

Interview with Jennifer “Jen” Mooney

HUM 2504: Introduction to American Studies, Prof. Emily Satterwhite,
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Occupation: Senior Instructor of English, Shanks Hall, Virginia Tech

Time and Place: March 19, 2010, 2 pm to 2:55pm, Shanks Hall, Blacksburg, Virginia

Interviewer: Aimee Gervacio, senior English major from Springfield, Virginia

AG: Aimee Gervacio

JM: Jen Mooney

AG: So Jen Mooney, “Talking About Work.” Would you please state your name, your job title, and the name of the school that you work for?

JM: Um, my name is Jen Mooney, um, Jennifer Mooney, but everybody calls me Jen now. Um, my title is Senior Instructor of English and, um, I work for the English Department at Virginia Tech.

AG: Okay. How long have you worked here?

JM: Since 1996. My husband and I came here the same time. [**AG:** Uh-huh] Um, we're both Virginia natives, um, we came back from graduate school at the University of Kentucky and, uh, we've been here ever since. We fell in love with it.

AG: Um, you went to the University of Kentucky?

JM: Uh-huh [nods]

AG: For grad school?

JM: Uh-huh [nods]

AG: Where'd you go for undergrad?

JM: Um, actually we went to a, uh, a little place that, um ... Um, we went to a little school, a little liberal arts school, in, um, south, far southwestern Virginia. We're both Dickinson County natives, and, um, we went to a place called, then, Clinch Valley College. Now, it's no longer called Clinch Valley College, it's the University of Virginia at Wise.

AG: Really?

JM: Yeah! Do you know that place?

AG: Yeah!

JM: Really? How?

AG: Yeah. Well, I just, one of my friends has a friend who goes there. [**JM:** Yeah] And then I heard, like, I know some girl's, like, "I'm from Wi-se, Virginia [**JM:** Yeah] and I go to UVA at Wi-se."

JM: Yeah [laughter] We have, we have a tendency to do that, Yeah. [laughter] Take one, one syllable words and do two syllables out of them. Like "gem" [**AG:** Mm hmm] for "gem". You know, so. Anyways. But Yeah, that's where we went.

AG: Really?

JM: Um, and uh, Yeah, we met, um, when we were, um, seniors; he's a year older than me, um, but, um, I'm not sure how that works that we were in the same

class. Um, but we, um, graduated the same year and, um, we met in a, in a, when we were both seniors at Clinch Valley. And then we worked two years as reporters [AG: Oh yeah] for the Coal Field Progress, in Norton, Virginia. And then we went back to grad school, um, we went to grad school, and we got our masters and our Ph.Ds at the University of Kentucky.

AG: How long did it take for you to, um, get your Ph.Ds?

JM: Um, way too long, really [laughter]. Um, the um, we uh, we got the course work done, did the preliminary exams, and then we got our jobs here before we finished our dissertations, so it took a little bit longer. But, uh, I was really down to the wire with my dissertation; it was like I had, like, a year to a, to finish it [AG: Mm hmm] and that meant, for me, a year to actually start writing it. [AG: Mm hmm] Because I had done all this research, but I didn't want to actually sit down and write it. [AG: Uh huh] So I actually wrote it in six months with my, um, the chairman of my committee kind of breathing down my neck [AG: Yeah] And I was here, and he was still in, he was in Kentucky, [AG: Mm hmm] so we were communicating by email and phone calls and everything. It took a while.

AG: So you finished your dissertation here?

JM: Mm hmm.

AG: That's awesome.

JM: While I was teaching four classes a semester [indicates with fingers]

AG: Really?

JM: Yeah.

AG: What classes were you teaching?

JM: At that time, I came here, the very first semester, um, I was hired to teach, um, what was I teaching, I was actually brought in like as a, to do technical writing. [AG: Mm hmm] I had done, um, business writing and had served as a consultant, um, to the school of engineering, a writing consultant to the school of engineering [AG: Really?] ... at um, [snaps fingers] UK. And then I was brought here and my first semester I taught three sections of Tech Writing and a section of 2604 [AG: Mm hmm] Into to Critical Reading, and then I kind of moved in. Once I got here, I kind of moved in a, you know, a number of different areas over time. But my area, my dissertation and my Ph.D is in nineteenth century British, and now I'm in Professional Writing. So, which is [trails off]

AG: Do you think you're going to back, like, to nineteenth century British?

JM: I really, really love Professional Writing [AG: Yeah] and I've always liked it. I remember when we were at University of Kentucky, we didn't have tech writing there, we had business writing. And there, most of the GTAs taught freshman comp. [AG: Mm hmm] Some of the lucky ones got to teach the surveys of American and Brit lit, um, the longer you were there. Um, and but, um, I found right away, the first time I was ever assigned business writing, that I really loved it. And there were people who were teaching lit who were going, you know, "I can't believe you want to teach that; it so boring." But to me it's not boring, it's really fun and exciting, and you can do so many things now with all

the new technologies. I mean, back then, that was, like, the mid-80s and late 80s; we didn't have the computers and everything. So it wasn't as exciting then with the technology but, in other ways, and now, I don't know, I'd really like to stay in Professional Writing. [AG: Really] Yeah, I like to teach, I like to do creative stuff, and it lets me have an outlet for my creativity, like the Doc Design class. [AG: Yeah. Cool.]

AG: So you came here in 1996. [JM: Uh huh] Um, what did, what was your title then and how did it progress? Like I remember you were my advisor, like, freshman year [JM: Yeah, yeah] Yeah, but I remember you when you went back to, like, teaching, So, like, what was the progression?

JM: It was kind of strange. Okay, I came here in '96 as a plain old Instructor. [AG: Uh huh] Um, and the goal when you get out, when you're working on your Ph.D [AG: Mm hmm] is to get a tenure track job somewhere. [AG: Yeah] And we came here thinking, well, we'll finish our dissertations, finish the doctorates, and go, and find tenure track jobs somewhere else. But we fell in love with this place [AG: Yeah] and we just wanted to stay. And um, so we got, um, I was an Instructor, and then, in like a couple years, I moved into the position of, um, Coordinator of the Internships Program [AG: Uh huh] and then I like had that for two or three or four years and then when we moved over here, from Williams Hall to Shanks in 2001 [trails off]

AG: It was over in Williams?

JM: Yeah, you didn't know that?

AG: No.

JM: Yeah, we were over in Williams. It smelled, I'm sorry. [laughter] But it did kind of did cause there was no AC [AG: Oh really] and, can you imagine being on the 3rd floor of Williams hall in August and September, having classes. And they turned the heat on in October every year and they turned it off in April. And if we had heat waves in middle of October or November or March, too bad. I mean, it was awful; I kept a little fan running in my office all the time [AG: Really] And so, and when we moved over here, we ended up in that little office suite down on the third floor [AG: Yeah] So that was where Tony Colainne was the coordinator of advising then, and I was the internship person, [AG: uh huh] and then Joe Eska was the undergrad program director, and Dee was down there. And so when Tony retired, I just kind of, um, Lucinda Roy was the chairman, the chairperson of the department then, and so, um, she let me step into his position. [AG: Mm hmm] And I was, I did that for like three or four years, and then I just got so burned out [AG: Yeah] and then came back. In 2007, I stepped down and, uh, I resigned in the fall of 2006, [AG: Mm hmm] but I had to stick with it through the spring of 2007. [AG: Yeah] So it's been really fun actually coming back to just teaching, [AG: Yeah] it really has. Since, you know I was only teaching two classes then [AG: Yeah] and sometimes it would be like online tech writing and I wouldn't see, I wouldn't even be in the classroom; I really like to be in the classroom. [AG: Yeah, cool] I'm sorry I talk too much.

AG: No, no, no, you're fine. Um, okay, so what did Shanks used to be? Was it just, was it just Comm?

JM: Dorm. It was a dorm.

AG: A dorm?

JM: Yeah, Comm was way over on the other side of the Drillfield, way over there, and we were in Williams. And we both, we moved over here. There's always, there's been, I don't know if you know, of the long-standing sort of rivalry between English and Comm [To the camera] We're not supposed to say anything about that. But there are people in English who really love Comm and I happen to be one of them. [back to AG] So, um, but yeah, there's been a rivalry over time, but it's really, so it was really like, "We're going to be in the same building, that's kind of weird" [laughter] I like it, I like the, actually, I love the stuff Comm does, so [trails off]

AG: Yeah, I wish I like doubled majored in Comm.

JM: That would be cool. It really would, I mean because, you get, Comm and Professional Writing have so many connections.

AG: Yeah, definitely. that's what my roommate's doing

JM: So, well, you could always stay.

AG: I could, I could just do that.

JM: What would your parents say to that?

AG: I think they would kill me. [laughter]

AG: So, let's step back a bit. Um, can you tell me a bit about your family background? Anything that you're comfortable with telling.

JM: Um, if you turn around and that little picture of, um, my dad, my mom, and me. and we were at Grigg's damn in Columbus, Ohio. Um, I was born, um, in, I said I was a Virginia native. I was born in a little town called Clintwood in Dickinson County and my dad was a school janitor there and my mom was always a housekeeper, a housewife, and so she never worked a "real" [with hands] job outside the home. but oh, that is a real job, [to the camera] So I'm not being sexist or anything. [back to AG] So, she worked in the home, he worked outside the home; more traditional family, but um. so um, I told you earlier that she walked to the doctor's office to have me. And so I was born in Clintwood, we moved to Ohio soon after that, so I was really raised from just a couple years old, we, uh, moved back to VA when I was about 11. And um, my dad, neither my mom or dad graduated from high school, I don't think, but um, they always, but I knew from the minute, that I was a tiny kid, I was going to college. [AG: Mm hmm] They always pushed me to do that. They always let me, they always encouraged me to read, I always had books. My dad would take me to, um, like, there was a store downtown, in downtown, in Columbus, called Lazarus [AG: Mm hmm] and it was, you know all stores now are in malls and they're one floor; [AG: Yeah] this place was like multiple floors and on one floor they had, like, um, a little bookstore for kids [AG: Mm hmm] and he would always take me down there and we would go to the bookstore and, uh, I'd get books, and so I was reading a lot [AG: Uh huh] from a very early age [AG: That's

awesome] and they were encouraging [AG: Good, good]. He had a really bizarre sense of humor [laughter] and she was really kind of bossy, so I kind of got both of those traits, if you ask Steve, so, more of my mom than my dad sometimes, but anyway.

AG: What about your brother and sister?

JM: My brother and sister - um, I was the baby of the family, and, um, do you know the, have you ever heard the term "change of life baby"? [AG: yes] Okay, it's when the woman thinks, you know, she's going through menopause, so she doesn't think she's going to get pregnant. [AG: Uh huh] Well, my mom did. you know, she thought, that wasn't going to happen, [laughter] but I was a change of life baby. My brother is 18 years older than me and my sister is 16 years older than me. So I'm actually, I feel much closer to their kids [AG: Uh huh] than I did to them, because, you know, when I was growing up, they were out of the house. [AG: Mm hmm] My nephew, my brother's son, is only two years young. [AG: Yeah] But, so I, you know, my nieces and nephews, my nieces and nephew, I only have one nephew, I basically grew up with them. [AG: Oh wow] Weird. [AG: That is cool] Yeah, they're all, we're all on Facebook together. [laughter]

AG: Um, so, you said that your parents probably didn't graduate from high school.

JM: I don't think they did. My mom might have, and I should know this, I know my dad didn't. My dad was born in 1920 and, um, he had, um, um, let me see, he was like 9 years old when the Depression hit and so, um, I don't think he finished school. [AG: Mm hmm] I think he went out and started working, you know. [AG: Yeah] He carried the mail, um, he'd also tell, told me about, um, when he was, um, I can't remember, maybe it was like late teens, going out and, uh, going down into the south and riding the rails like a hobo [AG: Oh wow] you know, just to go places and see things and do things. And my mom actually won my dad on a bet [AG: Really?] Yeah, they like knew each other for two weeks, um, before they, um, got married. Um, they were at, my mom had gone to, like a, county fair [AG: Uh huh] with one of her friends and, um, they saw my dad, he was, he was a very handsome guy when he was younger, kind of like, he looked like, kind of like a gangster, you know, dark hair. and my mom bet her friend that she could get him [laugh], and she did. So. So, isn't that weird? [AG: That so awesome] It's bizarre to me, because, um, you had to know them [AG: Mm hmm] and, I, some people, when I was growing up, I was, you know, my friends had younger parents. [AG: Uh huh] like, my mom was 35 when I was born, my dad was 40 [AG: Mm hmm] and my friends had younger parents who would take them out and like go to go-cart [AG: Mm hmm] tracks and things like that, and do younger things. [AG: Mm hmm] But, um, my parents took me to, um, museums [AG: Oh wow] Yeah, and museums, and, um, my dad would take me to bookstores, to zoos, to things like that [AG: Mm hmm] so, I feel as though, if I had younger parents I might not have become as

serious about things, you know, learning and that sort of things, those sort of things, as I did.

AG: That's cool. So did your brother and sister graduate from high school and go on to college?

JM: Yeah. My, both of them graduated from high school, neither went on to college, but, when my brother was actually, like, a junior and senior in high school, he was - math, you know how I am with math [AG: Yeah], you know that, but he was, like, a genius with math [AG: Uh huh] and he was actually using college-level math textbooks in his junior and senior levels of, years of high school. [AG: Oh wow] So he went directly from high school and got a job as a draftsman, working for an architecture firm, [AG: Oh wow] I know, in like the early '60s, you couldn't do that now [AG: Yeah] But, like so, he, he worked, that's what he's done for most of his life. [AG: Yeah] He's retired now, but he still does freelance stuff. And my sister, um, she's didn't, she worked, like, um, secretarial jobs, things like that [AG: Mm hmm] through time. She had three kids, um, my brother had three kids, so yeah.

[This section omitted from the transcript]

AG: Okay, um, you said that your dad was a, your mom was a housewife [JM: Mm hmm] and your dad was a high school custodian.

JM: A high school custodian, and when we lived in Ohio, he was a carpenter. and I get, I remember one of my, of the coolest memories was, do you know what a chalk line is? [AG: Yeah, those are fun] Yeah, and he would let me pop the chalk lines [laughter] and I really have an interest in do-it-yourself sorts of things, [AG: Uh huh] and so I get that from him. [AG: Yeah] My dream is to not write a best-selling book, my dream is to be able to build a house from the ground up myself.

AG: Have you been able to do that?

JM: No ... I can put up a door, I paint, you know, I rig things [AG: Mm hmm] so that I fix things around the house, [AG: Mm hmm] but, um, you know, maybe someday.

[This section omitted from the transcript]

AG: Okay, um, let's see. So, now, as a senior instructor of English at Tech [trails off]

JM: Yeah, I think that just means I'm old, it's not really important. [laughs] It's just, we did get, like, promotions, um, some of us who have been here a while [Yeah] Yeah, so now we're senior.

AG: Have you tried out for, uh, tenure?

JM: You have to, there has to be a job in your area that's open, [AG: Uh huh] and, let's be honest, Aimee, I mean like 19th century British lit, that's not one of the most popular courses in the world. [AG: Yeah] Um, and so, we have a couple of people who teach it, you know, that's Nancy Metz's area [AG: Yeah] and I doubt that there's ever going to be a job advertised in that area [AG: Mm hmm]

Yeah [AG: You don't look it] Thank you. I'll be 49 in April and, you know, they're gonna, jobs that are opening up like are going to be given to younger people, [AG: Mm hmm] you know, who are straight out of the Ph.D., so I'm happy [AG: Yeah], doing what I do and, uh, getting the, have the spare time to, um, to do creative stuff on the side.

AG: Has it been frustrating, though, that, you know, you can't really get tenure?

JM: Yes, because with tenure comes job security. [AG: Yeah] The weird thing about it is, it's like you get, I think it's five or six years, you come in as, um, an assistant professor [AG: Mm hmm] and you have five or six years, you work on publishing, going to conferences, your big goal is to publish a book [AG: Mm hmm] and then you come up for tenure review. [AG: Mm hmm] If you get passed at the department level, college level, and the university level, then you become an associate professor, and then you're pretty much "untouchable" [AG: Really] and you can't, you know, lose that job [AG: Yeah] but assistant professors don't always get tenure. [AG: Yeah] While I've been here, there's been one person who did not get tenure, and so, she had to go somewhere else. [AG: Yeah] And, uh, as an instructor, I mean, I would like the job security; it would be nice to teach two classes rather than four [AG: Mm hmm] and have time to research and write [AG: Mm hmm] and be more creative. But, um, as I said, in the fall I'll be teaching three classes, maybe that'll give me a little bit more time.

AG: Yeah. What about Steve?

JM: Um, Steve. Well, we've talked about it, you know, [AG: Yeah] and it's kind of, it's sad and frustrating at times when we think about the people we went to grad school with [AG: Mm hmm] who have, some of whom are now associate and full professors [AG: Mm hmm] um, and, we're instructors. But um, you know at the bottom of it, both of us are really happy [AG: Good] and uh, Steve, um, I don't think he's applied for a single tenure-track job in the, you know, anywhere [AG: Mm hmm] what the weird, the thing about us is we are very place-bound [AG: Mm hmm] and we, we didn't know what to expect from Virginia Tech. [AG: Mm hmm] I had never been to Blacksburg, when we came here for the interviews, I thought we had, like, missed the town [laughs] Seriously [AG: Really] because, when we were growing up in Dickinson County, people would come to school at Tech, [AG: Mm hmm] and they would talk about Blacksburg, and you know, I assumed it was a really big city. [AG: Mm hmm] and then when we came for the interviews, and came down Main Street, it was like [laugh] you know. maybe, this, we had no idea what was. Well, Steve had been here before, [AG: Mm hmm] in the past, he played baseball here [AG: Oh] he came for games cause he played for Clinch Valley. [AG: Oh] And um but, um, we love this area; [AG: Mm hmm] we love the people we work with, we love the school, we love the students [to the camera] Students at Virginia Tech are far more polite, they're kinder, they're more intelligent than the people, um, the students at the University of Kentucky, just wanna tell you that [laughs] So, I'm speaking directly to the camera for that one [to AG] It's true. It absolutely is, I mean, there's a really big divide. people who, kids who had money at the

University of Kentucky, you knew they had money. [AG: Mm hmm] You don't, you don't have any idea. I don't know whether you come from a middle class family, upper middle class [AG: Mm hmm], or, um, um, higher, what's the, higher ... higher, middle, lower ... Yeah, I don't know. I can't tell [AG: Yeah] I can't tell about any students because they're all, I've never met a student here who was not kind and nice. [AG: Yeah] so I'm happy [AG: It's 'cause we rock] Yes [to camera] Yes [thumbs up]

AG: Have you applied. since coming to Tech, have you ever applied to, like, other positions at other schools?

JM: Yes, I did one time; it was at Concord College [AG: Uh huh] in West Virginia and it was down to me and someone else [AG: Mm hmm] and have you ever, I shouldn't say this, but [laughs] okay, I could've made more money there [AG: Mm hmm] it would've been a longer drive but, we lived out in Giles anyways, [AG: Yeah] so it's not that far. But it's a really small school, the library is tiny, [AG: Mm hmm] um, I don't have a computer on my desk right now, I didn't bring my laptop today, but every four years here, we get a new computer. That wouldn't have happened there. [AG: Really] I was doing a lot with online classes then, I'd post a lot of stuff online, I don't think I could've done that there. the technology was simply not there. And once I tried to weigh things, [AG: Mm hmm], um, I took my name out of the running [AG: Yeah] so, when it came down to me and the other person, [AG: Mm hmm] I just wasn't comfortable about pulling up stakes, I felt like I was home here [AG: Mm hmm] and um, going there [AG: Mm hmm] where, it was, it would almost be like stepping backward; I mean, it was a small school [AG: Mm hmm] like, we, like the one we graduated from [AG: Yeah] but I wasn't sure if I really wanted to do that cause I really was getting into technology. [AG: Yeah] I can remember when we were at the University of Kentucky, and the, um, head of the writing program, we were all GTAs and the head of the writing program, there was this new thing called "email" [AG: Mm hmm, laughs] and he wanted us to try it, but like, you had to go to this computer in a central location, you didn't have computers in your offices, computer in a central location, you had to dial up and, um, type in this huge long list of numbers to connect to the email server at the library [laughs], and if you didn't it, like, within a certain number of seconds, it would like close, and you'd redo it, and I got really frustrated, cause I'm really bad with even typing numbers [AG: Mm hmm] and my, I could even remember thinking, this is the stupidest thing in the world [laughs] it is never going to catch on. So, but when we came here, the second or third semester I was here, I got involved in teaching [AG: Uh huh] an online course, um, and then we've created an online Appalachian lit course, [AG: Mm hmm] and then from then, it was like, oh my god, I love computers [AG: Yeah] I love the technology, so. That's what, that's what I love about Virginia Tech, it's another thing [AG: Mm hmm] so.

AG: Um, Could you describe a typical day?

JM: A typical workday?

AG: A typical workday.

JM: Um, my best kind of workdays is when I, getting up early and coming in early. Um, right now I'm in a kind of a weird schedule and, so, and we're down to one car right now, so I'm coming in with Steve now. but, uh, a typical day is, um, let's say, it would be like, I come in to teach at 8. [AG: Mm hmm] So I would get up at about 5, yeah. I would, um, drink some coffee, um, hang around with the cats and dogs, um, if I had the chance to check my email before I left home, I would because [AG: Mm hmm] I'm kind of obsessive about that and so I would try to check my email. I would come in, I like to get here early, to prepare, I like to have at least twenty minutes or half an hour before class, um,, teach that class, um, come in, come back up to the office for a second, um, grab a snack and then eat breakfast, which is a bad thing. um, a typical day would be going from to class to class, between classes [AG: Mm hmm] checking emails, going to, um, committee meetings [AG: Mm hmm] um, catching up, writing letters of recommendations, [AG: Yeah] um, grading papers, um, but there are also, you know, if I can squirrel away, you know, ten minutes here, fifteen minutes there, to look at, um, you know humor, humor websites [AG: Yeah] or something like that or check Facebook, I'll do it, [AG: Mm hmm] but pretty much, I mean, there are, there have been days when I'm grading, that I'll be on the computer, cause I do a lot of grading online [AG: Mm hmm] I'll be on the computer for like, six, seven, eight hours with small breaks, so, a lot of is like preparing for classes, and even when I might, I might look like I'm sitting here surfing web or something for the heck of it, [AG: Mm hmm] I'm actually surfing, um, gathering materials for classes because I'm always updating power points. Like the power points you saw in Designing docs [AG: Mm hmm] last spring [AG: Mm hmm] are different [AG: Yeah] now. They've got new stuff, there are new assignments, um, I've got new visuals, um, that sort of thing. so I'm always updating. so when I'm here, I like to keep really busy. [AG: Mm hmm] So, I'm just, it's kind of hard to describe a typical day for a teacher [AG: Yeah] because it's like I'm not here, like, from 8 to 5; [AG: Uh huh] sometimes it's might be from 10:45 until 6, or, um, days I come in early from 8 until 2 or 3. but, um, so it varies [AG: Mm hmm] and depends also. Like, in the fall, I'll be teaching an 8 o'clock class, [AG: Yeah] Steve doesn't know it yet, [laughter] um, an 8 o'clock, um, a 9:30 class, and, um, a 12:30 class, so I'll have a break in there [AG: Mm hmm] and then, since I'll be doing the Professional Writing, I'll be the assistant director for Professional Writing, I'll probably hang around Tuesdays and Thursdays until about 5 or 6; [AG: Yeah] I'll probably come in on Wednesdays too. [AG: Yeah] Lots of committee meetings, [AG: Yeah] cause I'm on how many committees now, I'm on Professional Writing, the um, advisory committee, I'm on, um, technology committee. [AG: Wow, that's a lot of committees] Yes it is [nods in agreement]

AG: Um, right now you're teaching Doc Design [**JM:** Mm hmm] and Professional Writing. [**JM:** Yup] Those are the only two?

JM: Mm hmm, but I'm teaching, what am I, no, no, I'm teaching tech writing, too. [**AG:** Oh, tech writing] I kind of almost forget about that [laugh] because it's online. So I'm doing two intro to Professional Writing classes, [**AG:** Uh huh] Doc Design, and an online Tech Writing.

AG: Oh, so that's ... four? [nods in agreement]

[This section omitted from transcript]

AG: So you said you're sharing a car right now. Is that because of choice or because like [trails off]

JM: Because our car broke down in, um, the other car broke down in December and it needs a new motor. [**AG:** Ooh] Yeah, [**AG:** Yeah] so we're kind of gathering the, you know, cash, [**AG:** Mm hmm] the spare cash to do that with. [**AG:** Yeah] so.

AG: So, I think we already touched on this, but, what do you like best about your job?

JM: I can, I can, seriously, um, two things: number one, it gives me, and not in, not necessarily in this order, [**AG:** Mm hmm] number one, it gives me a chance, definitely teaching the Professional Writing courses, [**AG:** Mm hmm] but also in some of the like, Victorian lit, it gives me the chance to always be creative, you know, to gather, um, visuals, songs, um, not in Professional Writing [**AG:** Yeah, laughs] new designs, to try new things [**AG:** Mm hmm] but also because of the students. Because I can be feeling like absolute crap [**AG:** Mm hmm] and go into class and, I would say nine times out of ten, I'll walk out of classes feeling [**AG:** Yeah] better about the world, and the day, and everything, just hanging out with students.

AG: What do you like the least?

JM: What do I like the least. At this point in time, with the budget crisis, [**AG:** Mm hmm] being a real budget crisis, [**AG:** Mm hmm] the idea that even though I've been here since '96, so that's what, fourteen years [**AG:** Mm hmm] fourteen years this fall, I could lose my job. [**AG:** Yeah] There's no real solid job security [**AG:** Mm hmm] if you're an instructor [**AG:** Mm hmm] and that would really seriously be the thing that I like, I mean, the thing that, that, the only thing that bugs me about this job. [**AG:** Yeah] Um, I'm happy with, I'm always happy with my schedule [**AG:** Mm hmm] I'm happy with the classes I get to teach [**AG:** man] I'm happy with where I teach [**AG:** Mm hmm] I'm happy with the students, so, you know, that's the only thing [**AG:** Yeah] I mean it's kind of scary, you know, we're on like, you know, 3-year contracts [**AG:** Mm hmm] when that, I think they're up at the end of next year, maybe, when the budget crisis is really going to hit Virginia Tech really hard. [**AG:** Mm hmm] Um, I just hope to be able to retire from this place. [**AG:** Yeah] I mean, I feel, when we went to UK, I never had a single UK sweatshirt, t-shirt, hat, anything like that. But I, and even

though I really don't follow sports, [AG: Mm hmm] I feel like Virginia Tech has become a part of me and I've become a part of Virginia Tech. Seriously, [AG: Yeah] just because I love the people and I love the job [AG: Mm hmm] and I love the technology [AG: Yeah] and the support for all of those things. [AG: Mm hmm]

AG: So would you say the pros definitely outweigh the cons?

JM: Oh, yeah, definitely. I mean, sometimes, uh, yes, I would like to be, I'd like to see, you know, associate, or assistant professor after my name [AG: Mm hmm] but, you know, that's, ultimately that's not what's going to make you, I don't think, happy. [AG: Yeah] I have five kids, you know, you know with legs, four legs, [laughs] well except for the one who has three, [laughs] and um, I have, um, a husband, who's, you know, I can tolerate most days, [laughs] a little house we love in this place that we love, and, we know, we meet people that we love. See, like, I'm going to remember you when you're gone, when you graduate [laughter]. I mean, I'm in contact with people who [AG: Mm hmm] graduated years ago.

[This section omitted from transcript]

AG: Okay. Um, tell me about your kids.

[laughter]

JM: ... Um, my kids, um, I'm looking here. They're not all here. Um, I have, um, [AG: Nope] nope. um, Max is, um, our oldest; um, he was, um, he came to us in, um 2000, and um, he's a Chow, um, he's about 90% Chow. we have Max and Cleo, who's the big white dog, she weighs 100 pounds, we've got Peanut, who weighs nine pounds, he's a little Chihuahua with three legs, he's lost his, he lost his fourth leg in an accident [AG: And you saved him. You and Steve saved him.] Yeah, we did. Steve mainly, cause I've never met him and I was like, you know, we have this beautiful little family here. [AG: Mm hmm] Um, but Peanut has really become a part of it, and he plays with Cleo, the big white dog, [AG: Really?] they are play partners [laughter] and, you know, she's like this tall [indicates with hands] [AG: Uh huh], 100 pounds, he weighs nine pounds [indicates with hands] [AG: Yeah] but they run and play together. and we have two cats too [AG: Awesome] and so. Yeah, I mean, we're really happy [AG: Good] so. [AG: That's awesome]

AG: Um, you don't have to answer this if you're not comfortable, [JM: Okay] but do you have kids of the two-legged variety?

JM: [shakes head]

AG: No? [JM: Mm hmm] By choice?

JM: Well, initially it was, sort of, when we first got married, it was like we want to have kids [AG: Mm hmm], and then, um, working for a newspaper, a weekly newspaper in a small-town doesn't pay a lot, [AG: Mm hmm] so we thought we'll wait until we're more financially secure. [AG: Mm hmm] And then we went to graduate school, [AG: Yeah] and, you know, that doesn't happen when you're in

graduate school. [AG: Mm hmm] And then the longer we waited, [AG: Mm hmm] the more, you know, our nieces and nephews started having kids, [AG: Yeah] so they were kind of our surrogate kids. [AG: Uh huh] And we realized, you know, life may be a little simpler. [laughter] So, I mean, it's just, we realized that we no longer wanted to have kids, [AG: Yeah] but, you know, we love our animal babies [Yeah] so. So I guess it was choice, I, really, [AG: Yeah] at this point, I don't miss it. [AG: Mm hmm] I can hang out with my nieces' kids [AG: Mm hmm] my, uh, my two nieces who live here, they have [AG: Mm hmm] among them five kids, [AG: Mm hmm] so I can hang out with them and let them do things [AG: Uh huh] that, you know, as a mom, I wouldn't let them do, [AG: Uh huh] because, you know, then I can give them back to their parents and they can deal with the aftermath, [AG: Yeah] [laughter] but, you know, I, know, we like to have fun with them, so yeah. [AG: Awesome] But, I, also, because I just feel, I mean, I really have, I don't know you're supposed to do this, but I feel like I've developed relationships [AG: Uh huh] with students here, not everybody [AG: Yeah] but some, I really, you know, it's just you feel a closeness to them. [AG: Yeah, definitely] I also like to joke that I never, I wanted kids until I became a teacher, and then I realized that they become teenagers, [laughter] you know, so, but that's not true.

AG: Um, so, so, are you going to, how long are you going to keep teaching here?

JM: Hopefully I'll be able to retire, here, and I don't know how long that's going to be. I mean I think, when can you retire now? Um, oh my god, when I think about putting, like, another twenty more years [AG: Mm hmm] in as a teacher, that would make me 69 years, I don't think I can do that. [AG: Yeah] But maybe like 65, if we can retire from here [AG: Yeah] and I'm wondering if I'll have as much energy, [AG: Yeah] you know [AG: You might, I think you might] I don't know, I hope. [AG: Okay, so] I can't imagine, okay, Aimee. [AG: Uh huh] I never wanted to teach. I never wanted to be a teacher [AG: What'd you want to be?] I wanted to be a reporter. that was it. I mean I, from the minute I started, I would make my own little newspapers when I was little [AG: Mm hmm] and write magazine articles and things like that [AG: Mm hmm] um, because I wanted to be a reporter. [AG: Mm hmm] And I was a reporter and I loved it, but when we went back to graduate school, I just fell into teaching [AG: Yeah] but I don't think I became a really good teacher until I came here [AG: Yeah] because this is an environment that just makes you, if you love, if you like, and I'm getting older, I think, has been a good things. [AG: Yeah]

AG: So, God forbid this doesn't happen, but, if, for some reason, you weren't able to work here, do you have backup plans for, like jobs or anything?

JM: I would probably try, although the pay, I mean, I don't know how make this work, [AG: Mm hmm] um, freehand editing, freelance design [AG: Yeah] but, that would mean creating a new career [AG: Yeah] you know, in, you know, in middle age, and people do that all the time and [AG: Yeah] and people go back to medical school [AG: Yeah definitely] but, um, I would miss, I would miss the connections with students [AG: Mm hmm] and with colleagues. In the summer,

I get really bored [laughs] I do, um, because, it's like two and a half, three months [AG: Yeah] and I don't have that contact.

AG: Have you ever taught summer classes?

JM: I have, and, now I've kind of moved into teaching online technical writing [AG: Mm hmm] and so, teaching online is not quite the same [AG: Yeah]. Um, so I have taught summer classes, but mainly in the past like five or six years, it's been online. but I, I'm always, I always want to need to do something. I can't imagine, um, my brother, of course, retired, I said [AG: Mm hmm] and, and, he started his own little consulting career [AG: Mm hmm] firm. And, um, I can't imagine retiring and just doing nothing. [AG: Yeah] If I couldn't work here anymore, I, I mean, I'd fall, I would have to fall back on the things that I can do well, [AG: Mm hmm] which would be editing, more than design, I just, [AG: Mm hmm] I feel like I'm just starting out in design.

AG: Would you, like, teach at New River, or like another community college?

JM: If I could, [AG: Yeah] if I could be hired. you know, [AG: Uh uh] um, I was just, I was assuming I wouldn't be able to get a teaching job anywhere because I'd be so elderly. But, um, yeah, if I could [AG: Uh huh] I would always want to teach now, now that I've fallen in love with it [AG: Yeah] in my old age. [AG: You're not that old] That's true, Yeah ...

AG: You guys are so much younger than I expected

JM: Really? [AG: Yeah] Do we act young? You guys keep us young. [AG: Yeah] Seriously, it's being around students, I mean, I know people who, people who teach who say, you know, students wear me out, you know. [AG: Mm hmm] I feel so old, but, you know, and, there are some of my colleagues that I think are pretty much the same age as me, but we're just really, like, just interested in things [AG: Mm hmm] um, new music, um, technology [AG: Mm hmm] you know, those sorts of things. I wanna stay, I don't wanna be in a rocking chair, [AG: Yeah] I do want, actually, no, I do want to be in a rocking chair [laughter] I'd like to be in a porch swing but, um, I don't want, I don't want to get old up here [points to head] [AG: Yeah] I think that would be devastating, [AG: Yeah] but you guys keep us young. we have to keep on our toes. [laughs]

[This section omitted from transcript]

AG: ... Let's just, all right. so you live in Giles county. [AG: Mm hmm] um, Pembroke [JM: Mm hmm] Alright. Does that affect how you get to work, and like, especially since now there's, like, just one car, like [trails off]

JM: It does, as you know today [AG: Yeah] because we were supposed to meet at 1. [AG: Uh huh] and Steve, you know, because he was coming with me, [AG: Uh huh] he was a little late, so, yes, it absolutely does [AG: Yeah] because I'm a real stickler for being somewhere on time, [AG: Yeah] and my beloved husband, of course, as you well know, is not. Um, but, um, it does, but you would be surprised how quickly, um, you can get from there to here [AG: Mm hmm] and the only time it really bothers me is in the wintertime [AG: Yeah] when I, you

know, the weather might be bad. [AG: Yeah] But, especially when you've had a tiring day, [AG: Yeah] um, when you get in the car and head back that way, it's just, you just feel all of this release [AG: All of it just go. Good] because you're going home [AG: Mm hmm]

AG: Alright, um, let's see. Um, what would you change about work?

JM: Yeah, I'd change the people I'd work with. [laughs] Um, it would be nice to make a little bit more money. [AG: Yeah] and that's seriously all I would change. [AG: Yeah] um, and you know, well that and, you know, knowing I could retire from here [AG: Yeah] Seriously, the only things I would change.

AG: Okay, um, again you don't have to answer this if you're not comfortable. But since you've been here, has your salary gone up? Gone down?

JM: It has.

AG: That's good.

JM: It's gone up In fact, it went up before we even got here. Because I was hired at one salary, [AG: Mm hmm] and then, before we actually, you know, got here, over the summer I think, it went up [AG: Mm hmm] a little bit. So Yeah, it's gone up very steadily, [AG: Mm hmm] and then, um, of course in the last few years, maybe the last two years, we have not gotten raises. [AG: Yeah] Um, but with the promotion to senior instructor comes a bump in salary. So we're comfortable now. [AG: You're comfortable] Yeah, we're not wealthy by any means, and, you know, so, and we don't have, you know, an amazing house or anything, it's a little small house, [AG: Mm hmm] and, um, but it suits us well because we're both hillbillies, [laughs] so we don't mind.

AG: Alright, but you're, you and Steve are both comfortable with, you know, what you're making and like [trails off]

JM: Yeah.

AG: Good. Do you have like, maybe not necessarily time, but like, do you have the means, again you don't have to answer this if you don't want to, but like, if you wanted to, could you, like, go on vacations and cruises, like?

JM: The thing that we would love to do the most is go abroad [AG: Mm hmm] and probably not; [AG: Yeah] we have student loan debts. Well, so we have kids, the kids, you know. [AG: Mm hmm] Aimee, I have not, okay, we got Max in 2000, in fall 2000 [AG: Uh huh] Since 2000, that's ten years now, [AG: Mm hmm] I have spent, maybe four nights away from home. [AG: Really?] Yeah. Um, and we have not spent a single night away from home together since the kids came, [AG: Wow] um, which is okay, cause he goes places and I can, like, out and do things [AG: Mm hmm], and rearrange and paint without [AG: Yeah] you know. [laughs] But, and I really would love, I've never been to England. [AG: Yeah] Have you been abroad?

AG: Oh, I went to France, um, in my junior year of high school. And the Philippines.

JM: Um, I would love to go. [AG: Yeah] England, Scotland, Ireland, [AG: Yeah] France, um, and, you know, part of. And it, that, that is something that bothers me. [AG: Mm hmm] But it's also, kind of like, also psychological with me, [AG: Mm hmm] because I can't imagine putting our dogs and cats in doggy day care or in a kennel [AG: Yeah] while we're gone, because I would be afraid of something, I mean, I'm kind of psycho about that [laughs] but, um, Yeah

AG: That's understandable though.

JM: We haven't had a real vacation since, since 19-, no, since the summer of 2000.

AG: Where'd you go in the summer of 2000?

JM: Um, we fell in love with the mountains of western North Carolina [AG: Mm hmm] So we would go down to Boone and Blowing Rock, and drive the parkway [AG: Uh huh] and stay, like, in Boone, uh, or, Blowing Rock overnight [AG: Yeah] So, Asheville [AG: Yeah]

AG: So, like, when you retire, would you like [really like to travel] to travel?

JM: I don't know. [AG: Yeah] um, even now, I would kind of like to travel [AG: Mm hmm] but when it comes right down to it, um, I'm really sort of a hermit. [AG: Mm hmm] But I would love to be able go to England [AG: Yeah] at some point, um. Yeah, I guess I would. Yeah.

[This section omitted from transcript]

AG: Alright, so you were a reporter [JM: Mm hmm] after undergrad. [JM: Mm hmm] And then, you've been an instructor [JM: Mm hmm]

JM: I've been a teacher since, first as a GTA, and then, since 1985.

AG: You've been a teacher since 1985? Wow. I wasn't even born then.

JM: How long is that, Aimee?

AG: ... I think that's like 25 years

JM: It is 25 years! [AG: Wow] Oh my god.

[Laughter]

AG: Um, okay, so. Have you held other jobs? Like when you were in high school or like when you were in college, did you, like, have a part time job?

JM: Back when I was in college, where we grew up, the opportunity for having, like part time jobs [AG: Mm hmm] was very small, very slim. [AG: Uh huh] Um, the very first job I had was as, um, I worked as, like a public relations assistant for the PR, uh, department of my, uh, my school. And it's actually, I went to a community college, Aimee, for the first two years [AG: Really] Yeah, and so, that's where I, my, my, uh, my first year at Clinch Valley [AG: Mm hmm] I can't remember if it was my second year at the community college or my first year at Clinch Valley, I worked as a, um, a professional writing, [AG: Mm hmm] or, I mean a, a public relations assistant, and I would write news releases and articles for newsletters and things like that, for the community college.

AG: Um, but have you done anything else? Like I work at the bookstore right now, and I tutor downstairs at the Writing Center, and then I tutor student athletes [JM: Shakes head] Nothing like that?

JM: Um, seriously, outside school, no. Isn't that weird? [AG: Yeah] I mean, you can't do that anymore, I mean [AG: Yeah] But, like, where I was from, um, there were no, no fast food places, um, movie theaters, if you wanted to see a film, you had to drive like an hour to see a movie. And so it was really isolated, very, very rural, [AG: Mm hmm] and, and, finding a job was not, was not easy [AG:

AG: Uh huh] Um, we were lucky; Steve and I both worked for the newspaper [AG: Mm hmm] after we got out of school. We were very lucky to do that. I didn't even do an internship [AG: Really?] Yeah, he did; he did an internship for the newspaper, you know [AG: Mm hmm] he later ended up working with, um, but, um, I didn't, I just didn't. I didn't have a car when I was in school [AG: Mm hmm] for a long time, so, um, you know, I've just been, I look at what you guys do now, and I don't know how you do it [AG: Yeah] I really, really don't. And it's not, my family wasn't wealthy by any means, [AG: Uh huh] I, you know, I got Pell grants and that, that sort of thing, to go to school, so.

AG: Oh, here's my question. Um, so you mentioned that you were, you know, with still, with, student, like, loans. Are you, like, done paying back your student loans?

JM: No.

AG: No?

JM: No.

AG: Still got a while to go?

JM: Yeah.

AG: Yeah?

JM: Yeah.

AG: Um, what do you think is important for people know about what you do?

JM: Um...Something that always bugs me is when people go "oh, you teach? So you get a three month summer vacation? [AG: Yeah] and you get a month off at Christmas." Um, this past Christmas break, oops, I'm not supposed to say Christmas, um, Winter break, I revised, um, my Professional Writing textbook [AG: Mm hmm], and in the summer, I'm reading and preparing and studying and [AG: Mm hmm] researching and doing stuff like that. That's something I'd like for people to know, that teachers who work at universities don't get, I mean they get the summer off, they can do all this in their shorts and pajamas [AG: Yeah] lots of times, but, um, we pretty much work twelve months out of the year. [AG: Yeah] Um, it's that, it's very, very, okay, another thing, a big thing. It can be really difficult [AG: Mm hmm] to teach, it can be very tiring, it can be very taxing, [AG: Mm hmm] it can be, it can be very frustrating, but it can also be immensely, [AG: Mm hmm] intensely satisfying. It can make you happy. But you have to be willing to share yourself [AG: Mm hmm] with students. If you

want them to trust you, [AG: Mm hmm] you have to, um, trust them and open up to them [AG: Mm hmm]

[This section omitted from transcript]

AG: Alright, um ... what have you learned from this job? Slash what have you learned from the entire school? Like, from Virginia Tech.

JM: What have I learned in terms of what?

AG: Just, like what have you gotten back? Like, since you started working here, what have you gotten back, like, you know, have you learned any lifelong, lessons, have you gotten, I mean, like, what?

JM: Okay. Um, before, between UK and coming here [AG: Mm hmm] '95 to '96, we took jobs at, they were one year jobs with no chance of renewal [AG: Mm hmm] at a small school in eastern Kentucky. And, um, my biggest class had fifteen students in it, and so it was really small classes, [AG: Mm hmm] really small school, and um, it was a totally different environment. When I left UK, I wasn't sure I wanted to continue teaching. [AG: Mm hmm] And so there we were at this small school, loved it again, [AG: Mm hmm] you know, absolutely fell in love with teaching, got jobs here [AG: Mm hmm] and the thought of coming to a university again, all I could think of was UK. [AG: Mm hmm] and I gave myself a year, um, that was my goal: if I don't like teaching again the way that I liked it at the small school [AG: Mm hmm] after I go to tech, I'm out, I quit, I'm done. And, it, Virginia Tech made me fall in love teaching again, and keep, and stay in love with it. [AG: Mm hmm] Um, so that's something that I've learned, is that teaching can be, like, renewing. [AG: Mm hmm] And every semester, there are different faces and different people [AG: Yeah] and I, you know, I want to be, I want to be somebody who can inspire people. [AG: Yeah] and, um, and, you know, I've been inspired by people here. Students, you know, I've learned so much from students [AG: Yeah] um, and not just, um, oh heck, I'll pick their brains on like, about like, technology [AG: Mm hmm] InDesign, [AG: Mm hmm] Illustrator, Photoshop, but I also just like to, you know, what they're doing. What ya'll are doing, and who you are, because it makes me see, um, makes me really happy to be a part of the world, happy to be alive, happy to be here, to get to know all of you all. Does that qualify as a life lesson? [AG: Yeah]

[This section omitted from transcript]

AG: Um, where do you see yourself in five to ten years? So, like, let's say, in five years, where do you see yourself, and then in ten years, where you see yourself?

JM: I'll probably be right here, physically, although I may, I mean, I don't know, I'd like, get a slightly bigger office, although I like this little office, [AG: Yeah] um, it's cozy. Um, I hope that I can get, you know, moving into the assistant professor, assistant directorship of, um, Professional Writing, that I can become more involved with, you know, creating new classes, working more with the

Professional Writing majors and minors. Um, in five years, I would have loved to have published a textbook of some sort. [AG: Really] Um, I, in ten years, I would love to able to have my name known in a little bit, you know, in Professional Writing or Document Design or Website Design, or something like that. [AG: Yeah] I would like to become a scholar in a whole new field, um, but physically, I want to be right here. [AG: Yeah] You know, I want, I want to be as happy as I am right now, [AG: Yeah] with knowing, you know, you all. I want to be in touch with the people that I'm in touch with right now, on Facebook [AG: Yeah] and, yeah, so.

AG: Um, and is there anything else you would like to share?

JM: Is there anything else you want me to share?... I'm very, the one thing I want, the one thing I would end with is, that I'm very thankful for being given the opportunity to be here [AG: Mm hmm] because it has, um, it has been, kind of like, a lifeline. I was thrown a lifeline [AG: Yeah] and, um, I'm just, I'm happy here.