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8 YEARS FOR MOUNTAIN OF COCAINE AFTER PLEA DEAL JUDGE CALLS IT MIND-BOGGLING

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In an unprecedented drug case, it was an unprecedented deal. New Yorker ██████, caught with 200 kilos of cocaine while driving on Route 46 in October 1995, was sentenced Friday to eight years in prison. For his role in the biggest drug bust in Passaic County history, ██████, 48, must spend at least three years, nine months behind bars before parole.

↙ It could have been much longer. Presiding Judge Randolph Subryan said criminals caught with anything over 5 ounces face first-degree charges, which carry a maximum 20-year prison term. The stash in back of ██████ maroon minivan came to more than 7,000 ounces.

"I shudder to think what would have happened if you had gotten through New Jersey to New York," said Subryan. "That cocaine would have hit the streets of New York, and the damage it could have caused, the amount of deaths it could have caused. . . . It's mind-boggling."

↙ But he added that the lenient plea deal worked out by ██████ lawyer was "the best I've ever seen in this courtroom."

Passaic County Senior Assistant Prosecutor Salvatore Bellomo explained the deal was offered because ██████ was obviously not a major drug dealer, only a "mule," or courier, with no prior record and no drug ties. ██████ said he never knew the drugs were in the minivan.

"I apologize for everything," ██████ said in the Paterson courtroom. "I'm ready to take my punishment. I just want to get this over with so I can get back to my family."

██████ told police a New York "acquaintance" gave him some money and asked to borrow

the minivan. The acquaintance later called and said the van broke down in New Jersey. [REDACTED] went to retrieve it.

He was driving it back on Oct. 9, 1995, when he was pulled over at 7 p.m. by sheriff's officers who noticed the right headlight was out, and the vehicle was belching exhaust smoke.

The officers discovered that [REDACTED] had a suspended driver's license, and the minivan was unregistered. Through the van's windows, the officers could see five large cardboard boxes. One was partially open, and officers could see what appeared to be latex-wrapped drug packages.

[REDACTED] gave his consent for the officers to search the van.

Authorities have never been able to find out where the drugs came from, whom they were going to, or who borrowed [REDACTED] van. [REDACTED] never told authorities how much money he was given. Prosecutors estimated it was in the thousands, but [REDACTED] attorney, **Michael Beatrice**, said it was much less.

Beatrice acknowledged his client was caught with a "Mount Everest" of cocaine, but he said [REDACTED] should get a lenient sentence because of the strange circumstances surrounding the incident.

Beatrice said his client has held a job with the same computer firm for more than 20 years. At the time of the arrest, [REDACTED] house was in foreclosure, and he was in dire financial strait

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