Interview with **Wadson Michel**

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Interviewers: Faye Charpentier, Samantha Grangaard

**Samantha**: Okay, I just wanna start off by thanking you, and I know it was twenty years ago, but I'm sure anything, and everything is, uh, helpful. Um, I'm Samantha Grangaard and –

**Faye**: Faye Charpentier

**Wadson**: and I'm Wadson Michel.

**Samantha**: Um, would you please tell us a little about yourself, about your, uh, your background?

**Wadson**: Um, my name is Wadson Michel, I'm a psychotherapist. I was born and raised in Haiti and I moved to the states when I was 18, New York City. Then went to school upstate New York, and uh, and also here in Mass. And I practice psychotherapy here in Somerville and Cambridge area.

**Samantha**: What brought you to the US? Why did you decide to go to school here?

**Wadson**: My mom, my mother was living in New York City, and she petitioned for me to come a join her, which I did. So, I went to high school for a year, and from there I went to Binghamton to study mechanical engineering, and then from there I went to Syracuse for clinical social work. I was very fortunate (laughs)

**Faye**: I'm just curious about the shift from mechanical engineering to social work (all laugh)

**Wadson:** And uh, my doctorate work is in adult literacy. Coming from Haiti, the high school I went to was very science driven, and my friends now are engineers. So the idea of coming here, uh, either to be an engineer or a doctor, my goal was also to go back to Haiti to help. And the roads are very back in Haiti, the buildings, as we learn, are so terrible in Haiti. So being an engineer was something that – that peaked my interest and mechanical was something that I had interest as well. And it wasn't after I was living here in the State I realized I had choices, I didn't have to be an engineer. I could be anything that I want to be. But many of the things that are available here were not available there in Haiti. For example, you apply to different schools, and which ever one you get into in Haiti, that's what you go do. If you wanted to be an engineer but you get into medicine, so you go become a doctor. Uh, so, once I was here, I realized that I was much better with people than machines, and – and I switched to become a psychotherapist, which I thought that – uh – I'm so glad I made that switch. I'm very happy with the career path that I have chosen.

**Samantha:** Yeah, we're not in it for the money (all laugh) Engineering [inaudible]

**Wadson**: Yes, and, um, then still planning on going back to Haiti. I, so, embark on a PhD in adult literacy to hopefully go home and open centers to teach adults to read and write, and because of that, doing research for my dissertation's brought me to Haiti quite often. And where I end up getting involved in different things, like working with children in orphanages, and working with disabled people, with disabilities.

**Samantha**: What was the process like for you for immigrating? What is difficult? Was it fairly easy? Was it incredibly stressful?

**Wadson**: It was a lot easier for me because my- because my mom was living here, and became legalized, and petitioned for me to come. The process was much easier for me, and arriving here at an age where I could just enter school and continue my education, able to assimilate into the culture. Even today, I try very hard to speak with a Haitian accent because I want people to ask me, “where are you from?” (all laugh). Um, I was very fortunate that my mom was living here.

**Samantha**: Um so, when you learned about – so you were 18 when you immigrated here –

**Wadson**: Yeah,

**Samantha:** And then, um, the Guantanamo Bay started to become, um, the refugee crisis around 1991. Were you aware of when it started happening? Do you remember the conditions leading up to it?

**Wadson:** Yes, I was aware of it, of the instability in the government in Haiti, where violence was rampant and people had to flee the country in unseaworthy vessels to seek refuge elsewhere. I remember reading in the papers about the Haitian unaccompanied minors coming to Boston. I had just complete my first year of grad school at that time, and I went to volunteer. It turned out that they were looking for somebody just like myself. And that's how I got involved with working with this, with the children in Waltham back then.

**Samantha**: So, when you immigrated to the US, um you, did they fly you over? Or, or was there a ship? Compared to the, you know, the boats coming over to–

**Wadson:** It was totally different for me, flying American Airlines, to come to New York. I had to face the culture shock, of course, was very difficult, me immigrating here. But uh –

**Samantha**: Even New York for me is a culture shock.

**Wadson**: Was a huge shock for me. I can remember today how difficult it was. But, compared to what, uh, the children that I worked with had to endure, mine was, piece of cake.

**Faye**: Do you remember what your, what your initial reaction to hearing about the Haitian refugees being detained at Guantanamo Bay was?

**Wadson**: I learned very little about it prior to meeting the children in Waltham. It was when I started doing interviews with the children that I learned about the conditions under which they were being detained, and how awful in so many ways, it was. Prior to that, I knew very little, cause personally I'm not one that follows the media as much.

**Samantha**: When you started conducting these interviews, were there any, uh, you know, themes to what led these particular children become unaccompanied? Were there, you know, were there recurring situations that these children went through that led them to being unaccompanied? Were they all pretty individual cases?

**Wadson**: The common theme was violence, fear. And trauma. Many of them have seen their family members taken from right in front of their eyes. Many of them shared stories about how they had to flee from the back door, or the window, hiding inside the house. Many of them have seen their brother or sister being beaten, their family members being beaten. Then talked about how they had to go elsewhere, leaving – to leave behind the community where they grew up, and where they knew everybody, to just go into hiding. They considered themselves lucky to have been able to get on the boat, which was one thing that I could only imagine how difficult how things were. When you look at pictures of what they call a boat, that is always full of people trying to cross the ocean, somebody had to be very desperate to take that risk. And they share stories about how difficult it was for them at sea. They share stories about how they were rescued, and they shared stories about how they were detained, and separated. And, and some of them talked a great deal about how they felt lucky to be alive. But at the same time, there is that guilt factor that enter when thinking about if they left a brother or sister, or a frailing grandmother behind, what happen to them. And the lack of communication: they did not know what happened to them, nor the family back home knew what happened to them once they get on the boat, or where they were in hiding, whether or not they were captured, whether or not they were killed. That feeling, for many of them, was unbearable. They shared stories about the conditions under which they were being detained: the separation, so many people in their tent, the struggle for food, and the uncertainty of, “what next?” Because they couldn't tell when, because many of them stayed in the camp for over two years, and not knowing what's next. I don't know if you seen some pictures, but it's like, dozens of people, living in very difficult conditions. It's not by the river, it's not by the lake, it's not in the forest. It's just horrible situation.

**Samantha:** Did they um, you said that they were rescued by the Coast Guard, did they see it that way? Do you remember their initial reaction, did they – what they expected would happen? Were they happy to see the Coast Guard?

**Wadson**: Many of them did know how far they had to go, they didn't know where they were on Earth, it was the middle of the ocean. They expressed that they were very happy to be rescued by the Coast Guard. Some of the boats, they reported people getting sick and vomiting all over the place, people jumping into the water. They did express that they were very happy to be rescued, and after they were rescued usually what would happen is that they would tell them to leave everything behind, all their personal belongings on the boat. And they did not understand why they had to burn them down. So they would burn it- the Coast Guard would burn the boat with the personal belongings on it. So, talking back later, it was that, it was a very scary moment for them. It's like okay, this ship brought me to here, but it's burned. I'm on a big ship going, where, I don't know, but all my personal belongings are gone, and uh, it was very traumatic. But overall they were happy to be rescued.

**Samantha**: When you heard about it, and you decided you wanted to volunteer and help, did you know you wanted to work with children? Were they assigned to you?

**Faye**: Or how did you formally get involved with working with these children?

**Wadson**: I went to the center in Waltham, and I spoke with the person in charge. And I tell them, I told them about my credentials, and, and, it was at that moment that I was, one of those moments, where I was very happy that I chose the field that I chose too, because right away I was able to put my skill into good practice, to be able to serve my people. Even today, there are so few Haitian psychotherapists in the Greater Boston area. So I could only imagine how happy the people were, and how happy that I was, to be in a position where I could assist. Um, what was difficult then, is that although they just arrived to the States, they were happy to be here, they still hadn't made connection with family members, and they still had to apply for asylum. So the end wasn't there yet, it was part of the process. And they did understand that they could get admitted, or not, so the fear was still there. The fear of being sent back to Haiti was still with many of them. Another common theme that just came to mind was, I was, I was amazed how little trust that they had. I really had to be skilled at establishing trust to show that I meant what I say and say what I meant, and have small contracts that they can actually attain, and then get the prize. Play therapy, being there, eating with them, engaging with them, um, because they became leery of trusting people. Part of the process of being detained was they were interviewed several time, through interpreters, and they were not sure who those people were. And they, giving the right information to the wrong person can cause more harm than good. Where, as for example, kids felt that they couldn't disclose the truth most of the time because if they were to tell people, this is where I come from, and this is where I was hiding, and this is who helped me, and the fear, that is, people will then go bring the information and they can cause more harm than good. So once I learn how difficult it was for them to trust people there, especially everybody was in uniform, the army, the same kind of character they were running from. For many of them it's very difficult to differentiate, this is a good cops, those were the bad cops. And it was very very difficult for them to make that distinction, and be honest, and truthful, and and and breathe a little. So they were always on their guard, so I don't think they ever sleep with their eyes open – er fully shut, but you know, at night. And they did ex – show signs of PTSD, the trauma they have gone through, the nightmares, and the bed-wetting. Um, was a lot of thing that I've been trying to suppress for a long time. Just talking about them brought back some of the emotion, and how difficult it must have been for them, to be in the position, feeling lucky to leave their home, detained in a place that was not so, so welcoming, and finally here and still have to apply, not knowing who to trust and who not to. Um, yeah, sorry, I can go forever.

**Samantha**: That's good, we have a lot of recorders. What were your expectations, when you came to the camp. Had you heard about, you know, the camps, Camp Bulkeley? Did you know about conditions at all? Did you think it was going to be better or worse than when you came into it?

**Wadson**: I learn about the camps that they were in, in Cuba. I love one day to visit and see what it was like. They describe how people were divided, either by age, or by status. Some people were interviewed and place in different part of the camps, and there wasn't much communication or interaction from one side to the next. If you had a family member on one side, you couldn't connect with them. They talk about seeing people being pushed and shoved by security, and at times they couldn’t understand why, they couldn't understand what was the offense, what did this person do to deserve this, because he was just standing there? What happened? Kind of things, and almost as if, part of what they described to me, one person said that it was almost like they were trying to make an example, it's like you know, don't – stay in line, or this will happen to you. So any little thing can get you there, so it's a way to – they were fearful. Um but when I get to Waltham, my expectation was that I'll put myself at service. And I'll – my job was very, very clear. It was to interview the students, these kids, and get some of their information, and also to help place them in foster care. I was able to work directly with the administrators. The Haitian population in the Boston area was very supportive, and many people came to bring their support and also wanted to adopt or be a foster parent for many of the kids. Part of my job was to oversee that. Um very – there is such a thing in Haiti called *restavec.* It's where the family member with the most means will accept a child from another family member who couldn't provide for this child, and the child will come stay at their house. In a sense this child will become more like a servant, and get food, and some education if they are lucky. Knowing that, I wanted to make sure that these children were being place in homes where, where people have the means and the understanding to provide the utmost quality of care for them. So I was very glad to be part of this process, whereas I can screen out some families, and only place kids in places where I felt that they will have a chance to have all the element that they need to prosper. And that's how I ended up connecting with the House of Peace in Ipswich. It a place where people come to – fleeing war torn countries. They were great, and I was able to place many children there, and the whole community was very supportive of them. I've come to the high school many times to meet with teachers, administrators, who did not know – have never met a Haitian student before. And to help assimilate the students, I took many trips to Ipswich and got to know the city very well, and the House of Peace, which is really a great place.

**Samantha**: When you conducted the interviews, what was the format like, kind of –

**Faye:** Was it more so like, an interview, or was it like a, like a client, or the sort of –

**Wadson**: It was more like trying my hardest to make it as informal as it can be, and it was in one sitting, because once I begun to gather information, and I realized that there was a roadblock. Whereas, we been through this hundred of time, why do we have to go through that again, is a way for them, fact-finding? Compare and contrast, to see, you know, to see a thread of telling the truth or not, things like that. So because my task was more to help kids assimilate, to help kids to feel better where they were at. I was not working for government agency in this instance, whereas this information were for the INS, or the agencies such. I realized what I had to do was to spend more time playing, spend more time getting to know them and them getting to know me. Then it was a lot easier for them to realize that I had to understand who you are, your personality type, see what you like and dislike, so that I can help place you in the best home. Because I assess the homes, and I don't want to put you in a place where you love to play soccer and all they want to do all day is play hockey. That would not be a good match in that sense. Then I realized that, these kids have a lot to share, more information than I needed. Whereas it was more like a cry for help. And I was able to identify that, this, the need for counseling, the need for a nurturing home, where perhaps a mother stays at home. Kids having nightmares require somebody who is available, so that when they start crying, somebody to reassure them. Sometimes looking at placing somebody with sibling of the same age, so they can have rapport, buddy system. Looking back, it probably would have taken ten of me to do the job justice, because they came with a lot of psychology problems.

**Faye:** Were most of the kids around the same age? Or was it a large span?

**Wadson**: They were from all range, from 8 to 20. Some kids did not even know their age. One kid, they had to go get some dental record to figure out how old he was. They thought he was 6, where in fact he was 9. Many of them had very little school. And many of them couldn't go to school in Haiti, and were in Cuba for a couple years, so they were three years behind in schooling. Add that, add to that trauma. Then they, now 15, meant to be a freshman in high school, where as the lack of the, the requirements. So it was very difficult for them. And a school has to be very understanding, and has the resources to provide the one-on-one or the after school care, or whatever the student will need, and some schools did not have an ESL program, and what to do with that now you have the student

**Samantha:** Was your role to find homes for them? Was it to-

**Wadson**: My role was really (Janitor opens door “thank you Rob”), my role was to assist with the home placement, and also to help stabilize them. And I had one summer to do it.

**Samantha**: So these were children who were already accepted into the United States. They just needed homes, they need to acclimate? Or were they still going through the process of figuring out whether or not they were going to be deported back or staying?

**Wadson**: They were here, in the States, and, but they still had to apply for asylum once they are here. So it was still part of the process. They were not here on the permanent status. Many of them fear still retaliation or being sent back home, because what if I go to the interview process, and I don't pass, do I get back, shipped back? Things like that. So for many of them it took a while before they became legalized.

**Samantha**: So was the majority of your work US or Cuba based? Or pretty even? Would you say you spent most of your time with the minors in the US or on Cuba?

**Wadson:** I was never in Cuba. All the minors came from Cuba to the US where I worked with them in Waltham.

**Faye:** What year were you doing this in?

**Wadson:** It was '91.

**Faye:** Okay, so towards –

**Wadson**: Yes, and I was only able to be with them for a summer, because I went to – I was in grad school at Syracuse. And every summer I came to Boston to work, cause my uncles were living here. So I had to go back again in September. So from July, August, and being of September, I was diligently working long hours, from early working to late night.

**Faye**: So after that summer was over, was that kind of it? Or did you follow up with –

**Wadson**: After the summer was over, that wasn't it. I went and complete my second year at Syracuse, and, where there was a wave of adult refugees in that region, so that kept me busy there as well. I managed to work with the [inaudible] church, with Harvey Pinion, in Syracuse, and got every involved with working with Haitians there as well. And then after I completed grad school, I came to practice in Boston, and continued to work with many of the minors while there were still at the House of Peace, going through high school. And I followed them until they went to college, or they move out of the region. I still keep in touch with two of them who still live in Boston. We get together as often as possible.

**Samantha**: When you visited Guantanamo Bay, what was your impression?

**Wadson**: I never been–

**Samantha:** Never visited? Okay.

**Wadson**: I would love to go there one day. I never been there. But from what the students, the kids, were describing it. Getting on the ship, the ship *Hamilton,* they were very happy to get on the ship. And then they got to Cuba, I guess many of them thought they were coming to the States, because the soldiers were speaking English. And then from there, it's like a, I think they did a poor job of communicating and sharing information with them, giving them a means to send information back home to let parents know. If fact, some of the kids that remain at the House of Peace, that I continue to follow, came a time when I realized that the service that I can provide to them could not go any further because they kept talking about how, even – imagine two years in Guantanamo, a year here, they still haven't had a chance to share information with their family members, to let them know that they still alive, or not. I took it upon myself, and took a trip to Haiti. Where as I took pictures, and had the facts, and kept detailed information of where they lived, and mapped it as much as I could, and went on a family hunt. I wish that back then that I had a video crew, to document us, but it was one difficult challenge. In one section I had to cross a river, I don't swim very well, and that's the only way to go through, water up to your neck, and fighting the current. I was very fortunate that I found all the five families in different part of the countries. And what prepared me to find the families, one, I can connect well with people, I can read people and try to convey myself very well. But Haiti was at the time, when people don't share information, and when you go to a region, somebody who does not look familiar, you start asking people about so-and-so, the last thing people want to do is tell you who so-and-so is and where so-and-so lives. I was skilled at convincing people, who led me to – uh, where they live is not like, you know, cross street, number five, you can send them mail. Its rural section, where the mail system is almost non existent. There isn't a address, that you can go to. Its like, you see that big tree, you take a left, and it – so I was successful at finding every family. Took pictures of family members, give them the gifts that was sent, get their information to connect, if there twas a phone, there was a place where they could receive elsewhere, and brought it back to the kids and –

**Faye:** What were the reactions like?

**Wadson:** I, I felt like, Jesus returning back to, from Heaven. It was amazing. Just knowing that making that connection that knowing, whoever is still alive was alive. I did bring some bad news but bad news is news because it’s at least they knowing they can go through the process and uh, I think that changed a great deal. Even grades went up (laughs) after that moment. So it was a powerful feeling disconnected with your family members, and not knowing really what happened to your mom and dad after they were taken, whether or not they still alive or dead. It’s no wonder that they couldn’t breathe, no wonder that they couldn’t trust anybody no wonder that they were not, forth, forthcoming to give information. And the transition from Haiti to Guantanamo to here if it was different for them because the fear was still there, they can be pushed, harassed, detained, um...not knowing when the next step is, they talk even about people who chose to return home because they know that it would be hard to be home, but the fear that their grandmother or whoever is unprotected and more vulnerable without anybody to protect them, if the people come back. And the uncertainty of sitting there, heat exhaustion, just sitting there, and drove people to back and face the worst, at least they knew what they were going to face. The uncertainty was very difficult for them.

**Samantha:** Um, when you found these families, how long did it take you, or how long was your trip?

**Wadson:** It was about a week trip to go find the families. It's difficult to travel through Haiti because I hundred miles could take you six hours. Um....And the roads were bad 20 years ago. And yeah it was about a week to go to different part of the country to find them.

**Samantha:** Um. I just want to ask you so much more about that, that's incredible. You know, um, when, when you went there how are you prepared to you know handle the worst news or how are you Um, thinking about dealing and talking with these families who might still be missing or how... What was going through your head?

**Wadson:** It's one of those situations, and thinking back now listening to the questions so, so well put together um... At that moment I was still focused on solution and uh, and focusing on how to, get information out to be able to get to my destination. How do I get people to lead me to where I want to go, was more the challenge um... The news unfortunately I've heard so many bad news from the hundreds of interviews that I've done with kids um....listening to a kid telling you they witnessed it themselves as opposed to go back to find out that oh, John did not make it. I, I conditioned myself to, to be prepared to the bad news because usually when somebody is taken from your home they usually don't come back, if they do come back or they don't come back well, um. That was a reality back then.

**Samantha:** Where you the only one that you knew of who went back to find, families for children or was there a community that was helping you along the way?

**Wadson:** I was the only one. Back then I was working, I started working for a clinic in Boston and then I was about to get the clinic to allow me to continue to work with children as a therapist so that uh, keep in touch, and they are very grateful, I was very grateful that they allow me to travel so far, because sometimes going to a meeting with teachers going to a meeting with administrators and to advocate for them, and got to help somebody had a panic attack. I get in the car and drive I mean, and the hours that I spent there I couldn't build for them (laughs). So I was just grateful that the clinic I work with allow me to continue to work with the children and it was through that process of doing counseling with them and I realized.....

(Poster Falls off the wall, **Faye** laughs, : whoops)

**Wadson:**  Falling poster! I couldn't continue to work that I was doing I couldn't get the result I wanted to get uh, so I realize that that was the key element was to go to open that box. And come back. And I am the only person I know that went um, that brought that hope that there were other people who found different ways to connect the children with their families because for those kids I don't think that they can move on (chuckles) without that connection.

**Samantha:** Did the families expressed interest in coming over or was there any or was it mostly joyful ? Was it regretful? Was the initial meeting...

**Wadson:** Joyful mostly. Regretful because for the longest time they thought that this kid died and they felt that nothing they could've done themselves to protect them, I guess that's the worst thing as a parent. Myself, feeling so powerless that you cannot help your own child. Like my daughter is in school in Florida, she, got a call she's hospitalized, first thing I want to do is get on the phone and book a ticket and head over, and not being able to do that... For any parent it's hard to imagine. I, the idea of coming over was not something that was expressed because it's not possible to come over. It's a long process for a poor Haitian to get to the State. They would not meet the visa requirements.

**Samantha:** We read in one of the books a woman who had, uh, left her family in the middle of the night um, and she didn't really get a chance to say goodbye. Was that a sudden decision, did many of these children have, like, their parents blessing? Did they, did their parents know where they had gone, or was it a runaway situation or was it the family couldn't go but the child could?

**Wadson:** They've smaller kids, shared stories about how (coughs) somebody came to the house, it was small enough to hide in a tiny space in the dark, or they have heard stories about other people, family people attacked. Um, this is what you do. You start running and you don't come back. Um, for the older kids, some of them were involved in fighting for democracy are going to meeting or passing leaflets and information in the communities and were known for that and they became target and some of them had a chance to their parents that I, I can feel the heat, um, so I think it's time for me to leave the community until things calm down and they never came back. So family member did not know whether or not they were captured or not. Even if you said goodbye to your family if you don't have the means to keep in touch... So it makes it very very difficult. For younger kids, most of them,um, left in very harsh situations. Some of them did come with parents and when they got to the camp they were separated by age and did not know what happened, but there were very few who came with parents.

**Faye:** Do you have any particular stories um, of when you were able to connect with the families in Haiti, um, in terms of how the families reacted or, from hearing you know, the news their children were still alive.

**Wadson:** I think it was a mutual happiness gathering kind of things and I was very happy to meet them and they were happy to meet me and they were ready to use their last pennies to get me meal. Haitians are so welcoming. I like this question because it makes me smile (laughs). And it's a good part about the work that I've done with these kids and meeting with their families and finding them, it doesn't matter if it took me 10 hours by bus, foot,donkey, crossing rivers to get there, but the moment you get there it's like, the only way I could describe it, I remember a woman told me about giving birth, it's like once she sees the baby and she forgets the pain that she just gone through. I think it's something similar, you forget how hard it is, it was, and then you so happy in the moment. And then to just be able to connect people, I think uh, was, it was, heartwarming for me as well, to be in a position where I can make that happen.yeah. And coming back I got utmost respect for these kids, uh,

**Faye:** Were they more open with you afterwards?

**Wadson:** Oh yes. So we can talk about teefee fee, we can talk about other things, even the harsh, even the harsh thing we could talk about now they can have closure. They can start grieving, they can start planning. Even the bad news, we were able to process through them. I guess it's one of the reason why I got in my field of work, this was very important that work, and so many thing happened and I can say that that experience prepared me to be an agent of change after the earthquakes which was you know the major catastrophe and that required my help whereas I went to Haiti about 10 times after the earthquake to do work so I guess it was my first training for greater things to come. What I will do differently if I were to do it again of course as I mention it was my first year, after my first year of grad school... Would be not only place kids in foster care but also have a plan for them to see a counselor because they needed it badly.

**Samantha:** It's obviously impossible to work with these kids without getting attached, um, so how did you find yourself, like, you know, helping them find closure and moving on or helping , You know, we were told over a hundred children you've helped, was it, was the fact that there were so many, did they, was it hard to connect one-on-one like that for some people or was it fairly easy because there were so many?

**Wadson:** It should have been difficult but it was very easy to connect one-on-one. Because each of them has a very distinctive story, each of them has, had something special about them and their needs were so different. What they had in common, was that they were survivors, they were traumatized and they felt lucky at time. At a time in which they were, they grabbed on something to prevent, to fight back, within their small body. I tried to reassure them it was a wise choice to flee, because what could you do with someone who, big man with a weapon. Yes, I was able to connect with them in the short time very well. Many of, some of them, went out of states in foster care, some of them found family members who were far away and we were able to connect them with them. Um, and those who stayed locally, it was almost impossible to keep in touch with everybody. And since there was six, five, six of them, in one location at the House of Peace so I was able to stay connected with this group.

**Faye:** Did they tend to connect with each other well, or is it kind of a mixed thing since it's such a big group of kids?

**Wadson:** at first it was difficult because they were conditioned, because of separation for this thing, for that thing on the camp. Then we were able to come together as a unit, using the analogy of Toussaint Louverture. **The children were able to, we are in Haiti (I don’t think this is right. He is saying something in reference to the Haitian Revolution)**, talking about we are all roots of the same tree, realizing that each of them were each root of the same tree, and that they had a common role, as far as supporting each other for the tree to continue to grow and prosper, so they had to help one another. At the house back then, they were all the children from different part of the world, there were some kids from Vietnam for example, and one of them was interested in medicine and one of the Haitian kids would have panic attacks, crazy, he'll remind him to get, get, get a bag and blow into it and, and, it was amazing to see people from different part of the world helping and working together and would play basketball together. Trip to the ocean sometime bring back bad memories...yeah they did a great job of staying together and staying connected. Even the two gentlemen are now married with children here, whenever we see each other we usually, it's usually the three of us which we did last week. I think we should all take a trip to Guantánamo. Let's do it.

**Faye:** Agreed. Right now. Let's just go.

(Wadson laughs)

**Samantha:** um, yeah. Do you have....is there anything else?

**Faye:** I would love to hear more stories. In general.

**Samantha:** Yeah, me too. Just in general.

**Wadson**: I have one story that was about... Kids who face so much violence and traumatized by it. One of the kids actually did kill himself and he was a....he kill his girlfriend and then killed himself...that was very difficult for me to, to deal with, and thinking about what could I have done differently for this kid who lived in Boston and I know there wasn't anything I could've done differently but you know, it's just like, whenever something bad happen you wish you could have done something to prevent it, but this kid... Kill himself, kill his girlfriend, and kill himself... He was one of the kids I went to find his, uh, his family and when I care, my friends at the House of Peace, we had to put together a funeral for him because he had no family here. Was about to get a priest, a Haitian priest, and a couple, a pastor, couple of other friends who went to the House of Peace and had the ceremony there, had the kid cremated and his ashes,uh, Kerry have the great idea of perhaps take it back to Haiti. My next trip to Haiti I took it with me and I was about to look for his mother again who then many years later was no longer there and nobody knew where she was and she...and so I....got in touch with Kerry and say I can't find the family and the best outcome would be to put his ashes in the river that flows through his town and that's what we did. And that was a very sad moment for me, um, carrying that home... It's like, It was much easier for me to bring photos...and connect it... But so I was able to bring him home. That is one of the saddest stories. Um. Yeah. Um. But all my work 20 years ago has prepared me for the earthquake, whereas I became one of the few therapist who went back home to do work with doctors, teachers, care providers and how to conduct, how to work with traumatized individuals. I belong to a medical team and I would go to Haiti, with this, I go to Haiti with this team once a year to work at first with children of all ages and kids and adults who,uh, disabled after the earthquake and there was a large number of Haitians who became disabled there is this team called Healing Hands for Haiti we were able to build a much bugger clinic to meet the needs and... Going to the school, going to different facilities to provide care and the training...was rewarding. Another thing that I do is I fly kites. I am kite Team Haiti and I go in competition internationally and represent Haiti and so I was able, after the earthquakes, I used kites as an instrument, a therapeutic instrument and was able, to tent cities, get some kites up and gathered a lot of people and was able to conduct some group counseling, using kite as a bait. (Laughs). And um, I guess, having had a chance to work with these children really paved the way for the kind of work I do. I work in clinics, I work in school, I work with immigrant populations, I teach ESL to adults, and get them assimilated to this country. And I guess part of that is like, working with this schools when the kids couldn't speak English and there was nobody to advocate for them and I learned how difficult it is some time to advocate you don't know the language. So... Teaching immigrants, adults to access services um... I was able also to work with the Haitian children who came from Haiti after the earthquakes and Movette High School, and Muldern High School,and Everett High School and to help them to understand, deal with their trauma, work with the schools to help them assimilate much better and I was asked once to present at the symposium at The Harvard school of medicine on how to work with people, children who are traumatized and I was pleased to be able to work, to teach my colleagues about best practices and what I learned along the ways so…

**Samantha**: you said that you like your Haitian accent... Did you find the children, um, were they proud of their Haitian, were they trying, were they mostly trying to become maybe Americanized they wanted to forget it, how did they respond to their heritage?

**Wadson**: The condition under which I came here...it's... I would say it's responsible for the person that I am. I want to come here...there was a process I go through that was very easy, I was still at home, get on a plane, flew here...I told you in the beginning it's difficult for me to do this interview because a lot of the information I...I did forget and maybe for good reason. I could understand why some of the kids was try to assimilate very fast, and try to be more Americanized than Haitian because... Having to remember the atrocity...and all the hardship they had to go through to come here, sometimes that can be considered as a good coping mechanism of forgetting. Um...but ultimately, we realized it's not the country. It's the people that in effect push us to, to...to prepare ourselves to be able to go change that. The two gentlemen, for example, that I stay in contact with have come back home several times, we mostly only speak in Creole when we get together and keep our identity and they are much older now, in their 30s and so, therefore have grown past that. But I can remember, even when couldn't speak English well enough, we would prefer to be identified as,as themselves without the label.(To Faye)-I like it when you smile like that. She says, smile like what?

(Samantha and Faye mumble)

**Wadson**: You have to ask questions.

**Samantha**: I know, I just want to listen (laughs). I think we got all that we came with but you know...

**Faye:** Is there anything we didn't touch upon that you'd like to share? Anything in terms of what your experience?

**Wadson**: I was thinking how brave those kids were. Being in the situation, maybe I would've done the same thing. I don't swim. To get on a boat with tons of people not knowing where, in the middle of the dark... Forget about resiliency, that will to survive... Yeah I think bravery, that's what comes to mind and I will label them as brave individuals who have taken a great leap of faith and it's unfortunate that they had to endure what they had to endure. It's unfortunate that the conditions were not as, as pleasant in Guantánamo as it could be. Whether not they were abused, physically or sexually, whether or not they were... And I won't talk about that. Unfortunately. I am trying to suppress those emotions but I think they were very brave.

**Samantha**: The point of this project is that we want people to be aware of these brave people and um, just for future, would those two young men that you're still in contact with, do you think they'd ever want to be interviewed? Or if you were to interview them or connect them with somebody who would because I'm sure their stories should be heard.

**Wadson**: One of them possibly, but the other one, and I ask, he was definitely not interested and then I try not to... Not to push too far but I can see in his eyes he has his reasons. If we were to interview them, if they were to agree to it, I can help craft the questions so it's culturally indicated and emotionally...fit.

**Samantha**: We'd probably get a professional, not just a students, you no, for something like that project.

**Wadson**: Because at times, it's best not to open a jar that you cannot control what comes out of. And it could be more damaging to them. Because I thought this was going to be easy for me, and just sit here, and inside of me, is just like..ugh...boiling.

**Samantha**: thank you so much for, you know, you don't have to worry about whether or not your helpful, this was amazing to listen to and you're, the only thing we got about you was that you helped 100, you know, minors, and like, that story but you going back to haiti and actually finding the families...like I want everyone to know about how amazing that is.

**Wadson**: If I look hard enough I might find some pictures.

**Faye:** If you do, and he would like to share them that would be fantastic. If you think of any other contacts might be interested in getting involved with project, or if you have any photographs like you said, you give us some articles that is very exciting.

**Wadson**: Believe it or not that was me 20 years ago. No dredds.

**Samantha:** You look pretty much the same though.

**Wadson**: I aim not to age.

**Samantha**: So far so good.

**Wadson**: Thank you.