

**LONNIE:** WHO WE ARE: a performance about the lives & work of SEIU Local 200 SU. My name is Lonnie Reeder. I was born in 1924 in Alabama. Started working here at Syracuse in '73 in the Grounds Department – then after 6 months General Maintenance for the last 35 years. Never had a sick day until last month when they took me home with a 108 temperature for two days. My favorite job is helping somebody.

**REBECCA:** Everybody knows Lonnie. He changes bulbs, fixes curtain rods, up and down the ladders. He's not supposed to pull trash but how do you tell an 85 year old man what he can and can't do? Hi, I'm Rebecca Vincent. My first day of work here was February of 2001. I started out as a temp. Now I'm a custodian. This year I was elected Chief Steward for Custodial, representing all custodial workers. I've been in Food Service - Housing - Crew Leader South Campus – Out of the Commissary – Freezer – Climbing Shelves – Back to Housing – Food Services – Back to Housing – now Custodial. As your family changes, you have to change.

**SHIFT POEM**

**REBECCA:** 7 to 3:30

**GERT:** 5 pm to 2 in the morning

**TISH:** 9 to 5:30

**DOUG:** 5 am to 1:30 pm

**LONNIE:** 11 to 8 pm

**REBECCA:** 7:30 to 4pm

**GERT:** 3 to 11:30

**TISH:** 2pm to 10:30

**DOUG:** 10pm to 7:30am

**LONNIE:** 24/7 365 Days a year

**TEICHERA:** I'm a child of the King. I started working here 25 years ago and have been a janitor at Steel Hall for one year now. For my years of service - I've received two watches – the first was a TIMEX. I dropped it and it stopped running. The second one I'm being more careful with. What do I know after 25 years? I continue to appreciate all the benefits the university offers. The pay isn't all that great but the benefits are good. Remitted tuition helped my children go to college – one even got an Associate's Degree in Liberal Arts. And before Doug introduces himself - I'd like to say “Welcome” to all of you. My name is Teichera Price.

**DOUG:** Douglas McClure. HVAC TECH since '96. Basically I work anywhere the students eat, sleep and study. We keep people cold in the summer and hot in the winter. So if it's burning hot outside...I'm on the roof sweating my butt off and if it's icy cold...I'm up on the roof freezing my butt off.

**GERT:** And you're the vice chair of our local. I'm ½ Black, ½ Cherokee Indian and 1/8 white. I was born and raised in Syracuse. My name is Gert Danzy. In terms of my life, as far as I'm concerned - Martin Luther King came and saved us. I read at a 1<sup>st</sup> grade level up until 7<sup>th</sup> grade when a teacher took an interest in me and taught me to read. And I can tell you it was almost too late. Now I'm a union steward. My great uncle Richard was a janitor at SU. I've been here since 1994. For my 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary here, I picked that little blue & white cooler. I love it. It's deeper than you might think it is...like me.

**LONNIE: A WORK DAY**

**GERT:** I get up at 3 – 3:30AM – all my stuff is laid out cause I don't have much time – clothes to wear – lunch made – it's grab and go. First thing is boil water for hot tea, fry an egg and toast. Then out the door by 4:05 and punch in at 4:30. Quick meeting with my boss – go to my building – ten to five.

Get my cart – I set it up the day before – get my mop my bucket – toilet paper, paper towels. First floor I clean is the 4<sup>th</sup> floor – the Dean's floor. I need to take special care there – some of them have dust allergies – takes about two hours to do it right. Once it's sparkling fresh – I make them coffee, decaf and hot water for tea. The Dean's floor says we can have all the coffee we want but if I'm going to make it for myself, I might as well make it for everybody.

Working early in the day - I'm in a unique position - I can see the sunrise. Ten to six I see the first crack of dawn. My people are farmers. They settled in this area in 1868. They didn't live by the clock. They lived by signs, the sun, the stars, the seasons. So it's a spiritual experience. Every morning I take 5 to 10 minutes to center myself. That's important.

**TEICHERA:** My favorite time of day? When I'm working? (laughs) I'd have to say when I get home and I don't have to go anywhere and I can eat a big meal and just go blank - knowing I've completed my tasks, got my work done. At work – I'd have to say when I look at my time and I'm on schedule. When I'm in the basement – my walk-thru's over – made my checks, put my equipment away in the janitor's closet. That's where I take a moment to tidy up my little bit of a workplace - to leave it nice – everything in its place and a place for everything - ready for the next day, the next person, the next time.

**LONNIE:** CURRENT TIMES, PAST TIMES

**DOUG:** I'd say we're in troubling times or we could say "challenging" times. Lots of privatization going on all over the country – universities right along with everyone else. I don't think they realize the long-range impacts of it. How do you maintain the quality of employees, a high level of skill and good judge-ment? It works because we're united – we have a union and an identity beyond "this job" "this paycheck". Has anyone calculated the cost of uncertainty on productivity, health, spiritual well-being? Has anyone actually tried to calculate the cost of fear? Cause we're scared and it's got a cost.

For me it goes back to the Labor Day storm in '98. We'd gone out on strike – nobody saw that coming but we did what we had to do – and the storm – tornadoes really brutal – came up out of nowhere – wind shear took the roof off of buildings - windows out of BP complex– trees down – electricity out – major damage everywhere. And SEIU 200 had just signed a temporary agreement with SU. Legally we hadn't settled the strike – the vote to ratify was still ahead – but we all came in – at 1AM, 2 AM, 3AM – we all showed up and pitched in to put the campus back together for the students. SU was surprised - since we legally didn't have to come it. But that's the point – we're all in this together. We've got to hang together or sure as sure is - we're all going to hang alone.

**REBECCA:** We have two incomes – my husband and I. I don't know how people with only one income are getting by. I was raised with "No money and no food." If I didn't have who I have in my life I'd be screwed. What I say about the future is "stay close". And the union is at the heart of that. I used to think differently but the union goes way deeper than I ever realized. "Stronger together". If you don't have a job – you got nothing. Everything else follows.

**GERT:** I got a foreclosure notice in the mail this past Friday. It says I have to vacate the premises June 30<sup>th</sup>. So I'm in the process of liquidating everything. I've been trying to hold on for the last three years. I wanted the house for my son. I just don't know. I just don't know. It's so embarrassing but somebody's got to start talking about it instead of hiding it.

**REBECCA:** I can't believe this is happening to you. You come in every morning, and you are so pretty, so warm, so welcoming to everyone. I see people depend on you to lift their spirits and here you are - dealing with losing your home. I am so sorry. I've got the number of a lawyer who helped me that you can call.

**DOUG:** And I'm realizing that this is something we need to think about in terms of our members

*“Who We Are” SEIU Local 200, Syracuse NY © Marty Pottenger 2008*

– cause this is just the beginning. I know I talked a lot. I usually only have one word answers for everything. And I do have a one word answer for how we’re going to deal with the future –

**GERT:** I bet I know your word -

**REBECCA:** Me too. *(walk next to Tish and make a line, stay)* Together

**GERT:** *(walk next to Tish and make a line, stay)* Together.

**DOUG:** *(walk next to Tish and make a line, stay)* Together

**LONNIE:** *(walk next to Tish and make a line, stay)* TOGETHER

**TISH:** We’re telling stories up here. And you are sitting there listening. Then we’ll finish our stories and we will all go on about the rest of our day. But stories are really sticky. Once you’ve got them inside you, they don’t go away.

I remember a story about a frog that ended up in a pot filled with water. I heard it in Al Gore’s movie. The water in the pot is heating up real slow – so the frog doesn’t know to hop out which it could do easy enough – just hop out and hop back to the other frogs in the pond. I like how Gore told it. Somebody reached in and scooped that frog out before the water got too hot, before it came to a boil.

I have another story about a woman separated but not divorced from a man who is destitute. Who is unemployed and broke. The two own title to a house which has gone into foreclosure. There’s mortgage loans and taxes. Also college loans, credit card debts and taxes with interest payments and penalties. She is one of many in that situation in America.

And her circle includes you. My circle – includes you. It has to.

*(All hold hands, take two steps back & bow together)a*

The End