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Dr. Emily Satterwhite – Hum 2504
Interview Project Step 7
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Reflection Draft – Step 7

Overall, I found this project about work to be very enlightening and informative. I have learned many things about the living wage, the “working poor”, and also more about my friend and sister’s boyfriend of five years, Matthew Brooks. Matthew Brooks is a Certified Culinary Trainer at the Olive Garden in Christiansburg, Virginia. I have known Matthew for over five years now, and have seen his struggle with jobs, family, and money issues.

Even though I appreciate whole heartedly Matthew agreeing to my interviewing him, I do feel as if he held out on some stories and experiences throughout his life. I know that he has been in major debt before and has worked very hard to try to erase it. With the help from my family, and his new position at Olive Garden, he certainly has made a step in the right direction to recovering from debt. I cannot say for certain if he has gotten himself completely out of the hole yet, but I do know that he has paid back a nice majority of it. I think if Matthew would have opened up about his past troubles with money, my partner and I would have gotten a better understanding of where he was coming from. However, I do understand why he would want to withhold such information, seeing as the emotional strain that comes with debt is very powerful, and also an extremely personal battle.

I almost feel as if Matthew didn’t go into details of his life, and extreme details of his coworkers because he knew that it was going to be video recorded, and also kept in the library for future use. I guess I feel this way because I know more than Matthew put out for the camera. Even though he said he liked the hectic style of work his job entailed, and that he enjoyed the people he worked with, I have heard stories throughout the past year or so that state differently.

However, I do understand the need for the video, because although notes are helpful, they do not say word for word what the interviewee is saying. Nor does it capture the emotion through body language and the sound of the voice. I guess the fear of being documented would keep almost anyone from truly giving all their emotions in an interview though.

Although I know certain aspects of Matthew's life background, I do feel as if the information he gave Jon and I was enough for us to understand his position. Matthew stated in the interview that he has been working at Olive Garden for about nineteen months, and I can honestly say that I had no idea what he actually did in the kitchen. I am glad he talked about all the different stations, which include the salad and dessert presentation station, the grill station, the appetizer station, and the sautéing station. Although I knew he "worked the line", I wasn't sure what all that entailed, so I am glad that he told that bit of information. I have never worked in a restaurant before, so learning all the different parts of the kitchen gives me a new respect for the organization the company holds.

Also, it was nice to find out about the benefits and promotion rates the workers at Olive Garden get. I was shocked to find out that the CEO's of Darden Restaurants have a 60% in-house promotion rate. I'm not sure about other companies, but 60% sounds like a pretty promising number to me. The Darden Restaurant website actually states that it "offers its employees not just jobs, but opportunities to build rewarding careers".¹ Some of the benefits that Matthew listed sounded pretty nice for a restaurant worker, and they were benefits I wouldn't have expected them to receive. I thought that the discounts with airlines and hotels sounded like a pretty nice touch, especially because I come from a family who is privileged enough to travel occasionally.

¹ <http://www.darden.com/careers/>

Matthew did state that he would like to earn extra money for the amount of work that he puts in. Although he didn't discuss how much he earns yearly, I am almost positively certain that it is still under the \$20,000 range. I focused my annotated bibliography on the topic of the living wage, and what it actually entailed. After reading through countless articles, I have come to realize that Matthew's statement that everyone would like to make more money is true. The living wage is a hard concept for many people to grasp, specifically because the broad issue it entails of the poverty line – which is inconsistent throughout the United States. Although many find it impossible, I feel like it is a step our country needs to take to help those in poverty.

This project has taught me many things. I better understand work in the restaurant business, I am starting to realize the need for a mandated living wage, and I learned that life is different for everyone. As I stated before, I come from a pretty well off family, and if not, my parents did a damn good job of giving my sisters and I everything we ever wanted. Growing up my parents always bought us whatever we wanted whether it was clothes or toys, took us to countless amusement parks and vacations, and even did the Virginia pre-paid tuition program to make sure we wouldn't be tied down for the rest of our lives with student loans. I have been a very lucky girl for the past twenty years, and I truly appreciate it. This class, however, has brought me to the realization that not everybody in America has the nuclear family, or the money to financially support themselves and their family. It wasn't until this past year that my mother finally started to talk about financial issues with me. With learning about how my mother, a middle school teacher, hasn't received a pay increase in the past four years, after teaching for over thirty years, and along with this class, I am starting to see how the real world actually treats its people.

Even though I have always considered my family to be a part of the American Dream, I am realizing that we really aren't. I really do not think that the American Dream even exists anymore. Even though some people are lucky enough to have advancements in their jobs, not everyone gets to enjoy that upward mobility. The truth is, too many people in our country are fighting a losing battle, and I think that the first step that needs to be taken to fix such a thing is mandating a suitable living wage across the country.