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Once I married we moved around the United States because my husband was an Army Officer. We came back to the area in 1994 because both of our families live in Christiansburg and we felt like we needed to come back and help with them, especially older parents and grandparents. Both of us grew up in Christiansburg, and I am an only child. My parents were both factory workers in the town of Christiansburg-Blacksburg area. I was the only person in my family—or the first person—to go to college so that was sort of a big push. Um, there was never a time when my parents said, “oh I don’t think we can afford college.” You *will* go to college, it was very important for me to do that. My husband is currently the acting Town Manager for Christiansburg. Our children. Linda is the older child and lives in Germany, she is married to a soldier, and the younger daughter, Mary, with her husband and new grandchild [*smiles*] lives in Zimbabwe, and they are missionaries.

Keep in mind that I went to school in the 70’s. I chose Virginia Tech because of their year-long student teaching program and I am an only child. So I had a choice between Radford and Virginia Tech. And I primarily chose Tech because of that, even though I knew Radford had been a state teacher’s school for a long time. Campus was smaller but I thought that the education and the courses I was receiving were adequate at the time. Um, I don’t advise students now to go to Virginia Tech for education. I think that, well, they have actually done away with it. When we student taught within that particular group, because they had modules all over the state at that time, and there were 8 of us in the Roanoke City model, and there were some of us in Northern Virginia. It’s hard for me to say, but there were probably 50 students who were doing student teaching at the time; we did it that year of ’75-’76.

We did move around a lot, we were generally in an area three years and we would move. One thing I chose to stay home with my daughters while they were younger. But also, um, also you will find with a teaching profession, a lot of times, that you will have to work your way into a position and by the time you do that then you are moving on. What I liked about the Army was that it gave me the opportunity to look and learn from many teachers across the country—how they do things differently. It also gives you an openness to change. We don’t have to do things

the same way as every year and I can appreciate that, 'cause I say different things in different places.

I love my job, so I really enjoy teaching and being a teacher and I really like the lower primary grades. I have taught kindergarten for a number of years and then I have taught first grade for a number of years. A typical day: you arrive in the 7:45 range. Here students come in at 8:30 and are immediately busy. My job continues until—contract hours are 3:45, but we're usually here between usually 4. Yesterday I left at a quarter to 6. It's a typical day, depending on meetings and if you have parent conferences, that sort of thing.

I had a student in Hawaii that was a special needs child and I worried about how I was going to work with him, but it turned out that I learned a lot more from him than he learned from me in some ways. Because he taught me about looking at the diversity and just what his special needs were, but he could still work with the children in the classroom. And his mother was very good to help, but she was also learning how to cope with his disability. So it was sort of like a whole learning year together.

It's very sad to have a student teacher or an intern who comes in as a junior or something, thinking that this is what they want to do with the rest of their life, and realizing it's not. Teaching is a tough job these days, doesn't pay very well, you don't go into it for the money for sure. If you want to become a teacher, you have to be serious, be ready to persevere. Patience, especially with first grade, because you have all kinds of things going on. Um, and being willing to just be open to these new ideas that are presented. You can't do the same thing every year. I have a sibling this year from a child last year and, you know, I don't want the parent to go and see the same packet that I did last year. There will be some things, but definitely try to change up. Look for new ideas. That's where the Internet comes in, too, because there's always new things.

Technology has really made my life more interesting. I like the use of the Smart Board, the things we can find on the Internet to use in our lessons. Some students may have tested better on paper and pencil instead of on the computer, and yet this is the computer generation [*smiles*]. They have grown up with the technology, so to them it would probably be almost strange to sit at a desk and fill in little bubbles, that sort of thing. Um, they are used to just clicking on the computer. But truly, technology has made a big difference in the way you teach, and you have to stay current with the things that are going on. Montgomery County is very good at offering

classes for us or pointing out that different colleges are offering courses where we can get our recertification points.

To an extent, I think here—especially here, we see a lot of pressure on students to do well on the SOL. Our school is noted for high scores in Montgomery County. So my children even hear me say, we talk about “this is an important thing, you have to learn this in first grade in order to move on to second grade.” And I’ll remind them that there is this big test in third grade that they have to know certain things. So the pressure is sort of there. Well, they do a lot of preparation and I don’t think that the primaries [first and second grade teachers] see that pressure. But definitely third, fourth now has an SOL, fifth knows that that testing is coming and they know that they need to do a good job at taking it seriously. When they test here our younger students know that they have to be very quiet in the mornings because the tests are given via computer. So the older students are down in our hallway in the computer lab, “remember everyone has to be quiet,” that sort of thing.

What I see is that teaching is often viewed in America, I think because we have free education so to speak, students take that for granted. They expect the education to almost be handed to them. Where in, say for example, in Zimbabwe where my daughter is, parents pay for their education regardless of how poor they are, and it’s more about relationships and making sure you have a job. I don’t see that work ethic so much in some of the students. I think we have come through a generation where I don’t see that. I think that people, more students are coming to school expecting to be handed the education. Not really work toward that, and then I also see the work force, many people will refuse to take a position because they feel like they could get a better position. Instead of starting at the bottom and working up, as I feel people of my generation more likely did.

I think there is an American dream in America, and when you go overseas you find out that people there truly believe that if they came to America their lives would be better. If people here were more willing to embrace the work ethic, I think they would see that American dream realized. It’s getting harder and harder to realize it because I think people are just not willing to put forth the effort.

To read the complete conversation, please see the transcript.