

Interview with Anna Weber-Wakelam

HUM 2504: Introduction to American Studies, Prof. Emily Satterwhite, Spring 2010

Occupation: Waitress at Awful Arthur's

Time and Place: March 17, 2010 – The Village at Blacksburg – 6:00 PM

Interviewer: Jessica Hodges, Sophomore in University Studies from Ashburn, Virginia;
Vanessa Shipman, Sophomore Communication major from Richmond, Virginia

VS = Vanessa Shipman

AW = Anna Weber-Wakelam

VS: Would you please state your name, job title, and the name of the organization you work for?

AW: Anna. Awful Arthur's. Waitress.

VS: How long have you worked at your current job?

AW: 2 months

VS: Would you please tell me a bit about your family background?

AW: I have a biological mother and father, but my father's not in the picture. My mom remarried about four times throughout my lifetime. We moved around once every two years; sometimes every six months. I've lived on my own since I was sixteen.

VS: Do both of your parents work outside of the home?

AW: Yes.

VS: What do your parents do for a living?

AW: My mom bounced around from job to job. And my step dad works in the military.

VS: Does your husband or wife work outside of the home? Or in this case, your boyfriend?

AW: Yes, he works outside of the home.

VS: Do you pay your own tuition and room and board?

AW: Yes. Yes, yes [Laughs].

VS: Would you describe a typical day at your job in detail?

AW: I go to work. Make sure I have cash money on me. I wait tables and serve people food. And provide friendly customer service.

VS: Where have you worked previously?

AW: I've worked at Hooters, a day spa in Virginia Beach, Virginia Tech, IDDL, and a clothing company.

VS: What do you like best about your current job?

AW: It pays well [Laughs].

VS: What do you like least about your job?

AW: The time it takes away from studying and hanging out with my friends.

VS: Where do you live?

AW: Off campus.

VS: So you have your own apartment?

AW: Yes.

VS: Do you have roommates?

AW: Two.

VS: What costs are involved for you to get to work?

AW: Probably three dollars in gas.

VS: How does Virginia Tech affect your business?

AW: Virginia Tech gets in the way sometimes with their tests, but it's more like work gets in the way of school.

VS: Does it matter what time of year it is for students. Do you feel like you ever get gyped when working in a college town on tips?

AW: I feel like because the restaurant that I work at is more of a high-end for Blacksburg, that most students don't go there and when they do, they're usually not ordering a lot anyways so they can afford to pay the standard tipping amount.

VS: Do you find it difficult to balance school and work?

AW: Sometimes, when I have to work until 2 o'clock in the morning when I have an exam at 8 o'clock the next day.

VS: That's got to be rough. Do you ever feel financially strained?

AW: All the freakin' time! [Laughs].

VS: If you could change one thing about your job, what would it be?

AW: Higher pay.

VS: On average, how much do you make in tips in a week? Or on a weekend when you work?

AW: Per shift? If I work an eight hour shift then I usually make like \$70. Depending on if it's slower or faster. Sometimes on Sundays I'll only make like \$30. But per week, I'll probably make like \$200.

VS: And how many days a week do you usually work?

AW: Three to five depending.

VS: Did you enjoy working at Hooter's or Awful Arthur's better?

AW: Hooters.

VS: Why?

AW: Because it's funner and you made way more money.

VS: Why do you think you made more money?

AW: Because I was half naked all the time. And I lived in a town where it was predominately military, so only military guys would come in there and they're single and they have nothing better to spend their money on then talking to a pretty girl.

VS: Could you tell us about any of your really memorable customers?

AW: One time, there was this guy who came in and he sat at my table for two hours. And all he wanted to do was talk and buy me drinks and buy me dessert. And at the end he left me a \$100 tip.

VS: Wow! And that was at Hooters?

AW: Yeah, and his bill was only \$40.

VS: Wow. That was really nice. Was he in the military?

AW: Uh no. He was a fat, old guy. [Laughs]

VS: Where do you see yourself in five to 10 years?

AW: Well, I plan to be at a law school in the next four years. So hopefully working with the UN or another corporate law firm.

VS: So you plan on supporting yourself through law school after you finish at Tech?

AW: Yes.

VS: And would you say you'd be probably working as a waitress throughout that too?

AW: Yeah, probably. It makes the most money.

VS: Do you have anything else you'd like to share?

AW: No. [Laughs]

VS: You live with your boyfriend, correct?

AW: Yes

VS: And at home you live in Norfolk?

AW: Yeah.

VS: How would you say your work affects your family life?

AW: Well I feel like if I was not financially dependant on myself and someone else was supporting me I would be able to go home more often and see my family, which most of my family lives in North Carolina. My sister and her three kids and my mom and I see them only once every three months just because I have to deal with school and work and if I didn't have to work or worry about money I could just go visit them whenever.

VS: So you're not as close to your family as you could be?

AW: Yeah, physically close, yeah. But I talk to them like every day, a million times a day.

VS: If you were to have children in the future, what would you say to them about working in a job similar to yours? Would you recommend it?

AW: If I ever had children, then yeah. I mean, I would want them to – maybe I would support them so they didn't have to worry about money as much, but I would still encourage them to have jobs and not jump into a career. That way they can gain work experience and see what it's like to work for nothing basically.

VS: What advice would you give to someone who is considering your line of work?

AW: A nice smile and a helpful hand goes a long way. People just want people to be nice to them when they go out to eat.

VS: What are the costs involved for you in working? Do you ever have to pay for anything that comes out of your pocket?

AW: If somebody orders and doesn't pay their bill, then you have to pay their bill. One time at Hooters, there was a guy who ordered seven shots of Petrone. A Petrone shot is ten dollars each. It was my first night working by myself without someone watching me, and he said he was going to the bathroom, and he never came back.

VS: So you had to shovel out \$70?

AW: No. I didn't pay for it. Somebody else paid for it for me. It was somebody else at the table who was with them. It was like a party and he was trying to schmooze with me so he paid it. But I would have had to pay that \$70 for someone else's liquor.

VS: God, that would be awful. Did you have to buy your own Hooter's outfits?

AW: Yeah. They gave you two for free. And then after that you can buy them piecemeal. And they weren't really expensive at all. They were really cheap. You had to buy pantyhose probably once a week because they would get a rip or a stain. And those are only five dollars. But at Awful Arthur's, you had to pay \$20 every time you get a new T-shirt. It was a lot.

VS: Yeah, that's a lot for a T-shirt. That's weird. Have you ever had time where ends haven't met?

AW: Yeah. I needed to get my car repaired and it was \$500. And I just had to dip into my college loans that I take out. Which I try not to do. I try to just like, pay for my rent and everything like that with money that I saved up or earned over the summer or the school year. But, yeah, last month I had to get some money out of the loans.

VS: This summer are you going back home? Or are you staying in Blacksburg?

AW: I'm going to go back home because I'm gonna take classes there. It's about half the price as it is here.

VS: Are you going to work at Hooters?

AW: Yeah, probably.

VS: Why do you like working in the food industry specifically?

AW: I like interacting with people. I can't really see myself sitting behind a desk and just answering phones all day long. I like to talk to people and move around. It makes me think that time is going by quicker.

VS: Do you have any regular customers that come into Awful Arthur's or that used to come into Hooters?

AW: Not at Awful Arthur's because I haven't been there that long, but at Hooter I do. I did—well I do. They'll probably be there this summer. Well I have three. There is this one guy named Tom who just comes in and does his homework—not his homework, his uh, work work for lunch everyday Monday through Friday. Then there is this other guy. I can't remember his name. but he always comes in and orders just a chicken breast, with no bone. With ranch and coffee...

VS: Ew that's an awkward combination! [Laughs]

AW: Yeah, it looks really gross. And he doesn't want any bread, and pickle, and fries or anything. He just wants the chicken breast with a coffee. And if anyone ever serves him hat isn't me or someone who knows, they always bring him the bread and he gets *really* mad. And he won't tip and he'll just be like "let me talk to the manager." And then there is this other guy who always sat in the smoking, so I only had to be his waitress once. But I always went a talked to him, because I never did smoking because I hate the smell of smoke. And he's really cool and he's a stock broker and

he makes a lot of money and drives a really fancy car. And he always tipped *a lot* and he would bring his friends in and they would tip *a lot*. So he was kind of the guy you wanted to be a regular. But he is really full of himself. So you could only have him in little bits of time before you start to get aggravated.

VS: Did anybody ever hit on you?

AW: Ten times a day. [Laughs].

VS: Did anyone ever grope you?

AW: Someone did place their hand on my lower back. No one's ever touched me in an inappropriate area, but he was walking behind me on his way to his table, he wasn't my customer, and he put his hand on my lower back to get me to move out of his way, but the way he did it, it wasn't very "move out of the way" it was more "I want to touch you." So, that was it though. Nobody really gets touched at Hooters ever.

VS: So it's not like the stereotypical like....

AW: Nope, you would think so, but I that because it is such a place where people look out for it so much that people just stay away from doing things like that because they know that it won't be tolerated.

VS: Okay. I think that's it. Thank you very much for your time.

AW: Oh, no problem!