

Interview (Anonymous)

for HUM 2504: Introduction to American Studies, Dr. Emily Satterwhite, Fall 2011

Occupation: Registered Nurse

Time and Place: October 17, 2011, 11 a.m.-11:30 a.m., Blacksburg, Virginia

Interviewer: Vanessa Ten-Kate, Junior Communication major from Herndon, Virginia and
Patrick Herndon, Senior Resource Management major from Orange, Virginia

Q = Question

A = Answer

Q: If you don't mind, will you please tell me your age?

A: I'm 55.

Q: Will you please tell me your job title, the name of the organization you work for, and how long you've been working there?

A: I'm a registered nurse. I work at [name of place omitted due to confidentiality request]. I have been there over two years. About two and a half years.

Q: What do you do there?

A: I'm a registered nurse and I'd been working in outpatient cardiac for five years. And I decided to make a change start working in psychiatric nursing. I started that in may

Q: How's that going?

A: It's going great I love it. To me it's much more interesting than cardiac so I'm really enjoying it and really learning a lot.

Q: Where did you grow up? In Virginia?

A: I grew up in southwest Virginia.

Q: What county?

A: Buchanan County...in the coal fields. My dad was a coal miner.

Q: So your dad was a coal miner; was your mom a stay at home parent?

A: She was until I was in junior high and then she started working in a bakery. She learned how to decorate cakes and she still does it for family and friends. She enjoys that.

Q: What does your husband do?

A: My husband works for Virginia Tech. He's an associate director.

Q: What about your kids? How many do you have?

A: I have two kids.

Q: And how old are they?

A: They're both 22.

Q: What are they doing right now?

A: My son has a disability so he works part time in a restaurant as a food prep. He volunteers for other things like for sports. He loves sports. He loves Tech sports. He's been helping the Virginia Tech women's volleyball. He also helps functions at the high school like soccer and volleyball and so forth. He's much involved in Special Olympics.

Q: That's coming up pretty soon, isn't it? In the next couple of weeks?

A: [Nods head.] He's participated in different sports...basketball and softball, so he really loves Special Olympics.

Q: I know they're selling tickets for the one at Lane Stadium right now.

A: And my daughter, she has been going to school part time but she really doesn't know what

she wants to do. So currently she's working part time in a restaurant.

Q: She's still trying to figure out what she wants?

A: Yes.

Q: It's not easy trying to decide what you want to do.

A: No she doesn't know. She's taken several classes and it's just not her thing right now. So she's just going to work until she can decide what she wants to do.

Q: Tell me about your job. How did you come to have this job as a nurse? Is it what you went to school for?

A: Yes. I mean I had jobs before I went to nursing school. I actually had three years completed of an elementary education degree, but at that time there weren't many jobs and there weren't many teaching jobs. My husband was working at a hospital at that time and I got a scholarship in their nursing program so I decided to go into nursing.

Q: You said you work 12 hour shifts?

A: Yes.

Q: What's your typical shift?

A: It's from 6:45 to 7 p.m.

Q: That's a long day.

A: It is a long day. I work three 12-hour shifts in a week. Each week my days are different.

Q: Do you like that its different every week?

A: Yes I do, and if want more time off I can request that like a month in advance.

Q: So you have some flexibility with your job?

A: Yes. So it's pretty neat having four days off during a week, so I like that.

Q: What's the best thing about your job?

A: Just taking care of people...helping them get better.

Q: My dad went through cancer and I know some of the nurses and my dad were so close after it was over.

A: It's just such a good feeling knowing that you're helping someone. You can't help everyone but it's just...I don't know, it's really hard to explain, but it's a really good feeling.

Q: What's the hardest thing about your job?

A: Currently working in psychiatry, probably the hardest thing would be when patients are noncompliant with their treatment.

Q: Do you usually see your patients for a long period of time or are they in there for a short period?

A: This is more short term. I'm in in-patient psychiatry, so patients are there more short term. Most patients are there like three to five days. Some patients are there longer, but most are three to five days.

Q: Do they usually go home afterwards, or do they go to another hospital?

A: A few patients go to another hospital. Another tough thing is we have a lot of homeless patients. Have you heard of the Rescue Mission? It's a homeless shelter so a lot of our patients go to live there when they leave the facility. The social workers really try to place them with family or in a different type of home, but a lot of patients have to go back to live in the shelter. It's sad.

Q: If you could have any job in the world, what would you do?

A: I don't really know. I enjoy nursing. Sometimes I think, well maybe I should've been a teacher. I love children. But then I got into nursing and I'm happy with what I'm doing.

Q: What do you wish you knew about nursing before you decided to make that your job?

A: I always wish that I had been a nurse assistant or nurse's aide before I went directly into being a registered nurse. You know, just that type of care. I wish I had done that before.

Q: To kind of give you a little building block?

A: Yes, a building block and maybe more confidence and more of an idea of what goes on in a hospital setting.

Q: How does your job affect your personal life?

A: Well working the 12 hour shifts, I really don't get to see my family. I mean I get home at, say, 8:00 and I may see my husband a couple of hours and then we're off to bed. But then I'm off four days. Sometimes I do have to work the weekend and he doesn't work weekends unless he's traveling. My husband and I are really close and we really enjoy our time together.

Q: So it mostly takes time away from your family?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you work any holidays?

A: Yes.

Q: That has to be hard too, I'm sure. What is your relationship like with other employees? Is it kind of a family atmosphere?

A: I would say it is. There are several employees where I work and you just get to know them and it's wonderful. It's the most supportive environment I've ever been in. Everyone's very supportive very nice. We help each other. It's just really been good.

Q: I guess you have to depend on each other in case something happens.

A: Yes, especially in psychiatric because with the behavior of the patients, you don't know what's going to happen from one minute to the next. You really have to be careful with your safety and your patients' safety and your coworkers' safety. So you have to be very supportive.

Q: Does law enforcement ever have to come in?

A: Yes. We have security there. We have three floors of patients. One floor is children, and there other two floors are adults and so we do have security there at all times.

Q: How often does security have to get involved?

A: Not really that often that I have seen.

Q: Have you ever had an incident where security had to be called?

A: Yes.

Q: What happened?

A: Lots of times when security gets there, the patient settles down. Sometimes the patient needs to get an injection to help them settle down, calm down. Most of the time with security there and a lot of employees that come, especially male employees that are strong. So what I see is that most of the patients are cooperative when all of that happens. Everyone supports each other.

Q: This is kind of going off of what we were talking about but what is your relationship like with patients? Is it close?

A: No, it's just professional. You know you talk to the patients and you're friendly with them but you have to draw the line there. You have to be professional; you can't just get close to them. We're not allowed to touch the patients and they're not allowed to touch other patients.

Q: How would you describe your work environment? Is it challenging? Stressful? Fulfilling?

A: All three. [Laughs]

Q: Tell me something surprising about your job that most people wouldn't know?

A: Well I can't really say, but when a patient is psychotic, some of the things they say is very surprising. But that's not something I can talk about.

Q: Well it sounds interesting.

A: It's very interesting; it really is.

Q: You kind of mentioned this, but are you happy with your job overall?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you feel like you might stay where you are? You don't want to move around anymore to different types of positions?

A: No. I have always been interested in psychiatric nursing, but I never had the opportunity to go into it that type of nursing. I had the opportunity this summer so I took it. I jumped on it and I look forward to learning more about this field and also going to some conferences and seminars and also doing some online education.

Q: This is kind of a hard one, what is the craziest thing that has happened while you were at work?

A: The craziest thing?

Q: Maybe the most hectic or wildest situation. Just something that stands out in your memory over the years. It can be from right now or maybe from your last jobs.

A: [Pauses] Something really crazy...gosh that would have to be with psychiatry. [Laughs] I've heard and see a lot of crazy things. Oh that is a hard one. Let me think a little more on that.

Q: If you could change anything about your job, what would it be?

A: Are you talking about the surrounding I work in?

Q: It could be anything. It could be the hours you work; it could be more benefits from your job. Something like that. Anything.

A: Well Come Back to that one. [Laugh]

Q: Their might nothing that you want to change, I know we talked about the outpatient, that might be one thing. We talked about how a lot of them come and go to the homeless shelter. But that's a really hard thing to change.

A: Um I'm really happy there. Yeah it would nice if some of the patients had a place to go. A place to live. [Pause] I wish that um the patients had more, like they're not allowed to go outside. I wish they had more exercise equipment and so forth like that. That's something I wish that would change.

Q: Do they ever ask to go outside and they have to be denied? What about smoking cigarettes?

A: No, there's no smoking at all. They have a nicotine patch. But they're not allowed to go out and smoke.

Q: Do you know why they're not allowed to go outside even just for a little bit.

A: We just don't have the, It probably the safety of it. I don't really see that theirs you know, they would have to be supervised defiantly.

Q: You do not have a secure outdoor environment for them?

A: No we don't, that's exactly right.

Q: That could be an improvement to invest in. Do you feel the amount you are paid compensates for the work you put in? Like the hours? Why or why not?

A: I would like to be paid more. [Laughs] I have a two year degree; it's an associates degree. I think I'm paid well for only having to go to school for two years. But it would be nice to be paid more. [Laughs]

Q: I guess after you have been working their awhile and you have kind of moved up the ladder,

it would be nice to move up the pay ladder to.

A: Now they do have shift differential. Like if you work at nights, you get paid more. You work holidays your paid more. You work the weekends, you get paid more.

Q: Is it like a time and a half for holidays or just a flat?

A: I think mine is an extra ten dollars an hour, and when I worked night shift it was an extra three dollars.

Q: What single word would you use to describe your job? Why did you choose that word?

A: One signal word...Hmm. [Pause] One single word about my job...ok [Laughs] [Pause]. It's not the money, with most nurses it's not the money; it's just caring for people.

Q: So caring?

A: Yes, caring.

Q: This one I think is going to be an easy one for you [Laughs]. Would you recommend your job to other people? Why?

A: Yes, atmosphere and people.

Q: Every day when you come home do you feel good?

A: Yes.

Q: What would you say it takes to be a good nurse? What type of advice would you give?

A: What it takes to be a good nurse, [Pause, thinking] you have to have patience, to have to give support, you need to be honest, you need to be competent, caring.

Q: Are their people you see who become nurses who can't handle it, can't handle the hours, can't handle the pressure, and what happens do they have to move on to a different job or do they stick around until They become better at it?

A: First of all nursing is not for everyone, I have seen nurses that are burned out or this is just not for them and I think some nurse just switch different areas of nursing, to find that niche. Then I have seen nurses who just get completely out of nursing, just do something else.

Q: Do you feel that being in the Physc. Ward, it's harder on folks, the nurses maybe?

A: I think with each area of nursing, It's just not meant for every nurse. You know what I mean, there's something for everyone and Physc. Nursing is not for everyone. Working with children, you hear a lot of nurses say I would never want to work with pediatrics, and like myself, I wouldn't want to work ER or intensive care, it's just not me.

Q: What were your hopes and dreams when you were younger? How were they fulfilled or changed? I know you always liked teaching but was their anything you wanted to be when you were younger?

A: When I was in high school I wanted to join the military. [Laugh] I did, but my parents did not want me to do that so, so at that age I wanted to travel and I wanted to see new things, and I was, I don't know what you called it, patriotic, or just disciplined, so that was something that I thought about. Now when I was little like early school, I remember for my student record, we had to draw a picture of what we wanted to be when we grew up, and I was like six years old, and that was a nurse. I drew the picture and I remember seeing the picture, and I drew the picture of a nurse with the little hat and its really amazing that now that's what happened.

Q: You actually fulfilled that.

A: Yes I did. [Laugh]

Q: Do you have any more dreams now, or more fulfillments? Travel, go to the river?

A: When I retire I would like to travel, yes, we go to the river, but yeah we would like to travel once we retire.

Q: Where do you want to go?

A: I don't know just different places, especially Europe; I would like to do that.

Q: Have you been there before?

A: No, I have not yet been to Europe So you know we love old things so I think we would love all that architecture in Italy and Europe and I would like to see that.

Q: So where do you see yourself in 10 to 15 years?

A: Oh I'll just be here in Blacksburg [Laughs]; hopefully we'll be here and just do some traveling. Maybe have some grandchildren we can spoil [laugh], so that would be nice.

Q: In our class we've been talking a lot about the American dream. What do you think about the American dream? Do you think the American dream is still alive and well? White picket fence and nice house, do you think it is obtainable?

A: It is obtainable; I think a lot of people, I don't think the American dream is in the picture or is up there like maybe they thought of.

Q: Maybe they shoot too high? Set goals maybe a little too high?

A: I guess it's just because of the economy and the job situation, and part of the American dream is having a good job and be able to buy things and do things.

Q: Comfortably?

A: Comfortably, yes. I just think now the job market is more competitive and there are less jobs so, but I still think you can fulfill it, you just got to keep trying and don't, don't give up. I think there are a lot of jobs out there, you just have to keep trying and you know.

Q: Do you feel you and your family have fulfilled your dream, your American dream?

A: Umm, my husband and I yes, but my kids, you know they're not there yet. They're still working on it.

Q: Is there anything you think I have missed? Or is there anything you would like to add

A: I can't think of anything right now.

Q: Have you thought of the craziest thing yet?

A: Ok, [laugh], I'm really not sure about that, you know I just have seen some crazy things, nothing comes to my mind, throughout the years there's been a lot of crazy things. I can't point out one at this time.

Q: Well thank you so much.