

Interview with Mark Agee
Groundskeeper at Wake Forest University
by Katie Green

KG: Ok, so I have about twenty questions to ask you and it shouldn't take more than thirty minutes.

MA: Ok, well I get off at 2:30 pm today.

KG: Ok well, I will have you done by 2:30!

MA: We normally get off at 3:30

KG: Well, thank you for staying, and if you don't feel comfortable answering any of these questions just say so.

MA: I'll answer them to the best of my ability

KG: So can you tell me a little bit about your background and where you grew up?

MA: Well, I grew up in West Virginia

KG: Oh, what part?

MA: Sophia, right next to Beckland.

KG: My family is from Charleston.

MA: I've been there once.

KG: A lot of my family went to University of West Virginia.

KG: Do you have any special hobbies or interests?

MA: Not really.

KG: No?

MA: Outdoor activities.

KG: Do you camp?

MA: I used to. I don't really too much anymore. I got four kids so...

KG: Wow--four kids!

MA: But we do try and do stuff every now and then. I like riding motorcycles.

KG: So you have four kids...how old [are they]?

MA: Three, five, six, and ten

KG: What are their names?

MA: Autumn, Alyssa, Zach, and Emily

KG: So three girls and one boy? {laughs} How is that? Busy?

MA: Yes, very busy.

KG: You're outnumbered by the girls

KG: Do you have siblings?

MA: Yes

KG: And they are in West Virginia?

MA: No not anymore, they are scattered everywhere. I got one in Oklahoma, I got one somewhere down near the beach in North Carolina, [and] I got one running around in other states--I don't know where he's at[sic].

KG: And what do they do? Like, what brought the one to Oklahoma?

MA: Well, the one in Oklahoma...he was in the Air Force. He just come[sic]out; he decided to live with his wife out there because that's where her family is from.

KG: That's great, and what do the others do?

MA: Well, one just lost his job. The other one I don't know I ain't[sic] talked to him in quite a few years.

KG: How long was your brother in the Air Force?

MA: Fifteen years.

KG: Wow, that's great. So did he retire?

MA: He didn't retire--I guess he got tired of it .

KG: [Of] all the moving? Was he deployed at all?

MA: Yeah, he's been in quite a few places.

KG: Do you know what he did in the Air Force?

MA: Yeah, he was an aircraft mechanic.

KG: Well the Army has some tensions with the Air Force and all the other branches!

KG: What did you want to be when you were growing up?

MA: Police officer

KG: Really, so that was always your dream?

MA: Well, I liked to watch a lot of movies back in the day.

KG: What kind of movies?

MA: Just action movies, you know, any kid wants to be like Dirty Harry or somebody.

KG: Have you seen any good movies recently?

MA: No, not really.

KG: I saw "No Strings Attached" with my mom, which was not a good idea. It was a romantic comedy.

KG: What is your daily routine like [while you're] working here?

MA: We take care of all the turf--plus we move furniture for the staff

KG: So what time do you come in in the morning?

MA: Right now we come in about 7, sometimes we might have to come in at 6; it just depends. It's usually 6 or 7.

KG: And what time do you leave?

MA: Usually 2:30 or 3:30, it depends if we come in at 6.

KG: Now do you also deal with the landscaping aspect... if it snows do you have to ice it and shovel?

Mark Agee? Sure. Yeah we throw salt.

KG: That sounds physically demanding. So does work make you tired?

MA: Yeah.

KG: [So you are tired] on the days when it snows. Do you hate the snow?

MA: I think our work would make about anybody tired.

KG: So do you have a daily routine that you have to do such as landscaping the grounds every day? Is that an everyday thing that you do?

MA: Well right now we are in our winter cycle so unless it snows we're just cleaning up courtyards and places like that

KG: So you're on call?

MA: No we're not on call--we're here every day and we know what we're gonna work every day so...but, come April to October we mow, weed-eat, stuff like that. We take care of all the grass. Everyday.

KG: Everyday you re-do the same grass?

MA: Yes, plus move things if somebody needs something moved or needs a desk moved.

KG: So that's you guys?

MA: That's us.

KG: So would you say it's busier in the spring with having to do flowers and gardening?

MA: Yes, well, we have a separate crew for flowers. We're just strictly turf and special projects.

KG: Ok, but every day you do the same grounds.

MA: Every day. It's basically the same thing but--

KG: So you have your routine every day. Well, I was going to ask what all does your job entail but I think that covered it. So did you have previous experience in this kind of work?

MA: Well I mean I did it growing up, yeah.

KG: As a summer job?

MA: Yeah, when I was a teenager.

KG: So how did you get into this occupation? You had done it [before], so you had the experience...

MA: Well yeah, I had done it before and I was doing some other stuff. I moved down here and tried some other things and an opportunity came open.

KG: So did you move from West Virginia to here?

MA: Yeah.

KG: Why, may I ask?

MA: Didn't really have much up there so I wanted to have a better future, you know? And my brother lived down here at the time so I come down and stayed down here with him for a little while.

KG: And how did you get the opportunity to work at Wake Forest?

MA: Somebody I knew worked for a contractor that worked through Wake and I got on with them first...and then they took over that whole department and there was an opening over here on campus and I applied for that and got it.

KG: How long have you been here?

MA: 9 years

KG: Wow, that's a long time. Has the sustainability movement, which I know is really big--going green--has that affected you and your work?

MA: No, not really. We hear about it but it don't[sic] really affect us.

KG: I feel like it could be a hassle.

MA: It's good for the environment, so it's probably a good thing.

KG: Well what you do is definitely important because I know when people come and visit (and I did this do) [they] judge on the appearance of the university and you all do an outstanding job of keeping it in tip top shape. I've never seen anything out of place--obviously you work hard.

MA: We do our best; we take pride in what we do.

KG: So do you think about the university when you're doing your job? Do you think about how important it is...

MA: Yeah.

KG: I was also going to ask what brought you to Wake Forest, but you said you wanted to get out of West Virginia? Do something new? Do you like North Carolina or West Virginia better?

MA: Yeah, North Carolina is pretty nice.

KG: Do you go back to West Virginia at all?

MA: I hadn't been in a while...I mean I used to, but I hadn't really went back in a few years.

KG: And you have been in North Carolina for 9 years?

MA: No, I been down here for 12 years.

KG: Do you live outside of Winston-Salem?

MA: I live in Walkertown.

KG: Where is that?

MA: In between Kernersville and Winston

KG: So not far

MA: Yeah not far

KG: Have you lived there for 12 years?

MA: About 11

KG: And where did you live before that?

MA: Well, first I was in Winston for about a year or so and then I moved to Walkertown and that's where I've been ever since.

KG: Do you have advice for people going into your work? And especially at a university? It does sound physically demanding.

MA: I mean you do got be in decent shape. I guess depending on what you do.

KG: So do you work out?

MA: Yes, every day

KG: What do you do? Do you lift?

MA: Yeah, I life weights and do some running every now and then. I do a lot of walking when I'm working so--

KG: So when you get home at the end of the day are you physically exhausted from work?

MA: It just depends on what we did that day. Sometimes--like right now--I feel pretty good.

KG: Have you ever injured yourself?

MA: At work?

MA: No, not really. I mean it's common sense...you have to watch what you do and be careful.

KG: Well, what do you like about working here?

MA: Everything. I mean--I like everything {laughs}. I mean, it's got good benefits...so I ain't[sic] saying the pay is all that great for this type of work

KG: No. Do you work year round, even during the summer?

MA: Yeah, we work all year long.

KG: Do you get a mini summer vacation?

MA: I mean we got PTO, paid time off...vacation time. We're here some weekends.

KG: So you don't get weekends off?

MA: Well here lately we have been getting off on weekends. They have been tight on overtime.

KG: Did you normally have to work weekends?

MA: Used to...there were a lot of times when we had to.

KG: Full day?

MA: Not everybody--just emergencies or if there is a special event going on. And most time[sic] even then they asked who wanted to stay you know?

KG: Do you feel connected with the people here such as the staff and the students? Or do you feel that there is a gap, especially between the students [and yourselves]?

MA: With the staff and the people I work with daily, yes. Really not so much with the students cause we don't really deal with the students a whole lot other than just seeing them out everywhere you know.

KG: Do you feel appreciated though by the students for all the hard work that you do?

MA: We have, yeah, yeah, there's been times when we've had your programs like this and stuff like that.

KG: So you do feel like your work is appreciated?

MA: Yeah, it is. There are times when they have brought us pizza before and they really tell you thank you and you can tell that they really enjoy what we do.

KG: Well, because the university is so beautiful.

KG: Is your job here a big part of your life?

MA: Yeah, I would say yes.

KG: Do you interact with your co-workers outside of work? Are they people you would consider friends?

MA: Yeah for the most part. You get close to people after time.

KG: Do you believe that this country, in general, offers everybody (and you) the opportunity to be successful in your work?

MA: I don't even know how to answer that one

KG: Well, personally I don't think that there is equal opportunity for advancement in America. Sorry, I know you don't want to hear me blab but I only have 3 more questions and I will let you go. But just like in your family, I too have family members unemployed and it doesn't make sense when they say this is the land of opportunity.

MA: It's common sense. There's certain people that are going to have better chances of getting certain jobs you know then other people do

KG: Has the recent economic conditions affected you and your family?

MA: Yeah, I've made cutbacks...you've got to. We definitely ain't[sic] going to travel that much anymore with gas going up and--you gotta make cutbacks. It's definitely something you got to watch.

KG: May I ask, are you married?

MA: Yes.

KG: Does your wife work as well?

MA: Yes.

KG: Where does she work?

MA: She works for a daycare.

KG: Now your children, most of them are school aged, so they got to school. But the 3 year old...?

MA: I got 2 of them that are in school. One's getting ready to start school next year.

KG: Where do the other two go while you and your wife are working?

MA: They go with her.

KG: To the daycare?

MA: Yes.

KG: Nice, so they have mom there with them.

MA: Yes.

KG: I remember daycare...it's hard not being with your parents so that's nice they have her there.

MA: It is

KG: Do you believe that the American dream is alive today?

MA: Sometimes. I mean, it can be. But I don't know, kinda.

KG: When do you think it can be alive?

MA: I don't know.

KG: When you hear the few success of people that make it big?

MA: It can be for certain people. Let's just put it that way.: it's really...I don't think it's for everybody.

KG: What do you think you need to have the dream?

MA: I don't know.

KG: I don't think that we all have the same chances in this country, so it's not fair. We're not all on the same playing field.

MA: No.

KG: Last question...do you have a definition of the American Dream?

MA: Not really.

KG: Do you think the idea has died out?

MA: Basically--just be successful. That's what the American dream is: doing what you want to do and being successful. That's what I would say my definition of it would be.

Katie: Sorry...one last one. Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

MA: Honestly, here. I mean I like my job.

KG: Do you feel like you get to spend a lot of time with your family since you work from 7 to 3?

MA: Yeah, I mean I get to spend every weekend with them; I get off at a decent time, 2:30 or 3:30.

KG: So are the kids home from school by the time you get finished with work?

MA: Yeah they get home about the same time as I do.

KG: What do they like to do; do they have special activities they are interested in?

MA: Everything

KG: That has to keep your really busy.

MA: It can sometimes.

KG: Do they do sports or dance?

MA: Well, yeah, I had some of them...3 was[sic] in gymnastics for a while. But I did have to make some cutbacks. And they played baseball and stuff like that.

KG: Are you doing anything exciting this weekend?

MA: No, not really.