

The Peale, Baltimore

Out of the Blocks Storytelling Series

Recorded by Aaron Henkin; Photographs and Music by Wendel Patrick

Produced for the Out of the Blocks website, created by the Peale, <https://ootb.thepeale.org/>



Howard E. Williams III ([00:03](#)):

Sometimes my guys clean up 40 bags a day, of trash.

Aaron Henkin ([00:07](#)):

And that's, you're talking about that litter?

Howard E. Williams III ([00:09](#)):

Trash literally from the street.

Howard E. Williams III ([00:12](#)):

Howard E Williams the third. I'm the sanitation crew chief, here at Charles Village. We find all types of trash. We go through the alleys and we clean the alleys. We've found from drug vials, we find needles, sometimes the needles be still having blood in them. We find all types of things, dirty diapers, sanitation napkins, and things like that, that I don't know, I guess animal might've gotten in the trash can and bust

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the bag or something and it's all out in the alley. It's a dirty job, but you know, somebody's got to do it. And it controls a lot of other things too, because people they don't like rats. So, trying to keep it clean, will keep the rats away.

Aaron Henkin ([01:00](#)):

Talk to me more about rats. You deal with them too?

Howard E. Williams III ([01:03](#)):

Yes. We service the rat bait stations. Make sure that they are always being refilled. If a person, a resident, requests of one, I'll write it on a pad and the rat man he will come and he'd go out and he'll put a trap wherever they want to trap for the rats.

Aaron Henkin ([01:24](#)):

So there's a guy called the rat man?

Howard E. Williams III ([01:26](#)):

No, there's a contract that we have with pest control. Like pest people.

Aaron Henkin ([01:32](#)):

You don't have to battle the rats personally? You just keep the traps full of bait?

Howard E. Williams III ([01:36](#)):

Yes. Keep the traps with the bait. But I don't mind battling. Because if I see them, I'm going to kill them because if they out in daylight, it's meaning that they're sick. So most likely it got into poison. If we're seeing one that might be smashed or something like that, we clean that up and we just write it down, that one dead rodent or so like that. We also keep a count of that too. How many rodents that we picked up throughout the month and it all totals up at the end on our chart.

Aaron Henkin ([02:07](#)):

So give me an average, like on an average month, how many dead rats do you collect?

Howard E. Williams III ([02:12](#)):

Probably up to like 20. 20 dead rats.

Aaron Henkin ([02:16](#)):

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How do people react to you? How do people treat you? Do people appreciate what you guys are doing when they see you out here?

Howard E. Williams III ([02:20](#)):

Well, we have a lot of people that do appreciate. It's like a scale. We have some that don't care at all. They will throw the paper down and somebody might say something to them, they be like, "Well (bleep) it they got to clean it up anyway." Sometime you got to overlook ignorance and keep it going. Even though everybody's not going to be the same, somebody's always going to be with a negative. There's always going to be a positive person, it's going to be a negative person, but it's up to them to learn what is right.

Aaron Henkin ([02:49](#)):

So how long have you been employed in the Charles Village Community Benefits District?

Howard E. Williams III ([02:54](#)):

Going on eight years now.

Aaron Henkin ([02:56](#)):

And before that you were unemployed for a while?

Howard E. Williams III ([02:58](#)):

Yes. I also was incarcerated. Coming home from prison and when you come home from prison, it's kind of hard to just step right out there and find a job. But I didn't let that get to me. I went above and beyond. I went to programs. You might've heard of a program called STRIVE. They prepare you for work. They teach you how to go and introduce yourself on interviews, how to update your resumes and all types of things like that. Before I went to prison, I was out here in the street like any other person. Ripping and running, selling drugs and making my money. And hanging with the type of people that I was hanging with, selling my drugs, they was doing stupid things and drawing attention so, not knowing that the police was watching them and they would come where I'm at. And then I get locked up and when I went to jail, I went several times, but after the last time I was like, I'm tired because I was losing a lot of time away from my kids. And when I came out of there, it was like, I'm done. It's over with.

Aaron Henkin ([04:18](#)):

You ever see old guys from that time of your life while you're out here doing this job?

Howard E. Williams III ([04:22](#)):

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Yeah. I see them all the time. I still speak, we speak. A lot of them respect. You have some of them that say, "You got a lot of people that always wants you to be on the downside." But sometimes you got to keep your head high and just keep it moving. I had people laugh at me like, "I never thought you would be working", but sometime you got to make a change in life. That's what life is about. Making changes.

Howard E. Williams III ([04:47](#)):

I'd rather make my money this way, because I know, only way I can mess up if I owe money to the state or anything. Uncle Sam can take my money, but selling drugs on the street, I'm going to lose because if I get locked up, they're going to take my money. My money is going to get spent on lawyers that I had to get. Then, I'm losing all the way around. So I'd rather just get my money the right way and deal with it like that. And I look at it like this, I got a family I got to support and whatever it takes to feed my family, I'm going to do the job. It can be the dirtiest job, I'm going for the money. I'm going to do it.

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