

Pamella Walker Interviewed by Casey Walker
March 16, 2020
Milford street

My name is Casey Walker. I am interviewing Pamella Walker. Do you give me permission to record this oral history?

Pamella Walker: Yes mam

Casey Walker: Where did you grow up?

PW: I grew up in Jamaica.

CW: Why did you leave your country of origin?

PW: I left my country to have a better life for me and my children.

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

PW: I miss the organic food and warm weather. The people are nice and friendly.

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

PW: I don't miss the crime rate because it was very high and the food is very expensive and unaffordable.

CW: What did your family and friends say when you told them you were leaving? Did they say something sad? Happy? Mean?

PW: My friends and family were very happy because they knew I would help them out financially with food and clothing and other things. Even for their kids to attend school with the school fees. Provide books for them so they can have a better education.

CW: What were your expectations of the United States? Be specific.

PW: I thought in the U.S.A you would survive with only one job rather than doing two jobs. I thought rent would be affordable but no it's not.

CW: Tell me about your journey to New York and did it go according to plan?

PW: Yes it went according to plan. I was seven months pregnant with my third child which is Casey who is doing this interview now. People were saying that the airline would accommodate me. On the day of my flight, I cried at the airport and left behind my two eldest children but I was happy at the same time to come to America.

CW: When and with whom did you come to New York City with? Why does it matter?

PW: I came to New York City in December 2000 with my husband.

CW: How did New York City meet and fail to meet your expectations?

PW: New York City failed to meet my expectations. I worked for 4 hours for 5 days and got paid \$6 an hour. I had to pay for a babysitter and a metro card for the bus. New York City met my expectations because I did not pay for college for my first child and that was quite a blessing.

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

PW: I was one of the poorest in my neighborhood. Some people would stare at me when I held my laundry bag to do my laundry. The clothes worn by me and children were not modern and people would chit chat while some were friendly to us.

CW: How did you adjust to a new language and culture in NYC?

PW: It was hard for me to adjust to the culture, especially clothing. We had two purchased clothes for different seasons where the income was low.

CW: How did you learn the English language?

PW: I spoke English since I was in Jamaica so it wasn't a problem for me.

CW: What new opportunities were available to you upon your arrival in New York?

PW: The opportunities that were available coming to New York City was that I could work as a home health aid. I pursued my GED and that was also a blessing for me.

CW: Tell me specifically how you felt?

PW: I tried to fit in but I was lonely staying in the house and no friends and family are close by. You have to make phone calls before you get to a friend or family home to see if they're there. They could be outside of an area with their jobs. That was sort of hard for me because we don't have to make a phone call. I could just knock on the door to see if they're there because most of the time they are there. Anyways I try to fit in the situation.

CW: Did people reject you?

PW: Not really. I didn't see any rejection in any sort.

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

PW: No I didn't experience that.

CW: What did the simulation project look like for you?

PW: It was hard for me to fit in with the transit like the train to pass through the tunnel. Being in New York City is a very fast-moving journey since you have to run and catch the train or bus and it can be overwhelming.

CW: Can you tell me more?

PW: Well you have to keep hustling and bustling everywhere even when you're going to the store, you have to buy what you're buying quickly. Especially when I had to do four hours of home health aide four to one. I had to take the train or the bus to go and pick up the kids from school. I could not work longer hours because of picking my kids up from school and it was very overwhelming.

CW: Where have you lived in New York City and why?

PW: I lived in East New York and I don't really have a specific reason for living there because everywhere you go, the rent is high.

CW: Did your children like where you lived?

PW: Yes they liked where I lived but sometimes it's noisy and could be hustle and bustle. Sometimes it could be quiet but you know we have to go with the flow.

CW: Was where you lived very spacious?

PW: No because I had two bedrooms. One for the kids. One for my husband and I. So it was sort of not so spacious because what happened was that the things were crapped together and not enough space.

CW: What was the hardest part about your move to New York City? What troubles did you face?

PW: Yes I faced troubles because there was a shootout years ago in the area where I lived. A guy shot himself and shot his girlfriend. Opposite there are about two more shootouts. Two people got killed. So that put a fear in me not to live there for long and to find a better place where it is safer for my kids and I. So I moved out less than two years ago.

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

PW: My favorite part of living in New York is the train and buses have accessibility. You don't need a driver's license if you don't want to. The buses and trains would take 30 minutes so it is accessible.

CW: Can you tell me more about why you love living in New York City and any more memories?

PW: The people are nice and friendly. They like to give when you're in need. Sometimes you don't have to ask them but by the look in your face, they see that you need it.

CW: How has your neighborhood changed since your arrival?

PW: Yeah the neighborhood changed because a lot of crimes, burglary, homicide was less compared to previous years and they are building more low-income houses that are more affordable.

CW: How has your reception in your neighborhood and in the United States generally changed over time?

PW: I got to fit in with some cultures. I eat Chinese food. Rent is more expensive and also I had a full-time job where I could buy clothes for my kids. The crime rate is not so high the way it used to be years ago. People try to be more productive even the youth in the community try to stay out of gangs.

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

PW: I would change Daca rules because most young people will be eligible for green cards. If they are going to school or work. People on Medicaid and food stamps would be also eligible for green cards especially when they haven't committed a crime. So that would be a big change for the people.

CW: Is there anything else you would want them to change?

PW: Yes I want them to lower the rent. The rent is very high and a lot of people are moving out of New York City to other cheaper states to live. I'm telling you this rent is very very ridiculous.

CW: How has the politics of the last decade impacted your experience as an immigrant in the United States?

PW: Politics has changed some of the presidents like to go to war. Immigrants got killed during hurricane season and houses got damaged and didn't get help. A lot of people are out of jobs and that is really really serious.

CW: As an immigrant are there any fears that you have? discomfort?

PW: Sure I have fears and discomfort because what really happened for instance, God forbid someone just comes and knocks you to the ground. Sometimes people end up in the hospital unconsciously and never regain consciousness.

CW: Anymore you want to say?

PW: We immigrants work very hard and if we want to be prosperous we have to work hard. By God's help work to achieve our goals because this is the land of dreams. God bless America.

CW: Why did you come to the U.S. over another country?

PW: I came to the U.S. over another country because it's a land of dreams and if you work hard and are conscious of what you're doing you will reach your goal even to become a nurse, teacher, or doctor. You can achieve your goal and dream if you work hard.

CW: How did your family try to remain a connected family?

PW: We are a connected family because we call each other. We send a text. We talk on WhatsApp. Even Facebook. So we have always been there checking on one another.

CW: What are the fun memories you have with your family?

PW: We can laugh especially when the kids are giving jokes. We laugh and share together and even when we make a meal that is nutritious the kids will say what did you make today.

CW: Did you miss your family when you moved to America?

PW: Not really because I know that life would be better for me and them. I could help them out financially when I can but not all the time. I help out with food, shelter, and clothing.

CW: Is there more you want to say?

PW: America is a developed country and there are a lot of opportunities here like free childcare. Depends on the income you make you can get free education. You can get Medicaid and food stamps.

CW: Thank you for recording this oral history.

PW: You welcome my third child.