

Narrative: Gail Pease, Senior Lead Housekeeper, Johnson Hall, Virginia Tech

Blacksburg, Virginia

Interviewers: Kaitlyn Cotter, Vivian Chen

I enjoy working here, I do. It's like any other job, no matter where you go, you're gonna have days when you wish you weren't there. We have them here, too, but if you don't like coming in everyday you're not gonna last. I try to enjoy myself coming in everyday. It's like go in, get it over with, get the day done with. You know, I don't create problems, so every day's been pretty good [*laughs*]. But a typical day is just one thing after another, you know? I mean, I don't think about what I have to do, I just automatically do whatever I see needs to be done. Probably 'cause I've done it for so many years.

My work hours are 7:30 in the morning 'til 4:30 in the afternoon. Sometimes, I work overtime if it's move-in or move-out day. Something major like that will make them pay us over time, you know?

It's not like I'm crazy about housekeeping, though. I ended up doing what I didn't want to do when I was younger. I shoulda stayed with the draft boards when I was 19. You know, I just got used to doing the drafting on the drafting boards and then it turned on over to computers and I think that scared me a little bit. I was working as a housekeeper at the automotive factory while taking a mechanical engineering course and I was raising 3 kids, you know, married and everything. I wanted to do this home study course and that was fine. I was doing really good at it and I think I would've been really good at it, but when they changed from drafting tables to CADs I thought, I don't wanna do this for another 4 years. It was hard to do it all, you know? I worked 5 at night 'til 1 o'clock in the morning and it was getting hard. So I just stopped doing the course. And the factory I was working for would pay for it, but you had to work for them after. I thought, you know, I can't go another 4 years like this 'cause it was really hard trying to raise the kids, you know, getting them up for school in the morning and everything else. I'm like, I can't do it. If I would've been single, it wouldn't have been a problem.

I wanted to be a conservation warden. Never did, though, never did. I probably would've but I was married and I just couldn't do that to my husband, you know? He really loves the outdoors; it should be him doing it. I didn't have to subordinate my goals to his but I didn't wanna be a fish and game warden where he was the one more into the outdoors stuff. You know, it would kinda be like doing something he really wanted to do, but it wasn't that important to me.

I mean, I chose housekeeping instead, and I guess I'm good at it. All the housekeepers get inspections every month. We have certain amount of items to be inspected and in Johnson Hall I think it's like 64 items. My boss goes around and he looks at different things. And if it's not clean, we get marked off for it, which is called a gig. And I usually get the highest assessment at the end of the inspection period. I receive a ribbon because I usually have the highest grade. It encourages all the employees to do better, I think.

Things with my boss are... okay [laughs]. Um, I think it was a little strained to begin with because this is new for all supervisors to get a lead person. I think being the only male supervisor maybe he felt a little intimidated having me under him, so to speak. From what I've been able to tell, the rest of the supervisors have good working relationships with their senior lead workers. I think in the beginning, mine was more strained because I don't know if maybe he thought I was gonna replace him or what. You know? I'm only here to make his job easier, take some of the load off him, but I don't think it sank in. Now, it's getting better. I mean, I was never in this position before, either, so this was new to me and it was uncomfortable in the beginning. Maybe by the end of the year, it'll be real comfortable, I don't know. Hopefully.

Housekeeping isn't a very high-paying job, you know? But it's kinda self-satisfying. I clean things and I go: "That looks really good!" The best thing is when other people notice. This is where I get my satisfaction. It doesn't have to be a high-paying job, you know? It hasn't been that bad, neither. My husband and I work at the same place. He actually works in Lee Hall and we have lunch every day. It's almost like being at home, but I only see him now and then.

The employees here are not really what I call my best friends. I mean, I've made good friends because they don't usually change anyone around within six years. But then you got people who, uh, will talk about other people, you know? We got the same problems as you would any other work place. Basically, I keep to myself and get myself out of those situations.

I never wanted a professional job. It's too much stress, you know? Being, like, a doctor is a lot of responsibility. I'm treating someone else's life and I don't like that kinda stuff. I would be nervous. I guess I don't have an American dream. If I do, I think the dream is just day-to-day living, you know? I wouldn't wanna be famous, neither. Rich people got money, but they're always worried about someone kidnapping their kids or someone breaking into their houses. They're really not happy. I think the middle class have the happiest people. I mean, they worry about day-to-day stuff, but not much because they don't earn much, you know? I guess my American dream would be to find someone you're happy with and have a family and grow old.

I've been married 35 years, been together 38, so, we're good friends. I was 19 when I got married and back then that was considered old. I had to see what my husband was like when he got mad, so it took that long for him to get really mad [*laughs*]. I wanted to know. I mean, if he was abusive it wouldn't have lasted. I don't care how much I loved him, you know? I didn't want to get into something I was gonna regret. So, it was like causing an argument just so I can see what he was like. And he wasn't even mad, he just hollered and stuff. So I was like, well, I can put up with that. Now we don't even holler or anything, we just don't talk for a little bit and it smoothes itself out and things are great. That's a little bit of advice, don't pick at the small things, you know? It's not worth it; you can get over 'em.

My other advice is when you go with a guy, how he is right now is how he's gonna be in ten or 15 years. They don't change too much. You gotta like 'em the way they are. It's hard; it's hard to change. But that's the way I feel, don't get stuck in something you're gonna regret, you know? Especially after you have kids, that makes it really hard, but we were lucky [*laughs*].

I have three children. I actually wanted to raise horses, but I ended up raising kids instead [*laughs*]. Kelly, my youngest daughter, is a stay-at-home mom and that's what she chose to do. I support her and believe me, babysittin' ain't easy! My other daughter, Layla, works in an office building. My son also works in an office, but I'm not sure what he does. They both are proud of their work, though.

I, on the other hand, was not always proud of my job. At one time of my life I thought: "Well, I'm just a housekeeper. I'm not significant." One day an engineer said to me, her name was Rosie Holmer, my job was more important than hers. She said that a customer that comes into the factory is going to walk straight out the place if it's a mess. My job gets them in the door and if the place is clean, then the engineers' job is easy. Rosie said that if it weren't for me, she wouldn't have that customer. This boosted me up a little because I had just begun housekeeping in a factory. I guess it made me stronger. I try to tell all the new housekeepers the same story. I try to instill in them a sense of pride because they are housekeepers. I truly believe one's work reflects the type of person one is. A good person will do good work.

To read the complete conversation, please see the transcript.