What are you supposed to do, I mean... I like--I'm excited about my position, how I help a lot of people, I talk to the people. You know, what they're supposed to do before they get into trouble. See, we don't want to... like, we got a good

president. I don't know if you met him.

LB: Yeah.

JV: Yeah, he's a fighter man. He's a good... We tried to prevent people getting to trouble before they're getting to there. We don't... we're not here just to solve problems. We try to prevent people to get into problems.

LB: So, how would you do that? Like, what's a typical problem that you would--

JV: Well, we see.

LB: Yeah.

JV: We see... because a good thing... the first thing we--we learn... is the confidence. With, uh--with our... members. They see [us?]? They can talk to us. When they see somebody do something wrong, instead of going to their company, they come to us. We have... lot of... people that come to me, 'Julio, I see this... guy doing this, you know, please.' I go... I got a guy yesterday, call him on the side, said, 'please... I see you did [?]' 'Ok, I mean...' See always the one that try to pretend they don't do nothing wrong. But we never approach it like, yes you did. We just--'just in case you--you know... try not to do it' [laughs].

LB: [Laughs.]

JV: See, because... that's, uh--the way we can do. Sometime we see things... that people do wrong. And... I got a guy, I see him do--uh, last month, he was driving... on safety matter. I see him. That's--final (?)--I was waiting for him. I go home, I said, 'I already talk to you. You remember though that they... you doing this is [on the...?]' 'Yes, Julio... [?].'

LB: So there's a lot of safety issues that--

JV: Of course!

LB: Yeah.

JV: We--we--we try to prevent... see, because... you know, we got lot of young people. New young drivers. And you know, mentality different and [like we?] [laughing...]

LB: [Laughs.]

JV: I knew some--if something is like... some habit. Like you wanna do... I mean, not--for some people, they drive and put their hands on the top. Like the [???]. It's something like--about having the people create--

LB: Yeah. Yeah.

JV: You know what I mean. And we try to... communicate with them. So try to... stay out of trouble.

LB: How many of the operators here are unionized?

JV: We have two-hundred... we--I say about 90%. Yeah, we got a--since we took over. We took over two years ago.

LB: Yeah.

JV: This new administration. See before, it was low.

LB: Wow.

JV: I don't want to say nothing about the past, but, soon we took over, it's booming now.

LB: Well it sounds like Eldridge Coles came in, that...

JV: That's... it's helping out too (?).

LB: ... made a difference too.

JV: Yeah, he's a good, uh... president and we glad--

LB: Yeha.

JV: ...we glad that, huh... he took over. He help--not the union. He help the company. He's a person, like... you can talk to him. He listen to you. To everybody, not to--to everybody. And he make the right decision. That's a good thing about him. I always... I'm... met him since I come--since I've been working here. I remember he--he was in the training department when I come here. He was supervisor. So... that's... one of the best thing. And I know he's on his way out. He gotta go. Cuz you know... [laughs] sometimes we... talk [??? hope] we don't get...[laughing] somebody... Yeah, my good--good things is... it's [one within?] the company. In the past... ten years. The good happen to the company. That he took over. Mm hmm.

LB: Mm.

JV: Yep.

LB: Yeah, but 90% union membership, that's huge.

JV: Yeah, we got a--we got a huge membership. Uh, we try--try to get it--try to get it... because of where we're working, they see--

LB: Yeah.

JV: They see the difference. Mm hmm.

LB: I'll bet.

JV: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

LB: So did you run for election or are you appointed?

JV: I was run it. Yeah, I run it. I wanna--I don't wanna run no more that I wanna... cuz [??] I think [?] retire next year. I don't know. I don't know yet. I'm gonna decide.

LB: A big decision!

JV: A big decision, right. Mm hmm.

LB: So... can you tell me about some of your most challenging moments ever--?

JV: The best challenging moment is when I start working. Is, uh... you know... everybody going through the nervous things, what I wanna do, what are... first thing in my mind was... I'm gonna go the right way. Because it's--when I... see, when I started this company, I started part-time. I have [?]. I don't know if you remem--you from Richmond?

LB: Well, I've been living here a long time.

JV: You remember the trolleys?

LB: No, that was before my time.

JV: You don't remember--well, ok. So we had a trolley downtown. That was my job, as a part-time. You see, [?]. It's no problem. Then... I was working, helping pull the... money boxes out.

LB: Mm hmm.

JV: When I become full-time... then I gotta go my own route. My first challenge is... how I gonna treat the people. How are they gonna see me. How they gonna react when they see me. You know, now... it's a different person like they've been seeing all the time. If I gonna do the right things today, I'm gonna do the right turn, make--that's... the... until two weeks after I was on my own that I get confidence. That was my big challenge on the--on the--on this job [laughs].

LB: What are some of your most memorable experiences you've had?

JV: That's what--I mean... one of the memories [?] I have is... when I earn my fifteen years safety award. Uh... with no accidents. Fifteen years.

LB: That's... a lot.

JV: Yes. Let me tell you what happened to me. In that particular time, I'd been developing arthritis in my hip--

LB: Oof.

JV: And once... I been... in my last two years, with my fifteen years? That was [?] time coming up (??). And I went through so many pains. In this legs. Because I don't wanna miss a day. I don't wanna--they only alternative I have is surgery. Hip replacement. Nothing else. I said, man, I don't wanna do, because if I do, I'm gonna lose my fifteen years... award because they're gonna back (?) them up. Because if you... it's a rule... if you two months out, they back you up. I went two years. With pain. Until I get that day [laughs]... Soon I get my fifteen year award, the next month, I got the surgery [laughs].

LB: Oh... did it help?

JV: That was--oh yeah! Since--never no problem.

LB: That's great.

JV: Oh, yes. So that was the one--with the... thing I've always been.. you know, learn--earn it. Because... I don't think... I'm gonna be here thirty years. That's my--you know. I don't think I'm gonna make it. But that was one of my challenge thing in here. Made that award. And I did it. Fifteen years without... accident.

LB: Which is pretty amazing cuz I think acc... I would imagine accidents must happen so much with cars pulling out in front of you, and--

JV: Well--well, you see--depends--ok, you're right. But when they talk about chargeable accident... Ok, you got a accident it's not your fault. Of course, they don't worry about that. But it's... your...negligence. That's when it's a problem.

LB: Ok.

JV: That's when you lose that time. But if you're not charging for that and--you know, it's somebody's fault. You know, you're ok. But, uh, let me tell you the truth. I remember... right now... my last accident is not a accident. The police officer got upset with me. I don't call the police officer, the company did. He got upset when he came to the scene because he don't see no damage. He [?] a guy come out of the driveway, I was at a bus stop. He--touch the bus. Was a lady in the bus. Only one passenger. And I ask her, are you--she's saw. I don't see the guy. I don't even see the impact, I don't heard nothing. But she saw it. And said, 'bus driver, that guy touch your bus.' Then when he--she told me that, I ask, uh 'you ok?' 'ehh, I'm ok, but I don't know how I'll feel tomorrow.' [Laughs.] So I [?]... So they call the police. To the scene. The guy got upset with me. 'Why you call here... [?] accident.' I said, 'no, no. I don't--I don't call you. The company did. But I want you to go talk to the lady inside the bus.' Oh man... they got so into argument. Oh... [laughing]. I don't wanna say [?]. So that's my last one. It's about six years ago.

LB: Wow.

JV: See, I don't get... no accident. Maybe that's God (?). Maybe I'm lucky... that nobody run into me. Nothing like that.

LB: Does that happen a lot with the buses that--

JV: Of course! It's a lot of--see, that's one... with the big challenges... we have.

LB: Yeah.

JV: Is that--the people out there. The traffic. Because, you know, it's lot of.... And we have-- [personally?], I look... I--I have told driver I have four eyes when I drive the buses. I drive for me, and I drive for them. Because I have to look. See one thing I learn, I was, uh, part-time, long time ago at the bus company here? And I met this guy. We were part-time together. He come from California. He told me he was, uh, bus driver in the transit company in California. And he retired from thirty years. And he never had no accident. Chargeable accident. Said, 'how do you manag--how do you manage... doing things like that?' He said, 'you know why? Because I give my right of way to other people.' I learn from this guy. It's true!

LB: I could see that. I mean--

JV: It's true. If you sometime go up to [?] light, let them go! [Laughing] What are you gonna do? Gonna hit it? See, something--sometime you have to be special driving buses. It's different than car.

LB: Well, I mean, I know going down Broad Street--cuz I live up in Church Hill, and when I go down Broad Street in the morning, taking my kids to school--

JV: You see that, yes. Right.

LB: ...it's crazy, the cars weaving in and out.

JV: Yes. Thank you. Thank you. That's one of the big challenges we have right now.

LB: Yeah.

JV: Because to me? Personally? The ridership, it doesn't bother me. Mm-mm. Because... I say... I treated people, they were--I don't care where they coming from. They can come from anywhere in the city. I treat everybody the same. Because, you know... they ride the bus, they pay their fare. Some get rude, some don't, some... well you know what? I take the good people. I let other people go. I don't worry about the--the people with problems [laughs].

LB: Do you have particular routes that you really like to drive?

JV: Uh... I like the Southside bus.

LB: Yeah.

JV: Southside [run?]. Yeah. But, I--right now, I'm on the board (?). I... do, like, [?] from every week. I like that, too. Because... particular, I don't like to stay on the same route forever. I like to change to different people, you know.

LB: I could see that.

JV: People see [laughs]... Yes.

LB: Do you feel like the ridership has changed a lot over the years since you started?

JV: Like, wh--what do you mean, about... a--in percentage, or--or--or....

LB: However you wanna take it, numbers....

JV: Well, depend (?), uh--

LB: ...rudeness...

JV: ... in the--in, uh... percent of the ridership? It might change because a lot of car (?) being--done since I work here.

LB: Yeah.

JV: I remember... when I start here... we have service... twenty-four-seven. Almost. Night, late. County. Everywhere. See, they've been cutting a lot of service, you know. Of course the ridership went down. But, see, one thing... people don't realize. It's not the GRTC problem there. It's a funding money that make--things like that. Ok... people see GRTC. But we shou--we--we sh... they c--we got raise money (?) so we can go everywhere. [Laughs.]

LB: [Laughs.]

JV: Yeah, it--it--it's changed. It's changed. Also... after the economy... they... I say... the people... attitude. It changed. A lot. Yes, it do. You can see people out there... unbelievable. You see it about five years ago, right with you (?)... the mood changed, you know what I mean. Yes, it changed.

LB: You mean getting worse?

JV: Getting worse, yeah. Mm hmm. But you know... compared to the state I been working? Here and New Jersey and New York... ridership here, they good. I love it. Because... they respect. I'm telling you. To me--even [my friend?] bus driver, they say, 'don't...' because they don't know the difference. But over here, if you--somebody do something wrong in my bus, and I talk to them? They listen to you. I see people drinking beer on my bus. [Stop...?] say, 'excuse

me, sir, can you please...' They [?] and they throw it away. In New York, they don't do that.

LB: [Laughs.]

JV: [Laughing] They hit you with a bottle.

LB: [Laughs.]

JV: See, to me... ridership in Richmond, I love it. I do. Mm hmm. Yes, it change, you know, because... economy. Service cut. Uh... some people, they can't go to work, because, you know, the service being cut. They have find another way to... go to work. Some people lose their job because... the service been reduced.

LB: Are there different kinds of people now who take the bus than when you started?

JV: Of course. You know, the... like, that lady told me, my boss... generations different. [Laughs.] That's [how?] lady said. 'Don't worry about--it's a different generation.' Yes, it's right. You know... talk about twenty years ago. This guy was... just... as a newborn when I start working here. But now he's twenty. He ride bus (?). I mean, he got different mentality. Yes he do. [Laughs.] They do. [Laughing] There was baby one day riding before, now they twenty.

LB: Yeah!

JV: They got a different mentality. [Laughs.]

LB: So what have been the biggest moments of change in your job for you?

JV: Uh--when I got laid off.

LB: When did that happen?

JV: That happen... uh... I believe... three month after I be... full-time.

LB: Wow.

JV: Yeah. I believe it was in 1992. When the company cut all... all those county... routes, late nights, we have... [schedule/certain?] drivers because I was at the bottom of the--

LB: Mm hmm

JV: ...post? I been laid off--that was--see, I... but the good thing is... when they come in, they [had letter?], they give me the opportunity, go to unemployment or stay as a part-time. I never left the company. See, I stayed as a part-time. Then, three months later, boom, they call me back. As a full-time.

LB: Oh, that's good.

JV: Yeah, that was good, but at that time when they told me laid off, you know, s.... I was so excited about my job. Then three months later, I got laid off. I mean... it's like... hurt. I mean, that was hurt me, that time. [Laughing] Yeah.

LB: That's tough.

JV: Oh, yes! Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

LB: Tell me more about how the union has changed over the years and how--

JV: I don't wanna say...

LB: Ok, then don't say--

JV: ...because I don't wanna... this go in the air and people think we talking about nobody but it's bet--

LB: Excuse me. [To someone at door] Hi...

Background: Hey. We just checking if you guys are still here. We're about to head out.

LB: Ok.

Background: So, um, we're gonna lock the door. So when you guys leave, just... close it behind you.

LB: Oh, ok, Leticia (?), thank you.

Background: Alright.

LB: We're here forever [laughs].

Benjamin: See ya next week.

JV: See, we... have big change. One of the big change I wanna tell you--off...

LB: Yeah, yeah.

JV: ...the thing? Uh... for the past three year, before we took over... the company, the union, do not have no contract.

LB: Well, I heard that already.

JV: Ok. When we took over, we took over... in July. Two years ago. And now [?] we have a contract sign.

LB: That's what Frank said.

JV: Yeah.

LB: He said it was the... two-year gap.

JV: That--that's the big--see, that's one of the thing... lotta people come back to us. Confidence. How can this guy, just took over three months and they got a contract already? Plus raise. And that--it remember this time, not many company giving people raise.

LB: No.

JV: We get a dollar-something in three years. I mean... we got a lot of... I mean... that was one of the big issue we face--I mean, we had, since we took over. And we've been working... Frank is a guy that he never sleep. I call Frank "New York." He never sleep--that guy send you a text message two o'clock in the morning.

[Laughter.]

JV: Sometime I sleep and see my text mess--Frank, send me a text. [Phone ringing.] Oh, that's yours.

LB: Sorry. Let me turn that off.

JV: And he's, uh... he's a fighter. He's a good man. I mean, he's... guy... and it's a lot of things that have been change since we took over. With the company and the un--and the... yeah.

LB: How was it throughout the--the nineties... here?

JV: Huh?

LB: How was it, you know, during your first, like, ten, fifteen years here? For--for the workers here.

JV: Well, with that time--that time--that was good. See, we lot--we got lotta work with those days, that time.

LB: Yeah.

JV: Until we have facing--when we were facing the cut-off in '92, '93, yeah, we got plenty of work. We woul--w... for those time, we do. But the thing after the... the... company start getting the [call?] they cut here. [The thing/they'd been?] getting worse and now worse (?) and then...but until--see, [?] ridership on those time, too.... Now we have the... the boom. With the VCU students. Ok?

LB: Interesting.

JV: Yes. Uh... we--I don't know if you remember, we lost a contract with VCU. We use to run the VCU shuttles.

LB: I didn't know that.

JV: Yeah, we lost that last year. But still... still... it's a student everywhere. If you go from twenty--you live in Church Hill, right?

LB: Yeah.

JV: When you coming down, I don't know if you ever see it--from 21st all the way down to 17th Street, when--early in the morning, like, eight, seven o'clock, all the bus stop full of student taking the--our buses going to--up to the hill. See, the--that's the--that's one of the, you know, good thing happen about the... ridership. With the company. And you know it's lot of people lost their job, too, they don't ride the buses no more. It's--

LB: That's right.

JV: ...a big difference [other than?] the nineties and now. Yes. It is. We got more buses on the street. We got more, I mean... but we don't have it like they used to. But it's no, I mean, you know what is going on--

LB: Yeah.

JV: You know about... the economy things, you know. Cutting here, cutting there, the copay has to do what they have to do. Unfortunately, we face... the public... we face the... challenges they're talking about because we're the driver. That's the one--they see us. They don't care about nobody else. And I--

LB: You're the face, yeah.

JV: Thank you. We're the face of the company. I mean, we get all the complain, all the stuff... all the cursing, all the stuff. But, uh, they don't understand that. Some do. Some don't. Yeah.

LB: How do you think that people who don't take the bus in Richmond view the GRTC--

JV: Well, but let me tell you about that.

LB: Yeah, yeah.

JV: OK... many people maybe they don't know. Ok, the thing is... lot of people don't use this--the buses--it's because [?]. ... doesn't know how to use the system. I been asking a lot of question on the street about... see... we have... express buses. The company provide free parking on the counties. To people ride the buses to work in downtown area. And the company remember

about... four, three... four, five years ago, tried to extend it to other counties. They fell because... the money--wo--thing is, you know what I mean? (?) But, uh... they--people up there, they don't ride the buses but they agree... that we need... a better system over here. We do. They do. You know. But you know, it's a political thing, you know what I mean? That's--that's the main thing. But--lotta people do, they--they wish... they don't ride the buses but they wish. The.. they extended the service. They can be--get to them. Because sometime... it's true. If you gotta walk two, three, half a block--I mean, half a mile to get a bus, you don't wanna catch no buses. You know what I mean? I mean, but they do. Some people do. I never s--heard... no negative thing that people that don't ride the bus. So many time I call for people, I say, 'what bus I can get from my house to... this place.' sometimes buses doesn't go there.

LB: Yeah.

JV: You know what I mean? But they do. They do. If we got a better system, the thing... would make, you know--yes they do.

LB: But like you say, there's not enough funding.

JV: But now...especially with the--with the... with the... gas price? People rather to drive--I mean... take a bus than... drive. Parking meter in the downtown, the parking system and stuff like that. Yeah.

LB: It makes sense.

JV: It makes sense. It does.

LB: Makes a lotta sense.

JV: Mm hmm.

LB: Um... how... what changes have you seen in Richmond in the time that you've been living here?

JV: Oof.... You talk about Richmond, physically?

LB: Whatever you want to say.

JV: Oh, man, that's a lot of change.

LB: Yeah.

JV: Shoot, I remember when 7-11 was on the [laughs]... 8th and Broad Street. McDonalds right there on 8th Street. 8th and Broad. You don't remember those days.

LB: I'm trying to remember. I moved here in '94, so...

JV: McDonalds was there... Thalhimers was right there...

LB: That's right.

JV: Uh, what is the... TJ Murphy? On 4th and Broad? Bunch of store right where the courthouse--new courthouse is. And, uh... it's such a--big change. Since I come here? Oh, yes. A lot of change. Mm hmm.

LB: Are there more Spanish-speaking drivers now for the GRTC?

JV: Only me and... another guy. Only two. [Laughs.] Maybe, I--I don't blame the company. I don't blame because maybe the people [didn't want to?] drive buses. I mean... I try to--it's not a company problem. But I don't see they apply for the job. Yeah. But, yeah, it's only me and another guy.

LB: wow.

JV: You know one thing is, when I work in the south, where a lot of community are. They love to see me.

LB: I bet they do!

JV: Oh, yes. I, uh [laughs]... I got an incident one day with a lady? But I was out--in the Patterson route, not on the Southside (?). She come with two... girl. And I told her she gotta pay two fare. She don't understand in English. She sent her daughter to me. And she say, 'what she say? Oh, you gotta pay two fare because two child.' She got upset. She started cursing me in Spanish. With her daughter. All that kind of [language?]--I don't understand that. Go all the way to the--where she gonna get off. I make sure she got off at the front door. Before I opened the door. I told her in Spanish. Excuse me, you better watch how you talk to people. That lady turned [laughs]... red, like... cuz she never know I speak Spanish [Laughing]. And you know, I like to work in the south (?) and they see me. Lot'll know me. A lot they know me. Because, you know, it's a helpful for them, that...the way--I gotta--I come in the bus yesterday, ready, no there other day coming from downtown. Right there on Cowardin and Hull, it's a lady speak Spanish, she don't speak English. She don't know what to bus to catch to get to... Haynes (?). And coming the 62, she asked, uh, the driver, but a good thing I was right there. And I explain it to her, she was smile. They--they... like to see--because you know, it's like every place is. I remember went to Germany, I don't speak nothing German. Man, I was... [laughs] awful...

LB: [Laughs.]

JV: And I s--and I glad when I find a guy that who speak Spanish. [Laughs.] He help me a lot. Basically like everything, you know what I mean? But I do. Yes. We do, I mean. It's a lot of Spanish people. Riding buses. Yeah.

LB: Yeah, Richmond's really changed that way.

JV: That do--remember, when I come here? I remember it's only one store. Spanish store. Only--right there on Broad Rock and [? boulevard?]-still there.

LB: Mm hmm.

JV: Now, you go--Jefferson Davis Highway. Soon you pass, uh... Hackenbro (?). That's only thing you see. Spanish store. Spanish store. Hull Street up that way. Broad Street down... so it's a amazing.

LB: It is amazing.

JV: Amazing.

LB: It's such turn around.

JV: Turnaround, yeah.

LB: Cuz I remember when I moved to Richmond--I mean, I grew up in--in Rhode Island, Massachusetts and--

JV: Right.

LB: ... you know, people--

JV: What part of Massachusetts you live?

LB: I lived in Boston and around Boston. Where did you live?

JV: I live in Clinton.

LB: Ok.

JV: You know Clinton?

LB: I think so.

JV: That's about forty-five minute before.

LB: Yeah, yeah.

JV: Before Boston. Between Wooster and, uh--

LB: Mm hmm.

JV: I left that con--town. That's too much--no.

[Laughter.]

LB: Boston can be a little crazy. But I--I mean, I grew up in Providence and everywhere--

JV: I went to Providence one day, yeah.

LB: Ok, yeah.

JV: Rhode Island, yeah.

LB: Nice.

JV: That's a lot of Dominican people, Spanish people there.

LB: But it's not like, when I moved here, you were either white or you were black. Right?

JV: Let me tell you what happened, an incident happen to me, when I came here. I rent this place, I throw a Spanish party. I rent a place on downtown. And the lady, she got a guy work with her? We have a... a problem, me and him. So he called the police on me while I was in the property. The lady--but the lady wasn't there. So he called the police. That was in 1990. Police came. Pull me outside, give me your ID. And he called the dispatcher, give him my information. When she say, 'it's a white male.' I said, 'excuse me, I'm not white. I'm Spanish.' You know what she told me? In Richmond, it white--black or white only.

[Laughter.]

JV: [Laughing] We don't--we don't--we don't believe in some--I said, 'uh, excuse me?'

LB: [Laugh.]

JV: But, now, look... we gotta--but listen, not only Spanish. We got Indians--

LB: I know!

JV: We got everything now. Everyone we have.

LB: It's really different.

JV: Its really different. Mm hmm. See but it's good, though. Culture is good.

LB: It's very good.

JV: Yep.

LB: I missed it when I moved here.

JV: I was in New York and I telling you, it's a lot--lot of different. Lot of culture together is good thing.

LB: Keeps it exciting.

JV: Yes! Yes. Mm hmm.

LB: So, Mr. Vidal, what do you like to do when you're not working?

JV: That's a... good question. I always working [laughign]. Company [laughing]--can ask the company. Well, I... enjoy see--I'm [?] like baseball. I'm--umpire baseball, like... I do, right now I'm working with a recreation center of Richmond. I do the kids, I was--the society of--I love that. I do the... Spanish League on Sundays. Baseball. That's a [?]-you know. But I like to travel. that's one thing I love. All my vacation, you don't see Julio in--in Richmond.

LB: Where do you go?

JV: I go to my country, I got Mexico, I go everywhere.

LB: Fun.

JV: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Mm hmm. But I work a lot. I work a lot.

LB: Well, you must between... your work driving and the your work... in the union.

JV: Well, yeah. Well the union doesn't take me too much time because... Frank got everything under control.

LB: Ok.

JV: YOu know what I mean? We--he--we really... tight, you know, when he need me, he call me. He wants do all the--because he's a full time [basis?], I'm a part-time.

LB: Mm.

JV: He's... I cannot be... full-time in the union because... my posiiton--well he's the full-time. But I mean, he's... more... into [like, the?].... the business [than me?]. See when he go on vacation, I take care of the business, stuff like that, but... he's more into it. Yeah.

LB: But you just work a lotta hours.

JV: I--over here, yeah.

LB: Yeah.

JV: Mm hmm.

LB: So... little--little less travel. So--

JV: So...

LB: How do you think having your job has changed the way you look at Richmond?

JV: I don't understand that--what do you mean?

LB: I mean... you see a different side of the city.

JV: Right.

LB: Because you're in the bus, driving around--

JV: EVerywhere, right.

LB: ...and seeing everyone, everything.

JV: Right, right.

LB: So, how do you think that's influenced--

JV: Changed me?

LB: Yeah, how--changed you and changed... the way you look at Richmond?

JV: Well, uh... really... it's helped me a lot. My--my job, because... I learn... in the city of Richmond. You can... ask me any... thing in this--we--in the city, I don't talk about county.

LB: Yeah.

JV: In the city of Richmond, I cannot tell you. I can no... you can ask me... any bus... where the--you can ask me what was go there, what was go here. That helped me. Change me. I learn... with my job... about--know the city. All the short-cut. How to get places. Quicker, yes, they do. Changing my--my personality, also. I been--when I start working this company, I was a little... rude. Mean... temper. My job change... me. Be more patient.

LB: That's interesting.

JV: Yes. Uh, how I work with the people. Because sometime... look into myself, before... and now, it's--my job has changed me a lot. The job with the city is... teach me... where every place is here (?), in--in the city. In the city limit. You can ask me anything about... I been doing all the route in the city. The company can call me now, say, 'Julio, I want you to go, take this route.' you know, to me? It's nothing I cannot do here. That's good--the--that's a change in my life. With my job. yeah.

JB: It's so interesting, every operator I've talked to so far has talked about... patience and how much patience you need.

JV: Yes.... You need to. I learn that. That's one the thing change... on me. My job... dealing with a--because I never did, uh.. dealing with a directly to the public.... And no--not also dealing... it's how handle a situation. When people come to you... one way--see, sometime I been cursed out for no reason. And I don't say nothing. Keep my mouth shut. I remember one guy, maybe he got a problem home. Coming out in the morning, curse me out for something, I don't know why. He got to the back of the bus. I don't say nothing to this guy. I don't say... keep my mouth shut. He went all the way back to the bus. When we get downtown, he coming back. Ok? And he apologized to me. And I learn from that point, I say, if I will say something to him... when he tell--say something to me? Maybe it would be different story. I got also one incident one time. I got this guy, a young guy, on 8th and Broad. He pull a transfer. Transfer expired about an hour later. I said, no, you gotta pay. He got upset with me. He say he don't wanna pay, call anybody, I don't want to get off the bus (?). He... sit down there, I don't move. Call anybody, I don't talk to this guy--[it worked?] When I see he don't wanna get off the bus, I call the company. They send a supervisor. He pull him out. And I left. A week later, coming onto the next bus stop, I saw this guy flag me down. I don't recognize him. You know what he told me? Said, 'bus driver, I'm sorry what i did to you last week.' Said, 'who are you?' said 'you remember last week, I got... I don't wanna pay you?' You know why he do that? Cuz I never say no word to this guy. He see me so calm. Now when--I almost lose my patience, I call the company. You see? Because he almost make me lose. The way he was talking? For no reason? And you know--see that's one thing I learn in my job. How to handle situation like that. How to deal with the people. Because... I was--I was... my temper was bad when I started here [laughs].

LB: Well, also, don't you think in the north, people behave so differently than they do here?

JV: Of course. Well, that--you know the thing is, what I told you is--the cultures. When you dealing with lot of cultures, you learn a lot. See, when here... when you see only few... it's a different story. You know what I mean? But after b--see, I got on, uh... [the bless?]. the... people see me different. I heard. Let me tell you it true. I'm gonna tell you right now, example. It's a two lady. I heard in the--in the--in the room over there every day, about those two--twins lady. They come in the bus, curse everybody, they do, they do (?). These two lady come in my bus... almost when I was doing the Church Hill bus last week -- cuz they live in Church Hill -- so nice with me, different. Different. I... I got a bless. And tell it true. Cuz I see... people... being... abused? Language abuse from passenger? They come to my bus, they don't even speak. And I don't know--it's maybe because... I don't gonna say they [?]-I never been there. But I don't know what it is. You know what I mean? I have a--a bless.

LB: That's a good gift to have.

JV: Good gift to have. Thank you. That's what I do. People never have problem with me. One day... [laughing] coming down Broad Street, an old lady flagged my bus down. I stopped, opened the door, I said--'bus driver, I don't wanna get in your bus. I wanna ask you a question.' I say, 'what?' 'How come every time I see you you smile?'

[Laughter.]

JV: That's what she said. I said, well, 'that's my--that's me.' [Laughs]. I b--I treat the people right. I do.

LB: You must build up relationships with your riders.

JV: Yes. Yes, I did. Mm hmm. Even... sometime it's amazing. I walking downtown, people call me everywhere. I don't know who they are. I look, 'hey...' Cuz I--I treat everybody, you know. With respect. Even kids, everybody. Everybody. I think I earn it. The way I treat them. And you know, everybody's not the same, you know, everybody got different... I mean... the way they are, but... but one thing I learn? Word doesn't hurt. You can call me anything. I don't care. Because you call that's what I am? No... that's stupid. You got a problem. You call people name that you don't know how they are? You know what I mean? If you know you are your way... I know what to do. I don't even have to talk to you, I... let the company handle the situation. But some people don't do that. They want the... jump into a situation.

LB: Yeah, it's a little different when it's--

JV: That's when you get in trouble.

LB: So... tell me, is there anything that I have not asked you that you would like to talk about, things that you have been thinking about? With regard to your job or anything else?

JV: No... I mean, we've been... I saw the question [? we went to] last week.

LB: You saw the questions, yeah.

JV: The last one, [laughs]...

LB: [Laughs...]

JV: I saw that paper be--I got that paper, I wanna talk about.

LB: Well--

JV: I s--go ahead.

LB: What would you tell someone who was starting out in a career at the GRTC as an operator? What kind of advice would you give them?

JV: That's what I wanna talk about. I advise people that, uh... and I told my coworker... when they say they wanna leave the company, [this that?], I wanna say, but I say, 'listen, let me tell you this. In the city of Richmond? It's nothing better than GRTC as an employer.' I telling you. I tell them that because... for one reason. This is a lifetime guarantee job. You don't see any

places. GRTC do no fire people. That's not true. I'm telling you. You fire yourself. I'm here twenty-two years. Never... yes, one time. I pull (?) over. I sleep on the--out--[laughs]... I got a two job that time--that time. I was sleeping and when I fall asleep on the bus, I... left late. Somebody call. They gave me five day on the street. that's the only time. But I--I mean, that was my mistake. But in twentytwo years I work int his company, you can check my record. Mm-mm. You know why? Because I do what you're supposed to do. That's it! That's the main ingredient to keep this job in--GRTC doesn't looking for you, they'll be after you looking... to fire you. No, you fire yourself. That's one thing I recommend the people. This is one... of the best company in Richmond. Everything, we got everything. We got... one of the best thing we have here? Is through the union, the seniority. See, I'm here right now and the position--like, this week. I can have five days off. Working two days. Because I say, you built your seniority with time, they allow to you to choose your run. The company doesn't give you nobody's run. You choose your days off. You choose your shift you wanna work. That's not--that's the best thing. When somebody--I got a friend, he working here right now. When I met him, he was working--you remember Wonder Bread? On Cary Street? Wonder... Bread.

LB: Yeah, I do.

JV: He was working there for twenty-five years. And I say, he twenty-one there--he only got one week vacation. I said, 'What?? You crazy. I wanna--I wanna bring you here.' Well he scared that time. Now he's here now. And he see the difference. You know what I mean? We got a good vacation pay here, with the time we build over... we got a... best. The best job is this one. But the thing is? You gotta keep it. Don't play games. Cuz the company doesn't allow nobody to play games. If you do, you're in the wrong place. Because they don't--you're gonna get caught. They're gonna caught. You gonna get fired. They don't--they don't operate... one of the thing I ins--tell, we have a new class I speak to them the other day? You gotta come to work. That's the main thing. I don't know why people--we'll pay. Good benefits. Everything. This company have. And I recommend anybody that they wanna apply, they wanna keep good job for life? This is the one. I wanna tell you why it's for life. We have people here, been working... thirty, forty years. They're retired. They're still here!

LB: I know, I've met some of them! [Laughs.]

JV: Part-time. Part-time. So that's a lifetime warranty job. The company keep you. They don't put you on the street. Long you wanna work, I mean, do the right things, this is the best job in the city. I don't care what peop--now... the good thing [??]... one of the... one of the worst thing--this job have? Is dealing with the people. If you don't know how to do that? You have to learn if you're gonna keep it. Because that can get you in trouble. That's one of the challenges this job have. It's nothing... inside the company? You [?] the best. The only bad part with this job? Is you gotta... uh, be with the public. Because we got all kinda publics. All kind different people. You know? That's--that's--that's a main thing. But this is one fothe best job in the city. I'm telling you.

LB: I'm getting that impression.

JV: See that reason, I--I... when I was in--in--in New Jersey transit, I learn that thing. That the

transit job? Because remember one thing. I never see--I don't know if you ever see, but I never see, in United State... that any city transit go out of business. Never. They cut off runs, they cut off service, but they in service. Whatever--they short amount (?), but they still... you can look, I think--you tell me what state, we have city transit, they stop completely. No, they don't. They always have service. So that reason I like this job. Cuz it's life--lifetime warranty job.

LB: Nothing like it.

JV: No.... that's right. Then... we got a benefit, like me right now, I can retire, get money in my pension have--lifetime [laughs].

LB: That's pretty good.

JV: Thank you! You know? It's something like, people doesn't realize, you know, but it's--this I recommend people, if you really want to be... in--this is [challenge?]-I love this job. Because... it's not a inside--I never like inside jobs, stay in the office, stuff like that. No, I don't like that. Because out there... it's lot of fun things.

[Laughter.]

JV: You see lot of things make you mad, make you... I mean... bu--lot of thing make you laugh. Oh yeah [laughs.]

LB: What makes you laugh when you're out there?

JV: I mean [laughs], I see lot of things, you know people, they... strong people, you know hat I mean. So they come... with a f--short fare... something... I mean, it's lot of things, you know, they'll like... it's a fun job. To me--that's why I put this way. I don't have this job like... money-maker--I make money. But I... you know, every time I wake up in the morning, I won (?)--thinking, what I gonna be? What's gonna be out there for me? Never have a problem and never have... *never, ever*... I have to... call the police and nobody help us. Because I try to solve their problem. Because one thing is--one thing--I'm gonna tell you. About this job. When you're out there, if you treat those people right. The people ride the buses every day? When you get into probl--if you treat them right? With respect? And make sure what they don't mean--one thing that people looking at you? They don't wanna miss their connection buses. The bus driver [???]... go to the person when they in the bus. And they got to get soothing to eat while they wan--they... they don't like that. They wanna be on time all the time. When you--when you do that to your ri--to your regular ridership, they respect you. When you get in trouble? You don't have to worry about. They there for you. Cuz that happen to me so many time. They [pull them in], 'wait--' bus driver say, 'don't worry about, sit down, let me handle it.' They do! Where you have to earn it. They... that's one, that's one thing I like... this job. Well (?) you have to love why you do. You have to. It's a lot of [laughing] challenges... You gonna hear lot of negative thing about people and that, but... it's--it's the way one... handles situation. Oh, yeah.

LB: It sounds like it's always a new day.

JV: Yeah, it is. To me? Yes. A new day. Especially, like, right now, I do different route every week... They don't see me in the--they see me in the same rout--some people... I got people they come in bus say, 'oh, bus driver, I don't see you for long time, where you been?' You know, I don't know! They been looking for me. They be, I mean... they do. I got out --that--that [blessed for that?]. Cuz people like me. Anybody. Anybody. Never have problem. Never. Mm-mm.... Yep.

LB: Well that's great.

JV: Oh, yes. Beautiful.

LB: [Laughs] It's a blessing.

JV: I love my job. Tell you true. I love my people out there. I do.

LB: Well, Mr. Vidal, this has been such a pleasure. Thank you so much.

JV: Thank you, for, uh [laughs].... Oh yeah... Yeah, it's nice, you know. That's what I tell my... coworker. I mean... it's hard to... please everybody, you know, try to teaching people the way. Because... I believe sometime it's the way you been raised or something. That make the difference. And, uh... I see also in my--even in my--in my own races, my own people, we do the same, like, hate each other, I mean, jealousy stuff like that. You know, that's probably... one of the thing that, uh... I see around here. With my coworker. I try to, you know... but it's hard to change people mentality. It's hard. But only thing I say, try to do your--your best. You know what I mean? If you wanna keep your job? Come to work, and do what your'e supposed to do. You see people out there that wanna do anything, that's... I see them, say, that's stupid. I mean--

LB: Yeah.

JV: Why you gotta do--change... system... establish for a hundred years over here.

LB: [Laughs.]

JV: Come in... [laughs.] Yeah, but I never have problem here. Never ever. Twenty-two years.

LB: That's wonderful.

JV: Yeah. Mm hmm.

LB: Well--

Benjamin: It's been really nice getting to hear your stories.

JV: Oh, yeah [laughs]. Yeah.

LB: And we're gonna have, uh, Michael Lease--he's our photographer, so he's gonna be

contacting you soon.

JV: Ok. Ok.

LB: To sit for your portrait.

JV: Ok [laughs]. Alright. Can I go now?

LB: Yeah! Yeah.

JV: Ok.

LB: Thank you so much.

JV: Nice to talk to you. Ok.

LB: Good talking with you.

JV: Ok. Nice to talk to you.

Benjamin: ... See you soon.

JV: Alright.