

Interview with Darrell Sheppard

For HUM 2504: Introduction to American Studies, Prof. Emily Satterwhite, Fall 2011

Occupation: Police Patrol Sergeant, Virginia Tech Police Department

Time and Place: October 12, 2011, 4pm-5pm, Virginia Tech Police Department Satellite Office, War Memorial Hall, Blacksburg, Virginia

Interviewers: Landon Sachs, junior International Studies major from Richmond, Virginia and Copley Decker, junior Interdisciplinary Studies major from Leesburg, Virginia

LS= Landon Sachs

CD = Copley Decker

DS= Darrell Sheppard

LS: Will you please tell me your name, and if you don't mind your age?

DS: Darrell Sheppard, and I'm 50 years old.

CD: What's your job title, and the name of the organization you work for?

DS: I am a patrol sergeant for Virginia Tech Police Department.

CD: How long have you been working there?

DS: I have been with the police department... eleven years, with the University for almost 28.

CD: What were you doing before that at the university?

DS: I was a supervisor for the physical plant grounds department. Took care of heavy equipment, Turf repair.

CD: How do you switch over into being an officer?

DS: Do I?

CD: How did you do that?

DS: Oh, umm. I just kept applying, finally got my foot into the door.

CD: Is that what you wanted to do?

DS: Yes that's what I've wanted to do for a long time.

LS: Cool. What can you tell me about your family background, where you grew up, things about your childhood, what it was like?

DS: Haha, a lot different. Uh I grew up right where I live right now, down on Prices Fork. Uhm we moved there from Christiansburg I think when I was like 3 or 4 years old. We lived in a little four room house that, uh, I have one sister and my parents had a bedroom and me and my sister had one bedroom and we had a kitchen and a living room. The bathroom was [motions] out back, ha, *that was a tickle*(?) It was down the path thereaways. We had an old cistern, we didn't... we had water in the house but, we had a cistern. My dad had to buy water, they'd come fill that cistern up and we had a pump inside the house, kind of where your spigot would be today, just an old hand water pump. Uhh, after we been there I was probably seven or eight years old, he had a well dug and we put a pump in and modern plumbing and the kitchen. Still... we had that old outhouse in the back. I lived there until I was about... [thinks] I don't know, 10 years old, eleven years old. My father was a fireman. He worked 24 hours off and 24. He was really close to his parents and he'd come home in the evenings. He worked from four one evening to 4 the next evening. And when he came home four o'clock in the afternoon, we'd go to his parents'

house, my grandparents, and have dinner or they always had, my grandfather had a small farm and he was raising the crops and, uhh, I didn't realize for a long time, but, when I was about eight years old, I learned that, he uhh, he was also a moonshiner, cause he had got caught [laughter] and he ended up in jail. But anyway, uhh, I really liked my grandparents and liked spending time down there and, umm, when I was eleven years old my grandfather died, which left my grandmother there by herself and, at that time, she didn't have electric stove, she had wood cook stove, she heated with coal and wood. Umm, she had running water, that came from an old spring box, and there was no hot water, it was just cold water and the waterline wasn't very deep so in the winter time, you left the water running, cause it wasn't off it was just gravity fed into the house. And you let the water run. But, umm, we heated a couple rooms in, in this house. Her house was uhh, seven rooms, it had four downstairs and three upstairs, no bath. Had a half size. Basement. [clicks tongue] ummm, when I first moved down there she still had milk cows, so I was up at, you know, four or five o'clock in the morning milking cows before school. And splitting stove wood for the wood cook stove because, I don't know if your familiar with that but with the wood cook stove you have to split the wood down pretty small to get into the small, wasn't like a heat stove, so that was another chore that was done, and I... pretty much grew up by myself, after that age of 11 on to, uh, 18.

LS: Do you have any siblings?

DS: Well, had a sister but see she lived with my aunt, she stayed with my mom and dad and didn't, we saw each other every couple 3 days but it wasn't like we were around each other a long time. It was just a better situation cause, she had her own bedroom now and so did I. Umm, my grandfather also ,uh, aside from making moonshine was a coal miner, and so's my dad. I remember, prior to being, on his death, they had a coal mine, several of them actually, and I remember going in the first one I was ever end, was called a lil' vein, and the same would call the opening you went into you had to crawl into, was only about 20...4 inches 26 inches high. And it was on a slope sideways. The big mines, the, where you get into 4 foot and 6 foot and 8 foot ceilings in the mine, are on a slope and you go down to get into the mine. This little vein was on a slope to the side, and uh, there was a reason for that because the way they mined they, there coal cars were shored, of course, it couldn't be very tall, and one side folded down, So they push the car that didn't have any cables or anything, was pretty much level on the slope, the pushed cars in, let the side down, dig coal out and rake it up into the car, close the thing, and push it back out. Umm, after they dug these, they dug coal in that mine for a year or so, and then, the went on to a big vein and, spent a bunch of money, pumping of water because it was basically full of water and pumping water 24 hours a day and finally went to a series of pumps, sort of like 3 pumps in a row and, I don't know how far they were down, probably, five hundred feet. They were pumping water, digging coal, umm, and they finally got out of that when my grandfather died. And I moved in with my grandmother, my dad bought a saw mill of all things in the world to do. And I think he tried he tried to kill me with it [laughter] cause, when he first got it, he didn't have any help, you know, he was just doing it part time, and he always just did it part time, and he of course get off at four o'clock then guess where Derrel was, he was off there at the saw mill at twelve years old. And uh, I always wanted to play football in school and you know, do some of the stuff the kids did, he never would let me I was, you know—

LS: ...Doing chores all the time?

DS: Yeah, you know, we, we got the saw mill, can't be playing football, a bunch of bull crap, you know? But uhh, then I guess I stayed with my grandmother till my sister kind of, she got

married just before she got out of high school, she actually ended up pregnant with this guy and ended up marrying him, marrying him they moved in with my grandmother so I moved out at that time. My dad had since built a house, he started a house, like a basement, that was another little project that they, him and my grandfather had. They'd laid all the cinder blocks for the basement, and capped it off and he actually finished the basement and that's where I moved back to, he was living in the basement at the time.

CD: At the unfinished house, was that were you were staying?

DS: Well the basement was finished, he just capped it off. He didn't have money to build the up, so, they capped it off at the basement in hopes of finishing it one day.

CD: So you're on your own at this point?

DS: No, I went back to my mom and dad's.

CD: Oh, ok.

DS: Uhh, and of course I started, uh, hooking up with women [laughter] and hanging out with them, and, I lived with a couple for a period of time. There was one I lived with for two or three months then I'd go back home. And then there was one lady that I lived with for about 18 months and, [shakes head] I was kind of mean to her but, anyway. [laughter] I was mean to her, she wanted to get married and I didn't.

LS: Yeah, didn't work out...

DS: Yeah, I kind of lied to her, and told if you wait till this point of time we'll get married. And about two weeks before that I said, I'm going to the beach and then I didn't ever come back. [all laugh] So that was mean, I kind of regret that, she was a nice lady.

LS: And how old were you at that point?

DS: I guess I was probably 21 when I did that, umm, but what I was telling you was when I got out of high school, my dad had that saw mill, let me back up a little bit. While I was in high school he had the saw mill, he actually sawed the lumber for the house and we sawed all the lumber for the house and finished, built the house, and when I got out of high school I actually finished the house, did all the finished carpenter work on the inside, and all that. And it's a brick house, and looks like one of the old brick ranch houses that was built in the seventies, which it was. Umm, but, where I was going with that? Anyway, and, I moved in with that one lady for about 18 months and shortly after I broke up with her I met the woman that I married, and that's Sierra's mom, and uh, we were married in 1985, the first time. [sighs] Right about the end of the time of datin' and I lived with that one lady, and mmm, starting a relationship with Sierra's mom I was in the process of getting my pilot's license, and umm, and actually that up after I met Sierra's mom, and the lady that ***she was staying with*** (?), was my flight instructor, was leaving, she was living near town, she was leaving [haha] and Erica was living with some of her friends over at Fox Ridge. Well, I didn't even ask Erica out, I just went ahead and rented her apartment that she had, cause I knew she was leaving. While I set it up where I rented the apartment and told her I got this apartment let's move in. [laughter]

LS: Pulled a fast one on her...

DS: She said, "Well I might not like it" but she did she ended up liking it. Was pretty funny [laughs]. Probably wouldn't do that today, I know better [laughter].

LS: That's too funny. Ok so, you said, that Sierra's mom, your wife, what does she do now, does she work?

DS: Yeah when, mmm what was she doing, when we first met, she was going to school at Radford and, she really was in the summer time, she was working for a hair salon that no longer

exists. And she didn't cut hair she was kind of like the receptionist and shampoo and do that. Umm, Then when we got married, she continued to do that I think for awhile. And then she got in to the school sys.... No then Sierra was born. Can't remember first the chicken or the egg but anyway, I don't remember, I don't think she was in the school system before Sierra was born but anyway. She was cutting hair I think, prior to that, and maybe she did, maybe she had gone to work for the school system because when Sierra was born she took off, took time off, and was off about two or three months, and had went to back to work, and we were paying a baby sister and it was an expense and she wanted to stay home with Sierra, so she said I'll start babysitting, you know, and take on some kids and help make some money. And if it'll work, I'll take care of Sierra, so that's kind of the way that worked out. And then after Sierra got up some age she went back to the school system. After a period of time she went to work and took away a club and then ended up one of the managers out there. And, then quit that and she's back in the school system. She's kind of doing both in the end. We're currently separated, for the second time. We were divorced one time.

LS: ...and then reconciled, then separated again.

DS: Yeah, well we separated and were divorced for about five years, and then remarried, got back together and married, and then we're separated for the second time.

CD: So, how did you go from pursuing your pilot's license to working for the campus?

DS: Well, it all, everything kind of happened at one time. I got hired at the... I was working on getting my pilot's license, my dad agreed, he always liked to fly too so he agreed to help me get it, pay for it, If I work on his house and take him flying. So, he funded, he put the money in for the pilot's license, I finished his house, about the time I got the house finished I got a job with the physical plant. And that was in 1984, and I went to work in June, June 16 of 84. I got my pilot's license July the 30th or something like that of 84. I met Erica the first time, when we met at the river, by the way [laughs]. Umm, that's another long story [smiles], it's a funny story. A friend of mine and I were at, I've been broke up with the lady that lived near town, I've been broke up for awhile, probably told Erica it'd been a lot longer than that, but it had been awhile. And he and I were down at the river and he had a old four drive pickup, just a beat up truck, and we had backed it into the river and, course we're drinking, eyes half shut and shitfaced, had Hank Williams Jr. I think playing on the damn radio and here comes two girls in a raft, one of them little rubber rafts floating down the river. Well they heard that music and they started paddling over to us [laughter]. Anyway Erica was one of them, and they had a couple of beers with us and come to find out they had, knew a couple of the guys that they were with. I, were friends with them, they lived in Prices Fork too, a little bit older than me but anyway. We, shot the breeze there for awhile, had a couple of beers, and they went on, never thought a thing about us, like I'll never see that woman again you know. About two weeks later, myself and the same friend were at the farmhouse one night, they had bluegrass, which I'm a huge fan, um, and there was, I was with some other friends, and I think I even had a date, I believe I was with a girl, and I got up to walk to the bathroom and this girl all *(unclear)* and caught me put her in her arms as I was on my way and was like "hey when are you going back to the river." And I thought [gasp] "Oh God, When was I at the river?" [laughter] I didn't remember. And we gots to talking and I kind of bullshitted my way out of that, figured out when it was that I met her. And of course I was with that date so I couldn't really, didn't try to do anything then, and I just kind of forgot about it again, was like eh that'll never happen again. Well about two weeks after that, I was at the Holiday inn which is, something else whatever it is but anyway they used to have a

barn, had music and such, dance at that time, I walked in Erica saw me coming to the door and she come over and got me by the arm [laughter] and said, “You’re sitting with me!” [more laughter]

LS: Then you just knew...

D: Yeah that was the end of that. So I always tell her, I didn’t, I didn’t chase you—you chased me. [laughter] Oh, that’s kind of funny.

LS: That’s a great story.

DS: Yeah I know, it’s pretty neat. But anyway, I was gonna say it all happened at one time, when I met her at the river I had just learned that I had got the job here at Tech, and it was a couple weeks before I start, so I met her maybe the second time after I started the job. Got my pilots license shortly thereafter and we moved in just, I hadn’t known her but a month ‘fore we moved in. we lived together for about a year before we got married, course I got along really well with her parents, her dad and I are good friends still today. I go down there and visit and take care of his property, mow the grass and stuff. He hunts, and I hunt, he drinks and I drink, it’s all good.

LS: So, you get your job, so you have this job supervising heavy machinery, and you work there 20 years you said?

DS: Well I started off as an equipment operator, that’s what I hired in as. Back at that time we dug ditches and stuff for like, electric surface, plumbing shop, and water lines, replace water breaks or whatever. That kind of after several years I was doing some other stuff, doing signs on campus, on the building signs you see on campus today I put most of those in. and another guy. And they were not lighted at the time, and then we went back and changed the panels, and made the lighted, so I had a hand in all that, thing. And uh, then my supervisor, I went through a couple there but it changed a lot, but anyway we had one from the highway department, and he finally ended up retiring, and I ended up getting his job, and that was overseeing all the heavy equipment, snow removal for the streets, and the dump trucks and all the big stuff. And by then, in the meantime I went to, when I was in high school I actually started going to New River, they had a police science curriculum started, and I actually took some classes at New River while I was in still high school, for police science, and it was interesting and then, my mom’s brother he was in law enforcement in Florida, he had been a cop and then moved on to investigation and was actually an investigator for public defender at the time. So it’s kinda how I got interested in that side of it, and I kept trying to apply at least for a year, I was going go to County but I actually wanted to stay, took their test and failed the first time, could’ve went back and taken again I just never did. But Erica, nor my family wanted me to go work at a police department outside of Tech, everything bad happens off campus—you get on campus you’re safe.

LS: So you think, yeah.

DS: But anyway, and I never could get my foot in my door cause nobody left, everybody liked the job here it was an easy, easy job, didn’t require a lot of youth. And things changed, they , the retirement system kind of changed, and that’s when they changed to where you retire at 50 years old, 25 year service, the chief at the time Mike Jones, said should I could lose 14,15 people just like that [snaps]. I need a pool of applicants, and that’s kind of when I got my foot in the door. That’s when they started testing. Prior to that HR, would look at the applications and say, “Yeah this is the best, this one’s the best” the police department didn’t have anything to do with it. And of course if you were a law enforcement officer and you applied you certainly ranked over

somebody who didn't have any training at all. So that's how I kinda got my foot in the door and I took the test, took the test with 144 people, and ended up in the top 5.

CD: Very nice.

DS: I was hired number 3 out of the 5, so...

LS: It's interesting; you're talking about being at Tech for so long, and not having the lights and the signs for the buildings. How different it was, not only the police force and your work at Tech, but just Tech in general, back then compared to today.

DS: Unreal, it's changed so much. Where do I even start, jeez. The first thing that comes to mind, you know where the stadium parking lot is for football, the stadium? Well it was all gravel, in disarray, we had another job that we had was at that time we went anywhere we could get them most of the time, but the arsenal that used kept a supply, I don't know where they got 'em, telephone poles. That's what we used as curb, and there was telephone poles all over this place, you know we used ones they didn't use for telephone poles anymore, they just laid 'em down, maid lines to park against or whatever, all those were gravel. But, there was no asphalt parking lots, I think about then the only one that was asphalt was the one, C lot, Clarke's lot. I think all of them were gravel.

LS: It's interesting because I remember when I was in high school and I was first applying to schools, I had mentioned that I wanted to go to Tech to my parents, and my mom had grown up in Richmond, long family of Virginians and when I first told her that she was like, "Are you kidding me, why would you want to go there?!" I guess it kind of had that reputation of being the school down the old dirt road. Just as you're saying, it sounds like kinda how it was. It's just interesting having not seen it before 2009, just what it was way back then. Just completely different...

DS: Tech Center Drive didn't exist. It only went to the top of the hill where those old farm houses are, not farm houses, but where the farm people live and there's houses. Course none of CRC was out there, jeez, I don't remember, trying to remember what the first building they were working on when I came here, I think they were putting the additions on Whittemore, it was a short building, only like two or three stories, building they were going up with it. At the time you could drive down Burruss service drive, the end, it went down and curved around by Cowgill and it kind of went down behind between Cowgill and Randolph, and there were some caves down in there, right next to Cowgill, and you could hear water running at the time. [laughter]

LS: Gosh.

DS: And I'll tell you something, you probably, I don't know if you wanna repeat it, I think a lot of people know it. If you know right behind Cowgill, you know that field, you know why there's nothing ever put there but those muds and trailers? There's a dump there. I don't remember seeing it, but everybody that was here prior to my coming was like, "Yeah, there's some bad stuff buried in there" [laughter]

LS: Gosh, just that old grassy knoll right there, now we know. Changing gears a little bit, talking more present day, just being a cop, what's an average day on the job like? Like you working yesterday...

DS: It's usually pretty quiet, especially at night, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday sometimes you get a little busy. Sometimes you'll have the occasional somebody stole my bike call, or locked my keys in my car, or you know, those things. During the day there's a little more crap goes on, cause there's always some club doing something or somebody that needs something or on the

weekends its doors needing unlocked, and we do a lot of that, well our lock up guys do. We do a lot of walking through buildings and the—not that [points] officer, but the officer that was sitting when you guys came in had a stack of assignments he went over, he's our, system that we have to keep track of all our assignments, have to be entered by hand, and so he's doing that, he puts his dispositions cause he went to court this morning and got a rid of bunch of 'em out of his file. Um, Pretty much run the gambit I mean, we get like, we haven't had any, and I don't want to jinx myself [knocks on table] but there for awhile I, this past fall, we had what seemed like, at least two or three people with mental issues every time I came to work, there was somebody that, you know, we either had to go get the ECO, or the TDO, access was talking to them or they were on the way to the PD for somebody to talk to him, or you had to go to a room and get 'em because they had made threats to arm themselves or somebody else, just depression and... we deal with that quite a bit, a lot more than we used to.

LS: Is it, so it's a lot of just patrolling, and-

DS: It is, traffic and, we get calls about everything. Awhile back, five o'clock in the evening, Vet Med calls, said they needed some help catching their duck.

LS: So you get a lot of boring, a lot of ridiculous, is there any action, any-

DS: Uh.... the drunks. You get the, the football games there always something up, the fights, something. And you usually, like, I don't work nights very often but, I know downtown we get busy with Blacksburg quite often, crap from bars after closing time. Alcohol poisoning, that's a common occurrence. Whatever you think, we usually do it at some point. Domestic, Assaults, we deal with a few of those occasionally.

LS: So it sounds like it seems, not easy but, compared to being a New York City cop or something, just Blacksburg and Tech being a very, I don't know, I like to think of it as quiet. It sounds like it's kind of a quiet job for the most part.

DS: It is, for the most part. A lot of my job though is paperwork, you know time sheets, and doing, I deal with people that work for me mostly, anymore, I don't do a lot of police work. I'm the one that if you have a question I have to answer it, be able to answer the question "What do I do?" You know, that sort of thing.

LS: Is that cause you've been here for eleven years?

DS: Well I'm a sergeant, I'm a supervisor for the police department, so... it's funny you said New York, we had, when I first come to the police department we had a retired NYC cop, who came here, I don't what happened in the discussion, he was a cop when I first started and he made sergeant and he was actually my sergeant, and we had a discussion in roll call one night about what we were paid, how much we were paid, and what we did, and just like you know most of the time it's a quite job and there's not a lot that goes on, normally, but there are those occasions when you're busy and stuff you have to do, only so much overtime and we have more now than we did then but, uh, I told him one day I said, "You know, I'm new at this, and I want to make I'm doing my job but I feel like I'm not doing enough to earn the pay that I get". And he said, "We don't pay you for what you do, we pay you for what you might have to do." I thought that was an interesting point looking ahead at... but he was retired from New York he was a Lieutenant.

LS: So I guess you made that comment to him, do you think the pay you get is, equal to the work you put in?

DS: Not anymore, not anymore. And it wasn't then, I guess, it's just... I don't know, I think a lot of people are paid too much on this university. I don't think anybody in the police department's one of them but... I could name a few of 'em, I won't. (laughs)

LS: Compared to, like, the Blacksburg cops, do you know how much...?

DS: They make more money than we do, yep.

LS: That's interesting.

DS: Yeah... they're paid—their patrol officers are paid more than I am as a sergeant. I can tell you that.

LS: Does that...does that upset you or, I mean, does that...have you ever considered...I guess, what's your relationship with that police department, do you have a lot of contact with them?

DS: The thing about that is, in my situation—I've been with the university so long, I make decent money. For an example: Chief Crannis for the Blacksburg PD has begged me to come to work for her ever since the day I got hired. She was talking to me in the academy when she was a captain, you know, "Hey, when you gonna come to Blacksburg, won't you come to work for us?" And I actually went and talked to her one time and she said, "Well, here's what I can offer you". Well, at the time I was making close to \$40,000...their starting salary was, I don't know, \$34- something...she said, "That's as high as I can go"... I'm like "I can't live on that, you know?" But at the time, our starting salary for officers was in the \$20's so it was a big difference, you know? They were already making more. And she said, "But I can have you making what you're making today in 2 years." Because in 2 years, if you stay with us 2 years, then you go through their investigation stint for 6 months and you get a 10% raise. So she said, "You'll be making more money in the long run"...and she was right. But it's just one of those things...I had bills and stuff, and I just couldn't back up.

LS: So you don't regret it?

DS: Nah, no. I don't regret it at all.

CD: Is there ever any jurisdiction issues with the Blacksburg police?

DS: No, we have...it's interesting, I don't know, I guess they think about it, I've never really talked to 'em about it. Technically Virginia Tech is in the town of Blacksburg so they have jurisdiction, there's no question about that. Our jurisdiction used to stop at College Avenue, one side of it was us and one side was the town. Main Street, you know, from when you turn left off College Avenue, Main Street was the line, and one side was Blacksburg, one side was us. Now, in the recent year, I don't know if it's been a year or 2 years, Chief Crannis asked that we have an expanded jurisdiction so our jurisdiction where we can take enforcement—I'll expand on that in a minute, but where we can take—we do anything they can do as far as jurisdictional issues up to Church Street. Now, from... I can't remember the street, I believe it's Clay...is it Clay that runs by the courthouse?

LS: Yes.

DS: It's from Clay up to Church Street and then all along Church Street to Progress up to... I guess it's Turner Street. So it takes all of Blacksburg downtown. So now, when we see a drunk staggering down the street we don't have to call and tell Blacksburg, "Hey, here he is."

LS: That's y'all's...?

DS: In the past we would say, "Hey, you need to do something about this, I'm here with him... if you don't have anybody available I can..." and they'd say, "Would you handle it?" and we could. And now, we just go on and do it, we don't need to, you know, when the situation arises.

And then we got the current jurisdiction—Montgomery County, Blacksburg, Christiansburg...that's it. And what that means is, we don't act on traffic or minor stuff, but we stop bank robberies and have full jurisdiction just like they do. Get behind a DUI, courtesy call and say, "Here it is, I'm behind it, do you want me to follow it or do you want me to take care of it?"

LS: And they just usually tell you to take care of it?

DS: Normally.

LS: What do you think the hardest thing is about your job?

DS: Scheduling. (laughter)

LS: Scheduling?

DS: No doubt, hands down.

LS: If that's your biggest concern, sounds like...sounds like it's not a bad job.

DS: It's the biggest headache I have right now. Because my shift...I only have myself and 4 officers. I have to keep a minimum of a supervisor and 3. It's hard to do, especially if you have one off and one gets sick, you're already below your minimum. So that's a big headache. I guess another thing is just keeping abreast of all the changes in laws and policies and stuff. It's pretty difficult. Always changing.

LS: Revising them, and putting out new books and rules every...it seems like every couple months?

DS: Yeah.

CD: You ever butt hands with the administration, the campus side?

DS: Um...technically no... (laughs) I question...I shouldn't even say that...we don't really question what they, you know, hand down, but internally you sometimes wonder why they do the things they do. (laughs)

LS: I guess, yeah...go into it as much as you feel comfortable doing, but how do you feel about Virginia Tech as an employer, but also just as an institution. Are you 100% Hokie-Hokie love Tech because you've been around in the area for so long, or is it more of a love/hate relationship?

DS: Um...I think I'd have to say love/hate. I mean, I'm a Hokie fan and I really like the school. It's been really good to me, you know, I've spent my whole career here basically doing one thing or another. I've been able to move around and do some stuff that I probably wouldn't have in the private sector had I stayed outside. I think it's a very pretty campus. When Sierra started looking at universities and we visited some, I won't mention West Virginia, but that's one of those (laughs). One of the grossest places I was ever at in my life, I swear. And when I came to work here in '84 that was the train of thought even with the administration. And all the administrators were like, "We need to keep this place- we need to beautify- keep it clean, pick up the trash and make sure everything's squared away, mow the grass..." and I didn't really understand that at the time, it wasn't until I went to West Virginia with her and it hit home, and now I get it. But it's been good to me. The part that I don't like is all y'all being here- you messed up a perfectly good town! (laughs)

LS: (laughs) We're sorry, we're sorry.

CD: How is it working where your daughter goes to school?

DS: (shakes head) It's fine. She was a little apprehensive about coming to school here, she didn't really want to come here...there was some discussion about why she didn't want to come...and I don't remember her ever voicing it to me, but she did her mom I think, and one of the issues was that I was a cop, and she was afraid that people would look at her different or something like that I guess, keeping an eye on her, watching her like a hawk every minute. So when we went to West Virginia—we went to a couple other places but—when we went to West Virginia and came back I told her, I said, “You know, if that's where you want to go, I'll support whatever you want to do, I'll help you what I can, but I don't understand why you'd go and spend three times the money to get the same education you could get across the street.” And then we had the discussion about, you know, although I do work here, and it's the same town she grew up in, I don't think she would feel like she was at home. Just because, it's a totally different atmosphere. I said realistically, if you had friends that go to school here that you went to high school with, you'd probably have to look for 'em. You're not just gonna see 'em. And you're not just gonna see me. And I think of her 4 years here... out in public, just to run into her, I can probably count 'em on both hands, so...

CD: Wow.

LS: I guess we've kinda been tiptoeing around it a little bit, but I guess...April 16th, were you working that day, I guess...I know it's a pretty heavy subject but what can you tell me about it as far as working for Virginia Tech, especially the police force, on that day?

DS: Um... that was a very hectic day, very stressful...I was the first officer on the first call at AJ...we have an early person that works—our shifts run 7 to 7—and we have one early person that works 6 to 6 just to cover those calls, you know, when you're in transition. So I was already dressed and ready, it was after 7 o'clock, everyone was dressed but we were in roll call which lasts anywhere from 10 to 20 minutes. And when the call came out we were just ending roll call, and they gave it to somebody else. I said, “Shoot, I'm set up in my car, got all my stuff, I'll go take this call”...so that's how I ended up being the first one there. And then, of course the chief and lieutenants and investigators and all that were on the scene over there when they gave out the call for Norris. And my lieutenant was standing beside of me, and because I was the first one on the scene at AJ...in the grand scheme of things I should have stayed with that crime scene because once an officer goes into it, if he's the first one there it belongs to him and it's his responsibility to keep track of who comes, who goes, whatever. But my lieutenant ranks over me and says, “You got keys?” and I said, “Yes” and he said “Let's go”. So we took off and went to Norris. So I was over there too when shots were still being fired.

LS: Gosh.

DS: And I was with the bunch that went in the door first, but luckily I didn't go in there. You know, I...I was told to post up at the door and not let anyone come in or out so...that's where I stayed.

LS: How does something, you know, a real life or death emergency situation like that compare to anything you've ever experienced before as far as training goes? Not many people, even cops, can say they've experienced anything like that.

DS: I don't know...I've thought about it, it didn't really bother me too bad. I lost sleep a couple of days and uh... I don't know why, my personality... I had a discussion with a dispatcher last week and she said, “You are our favorite patrol sergeant, you're the best.” And I said “Why? Why would you say I'm the best patrol sergeant?” and she said, “Because- you never get excited. Because if something happens you just take care of it; you handle it, you never get excited, you

don't never blow up, you don't get mad—you just deal with it, it's over, and move on.” So I don't know if, you know, my personality is just—that's the way it is and it didn't really bother me too much and it's just kind of a flatline and we go on...it didn't really affect me much, I don't think. Maybe when I die and there's a grander place or whatever I'll look back at it and say, “Yeah it probably did”, but...it surely looked at the way I look at people differently though, it just makes you think about everybody you come in contact with. What could they do, where could they be in 10 minutes, you know?

LS: I guess—you talked a little bit about your personality- what kind of traits do you think make a good police officer—or, a great police officer?

DS: Compassion. I think someone that's compassionate, that doesn't get excited easily. That doesn't get—I won't say mad, because I think everyone gets mad about stuff—but, that's able to control it and handle it and look at the whole situation and not just point it at one person. I think that's where a lot of officers get in trouble, you know...look in the paper probably any day of the week and somewhere in the country some police officer's done something stupid. Because they just let their temper get away with them. So, levelheaded, you know, someone that's honest... 'cause I think we get a bad rap just because of a few bad eggs sometimes.

CD: So you feel like most of your co-workers have those characteristics?

DS: Yes.

CD: Blacksburg police too?

DS: Yes (pause), but a lot of them have a different—maybe I shouldn't say this—but if you look at their force, and where some of them are from, they're not from around here. They didn't grow up here. A lot of them are from Boston or New York or different places. Now I'm friends with a couple of them that are from around here that are just, I think they're a hoot, I enjoy them and I trust 'em with my life.

LS: Do you think that kind of—so, I guess are you implying that the majority of the Tech officers are from the area?

DS: Yeah.

LS: Do you think that's what's attracted you more to staying with this job versus being a Blacksburg cop?

DS: I like talking to people, so a lot of the police departments are not so much about community policing—I won't say they're not about that, they're just not about getting to know people on a close 1 on 1 personal basis. Our department likes nothing more than for you to go out and do this sort of thing and talk to you, and I know a lot of other departments say, “You don't have time to do that, you have other stuff you need to be doing—there's tickets to be wrote, we need more income because you're not writing enough tickets, you're standing here talking to this guy!” You don't remember her, but one of the chiefs we had was a female—Duncan, do you remember her, do you remember that name?

LS: I don't think so.

DS: She came in shortly after I was hired—Mike Jones had hired me and then he got asked to leave because he got into a sexual harassment situation, and they hired her I think pretty much to clean house. At that time there was a lot of old school people here, people a lot older than I am that worked in the department. And she got rid of them, and she interviewed everybody when she first came in. Because I'd already been here 16-17 years, I said, “You know, you may get mad at me, if you do let me know, but you're gonna see me out in the street talking to somebody because I know everybody! You know, I enjoy talking to people” and she's like, “That's what I

pay you to do”. And I don’t think a lot of police departments are that way. And I think the university looks at it that way too—the administration, because it makes it a more appealing place for students to come to. They feel like their police officers are people, not just machines.

LS: (to Copley) Think we should go with this one...the quasi-wrap up?

CD: So, you talk about wanting to be a police officer as a child. Did you have any other aspirations?

DS: Aircraft, I always liked aircraft so...you know, I often thought I’d want to be an airline pilot or something but...I never got there. I wanted to join the military when I was just outta high school and actually went and talked to an Air Force recruiter and was ready to sign, had the date set up and everything and my Mom about had a heart attack. I was too soft-hearted, I couldn’t do it. And I kinda regret that. But at that time Vietnam had just ended...

LS: Completely different...do you think, being a cop now, do you feel those hopes or dreams are fulfilled? Are you content?

DS: Well, yeah, there’s some other stuff I want to do. I don’t know how much you know about what I do at home but, I build musical instruments.

LS: Really?

DS: Yeah, and I’ve been doing that since I become a cop because I got a lot of shifts that are 12 hour shifts so I got a lot of free time. I got into doing it, I started building mandolins and I’ve got a pretty good business—I got 2 right now, I probably got dye on my hands, I been putting the color on this afternoon. And I get anywhere from 2500 to 3500 dollars for ‘em. I make a pretty good profit, so...

LS: And you enjoy doing that?

D: I enjoy doing it. I enjoy working for myself at this age. I can come and go as I want, get up when I want, go to bed when I want, I don’t have somebody telling me, “You gotta wear this, you gotta put that vest on, you gotta carry that gun, you gotta train today, you got overtime tonight” (laughs) I’m about over it.

CD: Do you see yourself working past retirement when you reach retirement age?

DS: The musical stuff, that’s what I wanna do. And I’ve thought about maybe driving a bus or something, you know, part time. If it wasn’t for my insurance—my health insurance—I’d already be gone. That’s for me and Sierra, and it’s about \$1000 a month.

LS: In our class we’ve been talking a lot about the American Dream. What do you think about the American Dream? How would you define it? What do you think about it? It means different things to different people, so...?

DS: I think the recent failing economy has pretty much shot that out of the water for most people...most people that are older than you. If I’d handled myself better I would probably be where I think the American Dream is. I guess that’s to be secure in your old age, to have a home paid for, a stable family and not go through divorces. The perfect—the old TV shows, you know, from back in the 60’s. So I don’t know...I think the way the economy went, the banks loaning all the money to the people who couldn’t afford it and getting them in trouble...they were just people and they were just trying to have that American Dream, little did they know the bottom

was gonna fall out. What they put their money in wasn't worth the sand to throw under the house.

LS: We—I guess just me personally—what I think about a lot, is hard work and persistence leading to economic success or prosperity. It sounds like from your description earlier, talking about cutting up wood for the woodstove and working in the sawmill, to now overseeing part of this police force. It sounds to me like you've accomplished maybe not full prosperity and gotten yourself all the way to the top, but it sounds to me like you've accomplished that to some extent.

DS: Yeah...I guess...the American Dream...I guess my view of the American Dream is, you know, what I said about having the house and having everything just being in the little box in the yard, you have money to live on and you can retire and not have to worry about it and travel and all that...from your perspective, what you see of me, you're right. I've had a good life. I've done a lot of things that a lot of people probably can't do or wouldn't want to do. There's a lot of things that I've done that I'd like to do and hope to get to do again. One of those—I didn't tell you this part. Back in '80-'81, somewhere in there, shortly before I got my pilot's license—a couple years—I got the bright idea to buy an ultralight. And I had an ultralight for several years, I actually had a dealership that flew those. When Sierra was born, her mom made me sell it! (laughs) She said, you know I'ma get killed in that thing. But anyway...and I want one again. And that's just one of those things that I've done, and a lot of people would like to do probably, and either they're scared of 'em or they can't afford it, or whatever—they wouldn't do it. Not to brag on myself, but, a lot of people that know me say that I can do just about anything. And I think the reason I can do just about anything is the way I was raised—splitting the wood, milking the cows—having to do that...when I was a young teenager, 12 or 13 years old, pinball—we used to go to the skating rinks and I enjoyed pinball—well shoot, I couldn't go all the time so guess what I did? I built myself a pinball machine! (laughs) I mean, so just tinkering with stuff like that, you gain a lot of knowledge and you're able to do more of those things in life... accomplish more, what you want to do. There's always something new to do. I enjoy tinkering with stuff...flying my ole airplanes, building those instruments. I enjoy building different types of instruments. I've built everything from ukuleles to hammered dulcimers. You know what that is? You seen one of those?

LS: I have no idea...I've heard of it, but—

DS: A hammered dulcimer is—the one I built has fifty-some strings and it's almost like a triangle, and you play it with a hammer. It's got two bridges... it's a beautiful instrument, you should look it up. A lot of Christmas music, and stuff. It's great and I enjoy doing it. Just different stuff like that, just to see if I can do it.

LS: Just kinda challenging yourself?

DS: Yeah.

LS: You think there's anything else we might have missed? Anything else you'd like to tell us, to the camera, the world, I don't know?

DS: I don't know what to tell ya.

CD: Actually I was wondering—talking about how you had to things for yourself, the ukeleles and stuff...how do you think our generation's work ethic is? Even when we sat down initially you said 'Oh I came from a totally different world than you guys did'. There's already that assumption there. So just from talking to people on campus, how do you feel?

DS: Old (laughs). Yeah...Sierra's mom, Erica, she's always told me, she said, "just to talk to you, you sound like someone that was raised 40 years before you were born. Just the things that you did when you were growing up..." Things that are different...computers, cell phones. I mean, just think about how much stuff has changed just since 1980, you know? In 1980 there wasn't anything like a computer. If there was, it'd be as big as this building, you know? I remember the first one I ever saw, we were in the science shop over at the physical plant and the guy still had those old floppy disks. I don't even remember what he used it for; he was just trying to keep records on it or something. Then the university first got the internet, I was probably one of the first ones to have it in my home. 'Cause you could get the dial-up service and I thought that was the neatest thing.

CD: (laughs)

DS: Sierra was 2 years old, so...a lot's changed in 20 years.

LS: I feel like, you talking about your upbringing versus—I don't know about yours but—I was certainly not splitting wood, I was certainly not doing anything like that.

DS: Well you know there's a lot people my age that didn't...didn't grow up like that, because they weren't raised that way.

LS: Certainly, certainly. It just seems there's definitely a disconnect in this work ethic that you were alluding to, and I guess our generation's just entirely different. Information—gotta have it now, want it now—it's just different.

DS: Well I just thought about, there's a couple guys that I'm friends with that work out in—I don't know if you know what I'm talking about, tin city? Out at the metal structures lab, out on plantation road, you never been there?

LS: No.

DS: Well if you turn on plantation road and go all the way to the end there's the big farm—the big research, on your left, and on the right we always called tin city. It's a bunch of tin building and it's research. There's a structures lab out there and it's a neat place. They do all kinda stuff with high beams and bridges. They test the support systems, like they'll take a 12 inch high beam that long and put it under a hydraulic jack and see how long it takes and how much pressure it takes to bend it. Then they'll put it in concrete, pour that concrete so thick like a bridge and see how much stress it'll take before it bends or cracks...but anyway, there's a couple guys that work out there and, I told you we put those building signs up? There's some of those out there, and I remember the day that I had to put in, I don't know, 2 or 3 that I had to do that week out there. The guy that was helping me had laid out so I was by myself. And you're taking about digging a 2 and a half foot hole, 2 of 'em, for those posts to go in, and then concrete and all that. I didn't know these guys at the time but they knew a buddy of mine that I worked with. And I didn't pay any attention to them watching me, you know, and I went out there and dug those post holes and just killed myself really, just to get it done. Breezed through it, and it was about a week later the guy came back—I think he was on vacation, the guy I was working with—he came back and we rode out there and he saw those 2 guys. We pulled up and we were shootin' the shit with him but one said, "Boy I tell you one thing! I don't know who that boy was that come put those signs in but damn if he was tearing out the post (starts cracking up)"...I said, "Yeah, that was me..."

LS and CD: (laughter)

DS: He said, "There ain't another state worker in the state of Virginia that works like him!" (laughs)

LS: You know, it's a funny story, but it's kinda poignant... that you have that kinda ethic, just from your childhood...

DS: Yeah, my dad kicked my ass, you know.

LS: Think we got enough?

CD: Yeah.

LS: Alright, well thank you very much. Thanks again, we really appreciate you taking the time on your day off to talk to us.