

Carol Shonibare Transcript

Absey:

What is your full name?

Carol Shonibare:

My name is Carol Shonibare.

Absey:

What year were you born?

Carol Shonibare:

1966.

Absey:

Where were you born?

Carol Shonibare:

In the United Kingdom.

Absey:

What did your parents do for a living?

Carol Shonibare:

My mum was a machinist. And my dad was a glass filler, fish glasses for the aquarium. Place called Baxbon outside of London. My mum used to work in East London as a machinist supervisor.

Absey:

Please tell us why you decided to work for Royal Mail?

Carol Shonibare:

I decided to work for Royal Mail after-

Speaker 3:

Sorry, Carol. Give me one second.

[inaudible 00:01:06] one second. Sorry, Carol. Oh, that's better. Ask your question. [Absey 00:01:15] ask in an animated way, put some emotion into the questions. Okay, start again.

Absey:

Please tell us why you decided to work for Royal Mail?

Carol Shonibare:

I decided to work for Royal Mail, it was a challenging opportunity. Whereas I was working part-time, after having my kids then opportunity came and I applied. I got casual, got into the casual post. Then opportunity came for me to be employed at Mount Pleasant. So, I took the opportunity, and I'm still

working, and then they call me for interview. And then a couple days after, I got the job as a part-time post woman.

Absey:

Tell us about any family members who work for Royal Mail?

Carol Shonibare:

You mean recent or before? Do you really need before? You're talking about before?

Absey:

[inaudible 00:02:22]

Carol Shonibare:

One of my relatives, there was one of my cousin and one of my uncle used to work there for a number of years.

Absey:

What did your family member think about your decision to work for Royal Mail?

Carol Shonibare:

They were happy for me, because there were many jobs going and the places that was my first choice of job that I got. It was not my first job, but it was my second job. And they were happy because I am still employed now.

Absey:

Tell us how you started Royal Mail?

Carol Shonibare:

I started as a casual then I work my way up and get employed from part-time to full-time.

Absey:

Describe the training you did?

Carol Shonibare:

The training I did, I done quite a few training. So, I'll begin by saying I started doing processing whereas the machine, we've got machines when the letters are running on the machine, we process them by sorting them into rotation. And also, the parcels, we got parcel. Some mini art like some boxes dense, trays, you put them in and you got the frames where you sort the letters as well. And I do different type of work there in the process because you got the parcel bit and you also got the letter frames, you got the flats so I work in various different areas.

Absey:

What was your first job you did for Royal Mail?

Carol Shonibare:

My first job I did for Royal Mail was to sort letters.

Absey:

Tell us about how you felt your first days of work?

Carol Shonibare:

My first day, it was very challenging. It was not easy, I'll explain that to you. Because when you started working for the first time is a challenge because you got to get to know your work and you got to have the training. So, after my training was completed, then I was able to carry out my tasks.

Absey:

Describe your work in those early days?

Carol Shonibare:

In the Royal Mail, my work consists of five hours part-time and we had to make sure all letters and the parcels, which area I was working was process to go out for delivery the next day. Because first class is priority, second class is not priority. So for myself, I have to make sure all the letters were sort go out for the delivery.

Absey:

What was the atmosphere like your work in the early days?

Carol Shonibare:

The atmosphere, it was good. A lot of experience, I gained a lot of experience. Because I also work in the custom department, where I get a lot of training of all to manage parcels going by the weight, and what is consist, for example, if you were sending a parcel, say to Africa, tells you the information that was written on there like what was in the parcel. And it give me a lot of experience to know about customs, as if you was working with the custom at the airport. So, it was really, really challenging during that time.

Absey:

What kinds of people you're working with?

Carol Shonibare:

All nationality, our workplace has got every nationality you can think of. There was a mixture of every nationality.

Speaker 3:

Tell us [inaudible 00:06:52].

Carol Shonibare:

For example, some of my colleagues were from different background, as I said. So, we get on to know each other and to know, we know what type of person they are, for example, because they are from different backgrounds, some of their English was not good, but we help each other.

Just we have to help them like so for example, the manager might ask a question, "Oh, could you put those work over there?" Sometimes someone might not answer, understand. So, if you were there and you're working with them, we just work as a team and help each other.

Absey:

How diverse was your workplace when you started?

Carol Shonibare:

My workplace for first time I started, there was a lot of diversity. Because we used to do a program called culture week, which connected with what you just asked me before about different nationality. We had one room where all where we have a diversity, where we bring different food, so everyone knows what type of culture your food is, and the type of food you eat and the type of clothes you wear and get to know more about your nationality.

Absey:

What sort of equipment did you use in your work?

Carol Shonibare:

We use mini sleeves. I will explain mini sleeves is not exactly like this, but is something that the parcel have to go into. And they got tall ones, they got small ones and taller ones with zips that they do for dispatch. The frames goes in something like this thing here where the letters go for dispatch, but it's not exactly like this, but it's just similar.

We also have to use scissors to cut, open the bags, especially Royal Mail scissors. We have sacks, which the postman uses to carry out their mail maybe sometime in the morning and might see them going out with the mailbox. We also have these frames, we put certain special delivery letters and stuff this part.

Absey:

Describe your uniform?

Carol Shonibare:

Well, as you can see, my uniform before was blue, sky blue, dark blue. And now it's gray with this blue blouse that's actually uniform. Now we've got a red one, red blouse, which not many people like to wear, and we also have this shoe as well, we got maybe three different types of shoes. We've got long sleeve shirt in these ones as well, which is very smart, very easy to iron because it's cotton. We've got shorts, if you don't want to wear long trousers summertime, so uniform is very unique.

Absey:

Tell us about the skills you needed for job?

Carol Shonibare:

The skill that you need, you first have to have training. We are not allowed to go and know machine, for example, to carry out our work, we have to be trained. And once you train, for example, on the processing where I was on the machine, this is called CFC. And it stands for Culling-Facing machine. Where all there is a big jump thing, that they process the work. So, everything runs off, roll over like a big jump.

And then it goes separate it into first and second class. So, you get say a week and a half training. And then you have a folder, whereas you have to write notes, take notes. And each of you will be operating the machine to make sure you're fully qualified to run the machine that's under processing bit.

With the side where you do manual sorting, you do not need to be trained. When I say you don't need to train because you sort in the parcel. But you need to know the frames. For example, you have rod one, rod two, rod three, I'll give you an example. You will have librarian in Scotland, New Zealand, that's the rest of the world and so on. So, each one have their own frame that you sort them, so you have to be trained.

But for the process inside, which is the machine, you need to be trained, while on the manual side is hand sorted. You still need to be trained especially if you're casual, because you need to know the rods. But the machine one is more important. Because there cannot allowed to go onto the machine if you're not trained because if somethings happen like accident or something, Royal Mail can be liable.

Absey:

Describe a typical day of work?

Carol Shonibare:

Oh, a typical day, it could be Christmas. And the reason why I said that, Christmas is one of our busiest time of the year. Whereas you've got casuals, we got staff and they have to make sure they put them in different areas. So that way, we can get all Royal Mail work out of the office dispatch on time so customer can get their cards. It's very, very busy. Very, very busy. We're very busy.

Like one day, we could do millions, up to million letters. For the eve, the night start from say two o'clock in the day, till the next morning. It have to go for dispatch. Whereas some morning like Monday it will be busy. Tuesday a bit quiet. Wednesday, Thursday, a bit quiet. But when it come back to Monday is the most busiest time, especially Christmas time. So, that's obviously could get Easter, all the holidays, you can think of, very busy.

Absey:

What were your favorite things about your role?

Carol Shonibare:

My favorite thing was knowing that I work with my colleagues. And the work is cleared and then he was getting ready to go home, home time. Once my work was finished then I know that I done my job and that's when I'm always happy when the work is finished. Because if you don't get it clear, and we fail when I said fail, we have challenges that are more unpleasant whereas some time, the work gets delayed because of traffic. And if you don't get it out of the office on time, then it's not good for the business.

Absey:

What were the difficult things about your work?

Carol Shonibare:

Difficult things would have been if we don't have enough equipment, you have to have the equipment to carry out your duty. So, for example, remember before I said earlier about sometime the equipment to use if they're broken, we cannot use them. If there is something wrong with the bags, we cannot use them, for example, basically wouldn't be able to finish our tasks. So, we have to make sure we have enough proper equipment, furniture as we call them, to do our duty.

Absey:

Can you tell us about any discrimination you experienced or witness?

Carol Shonibare:

I've never really witnessed something, but I could see things would be happening at the workplace as in equal opportunity wise, for example, sometime someone could get in trouble, maybe your friend maybe gone off and didn't tell the manager that they've gone off the floor. So, that person maybe will get in [inaudible 00:16:24], sometime they overlooked it. But it can be dealt with by the manager.

As in say, if I see something and then the manager might have known about it, but just wait for that staff to come back to say, "Oh, you left the floor, you didn't say where you were going or something like that." So, it can be very challenging at times.

Absey:

Tell us a story that stands out from your working life?

Carol Shonibare:

Oh, do you mean something that I've been doing?

Absey:

Something that stands out?

Speaker 3:

Something that you remember from your working life that happened to you or that happened at work?

Carol Shonibare:

Well, I done something before, nothing bad. I volunteer recently, some time I go to, this was Windsor Castle to take some children with disability. And I was still very disappointed, because when I was volunteered to go with them, the rain fall. So, we ended up have to go to Sobell.

And the children, oh, my God, it was so challenging. But I still managed to take them, which was like two of us that volunteer. Just for the day to accompany them. But I was disappointed because I didn't get to go to the Windsor place that I was really, really wanted to go. So, we still managed to get out to take them to Sobell. It was really fun in the end anyway.

Absey:

What were some of the naughty things people did at work?

Carol Shonibare:

Oh, some things that people do at work? They will Skype, they will come in late. They will go off the floor for a long time. They wouldn't turn up some time till late, some people would go home before time. And sometimes they will get in trouble for that because the manager would find out somehow and then challenge them about it the next day or so, about the whole scenario.

Absey:

Talk us briefly for the different jobs you did working for Royal Mail?

Carol Shonibare:

My first job for Royal Mail, I work on the machine. No, first, I started in the parcels, whereas, I told you before about the processing of the machine. The second job I did. I was working on the parcel manual. This time there was no machine, there was another year that they past a bit. So, when the machines stop, the parcels go over to the manual side. We cut the machine, run the parcels out and then we put them out.

Then the second bit I done was the letters sorting, which is some frames, we have to sort them individually to people's address like YC1, YC2 and so on. That's another job. I work in the custom bit. I also work in the area where I did the broken packet and I'll explain about the broken parcel to you. For example, if I got a letter, and it was not in its envelope, say if it was torn or something, my job was to mend it. When I say mend it, I will get, we have gift bags like some plastic situ bags, where I had to put them, put that same letter in and seal it, is apology bags we call it. So, that was some of the few places I worked.

Absey:

Tell us about your favorite job?

Carol Shonibare:

My favorite job is working on the machine. Because, those two I love the ERS. I love working there. But my favorite is to work on the machine where the belt just running and you're just picking up, scanning, scan the work and process it.

Absey:

How did you progress in Royal Mail?

Carol Shonibare:

I progress by train, train up in other areas. I don't just stay in one area. If there was opportunity where I wanted to be trained, for example, they might advertise, say, they want someone on the parcel to train to do something, I just put in for application. And if you get it, then you just start doing that.

Absey:

Tell us about your relationships with your colleagues?

Carol Shonibare:

Well, my relationship with my colleague is at a minimum, I get on well with my colleagues. But at times, I try not to get too much into them. I just concentrate on my own work. I work with them as a team. But I try not to get too much so that I don't get in no conflict with no one so that I don't get blamed for something that I didn't do. But I do get on with them.

Absey:

Tell us about your experiences of joining clubs at work?

Carol Shonibare:

Clubs? We haven't got clubs at work, but what we've got, we've got a Black History Month. And also I've joined a club that I have actually have, I joined a sports club. But because of the corona now, we are not doing no club at the moment. But I joined the sports club. This was about eight years ago. I'm on the committee and I do trips like seaside trips, go to France and so on. But at the moment because of the corona, we're not doing no club at the moment until when the government lift everything go back to normal.

Absey:

Tell us about any other opportunity to socialize.

Carol Shonibare:

Opportunity to socialize, I'm actually the coordinator of the Jamaica Association for Mount Pleasant. We do a yearly function, is a charity event. We raise money for Jamaica Cancer Society. And with the help of management, they loaned us. We have a hall downstairs where we use, where family and friends can come and see what we've been doing for the charity, for the past 13 years, we've been doing it. It's just that because of this corona, we haven't been doing nothing. We didn't do it last year. But we've been doing it from 13 years now.

Absey:

What made you join the union?

Carol Shonibare:

I joined the union because if I was to get, if there's any opportunity where I might be in trouble with one of the managers or some, then I will have someone where can represent me, which I think is the best for me.

Absey:

Why is the union important for postal workers?

Carol Shonibare:

Because they are an assistant to some staff, members of staff, where sometimes problems arises at the workplace. So, you do need some time someone to speak on your behalf. Because not many people can speak on their behalf.

Absey:

What part did the union play in your life?

Carol Shonibare:

The union play part, not me particular, but in our lives at work whereas we have meetings to do with all the changes that's coming into Royal Mail, for example, at the moment, we have in some changes to do with job cuts and pay rise and stuff like that. So, that's when the union come in. And then they tell us of what's going to happen. They speak on our behalf, and then they keep meeting so we can also know what's going on within the Royal Mail.

Absey:

What part did the union play in your life?

Speaker 3:

Next one.

Absey:

Tell us about any strikes or disputes you're involved with?

Carol Shonibare:

Some I think it was, I don't remember if it was about some couple years ago, there was a strike, whereas we were told not to come into work. And I did not go in that day. Because I'm a union, I'm not union rep, but I'm in the union. So, we were advised not to come. So, the next day, there was nothing just happen to us. It's just that people's come in. But I did not go in.

Absey:

What was your most memorable moment at the post office?

Carol Shonibare:

Most memorable moment? It was get to know my managers and to work with them for a number of years. So, just to get the experience to meet up with other people who's got similar ideas to get the job done. For example, you might not know, but there is some time ago, we work in a group as you asked me a question before, and one of my colleague, she started like a year before me. And she came up with the idea to tell me to come over to work with us. So that was really good because she didn't leave me out. She was working there and she called me over just to work with her. So, he was a good memory and then I lift up myself and I start getting to know more about it.

Absey:

What was your most challenging moment at post office?

Carol Shonibare:

My challenging moment was to get to learn about the machine and how the machine operates, because you have to know about each individual area.

Absey:

However, you work, what were the main changes at work?

Carol Shonibare:

The most changes in work was job cuts, redundancies, resign, when I say resign is like if you apply for a particular job, you might not have the same job, because somebody might be more senior than you. So, you might not have the same job. So, that was very challenging.

Absey:

In what ways do you think your job has improved?

Carol Shonibare:

My job hasn't been improved because we are short of staff, it's still remained the same. But I just get on with it to enjoy it.

Absey:

In what ways has it got worse?

Carol Shonibare:

It hasn't got... Well, it got worse, challenging as well, because people take redundancy, and otherwise, they take the EVR, they retire. So, they didn't refill those vacancy. So, when they don't fill the vacancy, you have less staff. So, maybe I'm doing two people's job, before as that person who was there before, I wouldn't have to cover their job.

Absey:

What would you do if your child wanted to work for Royal Mail?

Carol Shonibare:

Is up to my child. Put it this way, I tell you what, two of my children used to work casual for Royal Mail. But they wouldn't work, they are permanent.

Absey:

If you were the boss of Royal Mail, what changes would you make?

Carol Shonibare:

I would have job opportunity, equal opportunity and I will make sure everyone is treated the same.

Absey:

Looking back over your working life, what has working for Royal Mail meant to you?

Carol Shonibare:

Working for Royal Mail meant a lot to me, because simple reason is I work very hard. My job is challenging. And I will repeat this challenging, because it's a challenging job. It's very hard, but I've to just get on with it and enjoy it, because jobs out there is very hard to get. So, that's why it means a lot to me. That's why I'm always making sure that I do the right thing to keep my job.

Absey:

Thank you very much for answering our questions. Is there anything you would love to talk about that we have not covered in our questions?

Carol Shonibare:

I can say you did really well. You try really hard. You was not nervous. But maybe I don't know if I missed anything. But you can ask me questions. Maybe I can fill them in the groups.

Speaker 3:

So, we can ask you some questions. But if you could still answer in this way just for consistency. Schola, is there anything I cut you or ask, anything come up? Or ask anything?

Schola:

What are the ups and downs working in the Royal like?

Carol Shonibare:

Ups and downs as in?

Speaker 3:

The ups and downs with the job?

Carol Shonibare:

As I said, some time, if staff doesn't turn up, then if it was like 10 of you was working and say about eight people is present and two don't turn up, then it wouldn't be good because it will be short of staff. So, you have to go to another area to maybe go and collect some other two stuff just to make up for the other area.

And this is happening right now in the Mount. Sometimes they don't have another job. I'll give you an example. Last week, I was at work and my manager came over to ask me to go to another area, two people didn't turn up, so I had to go and cover. They still needed one, but I went over to go and cover so that mean my area is still short because they took me from another area. So, sometime is up sometime is down especially when it's busy. So, don't know if that answer your question?

Schola:

But just [inaudible 00:34:04] they turn up just like the ministry started [crosstalk 00:34:08].

Speaker 3:

That's fine, I should have told you. Carol again, if you could answer this question, could you describe for the children what was it like? It sound like, are there noises, lots of machines [crosstalk 00:34:18]. Can you describe just exactly [crosstalk 00:34:20] was it like?

Carol Shonibare:

To be honest, when the machines start, there's three machines at Mount Pleasant. And when they start, you can't hear, I'm telling you, you have to be like come up close to each other or something like that. With a very noisy, trust me very, very noisy. Because there's the first one where they actually, they call it

the CFC, which is called Cancel-Facing-Culling machine, that one is actually like first point of the workplace. That's where the letters process and they drop run out into different first and second.

Then the second machine run out into the other machine, which is LSM, which is where it do the input have do in areas. It's first and second. But they stamp where you see the stamp the weight, and it goes into sequence of where it's going. So, it's very, very noisy, very challenging, good experience, watch the machine going around, spinning around in circles, processing all those letters. So, it's a good experience.

Speaker 3:

And how many letters [inaudible 00:35:48] on average during the process?

Carol Shonibare:

Well, I know if I can remember my machine process one day when is very busy, one machine could do depends on how much we've got in like one day, I'll tell you, I'll give you an example, one machine did like 56,000 for the all time from say two o'clock up to say nine o'clock, while the other one can do like 57,000 depends on how many letters come in.

But during Christmas time, they hit the target of the million, if that makes sense. So mostly, as I said, Christmas time is the most busiest time. Easter, Father's Day, not too much busy. Mother's Day, not so much busy but still have lots of letters.

Speaker 3:

Which day is busier, Father's Day or Mother's Day?

Carol Shonibare:

Well, I think it's mostly the Mother's Day, I would suppose. By Christmas, it is nerve wracking. Sometime we have to be sign in some of the letters by hand because it's so much to process. But we always make sure all of them get out of the workplace to go for the dispatch. And we have to make sure every single letter get out the office. Any more questions?

Absey:

On a scale of one to 10, how hard would you rate your day working in Royal Mail?

Carol Shonibare:

How hard is it?

Absey:

Yeah.

Carol Shonibare:

I can tell you on a day average, I will give it nine on a Monday, very hard because very busy because we don't get the delivery. We don't have the Sunday, we do Sunday, Mondays, some Mondays to double is in it, and Bank holiday is double, we don't come into the work. The Bank holiday, Monday to Tuesday, so I'll give it on a 10 and the Bank holidays, the Tuesday after the Bank holiday, we're very busy because I finished 20 to 10 and sometime I'm still there.

We could normally come out like half past nine, get 10 minutes at the end but there was no chance not answer that. So, where we come out like say quarter to ten or something like that depends on... And you see now work is coming in, the traffic as well, you have look at the traffic. That's one of the reasons as well if they were coming late. The late night coming is not good for us.

Speaker 3:

What was it like this Christmas just gone with the coronavirus? How did that affect your work?

Carol Shonibare:

We had casual in as usual. So, we were able to have them in over the Christmas as well. So, it made a bit of help. It was a bit a help then, because we couldn't work close together. So, it helped a bit, like if it's four your work in, we cannot have four people because of the virus. They have to put like two, three people, because it's just supposed to be two meters apart. So, they have to put space it out and they had less schedules there.

Absey:

Did coronavirus make things trickier or easier on the way [inaudible 00:39:44]?

Carol Shonibare:

Nope, not easier, makes it harder because, as I said before, we can't be joined together. So, it makes it harder for us because we are processing the letters and the parcels. And they have to block off where the letters bit is. And when we are collecting the work, we can't be too close to each other side. So, it didn't make it. It's not making better.

Speaker 3:

Any other questions from the team?

Carol Shonibare:

Any question?

Speaker 3:

Anything else [inaudible 00:40:26] we covered.

Carol Shonibare:

I just want to say you guys was really good. I hope I'm able to answer your question. But if there's anything that I've answered, and you want it in more details, feel free. Is there anything, you can go back to your questions, and see if there's anything that you want me to add to what I answered.

Absey:

You actually answered all the questions with a lot of detail. I was just [inaudible 00:40:56].

Speaker 3:

I'll just... Sorry, go on.

Speaker 4:

I was just going to say she just helping [inaudible 00:41:02].

Speaker 3:

One thing you told me before you came in, you didn't explain properly, is how you started as a Christmas casual. I mean, could you say how you first started, just tell that story?

Carol Shonibare:

All right. How I started the Christmas casual? There was advert going out. And I applied. And in the post come days, after the letter came for me to go for the interview. And they told me when I'm going to start where I want to go, and then I applied and I got to and then I went. I did one Christmas casual there. And for one year, but it was just for three weeks. But it's one year after, then another opportunity came. They were taken on people. So, then that's how I started.

And then from there, I went to Canning Town where I had my Christmas casual and after the Christmas casual, they were recruiting at Mount Pleasant. And I went to Stonebridge for my interview. This was a proper interview. So, I was interviewed, a lady asked me, "Are you ready to work?" And I said yes. She asked me about my children. So, at the time, my daughter was only one. So, I took up the opportunity and then there I am, but I can tell you how long Mount Pleasant, can you guess?

I'm there almost 23 years. And I love my job, to be honest, is challenging, but I love it because it's the longest I've been in a job like this. The ones before I had my different, was just part-time. This one is full-time, so that's why I'm enjoying it. And I get on well with my managers. Dave, I have nothing but I'm not boasting, but my manager said never have nothing nice to say about me.

I also do Royal Mail charities well like the raffle. I go around and do raffles and I do quite a few things in the workplace. So, if ever you have anything at the school, you just keep in touch with me.

Speaker 3:

And when you started, did you have any idea that you'd be there for this long?

Carol Shonibare:

Nope. Because they said they were not taking on people because I started part-time there, then the full-time came opportunity and there am I. And as I said, there I get on with my managers, we get on as well. Right now, there is four managers, that's why inform me to work in four different areas. And I only can work in one area. Because every week, I'm a reserve. Reserve is they can put you anywhere you're trained to work. So, like that machine now, if I were there one week. One week, I work, one week, I work there, maybe two weeks I work in another area.

So, they all want me to work, you see when you're a hard worker, that's why I'm telling you children, what you're doing is good. Don't let no one stop you from what you're doing. Just keep up the good work, because you will get somewhere in life. Don't let your friends try to pull you down. The moment your friends try to pull you down, you will be under same level as them. If I wasn't good, I don't think I will be doing the charity at Mount Pleasant.

I do it every year, is only from the corona, we didn't do it. Every year I'm also involved in the Black History Month. And they got these Asian peoples, they do their one as well, the beam, you know about the beam? We joined together, bring our own culture food. Lots of people come from upstairs in the office. So, don't let no one stop you. Anything that you want to do life is there waiting for you. But

you just have to don't let your colleagues try to bring you down. Because they want to see you fail. Remember that. They want to see you fail. They will laugh for you.

I get people laugh at me most time. Why am I standing? I'll tell you one thing, I was working at Canning Town before. And this girl, she says to me and I was like, "He looks so funny or something like that because I never used to talk much." But I just get on with my work. And she think that, "Oh, I'm overworking myself." But I wasn't.

I wasn't trying to impress my boss. I was just showing him that I have the ability to do what I'm doing. Do you know out of that group, certainly two of us came to Mount Pleasant. I saw the girl working, "Oh, you're still there?" I said yes. And this is 22 years. She's doing nothing. So, don't let no one, I'll advise you carry on doing what you're doing.