

Interview with Woodarmstrong Pierre

Born in Haiti, Lives in New York City.

Interviewed by Raidelys Lopez.

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English-language, Creole, and French

25 minutes.

Junot Diaz is a student at BMCC, majoring in science. In this interview he discusses his childhood and his family life

RL: Today I will be interviewing Woodarmstrong with some questions about his culture. Woodarmstrong can you tell me a little about yourself ?

WP: I'm from a little country in the Caribbean. I'm from Haiti. I'm Haitian by the way. So I was born and raised in the jungle. And it's a beautiful country just like here, just like we don't have the same opportunities that people have here.. But we still enjoy it. I came here on 2011 and I came here on independence day.

RL: So that would be July 4th?

WP: July 4th yea July 4th. So that night I was happy. I feel like that was one of the great moment of my life because i miss.. I didn't see my dad for like 7 years so i finally see him, I was happy and I have cousin and family i didn't see for a long amount of the time. So we kicking it we talking then we called it a night. I have 2 sisters and 2 brothers and my sisters they get married and my brothers about to get married. And me i don't know when i'm going to get married and my little brother he's doing good in school, you know that's my son and I love him.

Crazy thing is I came here one year later after the earthquake man that was a crazy moment. And that was kind of the worst.

RL: oh so okay umm so regarding the earthquake so you were there ? when it happened?

WP: Yea i was there and at that moment when that happened i was in school and guess what i'm about to tell you a joke when i was in school anf my professor he was teaching so when it happened and everybody sitting down he was the first one to get out before all the students in the classroom and after that we.. everybody was running in the same direction. Then that day i seen a lot of dead body. Shit is crazy. Thats thats that tragedy bro.

RL: And were you like traumatized by like seeing all those dead bodies ?

WP: Man it was hard for me to kind of get myself, you was stressing and you was young you dont what is going on and all you see is people dying i mean everybody know there dead bodies all over the place. It was crazy i don't even want to talk about the shit.

RL: Anyway uh what was your experience when you first came to the united states ? and how did you feel ?

WP: When i first came here i feel great i was happy but at the same time i was happy and sad because i'm leaving family and friends and culture. And the most thing that got me happy about is i got cousin i have family but everything else i left i'm still missing it till now. Is like theres still a part of me living in haiti.

RL: okay and um why did you come to the united states ?

WP: Actually I don't know why I came here I was 14 so I didn't understand life at that moment but my mom they give me the opportunity. But one thing i always love like you see when you watching tv, I'm never been here so everything i see on tv, i thought everything that you see on

tv it was the united states that's what they make it seem like in Haiti cause i was like theres not building in Haiti like here but they are building im like damn i want to see all this but when i came here all this does not impress me no more.

RL: Okay now was learning english hard for you or did you already come knowing the language?

WP: I mean learning english was not hard, it was hard but it was hard and easy at the same time cause when i was in haiti i used learn english , i used my mom used to pay to go to school for me to learn english but but when i came here i thought i knew english when i was back Haiti but when i came here people trying to have convo with me im like what the heck is going on the i had to catch on myself when i go to school started making friends and going out with people and that's when i started learning more english

RL: Okay and what was life like in your country ?

WP: Man life in my country is a perfect a perfect life. This is why I'm saying life in my country was perfect people thats 14 here and peoples thats 14 in Haiti they look different i don't know if is cause people here look stress they more stuff to do but people in in Haiti they look like free stress like they not stressing about anything.

RL: ummm okay now umm how long have you lived in the US for ?

WP: I came here on 2011 and we on 2018 so you could do the math

RL: So that would 7, 8 years

WP: That will be 7 years i believe so if i'm not mistaken.

RL: Okay now where do you reside now, like do you live in new york ? like what part of New York?

WP: I live in New York, I live in Brooklyn you know i'm from the heights so that where my people at, like all the friends i'm making that's where they live so.

RL: So when you came from haiti that's where you lived ?

WP: No when i first came from Haiti i used to live in Florida, i lived in Florida for like a year then i had to move here, then i moved here and stuck here.

RL: What did you expect when you came here ?

WP: When i came here i expect a lot, not even when i came here, like when my mom was taking care of papers for me to come here i started thinking, like damn i mean thought this country was everything but deeply is not. I have a opportunity to come to another country i could've go to canada cause at that time cause i have a my uncle a visa but i didn't like the flow of going to Canada.

RL: Okay now like over there when you watched tv like you saw that was like a lot of white people and like so did come , when you came like there's not really a lot of white people is like a mixture of different cultures and its diverse ?

WP: I mean not to sound racist in my country like us when i first came in my country we just give them a little privilege. But haiti we don't care about your skin color like if you white you white, you black you white you not racist.

RL: Okay now what challenges have you faced ?

WP: Much challenges I'm facing now is going to college trying to be somebody, trying to take my mom and my family of the ghetto man, is a lot of work you gotta do.

RL: and what are you studying in college?

WP: I'm actually studying science in BMCC, and next semester I'm going to graduate this semester and next semester im going to city tech then after this I'm going to go to dental school. Then I have to put in a lot of work to be a dentist.

RL: Okay and what do you miss from your country?

WP: I miss alot i miss my best friend we grew up together i met him when i was what i met him right after my mom left Haiti, so me and him were going to together i met him when i was six and i leave him when i was 14. Thats still my man i miss him, i miss my family, i miss my culture, i miss everything, i miss everything that's there, that's what i don't have here which is a lot .

RL: Okay now are there any similarities between the united states culture and the culture in Haiti?

WP: similarity umm let me think umm similarity its kind of hard fing to fnd, like what do you mean?

RL: Like umm are there some things that are in in Haiti that are here or like in the culture, Do you guys like things you eat there at the same from here?

WP: I mean yea we do I mean most of the things well not most of the things like 30% of stuff people eat in Haiti they came from here and is i mean you could say there's a little bit.

RL: Do you speak creole ? or french ?

WP: Of course i speak french and creole, ça va? Ça va bien. I speak you know I'm haitian, like i said i was born in the jungle so I have to learn how to speak to my people.

RL: Yea it must be nice to know 3 languages.

RL: And did you go to school in Haiti ? if you did how is the education different from the one here?

WP: Education in Haiti that's 2 different things, in haiti you have to memorize and im saying memorize i'm not saying you get it you gotta memorize this part of it you gotta remember everything word by word. Which here you don't have to memorize you just have to understand everything. In Haiti they give you a book you got like 2 pages you have to remember like the next day you got to class you gotta remember everything and if you don't remember everything you get whooped up like the professor is going to whoop your ass up.

RL: What is your families background ?

WP: My mom from the jungle my dad from the jungle we all Haitian.

RL: So where in Haiti?

WP: My dad is from somewhere called st. michele and my mom from somewhere they called Ile de la Gonave when you see it on the map you going to see a little island.

RL: And do you eat dinner with your family on a regular basis?

WP: Yea we do that everyday like when we learned to cook and when the food is almost ready everybody go sit down waiting for the food, we eat, talk, arguing , you know how family goes.

RL: Okay now how do you describe people's relationships here then in Haiti ?

WP: Man i just i don't know if its the facts that I'm cause Haitian honestly most of my friends that i have here they're not even, most of them is Haitian for some reason i can't get along with people here like specially friends like people is 2 sides and i ain't got time for this i ain't got time to pick and choose. It's either you're with me or against me. In Haiti somebodys is your friend

they loyal to you.

RL: Umm so do you have any eating habits/rituals that are specific to your culture?

WP: I don't know about this so i'm not telling something i don't know.

RL: How important is religion in your family? Why ?

WP: Man religion is most, my family is number one important is school because they think we have to be somebody, and second is religion. For me for me personally if i wanna make my mom happy is going to school and church and be most spiritual. But i don't picture myself like that, i have a lot to do i can't deal with this right now

RL: So you're a christian ?

WP: I mean yea, im a christian i mean i know the bible, i been in church all my life it just i been in church all my life is just i don't practice it. My dad is a pastor so definitely, when i used to be , when i was little like before i go to bed my dad used to preach to me telling me stories, like i know what the bible says.

RL: Okay now what is considered sacred ?

WP: I mean my family is number one, that's the most important and this shit that going on right right now that school shit.

RL: Okay now what is your favorite Haitian food ?

WP: My favorite Haitian food is digi sos pwa legume

RL: Can you repeat that ?

WP: Digi say it with me Digi Sos Pwa Legume, is rice and beans and the vegetables, you when you have a plate of food and they just put everything separate.

RL: oh so everything is separate?

WP: Got that right.

RL: Now define and describe the most important (or most celebrated) holiday of your culture.

WP: The most important holiday is coming up right, is May 18 you know every Haitian got to know about this you know 1804 feel m, i always remember when i came from

RL: and how do you guys celebrate this ?

WP: We celebrate, we play drums, we go out, like in Haiti when is that time they just mad people walking. You not even going to feel it you're just going to enjoy the time and celebrate.

RL: are there anymore holidays that are important ?

WP: Yea we got christmas, majority of people that are in Haiti are christian so they take that day. And the difference is that we don't celebrate it on the 25th we celebrate it on the 24th. And we celebrate the last day of the hay which is december 31st.

RL: Okay and what is considered most disrespectful in your culture? What is considered most respectful in your culture?

WP: You know one thing i forgot to tell you is that in july 1st we be eating that soup joumou. That yellow soup you never heard of it?

RL: No

WP: Ask anybody, If you have Haitian friends ask them what we do on the first day of the hay.

RL: Okay and now what is considered most disrespectful in your culture? What is considered most respectful in your culture?

WP: Most disrespectful is you, you taking you, you don't respect your parents, you don't respect your elders and like you gotta show respect to some that older than you it doesn't matter what

age you are once someone is older then you you gotta show them respect, that's definitely the key.

RL: And what's respectful?

WP: When you go into somebody's house and you say hi and greet them

RL: So greeting people ?

WP: Yea

RL: Okay I understand

RL: Now what is the best thing about living in the USA? What is the worst thing about living in the USA?

WP: The best thing is that when they give an opportunity you just have to take it.

RL: Do you still have family members in Haiti ?

WP: I got my best friend still living in Haiti, i met him since i was six, right after my mom left Haiti and i left him when i was 14 to come here but that my bestfriend you know. I still got family, i still got cousins, i got my auntie, which i plan to visit one day. It's going to happen sometime soon.

RL: Okay now what kind of roles do men and women play in your culture ? is it like here where men and women are somewhat equal or women are still housewives ?

WP: No its not equal is like the men they go to work they care your family, and the women what the women does you stay at home and you cook and take care of the baby, make sure everything is clean.

RL: And you believe is fair?

WP: I mean that's my culture of course i think its fair, because i grew up like that

RL: So you will do the same ?

WP: I will not do the same because i came here i see that's different, if i'm with somebody whatever your opinion is you, if you want to go to work, you go to work, if you don't want to go to work then you don't, but I'm going to make sure i work.

RL: How are children disciplined ?

WP: Children discipline go to school, you go to school you learn, you showing love, you respect your elders, what else ?

RL: So they don't get punished ? or anything?

WP: They do get punished, like we whoop in your ass, put your on your knees for like a day, the most tragedy they can do is they put on the hot floor like you know in Haiti is not here is sunny. She tells you go on your knees in the middle of the house.

RL: What have you learned since being in the US?

WP: I've learned a lot my whole childhood has been in Haiti, so when i came here i became an adult, so most of the thing that I learn, I learn how to deal with people here different. I learn how to be myself, stay to myself control myself.