

Interview with Matthew Brooks

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

Occupation: Culinary Certified Trainer for Olive Garden

Time and Place: 3p.m., 3rd floor Newman Library, Blacksburg, Virginia

Interviewers: Jon Cabbage – Fifth year senior, Interdisciplinary Studies and History major from
Bridgewater, Virginia

Sara Vaughan – Sophomore, Interdisciplinary Studies major with a focus on
IDED from Waynesboro, Virginia

JC = Jon Cabbage

SV = Sara Vaughan

MB = Matthew Brooks

JC: Alright, will you please state your name, your job title, and the name of the organization you work for.

MB: Um, my name is Matthew Brooks. I'm a Culinary Certified Trainer at Olive Garden Restaurants.

JC: Good deal. Okay, how long have you worked there?

MB: Uh, about nineteen months.

JC: Okay, so a year and a half.

MB: Yeah.

JC: About.

MB: About.

JC: Okay. Uh, would you please tell me a little bit about your family background?

MB: Um, my mom was a stay at home mom.

JC: Mhmm.

MB: Uh, my dad worked for um, GTE, a phone company before it became Verizon.

JC: Okay. Oh, okay.

MB: Yeah.

JC: I'm with Verizon now.

MB: [Laughter] Yeah. He was a lineman, and --- a middle class family.

JC: Yeah. Okay.

MB: That kinda stuff.

JC: Okay, that pretty much covers that one. Uh, would you describe in detail like a typical day at your job. Like, what goes on, what happens?

MB: Oh, gee. I don't know if I can say that. [Laughs] Um, I basically get to work in; umm... it depends on what station you're working.

JC: Mhmm.

MB: Um, I'm trained to do everything in the back.

JC: Okay.

MB: So if I'm uh, doing what's called PM Production...

JC: Mhmm.

MB: ...Um it's basically getting the line cook set up, and making sure their job runs smooth. If I'm the line cook you cook the tickets as fast as you can, make them pretty, make sure you don't burn it.

JC: Yeah, okay.

MB: But uh it's pretty much just uh, free rein to do what you need to do to make the guest happy.

JC: Yeah, okay. How many stations are there, I guess?

MB: Umm.

JC: You mentioned the two...

MB: Okay there's uh, two sautés...

JC: Mhmm.

MB: ...Uh, two assembles, which um, do plate presentations.

JC: Mhmm.

MB: Um, there's an appetizer station which makes the pizzas and everything else, and then there's a grill...

JC: Okay.

MB: ...makes the stakes.

JC: Not bad.

MB: Yeah, and then there's a salad person and dish.

JC: Salad, love it at Olive Garden.

MB: Yeah, [laughs] thank you!

[Laughter]

JC: Okay, uh what do you like most about your job?

MB: Um, it's something different every day.

JC: Yeah.

MB: It keeps you on your toes. It's not the same thing, well, it's the same thing over and over, but the situations that arise are always different.

JC: Interesting... yeah.

MB: Yeah, it really keeps you on your toes.

JC: Okay, not bad. What, kinda random not on the sheet, but what like what typical like hours do you work, I guess? Your like, normal shifts.

MB: Um, anywhere from seven in the morning to um, one, two in the morning.

JC: Okay, wow.

MB: It's... I just do everything there.

JC: Yeah, jack of all trades.

MB: Yeah, um, they just changed our truck time so it comes in at two o'clock, used to be five o'clock in the morning. In the winter, yeah, it was horrible.

JC: Man, that's awful.

SV: Not fun.

MB: No. [Laughter] Not at all.

JC: Well that might segway into our next question. What is your least favorite thing about your work?

MB: Um, definitely PM Production.

JC: Yeah.

MB: It's, it's just hectic. And, the way its set up is we have morning production which, you know, cuts all our vegetables and stuff to use that day...

JC: Mhmm.

MB: ...and um...

JC: Like all in one... Okay.

MB: Yeah, so we get the food out faster. And it never seems to be enough. So, if you're one person on PM Production it's a mess.

JC: Yeah.

MB: Yeah, you get really frustrated and behind.

JC: Mhmm.

MB: Other than that, I mean, uh, I enjoy the hectic style of it.

JC: Yeah.

MB: It's fun.

JC: Okay, I like that.

MB: Yeah. [laughs]

JC: I'm kinda a procrastinator like in my school work so I kinda enjoy that like, gotta get it out right this second too sorta thing.

SV: Yeah.

MB: Yeah.

JC: I'm with ya. Uh, how is your relationship with your coworkers?

MB: Um, pretty good. I mean, it's um, Olive Gardens motto is "when you're here, you're family."

JC: Ha, yeah.

MB: ...and when you work in a high volume restaurant, um, I mean, we're the busiest in Christiansburg.

JC: Also the best, I have to say.

[Laughter]

MB: Thank you. Um, it takes on like a brotherhood.

JC: Mhmm.

MB: I mean, it's just team work throughout.

JC: Yeah.

MB: So it's, it's a really good environment.

JC: Okay.

MB: I mean you do have your bad eggs, but...

JC: Yeah.

MB: Everybody has their bad days, so...

JC: Definitely. Um, how does Virginia Tech affect your job? If it does.

MB: Oh, it definitely does.

JC: Yeah.

MB: Summer when the students are gone...

JC: Mhmm.

MB: We're dead.

JC: Really?

MB: Yeah. Um, football games are probably the busiest night - like home football games.

JC: Mhmm.

MB: Oh, we get slaughtered. It's...

JC: Yeah, I mean, I can't imagine.

MB: Yeah, everybody comes. When um, the students move back in...

JC: Mhmm.

MB: ...like they're here with their families, we'll be on wait from the time we open until after close.

JC: Mhmm.
SV: What about graduation?
JC: Oh, Gosh.
MB: Oh, graduation is just as bad. It's...
JC: I'll probably come in there when I graduate.
[Laughter]
MB: And um, a lot of our workforce are students.
JC: Oh, okay. Gotcha.
MB: Yeah, when um they leave, it's a pretty good portion of our...
JC: How often do they leave, about, I guess?
MB: Um, some of them stay through Christmas. Um, just about all of them leave through summer.
JC: Mhmm.
MB: Especially if they live on campus. So...
JC: Yeah.
MB: Yeah.
JC: Okay.
MB: I would say, they're gone, four or five months out of the year.
JC: Okay, but I guess that's your least busiest times, right?
MB: Right.
JC: Most of the time.
MB: Most of the time, yeah. [Laughs]
JC: Okay, um, are you at a better position here, at Olive Garden, than you were I guess at your last job before this?
MB: Oh definitely.
JC: Yeah?
MB: Definitely yeah, um, at my last job, I was uh – I, I don't know if this is the correct terminology but um "taken advantage of".
JC: Mhmm.
MB: Like um, my boss was just a horrible person. He actually ended up losing that restaurant.
JC: Oh, wow.
MB: And um, everything else. But I stayed there. I worked hard, and I got no where there.
JC: Mhmm.
MB: So...
JC: Was this like a smaller restaurant? Or was it another...
MB: Um, it was Fatz Café.
JC: Okay.
MB: It's a southern chain. Um, first one in Virginia was built in Dublin.
JC: Okay.
MB: Um, yeah...He had issues.
[Laughter]
JC: Did you do the same sort of thing there? Or?
MB: Um, not really. It was a different style of everything.
JC: Yeah, I guess with it being a café as opposed to like a big...
MB: Yeah, a lot of sandwiches and stuff, so.
JC: Okay. Um, next question. Do you think there is a good opportunity for advancement, like

in your position?

MB: Oh, definitely. Um, most of Darden's employees, like high ranking CEO's and stuff...

JC: Mhmm.

MB: ...there's a 60% um, in house promotion rate.

JC: Wow.

MB: Yeah.

JC: That's pretty good.

MB: Yeah, um, my store manager um, has been working with, uh, Olive Garden for twenty years, and he started out as a dish washer.

JC: Wow.

MB: So...

JC: How about that. Not bad. Um, how long do you plan on staying at this position?

MB: I don't know.

JC: Don't know?

MB: I just plan on doing it until, um, I get through college.

JC: Mhmm.

MB: If I still want to do it, so.

JC: Right.

MB: I mean at that point, you know, I could probably get into management.

JC: Mhmm.

MB: But, I don't know yet.

JC: Okay, do you know how much longer it's going to be before you get through college? Or?

MB: Um, because of the financial aid situation, it's going to be a few years.

JC: Yeah, okay. Um, if you could change one thing about your work what would it be, and why?

MB: Honestly, I'd have to say nothing.

JC: Really?

MB: Yeah, because like I said, I enjoy the hectic lifestyle.

JC: Mhmm.

MB: I mean, I might get angry and yell, but at the end of the day it's knowing that, you know, I've helped to make it the number one Olive Garden on the east coast.

JC: Yeah.

MB: So, you definitely get a sense of accomplishment.

JC: Definitely.

MB: To know that you're doing something that everybody loves.

JC: Mhmm.

MB: So.

JC: Yeah, get to make a lot of people happy. Me, when I go there and eat - I love it.

[Laughter]

JC: Highlight of my day.

SV: You wouldn't change anything about your wage or benefits or anything?

MB: Um, we get a really great benefits package. Um, we get...

SV: What does it entail?

MB: Um, health, 401K, we get, um, employee stock purchases, um, discounts with, uh, major companies, airlines, hotels.

JC: Not bad.

MB: So, it's, um...I would like to get paid more, but who wouldn't?
JC: Yeah.
MB: Yeah, especially to do, you know, the amount of work that we do...
JC: With that hectic...
MB: Yeah, it would be nice to get paid more. But that's something everybody wants.
JC: Yeah, um, where do you see yourself in five to ten years?
MB: Hopefully a college graduate, just to be perfectly honest.
JC: Yeah, okay.
MB: With a career.
JC: Me too.
SV: In what?
[Laughter]
MB: With a career.
SV: In what though?
MB: Um, that's something that's been holding me back. I can't stay interested in one field long enough that I don't know if I want to be doing this for the next thirty years of my life.
JC: That's hard to predict.
SV: Yeah.
MB: Yeah, it's like 'am I going to enjoy this twenty years from now?'
JC: Mhmm.
MB: Is this going to be something, you know, I'm going to be happy doing? Or...
JC: Right.
MB: ...And, I just don't know.
JC: Yeah, I've, like me personally, I know I bounced around my major. Like, I'm a fifth year now, so now I'm settled. But like, my first couple years I was like 'I don't know what I want to do...' like...
MB: Yeah, I changed majors four times in one year...
JC: Yeah, I think I did four. I changed mine four times too.
MB: Yeah, I don't know what I want to do.
JC: I still don't to be honest.
[Laughter]
JC: Oh man. Okay and, do you have anything else you would like to share like about your job?
MB: I don't know, not really.
JC: Okay, were you at this Olive Garden when it first opened up?
MB: Uh, no. I came in uh...
JC: 'Cause I'm trying to remember how long it's been open. I know you said you worked for nineteen months.
MB: It opened in... I came six months after it opened.
JC: Okay.
MB: So we've been opened for about two years.
JC: Gotcha.
MB: And I just missed the really hectic opening.
JC: Yeah, nice.
MB: Yeah it's like I got there when everything was leveling out.
JC: Mhmm.
MB: So it made it really easy on me.

JC: Okay, um. I've got a few more that I kinda like scribbled in here, uh, from class. Uh, do you think like the work you put in equals like the pay that you receive, I guess? Like?

MB: Um, no.

JC: No?

MB: No. I mean, because um, when you look at it, um, management gets paid a lot for our company...

JC: Mhmm.

MB: ...and they really don't do anything. [Laughs] They do paperwork, that's it.

JC: Yeah.

MB: And, when you look at it, like um, where I'm a CT, I'm one of the leaders on the line; I have to make sure everything is running.

JC: Mhmm.

MB: And, you know, we're really the ones that keep everything together...

JC: Right.

MB: ...and keep it from falling. And I, I just don't think they pay enough for that. But like I said, I guess everyone feels that way about their job, so, except for the people up top. But...

[Laughs]

JC: Yeah, I'm sure you've seen the movie Waiting.

MB: Yeah.

JC: Great movie, sort of like what you're talking about the manager, like...

MB: Yeah, I mean I don't want to say our management does nothing, but they're definitely slow about getting everything together.

JC: Mhmm.

MB: And um, we just have free rein to do what we need to do to make sure everything goes off smoothly.

JC: Yeah, okay. Um, I guess we sort of touched on this earlier, but I guess the most rewarding part of your job?

MB: It's definitely, you know, being a part of something that everybody loves.

JC: Yeah.

MB: It's not one of those necessary things, um; I guess it's kinda like being an artist.

JC: Mhmm.

MB: Arts, a um, luxury item. Like, going to eat...

JC: I get what you're saying.

MB: Like, you can go and you can make your own food, but you know, you go out to a restaurant, and you have a really great experience, and you become connected to those people.

JC: Yeah.

MB: Because you know, you have given them something they love. So...

JC: Yeah definitely, I love food. [Laughs]

SV: Has anyone specifically called you out to say it was good, or anything?

MB: Um, not at this job. But when I worked at Cracker Barrel, um, I was the only cook on the line, and it was like two o'clock in the afternoon...

JC: Mhmm.

MB: ...and um, a guy that was drunk came in and wanted pancakes.

[Laughter]

MB: And he actually walked back into the kitchen, and I was at the, uh, fountain getting some

water, and um, he came and he hugged me.

[Laughter]

MB: And told me they were the best pancakes he's ever had in his life.

[Laughter]

JC: And I'm sure he meant that too.

[Laughter]

MB: I'm sure he did. But like, he had management like trying to pull him off of me. And he was like 'those were the best pancakes ever!' [laughs]...you really don't know what to do at a point like that. [laughs] Just like... uh, thanks!

JC: Just live the moment, sink it in. Oh, gosh.

MB: It's like I've gotten, uh, tips a few times at uh the restaurants.

JC: Mhmm.

MB: For my cooking and stuff, like 'best stake every, here's twenty buck.'

JC: Wow, nice. Well, did you have anything else?

SV: I'm trying to think...

JC: I think I've gone through all my scribbles.

SV: Yeah, I think that's it.

JC: Yeah, that's it? Well I appreciate it. Thank you much. Good interview.