

**Narrative: David Jones, Director of Events and Volunteer Programs, Warm Hearth Village
Blacksburg, Virginia**

Interviewer: Katie Mawyer

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I grew up in Pulaski, lived in the same little track of land where my grandmother and my mother grew up. It was a great little neighborhood with kids and that kind of stuff. I've got two brothers, one older, and one younger. My brother lives in Blacksburg, and my other brother lives in Georgia. My mother and grandmother still live in Pulaski.

I am the Director of Events and Volunteer Programs at Warm Hearth Village. I've actually been with Warm Hearth Village for about a year and nine months, but I've been here at Showalter at this position since December.

My degrees are in music, actually, and I taught high school and college before I came here. And then I had music studios in Wytheville, Blacksburg, and Christiansburg. I just happened to luck-up on this job. I just happened to see the paper. I was looking for something part-time to supplement my income, and really didn't even know this type of job existed until I was looking in the paper. *[Laughs]* But I did grow up around a lot of elderly people, which probably influenced me. I grew up beside my grandparents, and their family lived all around there. They probably weren't elderly at the time, but they seemed like they were elderly to me. *[Laughs]*

At the healthcare center, I was part-time and didn't have benefits, and then they offered me this position. It's full time with benefits. I still teach a few piano students, but not like I did. The economy really hurt piano teaching. It's one of the first things to go when you're cutting back. And I figured this was going to be more stable. And I'm a music director at Saint Thomas' Episcopal Church also. The church thing I've done all my life, so that really just comes easily to me, and piano teaching, too. I've just always had two or three jobs. I just stay busy. I would say now it's more to support myself.

My partner died on June 24th. So I went from two incomes to one, and he didn't have a will or anything so his father kicked me out of the house. And everything went to his father. And he had a very nice income because he had been at Tech for 20 years and had an administrative position there. So now I'm trying to support myself. I had to start from the very bottom. His father informed me that I had to leave the house, so I had to find a place to live. It had been years since I had looked for a place to rent and was finding out that everything really in Blacksburg

and Christiansburg was very student-oriented, not just single-person oriented. I've got a townhouse over in Christiansburg and bought all new furniture and everything. He took everything down to the utensils, because he said it was his.

I actually turned the job down twice. Christie, who's the administrator, knew me from college, and after I thought about the job and stuff, I thought, I could get real attached to people real easily, and you work in a nursing facility, so you know it's possible to lose them, and I didn't know that I could deal with that. I told her, "I don't want to take the job, because I know what will happen. I'll get attached to people and the people who are here are here for basically one reason." So she said, "Well just try it for 30 days, and after 30 days, you have no obligation to stay." And I'm still here. I make \$13.50 an hour, which that's not bad for this area. I mean, it's not bad, but when I was teaching piano, I was making fifty. But that also wasn't eight hours a day. That was about five hours a day.

I don't think there is a typical day. You know, the goal is to keep the residents happy and keep them active, and whatever that takes makes a typical day. And that varies from day-to-day. There is some routine to it. I mean, you come in in the morning and you put up the flyers. They get a flyer that tells them what's going on that day. We have a hotline; it's a number that they can call to see the activities and the menu for the day. I'm answering phones and answering emails. On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays I teach an exercise class, and we have a choral group here that sings. There's a few activities that are led by residents themselves.

I have 400 residents here, with less staff. But they're changing that. We're hiring someone new. We're hiring another full-time person. With that many people, you know, they want different things. The activities are really quite different; some have to be more simple activities. Here, we have scheduled concerts, lectures, and, things like that. They do the Wii. Every Tuesday there's a group that does the Wii up at the Karr Center, and we have a tournament every couple of months. And there's two ladies that teach it to the new people that come in. Some people here are very in to computers. I've taught a class to the men's club about Facebook and genealogy, and they got real interested in that. They want to know what's out there, whether they want to use it or not. [Laughs] They've asked about Facebook. They've asked about Twitter. They ask, "What is this, we hear about it, what is it?" This tends to be a very learned group of people because a lot of them were Tech professors.

The best thing about working here is knowing that they're happy, and sometimes just smiling at them makes them happy. I do my church work, and lead people, and teach the kids piano, and all that kind of stuff. It's all about helping out people. I think it's more than that. I think the people for the most part are very appreciative of what you do, and that makes it very rewarding. I think we all need appreciation. That's something you don't get when you're teaching high school a whole lot. [Laughs] Now college, I did. I mean, the people here are so caring.

Sometimes it's frustrating that you will have a conversation with a resident, and then maybe an hour later they'll come back with the same questions, because they've forgotten that you've taken care of that. But it's not bothersome. You get used to it. It's like I tell my grandmother...it's like having 80 grandmothers, working here. [Laughs] This is the best place I've ever worked.

One thing I would say is to not pigeonhole yourself in a job. All my life I thought I wanted to be a music teacher, and I'm not full-time. One of my professors in college said, "Don't ever turn down an opportunity," and I try to live by that. And sometimes that's come out real good.

Am I living the American Dream? In my situation as it is now, not having any rights when it comes to relationships and stuff like that, no, I'm not. Because when Martin died, his father took everything. I'm not trying to be on a soapbox, it's just the truth. So in the state of Virginia, I have no rights. But I have a place to live, I've got food, and that's important. I would just think the American Dream is really to be comfortable and to have food and shelter. And you'd be surprised how many people in this area do not have that.

To read the complete conversation, please see the transcript.