

Rose Saurel interviewed by Judith Atongi
October 19, 2020
Queens, New York City

Judith Atongi: My name is Judith Atongi and I am interviewing Rose Saurel. Do you give me permission to record this oral history?

Rose Saurel: Yes I do.

JA: Please fill in as much basic information as you are willing to share:

RS : Rose Saurel, Age: 22, Occupation: Supervisor at Starbucks, Racial Identity: Haitian, Gender Identity: Female, Sexual Orientation: Female

JA: Where are you from?

RS: I am from Haiti. It is a Caribbean country that shares its Island which is the Hispaniola with the Dominican Republic to the east.

JA: Why did you leave your country of origin?

RS: I left because I wanted a better life. The hardship back home was too much. I need to change something to help my family back home.

JA: Why did you decide to come to the United States instead of another country?
America is the land of "great opportunities".

RS: I chose the U.S. because I wanted to get away from my family and start a new life.

JA: What do you miss about your country of origin?

RS: The food especially and my mum as well.

JA: What don't you miss about your country of origin?

RS: I don't miss the hard life. The poverty rate was higher. I had to always be late for school because I had to make money before I go to school.

JA: What did your friends and family say when you told them you were leaving?

RS: Actually, my parents, especially my Dad at that point, were happy for me. He knew I was leaving for a better life but my friends were sad because we all were not going to be the same anymore. We had dreams but due to me leaving, it had to change.

JA: What were your expectations of the United States?

RS:I thought what I watched on TV was real but it wasn't. For example, I never saw a show that showed the killing of Black people unjust. I saw that when I came here and that changed my idea and expectations of this place.

JA: Tell me about your journey to New York. What did it entail? Did it go according to plan? Coming to New York, I was in the care of a Flight Attendant. She was nice and friendly. She showed me how to wear my belt and ring for help. It went according to my sister's plan.

JA: When and with whom did you come to NYC?

RS: I came with Flight attendants. They were my guide to my destination.

JA: How did NYC meet, and fail to meet your expectations?

RS: I did not expect much from coming to New York because I already knew every place has its problems but what hurts my feelings is the school system. Being that I didn't speak any English, I was given English exams to take and no translation was given. My sister had to read and translate for me.

JA: How were you received upon arriving in your neighborhood specifically, the United States more generally?

RS: I first lived with my sister in Brooklyn. She thought about the life of New Yorkers. They are the busiest people. Always moving and making money.

JA: How did you adjust to a new language and/or culture in NYC?

RS: I started watching more English speaking movies to learn how to speak English. I joined group projects. I kept my culture but I learnt other cultures. For instance, I made friends with people from Mexico and I got invited to their annual celebration and I enjoyed myself.

JA: What new opportunities were available to you upon your arrival in NYC?

RS: Um, not much was offered to me. I felt I was starting from the beginning of everything that I ever had. I was starting a class that I already completed in Haiti. I was making new friends again and I was being introduced to a new life.

JA: Were any opportunities denied to you because you were an immigrant?

RS: Oh yes, I was not allowed to apply for a job. I was applying though but I never got the job offer.

JA: What did the assimilation project look like for you?

RS: Seriously, at first I wanted to go back home. Back home, being a pulse size woman was okay. You are considered beautiful but here I was being called "too fat" or "not society accepted"

type of woman. It was the hardest thing and worst feeling ever. Everyone looked at you differently. Yes you are beautiful but that, does not mean you are accepted.

JA: What in your life keeps you connected to your nation of origin?

RS: I still watch movies from back home just for the fun of it but I still call my mom and siblings back home just to talk. The food, the good Haitian food here keeps me connected back home.

JA: How do you remain connected to the people still living in your home country.

RS: Thanks to technology. I call them all the time.

JA: How do you navigate a bilingual life?

RS: Actually, it's fun because with my job as a customer service, sometimes the people I serve do not speak English but they speak my language and I help them with whatever they need. Sometimes, I forget that I work with English speaking people but it's fun really.

JA: Where have you lived in NYC and why?

RS: I now live in Queens. The rent in Queens is cheaper. I used to live with my sister in Brooklyn but I moved out so now I live alone.

JA: What was the hardest part about your moving to NYC?

RS: Knowing that the laws of NYC is different from back home. They are similar but different in comparison. That is one hard thing for me. Knowing that the laws are different and I have to behave in a manner that is accepted.

JA: What's your favorite part about living in New York?

RS: The holidays celebrations. Christmas in New York is one of my favorite parts of living here. I once watched the ball drop and wished everyone a happy New Year.

JA: How has your neighborhood changed since your arrival?

RS: I moved out for my sister's place like a year ago and my new home had been the same ever since. It is a quiet place and the people love it.

JA: How has your reception in your neighborhood, and in the United States more generally changed overtime?

RS: Personally speaking, the violence and killing of African Americans has increased this year. My neighborhood has always been a quiet place and it still is. America still needs some changes but it happens to be one of the best places to be.

JA: Is there anything you fear because you're an immigrant to the United States?

RS: Right now, I have applied for citizenship and I'm waiting for the final documents. Being an immigrant can be hard especially when you're looking for a job and that was an issue for me but not anymore.

JA: Do you ever feel you need to hide who you are being an immigrant in the US?

RS: I remember I applied to many jobs and each time I went for the interview, I had the feeling that they would hire me but they didn't so the next time I applied and a different race and I got the job but I refused to go. That was the only time.

JA: What would you change about the current U.S. immigration system?

RS : I would like people to treat immigrants with the same respect they would want in return.

JA: If you've become, or are on the path to citizenship, please tell me about that process ,how has the politics of the last decade impacted your experience as an immigrant in the United States?

RS: I wish to not respond to any question requiring politics.

JA: Last question before we go, The Haitian Earthquake in 2010, how did it impact your life?

RS: The earthquake was one of the devastating life moments I have ever felt. Many homes were destroyed. People lost their businesses and parts of my house literally fell off. When it happened, I felt like my life was over. It's one of the moments in life that no one wants to go through but life happens and I am glad that no one in my family was hurt.

JA: Is there anything that I should have asked that I didn't ask?

RS: No