

# Mattress Chronicles



Carlos Macias hauls mattresses at all hours.

## A Deliveryman's Bedside View of Manhattan

By CARLOS MACIAS

Photographs by WILBER CARDENAS

**R**oaming through the thick, late afternoon traffic on the Long Island Expressway, whispering an old Spanish rock song that evokes lost adventures and irreplaceable friends, I approach Manhattan with a truckload of heavily platforms for a good night's sleep.

In New York, you can find all kinds of deliveries after regular business hours: groceries, dry cleaning, flower arrangements, wine, pet food, even mattresses. As many New Yorkers head home at the end of the day, some are looking forward to delivery of a bed or mattress between 6 p.m and 10 p.m. For Sleepy's, the company I have a contract with, night deliveries are a signature service.

Most people, when they visit friends' apartments, only get to see the living room and the kitchen, and maybe a bathroom (of course, close friends may also see the master bedroom). But that's the room I always get invited into, the room with the wedding photograph on the wall, the old, torn but cozy pair of slippers and the wooden

dresser whose top is crowded with prescription bottles, cigarette packs and loose change.

My delivery route starts in midtown Manhattan, where a lot of wealthy students and young professionals have moved into mostly new apartments with futuristic lobbies and concierge service. Those apartments are usually empty, so beds are one of the first things to be delivered; customers greet me with a sigh of relief and a big smile because they're looking forward to their queen- or king-size bed. After I am done, they usually express their appreciation with a firm handshake but no tips—they are not New Yorkers just yet!

Moving up to the East Side, I make my next delivery to an old lady whose children are married

and out of the house. Her husband could be a lawyer or doctor who is never home. The building is at least 35 years old and the lobby covered with old carpets, with a dusty chandelier and archaic elevators. She feels uneasy with my presence and tells me to be extra careful with her carpet, walls, ceilings, furniture, windows...etc. But after 10 minutes of tension, I use my workmanship to set up her queen-size bed, ready to be dressed with fine linens from Macy's or Bloomingdale's. As she follows me out the door, she says, "Here, a little something for cup of coffee, do you know your way out of the building?" She watches closely until I take the elevator down to the lobby.

My next customers are a couple and two teenagers in a two-bedroom apartment at the Peter Stuyvesant complex. They need the night delivery to avoid missing work.

They greet me at the door with smiles and a warm aroma of home-made dinner. The kids take me to their room, and they are excited because they can finally replace their old foam twin mattresses on the wooden bunk bed with new ones. I advise the kids to treat their beds with care and not let their friends jump up and down on them while playing video games. Then, Dad offers me a glass of water and hands me a \$20 bill. "How is the traffic out there? Do you have any more deliveries?" he asks. Mom signs the receipt and I leave.

Rolling south, I am slowed by the traffic. My watch reads 8 o'clock. I reach the Lower East Side, where old decrepit buildings coexist with new ones. The neighborhood is becoming what Greenwich Village used to be: a mecca for young artists, aspiring actors and everyone in between. Unfortunately for deliverymen, most apartment buildings have no elevators.

A girl with a Brazilian accent buzzes me in. My acrobatic talent combined with brute force comes into play, as I struggle up to the fifth floor. Lack of space is the rule—twin and full mattresses are the only sizes that would fit in her jam-packed apartment. Her room is literally the size of the walk-in closet of the old lady from the Upper East Side. She wants the delivery this late because she works the night shift at a diner and during the day she is usually sleeping.

My last deliveries are downtown. First, I have to deliver a \$7,000 king-size set with pillows,

headboard and a few more ornaments. The building is right in front of the New York Stock Exchange, so I have to go through the security checkpoints with bomb-sniffing dogs and double barricade. After I struggle to maneuver a 300-pound bed into the elevator, a young guy in his late 20s greets me at the door of a one-bedroom loft, which has almost no furniture except a huge L-shaped sofa and a 50-inch plasma television.

The bed setup takes approximately 30 minutes. He offers me a beer (the only thing he has in his refrigerator), which I refuse reluctantly. We chat about his job and mine. "How many hours do you work in a week?" I ask.

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Good money but very little time to enjoy it. That's why I invested in the best bed I could find. I need at least a good night's sleep," he replies. When I'm done, he gives me \$50, which more than makes up for having to pass up the beer.

It is past 9 o'clock, and my last delivery is just a few blocks from Wall Street, in a renovated office building that offers apartments for rent. The concierge directs me to the service elevator. On the 10th floor, a young Asian woman shows me the way into a one-bedroom apartment with a huge living room, which has been subdivided with Sheetrock walls. The place now looks more like a hostel.

"Could you please do this as quietly as possible? My roommates are sleeping already," she says. She looks very tired. When I ask her why, she replies, "I work all day and then I go to school. I just got in." Deep inside, I feel relieved that I'm not the only one juggling work and career.

Almost 10 p.m., and I'm finally done. On my way home, I dream about my own bed and how comfortable and warm it is. Then reality strikes: I realize that final exams are coming. No bedtime for me anytime soon. **D&S**