Stories Behind the Service
Memoirs of Service Workers at UMass

Transforming Your World:
Introduction to Community Engagement
Fall 2017
In partnership with
UMass Labor Management Workplace Education
SustComm/PubPAdm 110
Table of Contents

2........ Introduction
3........ Dedication
4........ “The Career Fair” A Short Story by Team 6
15........ Everybody is Happy: Xing Shun Wang
18...... A Man of All Trades: Bill Allen
22........ Should I Stay or Should I Go?: Renier
25...... A Wholesome Life: Carol Landry
28...... They Call Me the Rice Bender: Hendro Kusumo
31...... The Adventures of Matthew Thornton and Kevin Scanlon: Maintenance Workers
34...... Closing Statements
Introduction

Many people, young and old, have a dream job in mind. Some dream to become veterinarians while others want the simple life of bussing young students from school to their homes safe and sound. Few dream of working in service—whether it be cooking rice in Worcester dining commons or cleaning up the hallways in Morrill. However, these are jobs filled by people with dreams, high-reaching and humble alike. No one can guess what they think about being in service; some enjoy their role at the university, some have reservations and aspirations, and some have families to support. One thing can be certain about all of these men and women, though: all of them are people with pasts, loved ones, and stories to share.

The University of Massachusetts Amherst’s *Transforming Your World: Introduction to Community Engagement* class, taught by Dr. Ellen Pader, shares these stories as part of our final project. The following stories present the service workers’ voices through narratives told from their perspectives. Joe Connolly and Amy Brodigan are from L/MWEP were a community partners with this service learning class. They helped us achieve our goal of integrating our aspirations in this class academically and in the community.
Dedicated to the individuals and families of the people in this book. Thank you for sharing your amazing stories with us and allowing us insight into the lives of the service workers at UMass Amherst.

And to Dr. Ellen Pader for helping us share these stories.
The Career Fair

Instead of going with a more traditional interview approach, our group decided to focus on the stigmas and stereotypes dining hall workers face. Those in the service industry are often looked down on, and this burden is passed along to their children and families. After an interview with a UMass dining hall worker who prefers to remain nameless, we constructed this story to reflect an experience she went through.
The Career Fair
When I was only six years old, my family was forced out of our beautiful home in Nepal by The War. My mom, my older brother and I left behind my father and my grandparents. Father wanted to keep the family together but stayed behind to defend our country, while my grandparents refused to leave their home of seventy years. I miss the majestic mountains that watched over me everyday, and the smell of traditional meals that filled our family restaurant. The restaurant is where most of my favorite memories were made: it was not only where my mom cooked us the most delicious dinners, but it was where the entire family gathered and enjoyed each other’s company. I still miss it everyday.
When we arrived in America, we settled in a small, rural New England community. My mother tried to cope with the sudden change by opening up a restaurant, based off of the one from back home, but without the help of my father and grandparents, she struggled to maintain the business and was forced to work part time at the local college to make ends meet. Two years later, the restaurant shut down. With few other options, she was employed at the college’s dining hall, where she served food to students and faculty, full time. For the past eight years, she has worked late hours and comes home exhausted six nights per week.
Armenst High School

You are invited to bring your Parent in for our Annual Career Fair! All are welcome!

Date: Thursday, December 2nd
Time: 10 AM - 2 PM
Location: Amherst High School gym

classes, my entire grade gathers in the gymnasium to hear about the interesting jobs everyone’s parents have, with the hope of learning more about our dream jobs. While waiting for the assembly to start, I see some of the girls in my grade gathered in a circle pointing and laughing at another girl. I can hear them harassing her about her parents’ job as service workers in a local restaurant. While she pretends not to hear, the girls continue to talk down to her, taking aim at the “gross” and “poor people” clothes she wears simply because they are not name brand. I want to say something, but I know that would only make me their next target. Suddenly, my friends Mike and Trent come up to me talking about their parents’ jobs. Trent’s mom is a doctor and his dad is a financial advisor, and Mike’s parents are real estate agents. I awkwardly listen in silence until Mike asks what my parents do for work. I hesitate. “She owns a restaurant in the city,” I tell him before quickly changing the topic. I feel bad for lying, but am ashamed to tell them the truth.
When the final bell rings, I begin my long walk home. As usual, my mom is still at work. When she pulls into our garage at eight o’clock, exhausted from standing on her feet all day with few breaks, I feel the urge to tell her about the girl at school who was bullied because of her parents’ jobs. The inevitable question, “How was your day, Sam?” escapes her lips as soon as we sit down to eat dinner. I begin to tell her about how the girl was harassed because she wasn’t wearing designer clothes like all of her classmates. I tell her how the group of girls made fun of her for her parents’ profession in the service industry. I tell her how I was too embarrassed to tell my friends what she does for work because it’s inferior to their parents’ jobs. The last part comes out before I can stop myself. I can see the defeated look on her face, and she pauses before she speaks. I can instantly tell that I hurt her and feel bad for saying that. She sighs and breaks the silence by telling me about how hard the work is, how her lack of benefits adds to her already stressful life, and how she feels as if she is looked down upon because she is an immigrant. She tells me she feels invisible and disrespected by both the staff and the students she encounters. I throw out the invitation to the career fair.
Today is the career fair and everyone’s parents are arriving at school with their suits and briefcases. We gather in the auditorium once again to hear them talk about how we could be like them if we work hard, do our homework, and stay out of trouble. I feel a little bad that I didn’t invite my mom, but how could I have her talk to our class about her job as a dining hall worker in front of all of these successful people?
Earlier today, I didn’t want to upset my mother so I told her that I’d walk to school. I feel a twinge of guilt, as I sit in my plastic chair, watching my classmates’ faces light up when their parents take the podium. Suddenly, I hear my name over the intercom being called to the office. Sure that I am in trouble for not inviting my mom, I go down to the office with trepidation.
When I step through the doorway, I see my mom there, in her dining hall uniform, holding the lunchbox I, of course, forgot today. I see the look on my mom's face, like I had broken her whole heart.

In that moment, my mother felt miles away from me in the principal's office. Suddenly I see her for more than her title; I see her as hardworking, dedicated, and caring. I see how much she loves me.
I apologize, and she nods quietly. I think of her back in Nepal, making the tough decision to leave her home so that my brother and I could grow up in a safer environment, how she stayed up late at night doing math and running her own restaurant upon our arrival in America, and how proud I suddenly am of her. I grab her hand and bring her to my class, telling the teacher and the class, “This is my mom. She feeds people every day, she is the most hardworking person I know, and she works at the UMass dining hall.”
I hear some snickers from my classmates, but I stand there at the front of the class with my mom, and she begins talking about the business skills you need to run your own restaurant and what she learned from hers failing. I am proud to be there with her, but I wish my classmates and their parents would stop giving us pitied looks. If everyone could see service workers as I view my mom, maybe they would give them the appreciation and respect that they deserve.
“In 2003, I cooked the first Chinese food in Worcester for three hours to try it out. In 2006, I became full time, despite giving up full benefits so that I was assured my job wouldn’t get laid off. But I like to cook! In China I liked to cook Chinese food, so when I came here I knew there was one type of work for me. Even though I’m at the physical plant now, I cook at home. Usually it’s for friends, students, or my son. They come in my home and I will cook a lot of food. Everybody is happy, I’m happy.”
Xing Shun Wang is a maintainer at the Physical Plant at UMass Amherst. He is also a father, husband, and enthusiastic cook. Mr. Wang arrived in the United States in 1998 not knowing any English. Since then he has learned the language by attending classes at UMass, watching American children’s TV shows, and talking with his friends and colleagues. Mr. Wang put his cooking skills to use at his first job in America as a cook in a Chinese restaurant. He later cooked Chinese food in the Worcester Dining Commons on campus before transferring to maintenance. Today, when he is not working, Mr. Wang loves exercising at the gym, swimming, gardening, and cooking for his family and friends. He has found many advantages to living in America, including a good education for his son, and a better economic situation.

When I came to America for the first time, I worked at a Chinese restaurant and my wife at a salon. At first I didn’t like America because my English was no good. At restaurant everybody talk Chinese and I forget English I learned. Sometimes I would talk with my wife and we will say ok, should we go back to China? We always think no.

When I came to America for the first time, My son learned English well and I liked that the middle school teacher understood my family. The church people also understood that I had poor English and would come into my home and help my family. In 1998, I came here to Amherst to work in that Chinese restaurant, and my wife in UMass. In 2003, I decided to join her, because UMass wanted better dining halls, and felt that they needed a Chinese food section. So I cooked the first Chinese food in Worcester for three hours to try it out. In 2006, I became full time, despite giving up full benefits so that I was assured my job wouldn’t get laid off. But I like to cook! In China I liked to cook Chinese food, so when I came here I knew there was one type of work for me. Even though I’m at the physical plant now, I cook at home. Usually it’s for friends, students, or my son. I like my job, I like my family. They come in my home and I will cook a lot of food. Everybody is happy, I’m happy.

My son went to Amherst high school, then for five months went to UMass, before changing to Quinnipiac in Connecticut. Before in China the school was small and there wasn’t an emphasis on studying, but here it’s good! After the summertime with my son, he works at TD bank doing the tax work. Now he works every summer, but he likes it. After he finished college he went to work for a bank near Wall Street, because there is a lot of money in there. My daughter-in-law and my son work together there. Sometimes for birthdays, my son buys cell
phone for me. My son is very busy. Work is busy. He calls maybe once a month. The call is, “I’m busy. I’m good, I’m busy. I’m good, I’m busy.”

Sometimes I wonder if I go to China, if it would be better. But I tell myself no, that America is okay, and America is better because I have insurance. If I am sick, in America I can go to the hospital, I can call emergency services and they will come, so I don’t have to pay. In China if you don’t have the money you don’t have the service. I think America is better than China, because food, everything, is cheap. I can buy a house for cheap or even a car for cheap. I can change Chinese money easily. I look for when coats are very cheap, shoes are cheap. It’s like a treasure hunt. This is why I say I like America. With more money I buy flowers to enjoy, and food to grow.

When I drink my coffee I get to look over my flowers, my food, and my garden and think this is good.
“The world’s always changing so you gotta stay rolling with it.”

“I think it’s very important for you guys to stay involved in education, no matter what you do, because it helps you grow.”

“I’m happy to see my daughters grow up and do their own thing. It makes me really happy.”

“Anyone who is disabled deserves respect, I don’t care if they’re in a wheelchair, they have a social disorder, mental disorder…”

A class project of Transforming Your World: Introduction to Community Engagement SustComm/PubPAdm 110 In Partnership with the UMass Labor/Management Workplace Education Program, Fall 2017
Man of All Trades

William “Bill” Allen was born in Oregon about sixty years ago. His father was a higher up in the education system at UMass and his mother was a nurse. Bill attended a private school in New Hampshire. After graduation, he attended technical colleges to learn many different trades. He found himself jumping back and forth between jobs and ultimately ended up back here in Amherst working at UMass. He worked in the sheet metal shop, the grounds, and the HVAC shop. Now, after thirty-two years of hard work he is spending his last few years before retirement working as the head janitor of Morrill II.

My name William H. Allen, and I’m a man of all trades. I met my first wife at UMass when I was a junior in housing when I first started here. We were married for 16 years and then we got divorced. I met my second wife online and she lived all the way in in Lynn, Massachusetts and I lived in Hadley at the time. We just met each other at the Holyoke Mall and we hit it off from day one. We got married in 2010 and we’ve been married for 7 years. Now we live in Belchertown on a good size plot of land where we raise animals and sell eggs. We have 50 chickens, 3 dogs, and 3 cats and we love it out there. No offense to the school, but it's away from the school and I can retire in it. We got a big enough plot of land for all our animals and stuff. It fits us fine. We’re happy.

Family is very, very important to me. I got divorced when my daughter was around 6 and it wasn’t easy. She kept me going when I first got divorced. She didn’t know it, but she did. I devoted all my time to my daughter. I was very much involved in all of her things. My daughter rode horses, she played hockey, she danced, she did a lot, girl scouts, you know, you name it. I’m happy to see my daughter grow and do her own thing. It makes me really happy... it’s definitely helped me. And since she’s gone off to college and graduated from Syracuse and got her own life. She teaches school—special education—so what keeps me going now is my wife. I want to provide for her as much as I can.

So, here I am trying to do the best I can with what I’ve got, ya know. So this job I have now, I’m Maintainer 2, they call that head janitor or whichever one you want. It's not a big jump, pay-wise, from what I was before but it's providing for my family, is the important thing. When I was younger I didn’t think of that, I just wanted to get ahead, no matter what. I just wanted to make more money.
So I went to the school of automotive technology, I got a degree there and I contacted UMass and they said we want you because they saw all my references. And then when I got here they didn’t want to hire me because they were hiring their friends. You know, that happens a lot here at UMass, a lot of times it depends on who you know. And unfortunately people have friends and family in high places here at the university and people get jobs that way, but I just don’t want to do it that way. I didn’t want to get a job that I wasn’t qualified for. My father and mother told me that isn’t the way things go. You should be qualified for it. And so, here we are.

I chose other fields and other areas to keep evolving in and about 10 years ago I went back to the garage and I said, can I get a job here I see you have an opening? He says well now we’ve changed what we want for our specifications for a job. I’m epileptic and I can’t get all these new changed versions of the job. Just like I originally wanted to retire here and drive a school bus for the kids, because I love children. But because of my epilepsy, I found out I actually can’t get my license for that. I was very depressed about that, but I just moved on and I am where I am now. That’s the way the world goes, you know? Unfortunately. So, that’s where I’ve had to hold on and change. You know, anyone who is disabled deserves respect. I don’t care if they're in a wheelchair, they have a social disorder, mental disorder, people from different countries, too. I’m amazed how immigrants can speak different languages and survive here compared to what they’re used to. And I look at myself, and I’m barely getting along with only one culture and I’ve been here my whole life. The world’s always changing so you gotta stay rolling with it.

I have to look at two aspects when I work. I’ve always had to find another way to do things, it’s like how I’m left handed. I’ve had to work in a right-handed world but I’ve had to learn how to do it right-handed. And with epilepsy, I’ve had to do things 2 different ways, or maybe 3 cause I am a lefty, if you wanna count that. If I can’t do it that way, maybe I can do it this way. Like for grounds, I couldn’t get a hoisting license, which you need. I got a spraying license instead. They were willing to work with me, and you know I worked with them, and things work out pretty good if you work with people. I think that’s the biggest problem that this place has, is that people don’t work with people. When I was on grounds, I had 3,000 sets of eyes looking at me, telling me to do my job differently. They just demand that you do this, or demand that you do it my way. Why can’t we all just sit down here and talk it out? You converse and get things done more efficiently.

You just have to work with people. No matter who they are. You give them respect, they give you respect. I can remember my father, he was the Dean of the School of Management before it became the Isenberg School of Management, and I had some friends over, and they were janitors, when I had just started here at UMass. And he treated my friends the same way he would treat his professional people that came to visit at our house. And I thought that that was the way it should be. And I still think that that’s the way it should be. We all should respect each other.
My father was very big on education as well. We have a dinner for him every May in honor of his scholarship. My father always instilled to my sister and I that education is very important. Education has instilled a lot of important values in me and everyone should be really thankful for it. Because of him I want to be very involved in education. Even though I'm not a professor I think it's very important for you guys to stay involved in education, no matter what you do, because it helps you grow. And that's why I am here.
Should I stay or should I go?

“I am totally inserting myself in Amherst; I am working, I know people, I have friends, I play soccer, I am okay. And I am a Patriots fan.”

Have you ever eaten at Blue Wall?

Meet Renier, the man behind the scenes of one of the best college dining halls in the country! Renier is from Cuba and enjoys soccer, the beach, and spending time with his family. He plans on returning to Cuba someday, but enjoys the time he has spent at UMass thus far.
Should I Stay or Should I Go?

I will be back in my home in five years in Cuba. I don’t know, maybe in three years, it may change. But not now.

Right now I am here with my wife. She kidnapped me here and brought me to this weather and yeah, we are here because my wife is studying at UMass. I started work in February, so I have been here maybe 6 months. My English is not too good. I came here without any English, so I am here taking a course to work on improving that. As I’m sure you know, I am a very talkative person so being here working on my English is good for me, and maybe I can get a scholarship from UMass, they have a really good economics program here. I already have a college certificate in economics in Cuba, and I am doing an online masters in economics. But I am a good person, okay? You hear lawyer or economics and you think no, no, no but I’m one of the good ones.

Amherst also has a program for giving foreign people some kind of tutor. I got a good one, the best one. This lady is more talkative than I am! But in English she has helped me a lot. In this process, she has shown me all of the town, the different resources for knowledge, for coffee, for shopping. Right now, she’s my American mother. We spend a lot of time talking, and if I learned something English, it’s because she taught me. Her name is Diane; she is spectacular.

I meet a lot of people from working in Blue Wall too. It is a spectacular way to learn and improve my English because I am talking in English all day. My favorite part, especially coming here to UMass, is that I talk a lot with my co-workers. I am talking with Indian guys, Chinese guys, Korean guys, Mexican guys, and Puerto Rican. There is a lot of culture that I am exposed to; I like it.

I don’t have family here; my parents, my friends, my cousins, uncles are all in Cuba or Florida. My wife is the best person in the world, but we are alone here, and we were alone in this transition process. Then I started to know where people play soccer, where the people go for the library, and I began to know people in all these spaces and it was very helpful for changing my vision and to say, “okay, we are more comfortable right now.” Right now I have friends, and I know many people in soccer and the village. We spend time together and sometimes we go and get some beers outside or in my home. I am totally inserting myself in Amherst; I am working, I know people, I have friends, I play soccer, I am okay. And I am a Patriots fan. I’m in a better position to not suffer through the winter, right? Did you see the TV show with ‘Winter is coming?’ Well it is already here!
Really though, I am a beach lover because I am from Cuba. You need to see pictures on the internet. Particularly I am close to the beach, and every afternoon I swam one hour, and I miss all of that. This is my favorite activity if we forget soccer. Summer is not summer here, believe me. The water is too cold for us. I was trying to swim in the UMass pool but it’s not the same.

I am here for my wife, but my parents, my friends, my cousins, uncles are all in Cuba or Florida. This makes everything feel temporary. I try to spend a lot of quality time here, but I am not trying to build a home here. It’s not my goal. I don’t feel that my bed is my bed, that my home is my home. The process is difficult in the beginning because it’s hard to come here and start to build a life and then remember your history. If I chose to live here, I would like to be free to go to Cuba without any problems, but right now that isn’t possible. I feel I cannot be American and for that reason, my plan is not to stay here. Maybe I can stay here for 6 or 8 years, but I am always thinking back.

But I know too that brains change and at some point I am going to think more about what is my current life and forget about my past life. Maybe.
Carol Landry

A Class Project of Transforming Your World: Intro to Community Engagement in Partnership with UMass Labor/Management Workplace Education 2017
A Wholesome Life

My name is Carol Landry, I was born and raised in Northampton, Massachusetts, and I work night shifts as a maintenance worker at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. My husband and I bought a house in Florence when we got married and had my daughter. Because of family and work we just never decided to move anywhere else.

At this point, I have been working at the University for 26 years. I started off working in the dining halls, where I worked for 9 years. Working in the dining halls was very fast paced and high intensity. It always felt very chaotic and it was just a very stressful environment. I had heard that maintenance was more laid back, you get to work around a lot less people and kind of go at your own pace. Between better pay, weekends off, and a less stressful environment I made the switch from dining to maintenance, where I’ve been for the past 17 years.

Working night shifts can be lonely at times. I like to visit with faculty who are still in their offices at night. I often miss the connections I used to be able to make with students in the dining commons. This quiet time lets me reflect on what my ideal career would be. I love animals so my dream job would be a vet or vet tech. My break room is covered with different kinds of wild and sea animal posters. One of my fondest memories is helping my cousin who's a vet. I helped pull quills out of a dog's nose. I was like, “Wow this is so cool!”

The positive aspects of working at the university are the excellent benefits. I still can’t believe what they did for me when I was out of work for a year with breast cancer. I got almost a full year of compensation. The cancer was obviously a setback physically and financially, but with the aid of my job and its compensation, I was able to work on my health. I stopped chemo a year and a half ago and have been working on my strength. When I was done with chemo I could hardly walk. I went to physical therapy and had a walker for a while. I got back into exercising and biking on my own and through a cancer connection group. They have a variety of free classes that I take like pilates and stretching classes. I also took a class on beadwork, and enjoy that. I am still very thankful for what UMass did for me in terms of sick pay. Maybe it’s to do with how many years I have in, I don’t know, but what I do know is that I’m thankful.

I am also appreciative that my coworkers and I get along. I enjoy talking with them. I have a relationship outside of work with some, but not all of them. I have a friend that I work with that I’ve known since I started janitorial, and we do things together. We carpool or we go shopping to a certain store so I can show him where it is. We have done other things together, like go to the beach. I’ve also gone kayaking with this other dear friend who passed away from cancer. She had cancer in the past and got it back and got very sick again and passed, which was hard.
Outside of work and spending time with my coworkers, there are a variety of things that I do depending on the day and what needs to get done. With working nights you miss all the good shows. My husband records them for me. But when I’m home during the day I want to watch them but I have other things to do. I gotta run out to the store and sometimes go to my mother’s house. I’ll watch my shows in the morning and then I do what I have to the rest of the day whether it’s cleaning or exercising. Obviously when I’m not working I like to spend time with my daughter and husband. Tomorrow with my day off I am going to try to go to the store and make an apple pie.
They Call Me the Rice Bender

Hendro Kusumo
Head Chef at Street Food Station
at Hampshire Dining Common

“I like serving you guys all different food. My life is more important when you come here to eat and there’s more excitement. The students liked it and I liked getting feedback. It feels like home.”

A class project of Transforming Your World: Introduction to Community Engagement in partnership with UMass Labor/Management Workplace Education 2017
They Call Me the Rice Bender

Hendro Kusumo was born in Indonesia where he attended all levels of schooling including college. He was at the top of his class and excelled in English and accounting classes. Hendro then moved to the United States in 1998 at the age of 24. He began his life in America in California, then moved to New York City, and finally ended up in the Amherst area. He currently lives with his wife and three children in Granby and works as the head chef of the street food station at Hampshire Dining Commons on campus. Hendro has a passion for cooking which sprung from his need to cook during his wife’s first pregnancy; he can always be seen with a smile on his face. To him, family is everything. He is hardworking and dedicated to serving fun and unique foods to his students to break up the monotony of their school day. Hendro finds joy in seeing the happy faces of the students he serves, especially those of Asian descent who tell him that his cooking “feels like home.”

I get up at 5:45am every morning no matter what. They serve breakfast so I join my kids eating, and then go back upstairs and put on Good Morning America. I then start with the phone, I text my coworkers and tell them what to do and what to get. Sometimes we plan it one or two days earlier. We do things that are easy to execute. Not all of us here went to culinary school. I didn’t go to culinary school. Something you cannot make, you buy. We try to keep the costs low. I don’t give you a recipe, we do it from skill. I don’t give you the fish, I give you the fishing pole. You can explore. Do whatever you think is better. Make it unique. I am not a teacher. As a teacher I’d have to know a lot more. I’m learning too. As a leader I show them what to do. I can share after I’ve learned. As a teacher I’d know everything already.

At the beginning of my career, I was a cars salesman and then worked at a gas station. I was doing it for ten years. It’s fun, being a cashier and managing this convenience store. Dealing with people and customer service. I learned how to make sushi in California. I learned for two weeks and almost gave up, this was not my job, I didn’t know how to cut cucumber, I didn’t even know how to cut the fish. Me and my wife worked together making sushi, so now I would roll the sushi. So, I came here just to do sushi and I was like, ‘Oh I can do this!’

When I started here my job was making sushi. I worked at Hampshire and Berkshire making sushi. I came back to Hampshire to make something new. I wanted something different. It was a lot of work. It is challenging but it is good for myself and you guys. You get something different everyday. When students come, and I don’t see a line I’m freaking out because I’m
thinking ‘What’s wrong with me? What's wrong with my food?’ We’re pretty busy everyday with all the food we produce.

Your life is more important when you come here to eat and there’s more excitement. That's why something exciting happens every day. It’s not boring. Let’s say the kid from South West Asia has the chicken dish we have right now, they’ll appreciate it because they feel at home. They’ll tell me that the dish is like home because you can not compare to what your mom is cooking or your regular menu at home.

When I’m retired I would like drive a school bus or teach kids how to drive. I drive slow, carefully. I teach my son how to drive and be careful merging. I teach him to try to be safe. Everything I do I consult with my family. I have to go by the boss and the kids. I want to try something new, bigger, better, but maybe when the kids get to college. It’ll be only us and easier to move. Right now, moving would be so hard.

I hated cooking, believe it or not. I didn’t even know how to cook rice. When did I love it? Actually, when my wife had babies. I had to do everything by myself. I learned to love it. Now, they call me the rice bender.
"As much as it bugs me to say, this guy - Kevin here - we’ve gotten pretty close. I am a huge John Wayne fan, and Kevin and his wife were out for a motorcycle rally, and he’s driving down the road and sees a sign for the birthplace of John Wayne and he made his wife drive around a hundred miles out of the way because he said, 'I can’t go by this without telling Matt that I stopped'.

So yeah like I said, the friendships you form around here are really something”.

- Matthew Thornton
The Adventures of Matthew and Kevin: Maintenance Workers

Matthew Thornton has worked at UMass as a night maintainer, from 5pm to 1am, for 28 years alongside Kevin Scanlon, a coworker and friend who has worked at UMass for close to four decades. They believe their jobs have treated them well, allowing them to have time with their family, doing activities they love, and forming lifelong friendships. Being a service worker for so many years has also provided them with many interesting experiences, which they are more than happy to share.

I got out of high school and my father asked me what I was going to do for the summer, and I said I was going to take a year to figure out what I wanted to do. He said, “they’re hiring at UMass, get up there.” I’ve been here ever since. What I do here is pretty good. The actual job, the actual work, it isn’t that tough, it can be physical and strenuous at times, but this isn’t a high stress job.

Most students are easy to deal with and will listen when we ask them to leave; years ago, we would not be able to even clean if anyone was around. A lot of the time with professors, more so than students, you see disrespect. It is just mostly forgetfulness, but a lot of the time it’s just not caring too. You see very little of the actual not caring, but sometimes you’ll get someone who just really thinks that you’re beneath them almost, and really doesn’t care, and that’s the toughest part to deal with.

I’ve made some really good friends here though. There is this one guy that I don’t see much anymore because we’re in different locations, and he’s got a lot of physical problems - he can’t walk too well. When I see him struggling, I wanna cry... I think of him like a brother. And as much as it bugs me to say, this guy - Kevin right here - we’ve gotten pretty close since we started working together. I am a huge John Wayne fan, and Kevin and his wife were out for a motorcycle rally, and he’s driving down the road and sees a sign for the birthplace of John Wayne and he made his wife drive around a hundred miles out of the way because he said, “I can’t go by this without telling Matt that I stopped.” So yeah like I said, the friendships you form around here are really something.

Kevin is the only person I’ve ever met who knew that I’m actually a direct descendant of Matthew Thornton - that I’m named after - who signed the Declaration of Independence. We have an interesting family history actually. My family founded the town of Pelham, Mass and we hunt in Pelham. My dad’s great-grandfather, years and years ago when they had closed deer season because there wasn’t enough deer, I think it was in the late 1700s or something like that,
my dad’s grandfather shot the first deer in Pelham when they reopened the season. My family came down from New Hampshire and they worked with Daniel Shays of Shays’ Rebellion.

Working at UMass allows me to hunt deer and fish without taking all of my time off, so if the family wants to do something I still have time off. I still hunt with my father. In fact, I was hunting today with my father in New Hampshire; we go up everyday right now to deer hunt. We’ve done a lot of that kind of stuff, we shoot skeet and trap and even won some competitions at our local club. I’ve won probably forty or fifty trophies in competitions that we’ve had at the club against other clubs.

I have been very fortunate with this job and the time I have been able to spend with my family and doing what I love. I know a woman who worked here, had two kids, she worked here for $20 a week because all the rest of her money went to daycare. But she needed the benefits, so that’s what she worked for basically. It has been a juggle but we never had to pay for a babysitter, my wife works days, I work nights. That’s huge.

My daughter, she’s seventeen now. I drive her to school everyday. She just was voted the president of the Tri-M Music Association, she plays the piccolo and the flute - not to brag, but she’s very good. She even played at Boston Symphony Hall. The Belchertown music department is fabulous and she’s been a big part of it. I’ve been lucky because this job has allowed me to be around for my daughter when she was growing up.

The job has been good to us over the years, and the UMass community has pretty much embraced us because they know they need us, and we need them because without students and without the professors we wouldn't have a job either. But the relationship is more of a necessity thing. Mostly, the job has made a lasting impact on me through the people I’ve met and the lessons learned, some pretty easy lessons, some pretty hard lessons. Over all, this job has been really good for me. It has given me a lot of opportunities.
Our Closing Thoughts ~

“We learned many things in this class this semester but the big takeaway and lesson we learned from this project was to not take any opportunities for granted. Service workers don’t nearly have the privilege we do and we need to continue to remember this whenever we feel like giving up.”

~ Team 4

“This project has opened my eyes to the people and services we as students may take for granted and never stop to give credit where credit is due.”

~ Hannah

“This project has inspired me to get to know the service workers that I pass by every day and thank them for their hard work and dedication to making UMass a clean and safe environment, day after day.”

~ Emily

“When you’re a student at UMass it’s hard to remember through your coffee and stress-filled haze that everyone around you has their own lives and own things going on. This project brought me back to how essential it is to take a moment and appreciate those who keep this university going.”

~ Renee

“Matthew and Kevin felt that the UMass Community has treated them well, allowing them to form lifelong friendships and spend time with their family. However, we have come to realize in the process of interviewing Matthew and Kevin, that many students though they may treat service workers generally well, do not always fully understand or get to appreciate the rich family history and relationships that service workers have.”

~ Team 7

This class made me think twice about my day-to-day behavior. When I’m checking in to the dining hall, I want to say more than just hello. When I pass a maintenance worker on my way out, I want to wish them well.

~ Anonymous