EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

SUSAN OLMSTEAD

- **Program Support Technician** (Hokie Passport Services)
- **Joined Virginia Tech in:** 2004; I started at Hokie Passport Services then and have been here ever since.
- **Hometown:** I've lived in the Christiansburg and Blacksburg area since I was 10 years old.
- **slbrown@vt.edu**
- **Job Duties and Responsibilities:** I help address electronic door access requests, ordering and billing for card reader projects, and various other customer service and office duties. I have had several different jobs within Hokie Passport over years, and so I know at least a little about a lot of different aspects.

HOW HAS YOUR LIFE BEEN DIFFERENT DURING COVID?

The biggest challenge has been helping my tween/teen kids adjust to the changes to their learning and social environment. It has been difficult for them not having their normal middle school social needs met, and learning remotely or with a hybrid schedule has been hard on them.

WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR HOBBIES?

I enjoy spending time with friends and family, reading, hiking (nothing serious but I have done McAfee's Knob), and cooking/baking, but only if I can follow a recipe. I'm no good on the fly.

WHO IS SOMEONE WHO INSPIRES YOU?

MY KIDS! I have two kids, ages 11 and 14, and they are amazing humans. They are more socially aware and emotionally intelligent than I ever was at their age, and are always inspiring me to be the best version of myself.

BEST PIECE OF ADVICE YOU'VE BEEN GIVEN?

"*Vulnerability isn't a weakness, it's a shared strength.*"

A friend of mine said that to me and it really stuck with me. Opening up to people can sometimes feel scary, but it's the only way we can truly connect and be understood.

MOST REWARDING PART OF YOUR JOB?

I really enjoy Freshman Orientation (pre-COVID), and interacting with the incoming students. They are so excited to be here, even if some of them don't like their new ID photo!

ANY PETS?

I currently have two cats, named Mack and Cheddar. (like mac and cheese, get it?)

ONE THING ON YOUR BUCKET LIST?

I would really love to ride in a hot air balloon.

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EVER MET ANYONE FAMOUS?

My dad was on *Jeopardy*! when I was about 6 years old, and I got to meet Alex Trebek! I have a signed headshot and everything. I was super shy and hid behind my mom when he introduced himself, but I remember it very clearly. My dad won 3 games and enough money to buy a new van, and some other various prizes. My dad loved that game, and watched it religiously. He died in 2017 of intestinal cancer, so when Alex was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and later passed away, it really struck a chord with me.

A PLACE YOU'D LOVE TO VISIT SOMEDAY?

Anywhere in Europe! I have so many friends who have traveled all over, and Europe seems like such fun. I've never had a passport, but that's on my list of things to accomplish this year. I can't go anywhere until I've got one of those! (Assuming the world opens for travel again!)

ONE OF YOUR BIGGEST PET PEEVES?

People being generally rude.

IF YOU COULD WITNESS ONE MOMENT IN HISTORY, IT WOULD BE...

Probably the moon landing or the beginnings of people getting televisions in their homes. Since we are so technologically advanced now, we will never be able to experience that kind of thing for the first time again. Remember when thinking video calling was something for the far distant future? Something you only saw on *The Jetsons* or *Star Trek*. Now we do it all the time. It's how so many of us do our jobs now. We don't even bat an eye.

ONE CHORE YOU CAN'T STAND? ONE THAT YOU ENJOY?

I absolutely hate cleaning the bathtub or shower. The rest of the bathroom I really don't mind, but I cannot stand to do the shower. I do actually enjoy cleaning windows and dusting though.

FAVORITE HOLIDAY?

I love Halloween! No pressure to buy other people gifts, dressing up, candy, fun decorations, and spooky stuff!

IF YOU COULD HAVE ANY SUPERPOWER, IT WOULD BE...

Teleportation! To just instantly be wherever you want to be without travel time or traffic or any kind of hassle? Sounds amazing.

FAVORITE FOOD?

Pizza. Hands down. I could eat pizza for the rest of my life and be content.

FAVORITE MOVIE OR BOOK?

My auto response is *Harry Potter* (movies and books) only because I've seen and read them all SO many times. But I also love the books *The Night Circus* and *The Starless Sea*, both by Erin Morgenstern. She uses great imagery in her story telling.

I HEARD THAT YOU'RE A HARRY POTTER SUPERFAN...TELL ME MORE ABOUT THAT.

In 2001, a friend of mine begged me to go see the first movie with her. I'd never read the books, I didn't know anything about it, and when she explained it to me I laughed at her. A movie about an 11-year-old wizard? Sure. But I still agreed to go, and by the time they got to the scene where Harry is being sorted, I was completely invested. She turned to me and just whispered, "You love it, don't you?" and that was it.

I've read the series more times than I can count. My paperback copies are falling apart. I will never turn down watching *Sorcerer's Stone*. It's like comfort food to me. I love the characters, I love the overall messages of friendship, and how doing what's right isn't always the easy thing. How even the bad guys have complicated personalities, and the good guys don't always get it right. I prefer the books more than the movies, only because there is so much more information in the books that never comes up in the movies. My favorite book of the series is *The Goblet of Fire*, and my favorite movie of the series is *The Prisoner of Azkaban*.

And for the record, I'm a Hufflepuff.