

Interview with David Battreall

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

Occupation: Bartender, Sharkey's Wing & Rib Joint, Blacksburg, VA

Time and Place: March 21, 2010 1:30 p.m.-2:00 p.m., Sharkey's Wing & Rib Joint, Blacksburg, VA

DB: David Battreall

KE: Kevin Eike

ND: Nathan Davis

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

DB: My name is David Battreall and I'm a bartender for Sharkey's Wing and Rib Joint.

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

DB: Approximately four and a half years.

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

DB: Um I'm from a broken home. I moved back and forth from my mom and dad a lot when I was younger and then lived with my father for the majority of my life, since middle school.

ND: What did your parents do for a living?

DB: Dad was in construction and my stepmom is a nurse.

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

DB: A typical day at my job? Weekend or during the week? Uh during the week it's pretty laid back, depending on what day of the week it is. We come in, make sure the bar is set up and everyone knows what they're supposed to do. Usually we come in at 5, happy hour starts at 5, and if it's a Friday or Saturday, we'll usually come in a bit earlier. You know it's long hours, you're here till about 3:30 in the morning but you just multitask, which is the biggest thing with bartending. You know you're making 5 or 6 drinks at a time, uh, just dealing with crazy college kids, but that's life.

KE: How did you come to have this job?

DB: Um I started off bouncing and then I just worked my way up. I think most bartenders don't have too much skill off the street and bars just promote from within.

KE: Name a few things that you like best about your job?

DB: Um, girls. [Laughs.] I mean it's paying my way through school, um, it's fun. You're almost the life of the party, you know, we're the guys fueling the party I guess. But I mean it's just a good time, they're young kids coming in and having a blast and it's just a great atmosphere I guess.

KE: What about things you like least about your job?

DB: Least? Hours. Um I'm a full-time student so when you get off at 3:30 and you go home, you can't just fall asleep you know it takes you an hour to wind down so you go to bed about 4:30 or 5 and then wake up at 9 to go to class, so you just get used to being a zombie. [Laughs.] Like I got 6 hours of sleep last night and I thought it was awesome, I was like man I feel refreshed! [Laughs.]

KE: How many do you usually get, like on average?

DB: I mean, it's not unlikely to get 3 or 4 hours of sleep and get back up and go, so it's crazy.

ND: What are you studying? You go to Radford right?

DB: Education.

KE: Where do you live and what costs are involved with you getting to work?

DB: Um, I live near Floyd. I don't know if you know where that is, but down Prices Fork and past Foxridge and the middle school's on the left. But as far as costs, man I don't really know, since I'm always commuting to school as well. I'm at Radford and I'm an Education major, but I couldn't tell you what the fuel costs are.

KE: If you could change one of the following things about your work, would you change the wages, benefits, schedule, location, availability of healthcare, kinds of people you work with, or something else. Why?

DB: Um benefits. We get health insurance if we've been here for awhile, but wages, since we work off tips pretty much because we make, I think it's a minimum of 2-something an hour and we don't really get a paycheck because they take taxes out of your tips and so when you get your check, no matter how many hours you work it's, it's nothing. It'd be nice if we got an hourly paycheck, but a downfall too is when you go to apply for a loan, you know like you're making 2.13 an hour plus tips and it's, it can be difficult.

KE: What do you think is important for people to know about what you do?

DB: Uh, it's one thing to just be a good bartender, I mean it's a lot more than most people think, I guess. There's a lot to being able to take 5 orders and you've got, you know, 3 people deep behind the bar; take all their orders, you know, you make everyone happy. Try to keep tabs on who comes in your bar first so you don't upset this person because this person walked up and got served right away instead of the person who's been there for 5

minutes, you know. And you got to make it satisfactory and all that. Something that frustrates me is when it's really busy, I'm so focused and people are like "Smile! What's wrong?" Oh I'm not in bad mood, I'm just, you've got so many orders just coming through. [Kevin: "It's hard to be personable when you're focusing on your job."] Exactly! Because what makes a good bartender especially like that is not taking an order and just making one drink, instead going down the line and taking 4 orders. Because a lot of times, like on Fridays, our drink of the day is Long Island. Friday I say, "What do you want?" and they'll say, "Long Island," and I'll make it. "Long Island," and I'll make it. Well I can make 4 Long Islands right there, give them to you, and make more drinks and make more people happy because they're getting served quicker. It's just multitasking and being able to make sure everyone is happy.

DB: Guys like Eddie are why I like my job. [He and Eddie, a customer, both laugh.]

ND: Do you see yourself getting into business for yourself or opening up your own bar in the future?

DB: Um, I know some friends who are opening a bar in Key West who want me to come down. Actually, I'm an education major but I'm not going to teach, I'm going into business for myself, but it's not in the bar scene. I'm starting a fishing guide service for special needs kids, so yeah it's something that's never been done before. [Goes to grab drinks for customers] There's not enough gratification for me (here), I got to do something personally that gives back, you know teaching, firefighting, something cool like that.

ND: What's your favorite part about working in a business area like Blacksburg?

DB: Well no matter what the economy is doing, people like to drink. Virginia Tech for example, you get a lot of students from Northern Virginia, Maryland, and New Jersey and they're more well-off than most, so they come down here and no matter what's going on with the economy, especially if the economy is bad, it's just more of a reason to drink.

ND: Where do you see yourself in 5 to 10 years?

DB: Um, like location or? [We explain the question in further detail.] In 5 to 10 years I hope to be in business for myself with what I want to do. Family, whatever, you know, livin' the dream. [Smiles.]

ND: Do you have anything else to share about your job?

DB: It's awesome! [Laughs.] I mean I've been here for 4 years and dealing with drunk people can get on your nerves. Especially sometimes where you're like, "You got into Tech?" [Laughs.] But you know, other than that, it's like every year you gotta train new drinkers essentially, like how to act in a bar. People turn 21 and they don't know how to act, they don't know how to order, they don't know how to behave I guess at a bar. So it can be frustrating when young kids come in and they can't really handle their alcohol, you just

gotta pretty much teach them how to drink or how to act in a bar without getting kicked out or being an ass, you know?

KE: Is there anything else you want to say?

ND: It's a great occupation and I feel fortunate for having this job. Like I said, it's the only way I'd be able to pay for school and if I got fired tomorrow, I'd probably have to drop out and try and figure out how to pay my way, so I'm thankful for that aspect.