

# Stink

B: Uh, good kids.

D: Or nice kids, and they used an example of us being like a little kid drawing on the refrigerator with a crayola.

B: The whole idea of kidding around implies when you kid someone, they will kid you back. But when a boss kida a subordinate, it's implied that a subordinate doesn't have the same power to kid back, and that's where the anger is created.

I: Would either of you at least concede the fact that Purdy is a hard worker, putting in time on weekends, and working a lot of overtime without compensation like his wife said on the radio?

B: He puts in a lot of time, he's got a tremendous amount of energy and works really hard. I don't think anybody... since the Sanitation Workers organized in May... I don't think anybody has said the man does not work hard. He's a regular workhorse. He's to be commended for that. Our complaint is his relationship with the workers.

I: Dennis, you've gone out of your way to stand up for your rights as a worker, and for the rights of your fellow workers, so what motivated you in particular to say, "No more," to this?

D: Well, because it has changed my life, my whole lifestyle a lot. I wanted my folks to be proud of me for something I've done in my life. Both of them are still living and I want both of them to remember something good I did in my life. I don't think I'll ever be a doctor or something like that, but you know I've gotten more out of this than I would have achieved in college. Because what's the backbone of the country if it's not the working people. The wife fights with me constantly now, and if I had five kids, like some of the other workers, I can imagine some of their wives saying, "You'd better not do this, you'll get fired."

B: And in favor of Dennis too, I'd like to say that some people just have more ability. Dennis has a lot of ability.

I: This is a bit off the subject but Dennis, there's a rumor going around that you won a fishing contest when you were nine years old by filling the fish with lead shot. We want to know about the veracity of that story.

D: Yeah, I did.

B: Did you really?

D: Yeah, I did. See, we lived at Mary's Lake when we were kids. See, it was sponsored for children only... and they had fishing contests and stuff like that and yeah, I sure did. I think my brother helped me and he's a policeman. We stuffed a little bitty old fish and it weighed like twelve pounds... it was just a little bitty old fish and it was pretty obvious.

I: O.K. Phil, you went to college, you've got a B.A. in philosophy. Why are you throwing garbage?

P: Well, I originally got a job throwing garbage to put myself through graduate school. And I picked up 15 hours of graduate credit, then I got involved in all this stuff and so college had to just get put aside. I don't know whether I ought to go back or not, but that was my original intention.

I: There's a real break between the kind of people who go to college and get graduate degrees and the kind of people who work year after year after year.

D: You know the whole thing on that is you can't find life in a book. You can have twenty years of education and walk out that school door and you'll be lost. I think that everyone who gets an education, you know, it's beautiful, but I think if a person was educated in life before he went to college, I think he'd have a lot more ability to perform his daily tasks than to go to college and then work into life. Take Phil. I think he's learned a lot of things in 8 months, things that will carry through the rest of his life. When we first started going, you know, Phil was sort of like a ball, he'd bounce back and forth... you know, Phil's whole theory of how he doesn't want to hurt anybody, that's heavy, I don't want to either. But when it comes down to the fact of who gets hurt, the working people or the people responsible, I think it changed Phil's outlook in a lot of ways.

B: One thing I've learned, with all of my education, is that intelligence and education are not necessarily related. While I have a great deal of education, I've met a great many people who are extremely intelligent who just didn't have the benefit of the education that I had. Where I came from you went to college, and so I did. There was no question about whether I'd go to college.

## Someone Just Like You

It is often tough to think of the trash man as someone just like you. He is. He wants his life to be easier, so he is asking you to not stuff so much damn trash in the can, to avoid filling plastic bags with grass trimmings until they bust, to avoid putting big chunks of glass at the top of the can where they will cut his wrists, to put those cans close to the curb, to replace all bottomless cans and buy lids for the topless ones. Thank you.

D: I couldn't even finish high school.

B: Eighty percent of the people I finished high school with went to college.

D: We lived on a farm and we farmed 640 acres and we milked a lot of cows and we had pigs and chickens and my brother was one year ahead of me in school and my dad had three heart attacks and the doctor said "no more". So me and my brother, one night, while my dad was in the hospital, we talked and decided that since Eric was one year ahead of me he could go ahead and finish school. I dropped out and took on the chore of farming which was a pretty heavy chore like I sat on a tractor from, Christ, 6:30 or 7:00 in the morning until 10:00 or 11:00 at night. My mama would bring food out to me. My dad couldn't do it until finally I just had to quit school. I can't say I never had the chance. I've got the chance now. But I know so many people who have college educations who don't have any more than I've got.

B: Well I didn't go to college to make money.

D: Well, that's how I look at it different.

B: I think that one thing a lot of people I work with didn't understand is that I had no intention of going to college to get rich. And a lot of people think that I was foolish. To spend that much time and money to go to school.

D: What do you think Phil, that you've learned more about life from this deal, or do you think you learned more about life from college?

P: Well, they're just different. It's just two different ways of looking at the world.

I: Do either of you guys think you're playing a role, like you're the great democratizers, or feel related to anything beyond the immediate situation of organizing the workers in Lawrence?

D: I'd kind of like to run for the City Commission. I think I'd get about two votes. I think the role I'm playing in all this is that I want the working people to have a job they can do and go home and be at peace because they have guidelines to protect them about what their rights are.

B: It's a question of dignity. I think it was apparent because I was raised to be a person who gives orders rather than takes orders. I was raised to believe that I would go to college and would be some kind of manager, and I didn't really meet the working people until I started working. And I saw my toes get stepped on and it really made me angry. And I don't like to see myself, or anybody else, robbed of their dignity. And I remember a while back my mother told me she was embarrassed to tell her friends what I did for a living. And I said to her, "Isn't there dignity in honest work?" And she said yeah. And I said there you are. Would you rather I was a crook or something? And she said no. But that's the thing, there's dignity in honest work. Whatever a man does for a living, or a woman does for a living, there's dignity in that. It takes all walks of life, and all kind of people to make the world. And there should be respect for everybody.

D: Self-respect. For a man to be treated like a man is something, for a man to be treated like a number or a piece of machinery, I think it's a whole different world, you know. I think that's management's whole problem, they would like to just assume that working people are just there to benefit them. Because if they get a job done the cheapest way, if labor does, that's gonna make management look good. The cheapest they can get it done, the better for them.

I: But do you think that these problems are ever gonna get taken care of as long as you've got a management class on one side and a working class on the other?

B: Well see... somebody has to do the work and somebody has to tell people what to do and to make sure the job is done in a proper manner.

I: You're saying then, that workers aren't going to be able to be responsible for their own supervision?

B: I'm just saying that the relationship between labor and management does not have to be an antagonistic one. I don't think labor wants it to be, but I think until we feel that we have dignity, and we're treated with respect as human beings and treated in a fair manner, then the relationship will appear to be antagonistic. Because I think the kind of worker you have today, he's not just a bum. He knows what goes on outside of his home, he pays attention, he votes, he's more intelligent. When I started working sanitation I was told I was the first person to go to college at all and then work at Sanitation for more than two weeks, and now you've got three college graduates there. I imagine we've got a lot of people down there right now who have at least been to college. I don't know. So I think you've got a more intelligent worker. I think workers have a better sense than ever of their own rights. They're more willing to stand up for them.

D: You know, we're willing to let management be management... you asked if it's ever going to get any better... what's in the crystal ball for the future. It's gonna all come down to one thing and that's recognition of the right for us to be protected by law, the right for us to voice our opinions about our working conditions and safety, about our wages, and wrapping all of this up with recognition is what it's all about. Then we'll let management play their role, and we'll

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