

Tennessee Aquarium, Chattanooga, TN

Sibyl Gore

I love nature. I had taught school for 50 years. It was really important to me when I retired from teaching to be in a kind of a surroundings where I could really ENJOY nature. So first of all, I moved to a place where I was surrounded by three acres of woods. I had all these wonderful birds and animals, but something was missing. People. When I taught school, I called all those people that were surrounding me – they were my family. Okay. So now I'm HERE. THAT'S my family. That's the difference between living in the woods with the birds and the animals that are beautiful – I loved it. Peaceful. But a human being needs that personal touch, that personal relationship with others and I love it because when I come in it's like I ASK about the other docents. There's – I think now I counted the other day – there were 15 that usually come on Thursday. So I want to know, you know, about the other people I'm working with. How are things going? I mean it's FAMILY. It is really family. It's really the highlight of my week. I mean I look forward to coming here every week. It's like, you know, "Okay. Things may not go good on Wednesday but on Thursday I'm gonna – I'm gonna volunteer." It's just because I'm surrounded by so many PEOPLE, it satisfies a need I think in ME especially. I can hardly wait to GET here on Thursdays. I enjoy doing things for people because really my philosophy is "Make a difference in everything we DO here." And I believe it's a Mark Twain quote. I used to use it a lot. It's, you know, it's NOT what you DO, not what you SAY. That's not what people are going to remember. They're going to remember HOW you make them FEEL. And that's just sort of my philosophy. "Make the people feel good around me" because I'm telling you now, if you smile, they're going to smile back. If you make them feel good, you're going to feel good. So that's just the way I start my days, you know, whether I'm here or anyplace. I want to make a difference. And that's how I feel about the Aquarium. I'm going to make a difference.

(SMILING) In the Butterfly Garden the other day, the little girl just ran and just buried herself in my stomach. I mean she had her hands over her ears and the grandfather said, "She has lots of learning problems. The noise bothers her. The butterflies scare her." And um, I just talked very quietly to her and they didn't seem to mind that she was buried in me and (LAUGHS) I just walked her over to the window where they were hatching and she finally talked to me and she said, "Is it okay if I look at them in THERE behind the window?" Where they weren't touching her, was fine. And then she calmed right down. But it's THOSE kinds of things I think when you touch another person's life, that you REALLY make a difference and they're so appreciative. It makes you feel good. It's just ONE THING, but it makes you feel good. It's different than a paying job. When you're paid, it's like "I have to do certain things. I have to be somewhere at a certain time. I'm on a certain schedule." Whereas when you VOLUNTEER, I get to choose more. I have more choices. I'm not a material girl. You know that already. I'm a "people person" and the big thing is I JUST want to make a difference and that's – that's my GOAL. The only thing I can say is, "It's a perfect fit." And it's a perfect fit – for me, it's a perfect fit. It's just "the place to be."