PACIFIC PORTRAITS

The People Behind the Scenes at Pacific University

VOLUME 1

BEE TREE
PACIFIC UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES
Forest Grove, Oregon
Our treasure lies in the beehive of our knowledge. We are perpetually on the way thither, being by nature [...] honey gatherers of the mind.

Friedrich Nietzsche

The “Bee Tree”, an iconic ivy-covered tree that stood on the Pacific University campus for many years, was already old and hollow when pioneer Tabitha Brown arrived in Oregon in 1846. Mrs. Brown started a home for orphans that would grow into Pacific University. According to the Forest Grove News-Times, the tree was “said to have housed a swarm of bees who furnished the little old lady with honey which she sold to buy provisions for her orphan children.”
Tracy King is seated with a regal posture, her fingers knitted together in her lap after finishing an email. We are welcomed by Tracy and we sit with her at her desk near the front of the office. The desk is piled with paperwork and her computer has two screens to facilitate her work. Around us is the quiet commotion of any office, one employee is speaking boisterously to a man with a question, two others are having a conversation back and forth over their desks. Amidst this hum, Tracy tells us why she’s here and how she got to Pacific University in the first place.

Originally from Jamaica, Tracy grew up in New York and then moved to Atlanta, Georgia. Eight years ago she moved to Oregon and began working here five years later. This August marked her third year as an HR Generalist, handling the benefits for the staff and faculty. She enjoys this work, especially since for-profit employers were always too focused on making money and not about making a difference, and that naturally led her to Human Resources.

“I originally wanted to be a teacher,” she says, “seeing a kid’s whole life change... you can’t put a price on that.” This love of children, and her drive to help them, is what led Tracy into Human Resources. She echoes the sentiments of social work majors the world over, the pay is some of the lowest available but the difference she makes is what keeps her going regardless. “If I can help the staff with this stuff, it makes their lives easier and that lets them help the kids even more.”

Her posture remains formal throughout our meeting, but her speaking is relaxed in comparison. She is quick to smile and even quicker to use the word “stuff” if it will get her point across. Tracy is dressed in vibrant colors when we meet, standing out against the beige of the office walls. Her hand motions are efficient while she speaks, and she uses them to accentuate her points and help emphasize certain ideas. Her
eyes continuously dart about as the
conversation develops, focusing on
every relevant person or thing as
they come up.

As the HR Generalist, Tracy’s
normal day consists of work on the
computer, especially email. A lot of
this communication is to ensure the
seamless entrance of new employees
and in general trying to make the
lives of the faculty and staff less frus-
trating overall. This may not seem
like a lot of work, but with new staff
being added all the time, “It keeps
me busy,” she says in response. She
even seems to be understating this,
judging by the amount of paper-
work on her desk and emails in her
inbox. And as we leave, the sound of
her slender fingers returning to the
keyboard is barely audible over the
sounds of the office.

When we visit her a second time,
she is carefully looking over a small
magnet. Bright pink manicured
nails accented her long fingers. The
maroon and black rectangle had
Southridge’s basketball schedule in
white lettering. Her twelve year-old
son Jordan, illuminates her desktop
screen in a cool football stride. With
a laugh she says when not working
she’s chasing after her son, whisk-
ing him off to football or basketball
practice or another school func-
tion. Jordan would be playing this
upcoming weekend at Aloha High
School. “It’s gonna be a big game!
Well big for these little guys,” she
chuckles. “My son’s team will be
playing for the league champion-
ship!” her eyes grow bigger, full of
pride, eyelashes fluttering furiously.
She even invites us to come watch
the game to see her son in action.

Between work and being a mom,
Tracy also manages to find time to
workout five days a week, explain-
ing her lean, gazelle-like physique.

Listening to live music is some-
thing she really enjoys. In a bumper
sticker-esque way, she claims she
would drive for music. That’s one of
the things she misses about Atlanta
and New York. Many of the big
name artists that she loves bypass
Oregon. “My favorite artists to see
in concert are Eryka Badu, KEM, R.
Kelly and Jay Z,” she tells us. One
of the most memorable shows she’s
seen? Jay Z and Kanye West in Seat-
tle. “Unbelievable show,” she says in
awe. I can only imagine the energy
of two super stars like that packed in
one arena, would’ve melted anyone’s
brain. She’s working on seeing Janet
Jackson perform in January. “There’s
just a whole other vibe and life in the
city that’s not here” Tracy says, “but
I like it here. It’s beautiful. Oregon is
a really good place to raise a family.”

With her husband being so involved
in sports through work, she loves to
tag along when she can and attend
football and basketball games. They
attend the Super Bowl every year
and was still heartbroken over the
Seahawks’ most recent loss.

I ask if she had a completely free day,
what would she do. Tracy paused,
hers hands cupping her face in
thought, “I could be at the beach all
day. And the beach, not the coast,”
she emphasizes, having noticed how
Oregonians distinguished the two.
At the coast, you sit and play in the grey, somewhat dirty-looking sand. You dance around the edge of the frigid water, but never go in.

She leans back in her chair slightly, imagining the warmth of the sand and the sound of the ocean. “I wouldn’t have to swim or get in too. I could just sit and listen to the ocean all day, relaxed. I think the ocean is the best sound.” Her eyes look off, as she calmly reminisces. Maybe to a beach at home in sunny Jamaica. With her vibrant appearance and personality, Tracy brings life to what would seem to be a mundane job. She wholly embraces the emails and computer work, hoping to give faculty and staff peace of mind and less stress so they can focus on impacting others. Wading through stress and paperwork, Tracy brings a soothing calm to the Human Resources office much like the ocean brings her.