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**Fils-Aime, Pierre, oral history interview conducted by Lina Raciukaitis, March 23, 2018;
Caribbean Heritage in Cambridge Oral History Project; Cambridge Historical Society**



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Oral History Interview with Pierre Fils-Aime

Caribbean Heritage in Cambridge Oral History Project

Interview conducted by Lina Raciukaitis on March 23, 2018

at the Cambridge Public Library Main Branch, Cambridge, MA

Note: Pierre Fils-Aime edited the transcript so that it is no longer a word for word transcription, but instead a representative written document, until page 7, as noted.

Lina Raciukaitis: Okay. My name is Lina Raciukaitis and this is an oral history recorded as part of the Cambridge Historical Society Caribbean Oral History Project. Today is Friday, March 23rd, 2018. It is around 11:30 and I'm at the Cambridge Public Library Main Branch in Cambridge, Massachusetts with Pierre Fils-Aime. Pierre, do you consent to being recorded for this interview?

Pierre Fils-Aime: Yes I do.

LR: Okay, I'm going to start with some basic questions about you. So first, what is your full name?

PF: My full name is Pierre Paul Arthur Fils-Aime.

LR: And when and where were you born?

PF: I was born in Haiti on March 25th, 1965.

LR: And where did you grow up?

PF: I grew up in Saint-Marc, in my hometown, in Haiti. It's at the center of the country. It's a coastal town. When I became seventeen years old I relocated in Port-au-Prince, which is the capital city, and then that's where I finish high school.

LR: Why did you relocate?

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PF: Because I was accepted at one of the best schools in Haiti, which is a Catholic school, all boys school and I was excited to be there, and my parents were so proud that I got accepted.

LR: What was the name of the school?

PF: Saint-Louis de Gonzague.

LR: Did you have to apply?

PF: Yes, I did.

LR: Yeah. And –

PF: And I had to take exams.

LR: An exam... and before then you were going to school in Saint-Marc?

PF: Yes, and it was Ecole Frère Hervé which is a Catholic school as well. I had all my education from kindergarten through high school in Catholic schools.

LR: And what were the names of your mother and father?

PF: My mother's name was Rhea Metellus. When she married my father she became Rhea Fils-Aime because my father's name is Antoine Aristilde Fils-Aime.

LR: And what did they both do for a living?

PF: Okay. My mother was an elementary school teacher, all her life. And my father was a farmer. He owned about twenty hectares of land.

LR: Were they from the same town?

PF: Yes, both of them were from Saint-Marc. At first, my mother used to travel every day to go teach in the countryside and come back home in the afternoon. My father was doing the same thing, his farm was in the countryside, he'd go early morning, work, and return home every afternoon. In the meantime, kids were in school and we were always back home before our parents got in.

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LR: What kind of work did your father do, in the, in the countryside?

PF: Well, my father was a farmer.

LR: Yeah.

PF: So he used to manage his farm and provide employment for a lot of peasants. He produced mostly rice but also watermelon and various types of other produce.

LR: And was your mother a teacher of like a specific subject, or was she, of a specific grade?

PF: My mother was an elementary school teacher.

LR: And did you have any siblings?

PF: Yes, I have two younger sisters in the nuclear family but my father had other kids outside of the marriage.

LR: And what was it like in your family growing up?

PF: Oh, it was joyful. I'm the only boy from my nuclear family, and I love my two sisters. Since a very young age I tended to have a sense of purpose and leadership. So I conducted myself in such a way to be like a role model not only for my sisters but also for all the younger kids in my family. I was the captain of my middle school soccer team and then I got hurt playing soccer, which caused me to change into volleyball, and I discovered that I had more talent in volleyball than in soccer. As I mentioned earlier, I came to the U.S. with the national volleyball team. Therefore, I had a very joyful youth. I was very lucky to have had such wonderful parents who were always there for us. It doesn't matter if it were for volleyball or soccer, my father would leave his farm around mid-day or early afternoon to be there watching the game and supporting me.

LR: What was your middle school and high school like? Or, primary school, secondary school? What was that experience like?

PF: It's a little complicated. We were lucky to be raised in a middle-class type of family that never had a problem feeding us and sending us to private schools. But around that time school was very tough in Haiti. Teachers had the right to spank kids, use objects to reprimand students. The idea of knowing that you're going to get spanked in school every day scared me to death and it interfered with my ability to give my best in school. But in the end, I got my momentum and did fairly well. After all, I was always a joyful kid, I socialized very well and my leadership skills got me to become the captain of my middle school soccer team.

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LR: And what other subjects really sparked your interest?

PF: Well, I was always curious intellectually, I read a lot. And I admired people with high academic levels. During court criminal sessions in my hometown I took pleasure attending criminal trials. I was one of the rare kids in my block who enjoyed going to court just to listen to lawyers using flamboyant statements to defend their clients. I got very inspired by that. I always felt I should become an intellectual. Money was never the main purpose of my life. I always believed that I should be able to show my capacity and talents in writing to express my ideas. I was always more into the intellect than in the material.

LR: Did – do you think that made you different from like, your other friends, or was everyone sort of on that same page?

PF: Well, I don't know if that made me different, but most of my friends know that about me. Although the soccer and volleyball teams had a committee with a president and general secretary, I was the one they called for everything they needed to write for the team, probably because they knew I had the capacity. I enjoyed a lot of respect among my peers because of that and this tends to make me feel very proud.

LR: Who were some of your other role models?

PF: Do you mean in life?

LR: Yeah, or like when you were growing up.

PF: My uncle, Doctor Roger Larose, and of course my father as well. My father didn't know his mother who died when he was only four years old. He didn't have any recollection of how his mother looked like, not even a picture of his mother.

LR: This is your father my father?

PF: My father.

LR: Okay, yeah.

PF: When he became fourteen years old, he started working. He never worked for the government or the private sector. He was always fending for himself, and managed to keep his dignity and respect in society. He got married and raised his kids with dignity and high values. He made so much out of so little, that's why I am

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extremely proud of my father. My uncle, who is my father's brother, had a profound influence on me. He was a dentist, very generous, and easily approachable. I could talk to my uncle about almost everything, even about girls, but I would never dare try that with my father who was a very strict person. My uncle was such an ethical person, he held everybody around him with high standards. Growing up, I always felt that I should become somebody like him to gain prestige and respect in society.

LR: And, how did the end of your high school years go and then how did you transition into the next phase of your life after that?

PF: Well, after I finished high school at Saint-Louis de Gonzague, I applied for Sherbrooke University in Montreal, Canada. Unfortunately my cousin, who was supposed to coordinate the transition on my behalf, didn't do a good job. This caused me to lose a couple of years trying to find opportunities outside of the country. In the meantime, I took computer classes, management courses, and played a lot of volleyball. Therefore, four years have passed between my high school graduation and the time when I finally came to the U.S. Our volleyball team, Jeunes Sacre-Coeur, was among the best in the country. Since we won the national championship at that time, the government designated us to represent Haiti in an international volleyball tournament at Miami Dade University in Florida. So this is how I came to this country.

[end of Pierre Fils-Aime editing]

LR: Yeah. How did you first get involved with that specific volleyball team?

PF: We had our hometown, our block, volleyball team. And then that would be dream vacation time, during breaks like Christmas break, Easter break, and then summer break – summer vacation. So that's when we played to organize a lot of recreational activities in the town. But during school time when we were in Port-au-Prince, we played for another team in Port-au-Prince. So that team, in Port-au-Prince, won the championship.

LR: Okay.

PF: So yes.

LR: Were your other – some of your other teammates people that you knew from your town?

PF: Yes. Two of them at least transitioned to that team too and came to this country with me too. The three of us stayed.

LR: And so, how was your transition from that tournament and then – in Florida – and then staying in the U.S.?

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PF: Well, to be honest, the condition in which we were living in Haiti – I had no doubt, once I traveled to the U.S. I would stay. We knew we would have stayed. So, after the tournament I arranged with one of my cousins – he came to pick us up. And then, when the team was coming back, going back to Haiti, we said, “Well, you know what, we came only a few days and we have a month visa so we will stay one or two weeks to visit or do shopping and everything, we’ll come back about next week.” So they believed us, and they left. But we stayed.

LR: Yeah, did your family back in Haiti know that you were planning on staying?

PF: Yes. My family knew that I was staying. My mother stayed with us in Port-au-Prince but my father was still at my hometown. He came to visit me to say goodbye that morning, just to say goodbye and left. Yeah, so he knew I was leaving for good.

LR: Yeah, and what family – you mentioned your cousin – so what family did you have who were already in the U.S. when you came over?

PF: I had plenty of family members in the U.S. But the one who came to pick us up after the tournament was my cousin by my mother’s side. And he actually is my mother’s godson, and so it was natural that he understood that we would stay and that he needed to help us. So we stayed at his house for ten days, but after I looked around, at the type of people around – and at that time the drug trafficking was rampant in Florida, 1990 – I said, “You know what, I don’t want to have anything to do with that. I don’t want to be near that. It’s too close to me, I’m not staying in Florida.” So ten days after the time we met, I took the bus, Greyhound, and then we headed to New York, us three. And I stayed at another cousin by my father’s side now, and in Brooklyn. And that’s where I spent four years undocumented, and then another year undocumented in New Jersey, at one of my aunt’s. In the meantime, both my parents died. I couldn’t go to the funeral. I was tempted to go back but everybody was saying, “Pierre, Pierre, you know how things are, there’s nothing waiting for you in Haiti, you’re already there so try your best to improve your situation, we would be better off with you being there than you coming back and do nothing, you are our hope,” and everything. So it was a lot of – I was very traumatized because my father – I grew up in a very functional family, very loving family, and I felt my parents gave me more than they ever dreamed in their own childhood. So it was always my dream to grow up, become professional, successful, to give back, to make them feel happy. And I’m very grateful for what they’ve done for me, and unfortunately I didn’t have that chance, so that really broke me down. But I knew I couldn’t allow myself to get depressed and dysfunctional because with my parents deceased and no close family members around – so, this is it, I have to fend for myself. And then I said ok, the best way to do it is by honoring my parents’ dream for me which is become professional, become successful academically and everything. So that’s why I knew I had to stay away from friends in New York. And that’s what it is.

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LR: Yeah. Who were you in contact with back in Haiti?

PF: In Haiti, when I was undocumented?

LR: Yeah, right at the beginning when you came to the U.S.

PF: I was always in contact with both my parents, my sisters, my family members, of course. When we had somebody going back to Haiti I found myself very often writing like seventeen, twenty letters because you want to make everybody feel like, okay, I thought of you. If you write somebody and want to say hi, another person says, "Ok, why you didn't write me too?" So, I wrote to everybody. And when, in 1995, I came back to Haiti, I went back to Haiti for the first time, I made sure I purchased at least one thing, one item, for everybody in the house, everybody, so just to make people feel, okay, I was away but you were always in my mind.

LR: Yeah. And when you were living in, in Brooklyn at first, you were with the – were you with the two friends on the volleyball team who were from...

PF: I was – well, one was a friend, the other one was my cousin.

LR: Right, your cousin.

PF: Yes. And the friend had plenty of siblings in Manhattan. But I had to beg my cousin to allow the other cousin I came with to stay with us. But after a few months he went to Queens and lived with another uncle because the family couldn't keep both of us. So, in the end I stayed with my cousin, and my friend was in Manhattan with his family and my other cousin was in Queens with another uncle. But we kept communicating because we regularly went and played volleyball with New York Creole volleyball.

LR: Okay.

PF: And even when I was undocumented I always tried to go to school. Myself and my cousin, who came together with me, we took the TOEFL test and we passed it, and this gave us the opportunity or the right to go to college. But we didn't have money. Then I was accepted to the CUNY system but every couple of weeks I was at the Dean's office because I couldn't pay. But I played volleyball for the college and I got cited in the newspapers, in New York Newsday, so I felt good. Among all these ordeals I was suffering, undocumented, not having money to pay for college, but at least on another aspect of my life, I could show some talent and feel good, like okay, I'm still somebody.

LR: Yeah, volleyball seems like it was a big part of – of you!

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Caribbean Heritage in Cambridge Oral History Project; Cambridge Historical Society**



PF: Of course, volleyball - that's what opened doors for me.

LR: Yeah.

PF: In Haiti and here, mostly here. Yeah. Volleyball gave me the visa to come here and volleyball was my escape when I wasn't documented.

LR: How long were you able to stay in CUNY, in the CUNY system?

PF: Well, I entered it in 1992 and I was kicked out of it – because I couldn't pay – in 1994. But of course I was going part time.

LR: Yeah.

PF: I couldn't afford full time at that time. And then when I became documented, when I had my green card, I entered the SUNY system, that is State University of New York.

LR: Yeah.

PF: And it was a different ballgame now because I had my green card. I purposely applied for all schools in upstate New York. Like Albany University in Buffalo, Syracuse, and Binghamton, and among all of them accepted me but I picked Binghamton because I wanted to stay away from the city, stay away from friends who were only interested in partying, drinking, smoking, things like that. I knew that wasn't the way to go. And the only way I could protect myself from that was by getting away. And after I graduated, in the meantime, one of my siblings - one of my sisters came. She got married, she came here, she was in Philadelphia. While I was on campus I visited her. She relocated to Boston and after graduation I relocated to Boston to be with her. So that's the only reason why I'm in Boston.

LR: Yeah.

PF: Yeah.

LR: And, I'm gonna come back to that –

PF: Sure.

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Caribbean Heritage in Cambridge Oral History Project; Cambridge Historical Society**



LR: But what were you studying?

PF: Say it again?

LR: What were you studying?

PF: That's a good question. When I first started I was pre-med. It took me a couple of years to realize that I was older and I didn't have the support system that I would need to stay ten years in school, you know? I would've come out when I was over forty years of age. And then I changed to physiotherapy. I started to do some internship at Binghamton General Hospital and it was at my internship I realized I am not made to put hands on people. I'm more into frustrating people, talking to people, and convincing people, counseling people. I'm more into the intellect than to be touching, doing anything manual. So I changed at the last year, my senior year, to psychobiology. I graduated with BS in psychobiology. And then after graduation I did some career exploration and I joined AmeriCorps, and I went to many states being trained as a community organizer. And then while I was an AmeriCorps member I participated in a contest for community economic development with the National Congress so I had to write an essay and then - and in all the country I was among the few who won. And then as a reward I was allowed to go to Washington D.C. for a week or two to be exposed at a conference to practitioners in the field of economic development from Africa or from Europe, and that's how I fell in love with the field and I knew I had to change careers. But just to go back, since we're talking about the life of an immigrant - when an immigrant comes like a youth like I was, I was victim of - I was more educated than people I was staying with. Their level of education was low, so they were doing manufacturing, just doing labor, so they didn't understand me being obsessed with school. So they saw me as a snob, I think I'm all that. But I knew I had a lot of educational baggage with me, I knew I could do better than what I saw in house. And it was tough. Sometimes I didn't have food to eat because they felt like I was not one of them and they were hiding food from me, and I wasn't working, I was undocumented, I didn't have a work permit. But what I was driving at is that they were all saying, "Well, the medical field is the one to go to because it has money you need. That's the one that is flourishing here in the U.S., and if you go in any branches, any branch in the medical field, you'll be alright." So I felt like I didn't have time to make any more mistakes. I was older, so I went to the medical field, but that's not me really. I learned the hard way that I'm not made for this field and I had to go with my nature, my real self. So that's why I changed. And since, I feel I've been all right.

LR: Yeah, it sounds like you learned through experience.

PF: Yes, exactly.

LR: That -

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Caribbean Heritage in Cambridge Oral History Project; Cambridge Historical Society**



PF: Yes, yes. But what I meant exactly is that a lot of kids, a lot of youth, young people who come here, I can talk about Haiti, Haitian immigrants – if you don't have the proper, the appropriate kind of orientation, people with the right information, they can lead you to any kind of direction that will just jeopardize your future in this country. And that's exactly what happened to me – I lost a lot of time trying to prove myself in a field that I have nothing to do with. But I was resilient, I knew, okay, I had to do something, I have to find my way and freedom, but AmeriCorps did it for me.

LR: Yeah, and it sounds like a lot of just luck or, or chance too – where you end up and like – first as an immigrant when you come, who you end up staying with, and who's around you, and how they influence you. Especially since you're so – like any immigrant is so new in a completely new place that they've never been in before. And sometimes, just whatever's around you is what you latch on to.

PF: Yes. And one other fundamental aspect I didn't mention and it's one of the most critical ones: the language. When I was in Haiti, I never spoke a word of English. I had English courses in high school but it was basic grammar, but good grammar, which prepares you to learn quicker than people who don't have a good level of education. So I had a little bit of pride so I felt – okay, I'm more educated than those people, I don't want to have them to go and translate for me. So every time I was going to a store, I would write and translate what I needed to say and say it several times and go with my book in English and say it – and that's how I helped myself. And one other thing, it was nerve wracking. Like you know you can prepare yourself to say something but you're running away from people, you don't want them to talk to you because you know you're not going to understand it or it's too fast for you, you're not going to understand. So, the way I helped myself with that is by listening to the radio, like I listened to country music a lot and after a while I started to understand what the song was about. But also I watched some TV shows like *The Honeymooners*. I realized if you become familiar with a character you become familiar or comfortable with the character's accent too. Although, you don't understand everything, but you understand the whole idea of what they say and that's how I picked it up. And after that, school. I went to quite a few English courses.

LR: Yeah. I was wondering if you could go back to AmeriCorps a little bit too –

PF: Yes, yes.

LR: And how you got involved in it.

PF: Oh, well when I relocated to Boston with my sister after graduation from Binghamton University, I was looking for jobs and I went, every day, I went to libraries, I went to Haitian agencies, tried to meet with Haitian professionals to get some information because I'd learned from what happened to me in Brooklyn – to be successful you need to get the right information. So not only I went to libraries, but I went to visit several Haitian

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agencies to meet with professionals, they tell you what's going on. A lot of them were impressed with my approach because most people don't do that. And then I had to make a choice. Get a job from any kind of field which I was not interested in, or just get a stipend from AmeriCorps and then get exposed to a wealth of information. I went for the stipend. And so for a year I traveled many states being trained as a community organizer and I learned to get confidence in myself because among my peers I realized that, okay, I'm not among the worst, given my background. People go through all kinds of experiences so I became more confident in myself and then more ambitious, and then I went from there.

LR: What kind of community organizing did you do in the program?

PF: Well, I was placed at Boston Aging Concerns to be trained as a community organizer. They had family - Grandfamilies House, that's a program where grandchildren are being raised by grandmothers because the real parents are either in jail or have AIDS or are not around. So I was an assistant to that program. So, that's one. But traveling with AmeriCorps I got exposed to different types of situations, we're helping people to take a stand to help the situation in their hometown like cleanliness, all kinds of things. So sometimes it's like training, professionals come to an auditorium, teach us some notions, community organizing, things like that.

LR: Did you – which states did you travel to?

PF: I went to Connecticut, I went to California twice, once in San Diego, once in San Francisco. I went to, what's the name of it, it's in the west – Denver, Colorado, we went to New Jersey, I think I went to the Bronx, welcome back to New York, hello, it was a nice feeling (laughter).

LR: Yeah, and after that program, what did you do?

PF: Oh, after that program...I was accepted to the Master's Degree program at Southern New Hampshire University for Community Economic Development. While I was doing that I was placed at Allston Brighton CDC, Community Development Corporation, Allston Brighton Community Development, to be trained in the economic development department there through the program, for the program at Southern University. And then after a year I accepted a full-time position at Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corporation.

LR: Where was that?

PF: In Dorchester –

LR: Okay.

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PF: Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corporation.

LR: Okay, and what kind of work did you do there?

PF: I worked there as a small business counselor. And it was exciting because that was my first real professional job because I designed it. Well, my predecessor, who was a female, worked at that position for four years. And when I came on board I started visiting the small businesses around – they didn't want to have anything to do with my agency. They said, "What? Codman Square DC? No don't come here." I said, "What happened?" They said, "Well you don't do anything for us and you keep lying." Things like that. I said, "Well, I'm new, I want to work with you on new ground. Tell me – if you give me a chance I'll allow you to let me know what you need and then I will go shop around to let you know what I get and then we'll go from there – just give me a chance." So, they told me – I was told in the agency that for four years when my predecessor had like, three people in a workshop or seminar, that was a success because one person usually showed up or nobody at all. When she had three, they felt good. Within a month, a month after I got hired, my first workshop, we had forty-two people who came there. It's a matter of approach, the way you talk to people, the way you make people feel. This I know I have. I'm a people's person. And so forty-two people – we didn't even have enough chairs in the community room to let people sit. And then it went like that, I worked there for five years. I was like an ambassador for the agency because this was the first time they were having this flow of people there. And the executive director, Gail Latimore, she had a lot of respect for me, she was praising in all meetings because people who they could never approach were coming and everything. And after that I accepted, I transitioned, into a private corporation job because I had my child and I needed more money, a more stable economic situation to live. But after two years into that I was told that the company would be outsourced, relocated to Costa Rica for cheaper labor. And then I was unemployed for a long time, during the crash. And it was tough.

LR: What was that company?

PF: Oh...

LR: The, the corporate company that you worked for?

PF: Well, it was UNO, it's a remittance company, like money transfer. Global money transfer. But it was owned by Omnex, which is a larger worldwide money transfer company.

LR: Did you –

PF: And it payed good money.

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LR: Yeah, did you find it hard to leave the position in –

PF: Codman Square?

LR: Yeah.

PF: Given the difference between the salary, no (laughs). Of course, at that moment that's what I needed.

LR: Right.

PF: And given the budget of the agency I was working for, I knew it was gonna take a long time to get any kind of raise that would satisfy my needs. And then the other company heard of my work and they approached me and then they offered me – at first I told them, “Okay, let me work for you part time on weekends and in the evening,” I didn't have to go to any office, I could work from home. I was producing so much revenue for them and they said, “Well Pierre, we're going to offer you something that you won't be able to decline,” and then they offered me a salary that I couldn't decline. Then I announced that unfortunately I have to move on and it was a disappointment on the agency. But I never felt good really, doing that work for the private corporation, because I felt like that's not me. I'm more into empowering people to improve their livelihood, their life, as opposed to using tricks to have big corporations make money out of people. So, when I got laid off because of outsourcing, I didn't feel like - of course it hurts to lose your salary, but I didn't feel too bad about it because I didn't enjoy doing this kind of work really. So it was a good opportunity for me to get back to my natural field.

LR: Yeah. And, after the period when you were unemployed, did you move to Just-A-Start after that, or was there something before then?

PF: Well, while I was unemployed I tried all kinds of things.

LR: Yeah.

PF: I tried selling insurance, what else did I do...a little bit of real estate. But I didn't like the - it's the same to me, like working for a big corporation - go, talk to people, convince them. I didn't enjoy that. So I was not as enthusiastic as I was looking for a job in my natural field. It was - it's going to be interesting - looking for jobs. And I have to say that at a certain point I exhausted all my unemployment benefits so after a certain point I couldn't pay rent. I got evicted. I went to shelter with my child. As I was in a shelter, around the same time, my daughter got accepted to into Boston Latin School, and this meant a lot to me because she went to St. Mary's in Brookline, the Catholic School, since she was three years old. She spent nine years there and in her sixth grade, it was a twenty-five student class, she was the only one who couldn't afford a tutor to prepare for the Boston

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**Fils-Aime, Pierre, oral history interview conducted by Lina Raciukaitis, March 23, 2018;
Caribbean Heritage in Cambridge Oral History Project; Cambridge Historical Society**



Latin School exam. So she was very, very depressed about that because after the sessions kids would come to school and say, "Oh I know I'm gonna pass," and everything. And she felt like they were bragging because they knew she was not, and they were part of the same tutoring session. So I kept telling her, "You know what? Don't worry, I'll work with you, I know you're capable, we'll go through this, don't worry." And unfortunately, it was November first, the Saturday when she was supposed to take the exam she became very sick with a flu. I took her anyway to take the exam and I was very pleased because she was among the thirteen kids from that group who got accepted with a good average. So, around that time my child's admission to Boston Latin School was the only positive aspect of my life. And that's what kept me going. I said, "Okay, my daughter proved herself to be an intelligent bright kid so I need to keep on going. I'm not going to let the shelter thing break me down. As I am in the shelter I'm going to keep fighting to find a job." And in the shelter it was tough. Because you're in a shelter, they take everybody as the same, like you're lazy, you didn't want to work, that's why you ended up there, and in my case it wasn't like that at all. And I felt ashamed and frustrated because they were treating me like I was nobody. They wanted me to do any kinds of things. I refused. And then I looked like I was lazy. The shelter person said, "Pierre, I found a job for you." I said, "What is it?" He said, "Well, you can work as an elevator operator in Boston, in a building." I said, "You know what, I'm not taking it." He said, "What! You don't have a job you have nothing, you're in a shelter!" I said, "Nope, I'm not taking it." Because I've learned from my mistake, once I get into that, I won't have any good information around. That's gonna fly around me, for me to use to become for where I want to be. I said, "I know I have the right to take my time to find stuff because there is no law that says you need to take this or that." And there became a lot of uneasiness between myself and them because I was in the field that they were in, I know how it works. I know they were doing the wrong thing by putting pressure on me to take anything, and so I knew their job better than them because I've been there, helping people at an agency. So they felt like I was somewhat unruly or they were trying to label me as lazy. And then while I was there I got accepted to become a professional at a bank and they were amazed, "How so?" And then I said, "I told you, I know what I am capable of." I'm not going to put myself in a field that's going to cripple me. And then when I was given the day to start and everything, two days before that date they called me and said, "Pierre, you cannot have this job anymore. Why? Because you don't have enough credit – your credit is not good." And I was disappointed. And then I continued looking, and then I went to MBHP, which is another agency for housing, job training, things like that. As I was applying I saw somebody whose face looked familiar to me. And then the person, it was a man, the person looked at me and I said, "I think I know you". And the person said, "Pierre?" I said, "Amanda?" They said, "No, I'm not Amanda anymore. I'm Jesse now." I said, "What? Okay! I'm sorry!" So it was, I told you it was going to be interesting, it was one of my colleagues from AmeriCorps.

LR: Oh, wow.

PF: She was a lesbian at the time, when we were being trained, and then I didn't see her for like fifteen years and she became transgender.

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**Fils-Aime, Pierre, oral history interview conducted by Lina Raciukaitis, March 23, 2018;
Caribbean Heritage in Cambridge Oral History Project; Cambridge Historical Society**



LR: Yeah.

PF: She became Jesse. And then she was – he was the one who referred me to my former supervisor at Just-A-Start.

LR: Wow.

PF: And that's how it's been.

LR: Yeah, what are the chances?

PF: Ah, exactly. But you know what? What I'm the most proud of is that through all these bad situations, I've managed and conducted myself in a way - I've never been arrested, I kept my dignity. That's what I'm the most proud of. At work I'm respected and my supervisor, the one I have now, she has a lot of respect for me, and this is the most important thing for me because - remember in the beginning - I am not a money person and looking for jobs, negotiating my salary, is the most excruciating thing for me. I don't like arguing about money, that's not smart, but that's me.

LR: Yeah. What's your daughter's name?

PF: Nikita.

LR: Nikita.

PF: I gave her that name, yes.

LR: Where are you currently living?

PF: In Boston, in Hyde Park.

LR: And what is your daughter up to?

PF: Oh she's in – she goes to Boston Latin school since the past four years, since 2013. So far she said she would like to be a lawyer, and last summer, last year, she was accepted for paid internship at the Boston Bar Association.

LR: Oh, wow.

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**Fils-Aime, Pierre, oral history interview conducted by Lina Raciukaitis, March 23, 2018;
Caribbean Heritage in Cambridge Oral History Project; Cambridge Historical Society**



PF: And she got sick and she couldn't go. But this year she got accepted again, so she's looking forward to it this summer, to work for the first time. And in the family people tend to - whenever the kid is fourteen years old, they let the kid go work in the store, in the mall, to make money. I don't like that. I think it's a waste of time and it's a misorientation too. I always told my child - I'm not going to allow you to go work at a store if you don't have anything to do with business. If you want to be a lawyer, you're going to work at the lawyer's office, a part time or as a volunteer. That's to learn the ways, to expose yourself to the field, to learn the jargon of the field, things like that, and then decide if that's what you like. That's a better use of your time. I'm very happy and proud that's what's going to happen. She says she'd like to be a lawyer, so I helped her get that internship - paid internship. And she's proud too that she's going to work in a professional level.

LR: Right. So how long have you been at Just-A-Start?

PF: I started I think exactly August 10th, 2015.

LR: 2015...

PF: Yes, almost three years now.

LR: Yeah, almost three years.

PF: Yes.

LR: And could you describe what you do there?

PF: It's a lot. I work as a resident service coordinator but the official title is Community Coordinator because I cover seventeen sites, so it's a real community. I'm the point person for all residents to call for all kinds of services. I resolve conflicts among neighbors, conflicts between residents and management because the agency I work for is Just-A-Start corporation but they hire Maloney Property Management to manage their buildings. People pay rent to Maloney Properties and when there is renovation in the housing situation, they call my name at management. If they're not satisfied, they call me and then I intervene on their behalf. But also I organize workshops on topics pertaining to resident issues, and I organize annual events - Thanksgiving dinner, turkey giveaway, holiday dinner. I do movie nights. But the biggest annual event is family fun day which is an annual barbeque, high budget, it's a big thing, a lot of vendors, all kinds of amusements and games, music, shows, magicians, things like that. But I coordinate, I coordinate a lot of projects with colleagues within the agency but also from other agencies in town.

This transcript is made available for research purposes only.

**Fils-Aime, Pierre, oral history interview conducted by Lina Raciukaitis, March 23, 2018;
Caribbean Heritage in Cambridge Oral History Project; Cambridge Historical Society**



LR: How would you describe the atmosphere at Just-A-Start?

PF: Well, my office is not located in the main building. My office is located at the George Cross building which is at the corner of Broadway and Windsor. And this building is well renown in town. We have a population of 61 households. And we have quite a few challenged people living there. Very small number of kids. But because we have quite a few challenged people my role is important as a buffer between them and management because sometimes there is a lot of confrontation and uneasiness between the two and so they all come to me all the time. I'm very familiar with them. Whatever the agency wants to do they come to me first because I'm the one who has good rapport with the residents. But my interaction with the people at the main office, excellent, yes. But very often I find myself in some, not confrontation, but uneasiness with management because sometimes they want to approach a conflict situation this way and I feel it's better that way. You know, things like that, but that's natural at work.

LR: And how would you describe – because from your work perspective, because you work in Cambridge – how would you describe Cambridge as you know it?

PF: Personally, since the time I first came to Cambridge, I admired the city because you have a sense – I never had a sense of insecurity around me. Remember, I lived in Brooklyn, it was like Vietnam. When I relocated in Boston I lived in Roxbury. Kind of the same. But Cambridge is the first city where I have a sense of security in it and so I understand why housing is problematic. Everybody wants to live here. I try my best in the work that I do to help people stabilize their affordable housing, but I know through interacting with other colleagues that this is one of the rare cities that has a lot of money for social services. This, I feel good about.

LR: Yeah.

PF: And interacting with officials, going to events with my colleagues at work, you can see that people do care, like people in political systems here, they do care about providing services to people. And I could have a sense of that two years ago, over a year ago, when there was that big fire that broke out on York Street.

LR: Yeah.

PF: Yeah, that church, Saint Patrick Church. Then so quickly, the City Mayor and other officials in town got together to help with relocating people quickly with housing, providing all kinds of services to make sure they go through as smoothly as possible.

LR: And from your position, what's your perspective on the housing crisis in Cambridge?

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**Fils-Aime, Pierre, oral history interview conducted by Lina Raciukaitis, March 23, 2018;
Caribbean Heritage in Cambridge Oral History Project; Cambridge Historical Society**



PF: Well, the thing is that I feel like the market rate is crazy, and as I mentioned earlier to you, if somebody loses housing with us or with any other agency you must go to another town to live because you won't be able to afford the market rate to find another place to live. And the waiting list in housing, even with the non-profit agencies, it's crazy. So, it's a tough situation.

LR: Have you – I mean, you've only been here for three years or so but, have you noticed any developments in that or changes in the way that it's being addressed?

PF: Well, I know Just-A-Start Corporation is in the process of creating new developments, that's for sure. But also by interacting with some city employees I know there is this – what's the name of it, it has a technical terminology – where with any new development, I think the City, the state, I think it's the City, requires the new development to have some affordable part of it – inclusionary housing.

LR: Okay, yeah.

PF: So I think it's a great thing, that's a good idea. So this will help alleviate the situation as well.

LR: And while you're in Cambridge do you spend time anywhere outside of work?

PF: Yeah, restaurants (laughter). I take lunch and yes, that's what I get to do because I come to Cambridge to work only.

LR: Right.

PF: So I take my lunch most of the time in restaurants. Sometimes at Izzy's, not to far, sometimes I go to – I forgot the name of the restaurant – on Hampshire Street, near Cambridge street, what's the name of it again? I keep forgetting. But sometimes I go to McDonalds.

LR: And what have you learned about Cambridge from the communities that you work with?

PF: From the communities?

LR: Yeah, like from the people that you work with who live in the housing places that Just-A-Start does.

PF: Oh, well it's a very diverse city and people would be amazed to – like, if you see the statistics, it's said that the economic level of the population is high but from my experience, you have a lot of very poor people living in Cambridge. And the only reason why they can stay is because of affordable housing. But the thing is, personally

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**Fils-Aime, Pierre, oral history interview conducted by Lina Raciukaitis, March 23, 2018;
Caribbean Heritage in Cambridge Oral History Project; Cambridge Historical Society**



I'm a people person. I have to be like that for my job and I'm naturally like that, but I know it's important for the type of job that I do. You need to make people feel comfortable to come and talk to you, so people come to me because they don't have food to eat. People come to me because they have difficulties with their significant other, like sentimental relationship, things like that. You know, all kind of issues, so I try my best to make people feel good around me – to come and talk to me yes.

LR: And when you think of Cambridge, what's the first thing that comes to mind?

PF: Very good city to live in. Because it seems like this is the first time I'm in a town where I feel like the city officials are very much in tune providing services, using the city money to provide services. And for example, periodically I write newsletters for my agency, my program, as well. And very often I have to announce that the City has like, six hundred thousand, eight hundred thousand dollars they would like to spend so they want citizens to let the City know, to vote on what to do with it. I don't see that anywhere else. I don't see that in Boston, I didn't see it in Brooklyn or in Roxbury. But it's Cambridge so that you have a sense of, okay, this is a town where at least they're trying something.

LR: Yeah, and what is your interaction with other city – like Cambridge city organizations?

PF: Oh because I participated in several training sessions with people, because I have to collaborate with people to offer presentations, seminars, I have good relationships with other colleagues from other agencies – CEOC, the City Annex at 344 where I went (laughs) this morning mistakenly I'm sorry. And where else – like Tutoring Plus, a girls media program where they work with kids or teach kids on how to handle stereotypes, again girls talk about sex issues, security, rape, things like that. So I collaborate with quite a few colleagues and I provide referrals too for stuff that we don't have in our agency.

LR: Okay, so if someone, if one of the residents is interested in something, you can direct them to the agency that can help them most? Yeah, I feel like through your work you are getting to know Cambridge in a way that some people who actually live in Cambridge don't really know even.

PF: Exactly, exactly, I get information, I get a sense of programs because I have to keep learning about the resources available, and then when you search them you contact people, that's how you become familiar with not only the programs but also with people running them.

LR: Especially because the type of people who live in Cambridge are so different, like there are students and there are professionals and there are people who have immigrated recently.

This transcript is made available for research purposes only.

**Fils-Aime, Pierre, oral history interview conducted by Lina Raciukaitis, March 23, 2018;
Caribbean Heritage in Cambridge Oral History Project; Cambridge Historical Society**



PF: Yes, another aspect – to get back to what I think or how I feel about the community that I work with – what most people don't know is we have quite a few illiterate people in our community. How I know that is when they're supposed to fill out forms, sometimes they – you think it's an English problem but it's a literacy problem or a level of education problem. Things like that. So that's why the way I provide services – like for example, we were hiring a financial capability coordinator for Just-A-Start, and I insisted that this person shouldn't be somebody who's going to provide workshops because I knew my population, they don't have the patience to sit down and take a lecture. They don't want it, they don't understand anything out of it, even if you provide visuals, means nothing. They want to sit one-on-one with you, asking you questions and you answer their questions. I was part of the team that was interviewing candidates for the position and my supervisor invited me because she knows my stance on that. And we hired a wonderful young guy who speaks Spanish, who had some internship in Peru, and who understands the importance of giving people the opportunity to come and sit down and talk to him one-on-one. For my population lecturing is not a good idea.

LR: Yeah, it's a really old format –

PF: Okay.

LR: That's like – no, it's just used so much, everywhere, like lectures seem to be the most popular way to present information, but for so many people it doesn't work. It's so easy to just sort of drift off in the middle of a lecture, or, you know? So yeah that's - new formats of engaging people, presenting information...

PF: Exactly because okay - if management says, "Okay, this person keeps being late for rent, or is like, four months late for rent," the idea is not, okay, invite all of them and give them a lecture. It doesn't solve anything in the personal situation. The best approach I think is inviting this person one-on-one in all confidentiality to say "Okay, what's wrong, tell me what's going on, tell me what you have and what we can work with." And then that's when you can have something factual or more efficient in terms of trying to solve some problem. And that's what we're trying to do.

LR: Yeah, definitely. I was wondering if we could talk a little bit about the radio show?

PF: (laughs) Oh, how much time do you have? Now, we're getting into my passion – passion is not radio, but passion is my feeling for my country, for my people. Since my youngest age I was always very touched by history. And all my life I listened to the news, I was interested because I want to know what's going on, I want to understand what's going on, I want to be able to formulate my own perception, my own ideas, what's going on and what should be done. So when I was at Saint-Louis de Gonzague in high school in Haiti, Port-Au-Prince, in my last year the school usually had some kind of retreat and they allowed the class committee to pick a priest – remember, it's a Catholic school.

This transcript is made available for research purposes only.

**Fils-Aime, Pierre, oral history interview conducted by Lina Raciukaitis, March 23, 2018;
Caribbean Heritage in Cambridge Oral History Project; Cambridge Historical Society**



LR: Right (laughs).

PF: Saint-Louis de Gonzague, okay? To pick a priest of their choosing to do the retreat, to be the one interacting with us for the retreat. I'm from another town, I didn't know people really in Port-Au-Prince, and I wasn't informed in the political arena in Port-Au-Prince as a young kid in high school and at that time it was one of the worst dictatorships, so it wasn't for me to be involved in any kind of politics at that time. But I was interested. I was reading all kinds of things.

LR: What was the dictatorship?

PF: Duvalier.

LR: Yeah, okay.

PF: Okay? Jean-Claude Duvalier. Who they call Baby Doc, because his father was Papa Doc. Francois Duvalier was the father, they called him Papa Doc and then after he died, his nineteen-year-old son took over.

LR: And there were no elections, no –

PF: No elections, no. Dictatorship, that means no elections, no democracy, nothing. So for that retreat the class committee picked Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide. I had no clue who he was and when he came to talk to us, doing the mass, the guy was talking in a way like no other was talking in Haiti. He was telling truth to power, he wasn't afraid, and I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Of course, the officials of the school didn't like that, and after the retreat – it was a three day retreat – around Halloween time, like November first, second, and third. It happens every year at the same time in November. So he was talking so fiercely against the regime, the school official said, "Never we're going to allow him back for future seniors, future retreats." So that's how I realized that, okay, all is not lost, we have people who want to put themselves out there, expose themselves, risk their lives to see if they can incentivize the people to change the situation in Haiti. And then, the next thing you know, a year later – no it's not one, it's not a year later, it was 1985 – so months later the dictatorship was overthrown and Father Aristide became a prominent figure in the political movement and his masses in church were crowded with people because he was the one everybody wanted to listen to. So that went on, with a lot of political turmoil, for four years and then I left the country in 1990. So the Duvalier regime got overthrown by the people February 7th, 1986 and I left the country four years later, March 1990. And then, a few months later I heard in the news that Father Aristide was declared like a candidate for president. I said, "Woah." And he was so popular, I knew he was going to win. And then it was a landslide, he won like, ninety-five percent. And when he came to power he tried to change everything, the corruption in the administration, raise the workers' salary,

This transcript is made available for research purposes only.

**Fils-Aime, Pierre, oral history interview conducted by Lina Raciukaitis, March 23, 2018;
Caribbean Heritage in Cambridge Oral History Project; Cambridge Historical Society**



invest most of the money in education and health, healthcare, things like that, and he didn't allow the army and the police to keep doing brutality against the population, so in seven months only into power, they overthrew him. He went in exile. And I was in New York. I found myself during exam day, I said to the professor, "I'm sorry, I have to go to the rally because it means a lot to me, they overthrew the first ever democratically elected leader, or president, in my country, and we're having a rally in front of the United Nations in Manhattan, I cannot concentrate inside the class while I know this, I feel like I should be there because I'm in New York." So he said, "Well Pierre, go ahead, you're doing good, you can go." So just to tell you, I was active in the political movement. And then after three years we forced Bill Clinton to help him back. And then he just finished the term and then one other member of his political party won the presidency after, and then he ran again. He became president a second time, the former priest. And then it was the same. Like the bourgeoisie, I don't know if you understand what I say when I say "the bourgeoisie."

LR: Yeah.

PF: Okay good, because that's French, that's why I'm asking. The army and the international community - because he didn't want to allow them to exploit our natural resources, goldmines, oil and everything - they overthrew him again. So he spent seven years in exile in South Africa. And then he came back after seven years. And then he's not president anymore but he continues within the political movement. And then three years ago, there was one of the sympathizers of his movement who lost her radio show in New York. And then I felt the way she lost it that was not fair, and I was among the ones who asked for a couple of hours in Haiti for her in the radio show, the radio of the political movement, and they granted her. And then since that time I have been the one writing for the show. I write editorials and questionnaires. At first I wrote everything but because of time and everything - but the editorial and the interview cover like eighty percent of the show.

LR: What's the name of the show?

PF: Sewòm Patriyotik, which means patriotic serum, I don't know, serum is good English?

LR: Yeah.

PF: Yes, like you're giving something to keep you strong. Sewòm Patriyotik in Creole, and French, yes.

LR: What's the name of the woman who, ah, like -

PF: Who presents it?

LR: Who presents is, yeah.

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**Fils-Aime, Pierre, oral history interview conducted by Lina Raciukaitis, March 23, 2018;
Caribbean Heritage in Cambridge Oral History Project; Cambridge Historical Society**



PF: Maud Jean-Michel. And I picked, I created the name “Sewòm Patriyotik”, I wrote the spot to announce the show every day, I organize the show in five segments, give the name to the segments, and also pick the musical theme for each segment. So, I’m in the kitchen, I’m the one, you know –

LR: Producer.

PF: Yeah, exactly.

LR: What are the segments that you do?

PF: Okay, for the five, first ten minutes, we open with “pense positive”, which means positive thoughts. Like we can come with a quote from a political figure, a former leader, could be Malcolm X, it could be John F. Kennedy, it could be Martin Luther King, and then we just spend five to ten minutes talking about what it means and then how we can adapt it to what’s the situation in Haiti. And then the second segment would be my editorial, they announce, “This is Pierre Paul Arthur Fils-Aime’s editorial for the day,” it lasts between thirty-five to forty-five minutes because it’s a long extensive text to read, and after that we take five to ten minutes to go over the most important news of the week. And then after that it’s the interview, that’s another like forty to fifty minutes. And then after that the last segment is we put listeners on the air.

LR: Okay. What was your last, like your latest show about?

PF: Oh the last one?

LR: Yeah, that you did.

PF: Okay, it was last Sunday. What was it about? Okay that’s a good one. I’m so proud because remember, when they overthrew president Aristide in 2004, he had already created a university which he was running. He has a Foundation so the university was part of the Foundation, and then it started with the one school, like medical school. So when they overthrew him the U.S. invaded Haiti and then they kicked all the students out of that university, and they made the university location a barrack for the army. They stayed there for years. And then when Aristide came back seven years later he started to renovate and it was for the first time last Sunday – which was the seventh year anniversary when he came back – it was the first group of students who actually graduated. It was one hundred thirty-eight among them, seventy-seven doctors, medical doctors, forty-eight nurses, and thirteen lawyers. So that’s historical. And he had then, for the first time since 2000, he’s been having good press in Haiti. So I wrote an editorial about that to help people understand what that means for the country but also for our movement because they made this university a military place, so it’s been fourteen

This transcript is made available for research purposes only.

**Fils-Aime, Pierre, oral history interview conducted by Lina Raciukaitis, March 23, 2018;
Caribbean Heritage in Cambridge Oral History Project; Cambridge Historical Society**



years since. Just imagine where the country would be if every year we had a group of professionals coming out of this university. But fourteen years lost. So, it proved what he can do, he wanted to do. So that's what my editorial was about.

LR: Do you have positive feedback? Do you get feedback from –

PF: Oh yeah! Oh right – remember, the last segment is like for listeners to call –

LR: Listeners, right.

PF: Of course, they love – the editorial is the main part of the show and that's the one people like the most. They can miss any other segment, they don't want to lose the editorial because I make some kind of political analysis on what's going on and also give an orientation to what should be done to advance the movement. So people love it because people are looking to me, to us, to help them feel okay, we're still in business, we're still fighting, it's not lost, and things like that. So they look forward to the show, but mostly to the editorial. And also after the show people keep calling me. So that's why on Monday morning I'm always very exhausted, very tired (laughs), because on weekends I don't – I just got the okay with my guest for Sunday – and so on weekends I have to compile documentation and everything to prepare for the questionnaire, read a lot of newspapers to know what's going on and to elaborate on a good questionnaire. But also to write a sound editorial because we have people from all ranks listen to us because I'm fierce. I don't protect anybody. I tell the truth like it is and people always, they don't know when it's going to be them and I name names and that's unique to my show. Because in Haiti, people have some remnant of the dictatorship trauma in them so they're reluctant to name names because they don't want retaliation. We name names in the show, and that's what makes it sensational, you know? Yeah, exciting, yes.

LR: Yeah, is it – so it's broadcast in Haiti but is it also available for other listeners?

PF: Of course, of course.

LR: (laughs) Okay, just wondering, yeah.

PF: (laughs) I listen to them here, I listen to it through the internet. Either on the internet or through the phone because they have an AudioNow or some kind of special phone number where you can just ring and you're listening to the radio. Yeah, people call, listeners call from Alaska, from Africa, from Canada, from Germany, from everywhere. So we have listeners everywhere.

LR: Wow, are the listeners, are they Haitian or like, a range of people who listen?

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**Fils-Aime, Pierre, oral history interview conducted by Lina Raciukaitis, March 23, 2018;
Caribbean Heritage in Cambridge Oral History Project; Cambridge Historical Society**



PF: Well, of course. Mostly Haitian but outside of Haiti we have a lot of Haitians who marry or get involved with other nationalities who understand Creole as well, some of them listen to it. But also in the Caribbean we have other countries that speak Creole as well. They listen too.

LR: Yeah, wow.

PF: It's – I'm not doing it for money, I never asked to get paid or anything but I feel so rewarded because I consider the planet earth like, with billions of people, and every weekend I sit down at my table trying to think of how to influence millions of them. To me that's big. I feel so humbled, and that's a privilege and an honor to me. I'm always nervous writing because I always want to keep the standard at a certain level. I'm never confident with what I write because I tend to be a perfectionist. But when I email the text, the questionnaire, and the editorial, my presenter says, "Oh my god! Today you're just going to wow people!" (laughter) I say, "Really? You think so?" She says, "Oh my goodness that's your best!" And then it's not until she starts reading on the air and then people start to react and it's later that I say, "Oh my goodness, so I said all that?" I'm never confident, just to tell you. I take it seriously, I put all of myself in it and I feel very good with the body of work that I accomplished so far with it. And the most rewarding thing for me is that I create concepts, I create words. And during rallies in Haiti, people are using them, other radio figures are using stuff that they hear from my editorial, so that makes me feel good.

LR: Yeah, has that opened other connections for you? In Haiti, or like in the community that listens.

PF: When you say open opportunities...

LR: Or yeah just – has it brought new opportunities or brought some sort of connection with a person that you weren't expecting maybe?

PF: Oh yeah, oh yeah! Like – can you believe, while Aristide was in power, I used to hear this person is a secretary, this person is a senator, this person is counselor to the president, prime minister. I'm interviewing all of them. All of them know me, they're calling me, I'm calling them, they want to – "Please Pierre, I want to get on the show, I want to get on the show." So, of course. And I become very familiar with them and I become very informed about what's going on underneath all the contradictions in the movement. Because what's being said on the air, in the news, is one thing; but what's really happening inside the movement - you need to be talking to individuals to find it out. And I have that privilege. And it's important for me because if I don't keep the real truth I won't be able to be right in a way I want to orient, direct the people. So, it's important for me. And it's exciting. A lot of people say, "Pierre, you're doing all this?" Because on Saturday evening, I go to bed around three in the morning, preparing questions, and I have to wake up early to spend all day writing the editorial

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**Fils-Aime, Pierre, oral history interview conducted by Lina Raciukaitis, March 23, 2018;
Caribbean Heritage in Cambridge Oral History Project; Cambridge Historical Society**



because I need to send it around three P.M. because I need to submit it at a certain time for the presenter to be familiar with it because it's extensive, between nine to eleven pages every Sunday. And every Sunday it's new. So people tend to say. "What? You're doing –" and I spend all Sunday and then right after the show, I finish, I need to listen to the show and then I stay on the phone, by text, monitoring the show with the presenter. Like while doing the interview probably it's sometimes on the second question, the guest already answered the fifth one and I say, text, "Skip five, okay, go to seven," things like that. So I'm part of the show (laughs) for two hours. And then after that people start calling. President Aristide calls me all the time. This morning he called me as I was on the train.

LR: Oh wow, (laughs) yeah.

PF: He'll call me - because he was coordinating for me to get this guest who is difficult to get. So just to see, now I'm talking to President Aristide. He is huge I'm telling you, he is huge. And that's a privilege to me. And when I told him, "Well, I met you in 1985, Saint-Louis de Gonzague," he said, "You were in that class?" "Yeah!" Things like that, can you believe that? So it's like I feel like I'm a very lucky guy for being exposed to so much history and such exhilarating things.

LR: Who did you get to be on your show this upcoming show?

PF: This upcoming show?

LR: Yeah.

PF: He is a member of the party. Last week I had a senator. This one, he is a member of the committee that runs the political movement. But what's special about him - he entered the movement when he was an adolescent like fifteen, sixteen years old, the first time President Aristide got overthrown. He is from a rich family, the Vorbe family. His name is Pasha Vorbe but his real name is Edward Vorbe. Everybody in Haiti knows him. So he was - after the military overthrew President Aristide in 1991, he was in his store doing his business and then the military came and discharged weapons on him. They thought he was dead but he became paralyzed. He cannot move his hands and legs, but this didn't stop him because his brain is good, he speaks well, and he stayed in the movement. He grew up to become one of the officials of the movement. So the reason why I wanted him for this Sunday is I feel like he has inside information, he will be able to articulate some important information about what happened last Sunday at the historical graduation ceremony. He was there, so I saw the picture, and one thing that touched me about what happened last Sunday - to me the most important thing is that in that group that graduated, we have a former Saint-Louis de Gonzague student, the high school I went, but also kids who President Aristide took down the street, like who have no parents.

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**Fils-Aime, Pierre, oral history interview conducted by Lina Raciukaitis, March 23, 2018;
Caribbean Heritage in Cambridge Oral History Project; Cambridge Historical Society**



LR: Oh, yeah.

PF: So he took them, he put them in a center that he created, put them in school, and they grew up to become doctors and lawyers in this movement. See, you have people from rich schools and people he took down the street graduating at the same time. So that's what our movement is all about. So we care about people, it doesn't matter your economic background.

LR: And you keep mentioning "our movement" so what's the – what's the movement?

PF: Oh the movement is (laughs) I told you not to get me started (laughter) – the movement from our perspective, it started since the shores of Africa. They took us, they kidnapped us as slaves, brought us on the American continent, in our case in Haiti, in the Haitian island. The Spaniards started and then after one hundred years the French took over. But for three hundred years we were brought from Africa as slaves, to be mistreated on plantations, and of course we always rebelled but the colonial machine was so strong so it took us three hundred years to uprise. In August nineteen – not nineteen – 1791 – with historical leaders like Boukman, Toussaint Louverture, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Bookman was the one who was the main leader in the uprising, the revolt, in August 1791, and then he got killed a couple of weeks later in the battle. And then Toussaint Louverture, more educated, genius, so he took the fight and he proved himself to be a genius. Not only did he create an army himself, at that time the French, the Spaniards, and the English were fighting to take the island for themselves because the island was so flourishing, so rich because of the slavery, because of the work of the slave. They were at war, those three big superpowers. Whoever got Haiti would have enough resources money-wise to win the wars. That's why they were fighting on the island, to get it. So, Toussaint Louverture created an army with slaves, kicked the Spaniards out of the island, kicked the English out of the island, and then he created a treaty with France so he kicked them out for the French, and for the first time, he governed the entire island. Because at first, the French could govern during three hundred, two hundred years, the French had the western part of the island, and the Spaniards, the eastern part of the island. Toussaint Louverture won wars and governed the entire island on behalf of the French. They felt like he was too powerful so they kidnapped him and took him to France. Killed him there. And then his lieutenant, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, our founding father, took over and then fought the French, beat them, and then declared ourselves independent. Of course, they managed to kill Dessalines after a couple of years and everything, but why – because Dessalines wanted some kind of equity, social justice. He wanted to separate the wealth of the country with equity. So they hated him for that and then they killed him. And since that time, the people – that's what I call the movement – we've been fighting, and it's been two hundred years, dictatorship after dictatorship, alliance against the people with foreign countries to exploit the country, to exploit the people. So President Aristide since Dessalines was the first one who took the battle where Dessalines left it two hundred years ago. He was the first elected so that's why the people went crazy after him. Of course the same types of forces have been fighting him. That's why I call it the

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**Fils-Aime, Pierre, oral history interview conducted by Lina Raciukaitis, March 23, 2018;
Caribbean Heritage in Cambridge Oral History Project; Cambridge Historical Society**



movement, it's a movement that started long before him. And I'm so proud – and that's why I feel like that's something I shouldn't get any money out of. I feel very proud and very humbled, very lucky to be part of it.

LR: Yeah, it's really rooted in a long history.

PF: Oh yes, yes.

LR: Wow, yeah. Okay so I'm gonna wrap up soon –

PF: Oh, really? Okay.

LR: (laughs) Unless you want to add something more.

PF: Oh, well, there is so much.

LR: Yeah, of course.

PF: In my life, my experience as an immigrant by itself, I feel like I have a story to tell. But my involvement in the political movement, or my feeling for my country, is something else. So, there is so much to talk about, if you don't ask me questions I don't know where to start.

LR: Right, yeah. I mean for, let's see, so we're almost at two hours –

PF: Oh really? Already? Oh my goodness, I talk too much.

LR: (laughter) So, for today I think we should definitely start wrapping up but I mean if you're interested in going into more detail about certain parts of things, we could definitely schedule another time.

PF: You don't feel like you have enough of me already? (laughter)

LR: Just cause like oral history recordings, they could be like one hour or they could be like, forty hours.

PF: OK, we don't want to do forty hours.

LR: No, no I'm not suggesting that but –

PF: I will need a few stuff for a book that I might write in the future –

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**Fils-Aime, Pierre, oral history interview conducted by Lina Raciukaitis, March 23, 2018;
Caribbean Heritage in Cambridge Oral History Project; Cambridge Historical Society**



LR: Yeah, so we can definitely like, talk about maybe picking up somewhere if you'd be interested, but –

PF: Well, it's a matter of time too.

LR: Right, of course.

PF: But I think you have enough, and have an idea of all aspects of what I've been through.

LR: Yeah, absolutely. Thank you so much for sharing, it felt like a journey through your experiences. But I do have a few questions just related to this oral history project in general.

PF: Sure.

LR: Is there anyone you recommend that I should talk to – anyone you recommend that I should do an oral history interview with who's around Cambridge?

PF: Well, I have other colleagues I'm thinking of whom I went through a training with last year. Of course, I could communicate you their names because they work in Cambridge and chances are they live in Cambridge so I can give you a couple of names.

LR: Ok, that would be great. And what would you like to see as a result of his project?

PF: Well, I'm not too sure what this project is entirely about, so I'm simply being how to say, cooperative, you know, talking about history, I like that, and when I think, Diana – I think Diana?

LR: Yeah.

PF: Asked my supervisor for me to be – I was shocked because I don't live in Cambridge and things like that, but I'm not ashamed to talk about my life, and so if that can help another immigrant, by listening to my story and learning from it, or if the program can use my experience to help improve the situation of other newcomers like immigrants, I'm happy to help.

LR: Yeah cause the goal of the project is to reach out to people who are from the Caribbean or have Caribbean heritage who live or work in Cambridge just to expand that history. To record stories of people who are in Cambridge, who work or live in Cambridge for local history, for the Cambridge Historical Society to hold in the archives so people in the way future can read it and also to create some sort of final presentation or final

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**Fils-Aime, Pierre, oral history interview conducted by Lina Raciukaitis, March 23, 2018;
Caribbean Heritage in Cambridge Oral History Project; Cambridge Historical Society**



product of it so it's more accessible to people today. So it's like a wide spanning thing because once there's a recording and a transcript, that's kept for a long time and whatever uses are found for it in the future, I might not know, but for now it's definitely very much a community history. And trying to like –

PF: So where is it gonna be available? In libraries, or where?

LR: Right. Because it's through the Cambridge Historical Society, it'll be on the Cambridge Historical Society website and there's also an archive collection there, so it'll be there as well. But, yeah, if you think that having parts of it in libraries as well could be really helpful then that's something that can be considered.

PF: I'm just asking. Now, okay, I'm trying to see, to figure out when I can go, when is it gonna be ready, are you gonna write an article about it, or are you gonna write any text about it or it's only the recording?

LR: So, we're sort of – because it's the beginning of the project, it's still new and we're thinking about different ways that we could present it.

PF: I see.

LR: And so hearing from people who we talk to, like you and other narrators who are gonna be recording, hearing what they feel like would be most useful or most sharable and best way to do that is part of thinking about how we're gonna do it.

PF: I see, I see.

LR: So we don't want to like create a final decision that won't be useful.

PF: Okay now when do you think it's gonna be available for me to listen to.

LR: Let's see. I think in about two weeks or so.

PF: Really?

LR: Yeah, I mean I could send you this file today (laughs), but the transcript takes time I think I'm gonna do part of it manually just like typing it up and then I might be able to do a digital type-up of it. So the transcript takes a little more time but the recording you know, I can definitely send to you.

PF: I would appreciate that.

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**Fils-Aime, Pierre, oral history interview conducted by Lina Raciukaitis, March 23, 2018;
Caribbean Heritage in Cambridge Oral History Project; Cambridge Historical Society**



LR: Yeah, Okay.

PF: It's gonna be scary to hear what I said (laughter).

LR: Yeah I can definitely send that to you today. And yeah the transcript, and then you can edit the transcript, the recording is hard to edit, but for the transcript – because the transcript is what people usually go to first just because you can read through it.

PF: (checking phone) My daughter – “can you please put money on my card for dinner?”

LR: So do you think something like an article might be a good way to – because then I could send it to you after the project is done to do a final sort of, write-up, a final summary and then you could definitely use that too.

PF: Of course, because that's a lot of accounts on my life I just gave you, if the program could use it to prepare a text, an article like for wherever you're gonna post it for people to see the life of one immigrant or whatever – I would like to have that too, it's about me.

LR: I mean, anything that's done through me at least it will be like, sent to you or while I'm there it'll be sent to you, but because it's gonna be in the part of the collection, even after I'm not like, there anymore working on projects with them then I don't know what it can be used for.

PF: So even if you're not there I would like to know where I can go and check it out.

LR: Yeah oh, absolutely, where you can find it and – definitely. Someone else – I think the library idea is interesting because someone else mentioned that. They asked if it would be available in libraries –

PF: Of course. When people want to research, we go to libraries.

LR: Right, yeah. I think it'll be connected to libraries if people are doing research or something.

PF: Sure.

LR: Yeah I just wanted to – just wondering if you had any thoughts on that.

PF: I think library's a good idea and one of the reasons why I think it was important, it could be a good thing to do – if it's gonna positively influence other people because what helps is that once you know that, okay, you're

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**Fils-Aime, Pierre, oral history interview conducted by Lina Raciukaitis, March 23, 2018;
Caribbean Heritage in Cambridge Oral History Project; Cambridge Historical Society**



not the only one who's going through all this, others have gone through that, here's how they overcome it and this is, here is the mistake not to make, it helps. I think we should try to have it available as much as possible in places where people would know that, if I want to research about immigrants, this is where I go.

LR: Okay. Thank you!

PF: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

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Caribbean Heritage in Cambridge Oral History Project; Cambridge Historical Society**