

Interview with Clarence Sealy

INTERVIEWER:

Interviewee(s): Clarence Sealy

Year of Birth: 1937

Location of Interview: Panama

Language of Interview: English, Spanish, Patois

Date of Interview:

INTERVIEWER: Good morning.

SEALY: Good morning.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in the interview, we appreciate it, the project will definitely benefit Panamanians of West Indian descent and people of African descent hopefully more broadly. I will be asking you a variety of questions about background, culture, family, et cetera. So tell me about your, where you were born, and what it was like for you as a child growing up, what are your memories, what was, what was it like?

SEALY: Well I was born in Geurreros Hospital, right up the street from here, 1937. Yes, and—well, what more should I say, about—where I was born? I just said it—and uh my parents, okay, two different sides, one side is Barbadian, the other side is Jamaican, traditionally, you're not supposed to get along—but uh Mom and Dad got along pretty well. I went to school in what used to be the Canal Zone—yeah—and I graduated from La Boca High School, from there I went to United States, supposedly to study, but I was too smart for that, see, my uncle told my mother what I was doing, and I had to join the U.S. military so that I would support myself—to support myself. in the military I traveled—all over the world, I would say, you know, and, after the military, I worked with U.S. Military Customs, so uh—and at this job, I traveled all through Central and South America, so I have a pretty good knowledge of the uh culture, traditions, of all these countries. Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Wonderful.

SEALY: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: So tell me more about what the job was like—what you liked about it, what you didn't.

SEALY: Okay my job was uh, in Customs, my job was to, uh inspect all these troops that go into these different countries, before they go back to the United States, so that they wouldn't have to go through a port of entry, they just go straight back to their bases—that, that's just the gist of my job, you know—inspecting for drugs and other illegal objects going back to the United States.

INTERVIEWER: So your employer was the United States?

SEALY: Yes. U.S.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

SEALY: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: And what was that like for you as a Black Panamanian, working for the U.S.?

SEALY: Well uh, you know, all these different countries are different, we call them Latin American countries but, they have a lot of different customs, and a lot of different languages, you know, that are spoken in these countries that- not Spanish, you know. I did pretty well because I, I speak Spanish, and English both, but there are countries like—let me see if I can remember right now—like, Surinam, for example, in Surinam they speak this Africanized Dutch, and I, I was completely lost, you know—I had to do a little drawing, you know but I got along pretty well, I do, I'm a pretty good communicator, you know, so, uh I didn't have much, many problems.

INTERVIEWER: So tell me what you remember about your childhood. What is one memory that stands out for you?

SEALY: My childhood.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

SEALY: Well, I was raised by the Jamaican side of my family, see, and they uh—Jamaicans are supposed to be strict, they were strict, but neither my grandmother or my grandfather ever put their hand on me, they didn't need to, because all they had to do was talk and that was it. So I had a pretty good childhood, I think, you know.

INTERVIEWER: What sayings do you remember?

SEALY: Uh—

INTERVIEWER: From them.

SEALY: If it—if it, uh...if it cheap, it no good—if it no good, it no cheap. Oh, if it cheap it no good, if it no good it no cheap—did you understand what I said? If it's cheap it's not good, if it's not good—if it's good it's not cheap. I remember that all the time because, when something is reduced in price, I take a very good look at it, because there's some reason why it's been reduced.

INTERVIEWER: Now tell me about your grandparents, then, what were they like?

SEALY: My grandparents, my grandmother's name was Daisy, my grandfather's name was Cordova, you know, they say in English, Cordova in Spanish, where he got the Spanish name from, I don't know, but I did, I do—I did notice in Jamaica, there are a lot of people with Spanish names in Jamaica, you know, I didn't know that before going there this last time, but looking in the telephone directory, I noticed that and uh, they came from uh, the Western part of Jamaica, Black River, St. Elizabeth Province, uh Province you call it or—Parish, is that it? Yes and most of the fruits and vegetables in Jamaica, well I'm familiar with it, you know, so, I really had a nice time in Jamaica, and I'm going back again, went twice last year, and I'm going back again.

INTERVIEWER: So how would you describe your connection to your Jamaican ancestry, or your Barbadian ancestry for that matter, you, you say you've fallen in love with Jamaica?

SEALY: Oh yes yes.

INTERVIEWER: Tell us—tell me about that relationship.

SEALY: Well, before going to Jamaica, like I said, I've been all over the world, but in Jamaica I noticed that—in the bank, I went into a bank—and all the people, from back all the way to the front, were Black, you know and that's, to me was unusual, you know uh, some places you go, you see one or two Black people, or you might see uh, some Black taking care of the customers in front, but when you look in the back, you see some European, you know. It wasn't so in Jamaica, I saw, everybody from back to front were Black, you know and that made me proud of being a Jamaican, of Jamaican descent.

INTERVIEWER: Who were your best friends in school, do you remember?

SEALY: My best friends.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, when you were, when you were a kid.

SEALY: Oh yes, uh—by name or—I don't know, they- well, my friends, where I grew up, most of uh the students, were of uh West Indian descent, on the Canal Zone, I don't know if you've already been told this but uh, most of them were of West Indian descent, and when I went to, to Jamaica, I dropped a coin, and, I was with a taxi driver, so he was going to bend down to pick it up, so I said, (speaks Patois), he said, “You talk my language?” I said yes, because my grandparents spoke like, spoke like that, and I'm quite familiar with the Jamaican way of speaking, Jamaican accent.

INTERVIEWER: So you also speak, you can speak with a Jamaican accent, you can speak Patois?

SEALY: Sure, sure enough. But this guy told me one time, he said, he was coming out of this house, and as he came out of the house, he saw his wife, and he said, (speaks Patois),

and uh, he said, you know, you know, the woman love me so much, you know, and she believe me you know. And I said, you believes she believe you.

INTERVIEWER: Speaking about that, did you ever hear about the uh, the phenomenon of the two families, the Colon men who have a family here and a family in, in Jamaica?

SEALY: Well that's quite prevalent, I think in the Caribbean, you know, because I, I—anytime I ask my grandfather about his background, you know, why he came from Jamaica here, and never did leave here to go back to Jamaica, I always thought there was something there that he didn't, didn't want anybody to know about. Yeah this guy come back from—this guy came back from Jamaica, you know, I, when I was in Jamaica the last time, and he told me about this story, he said that this guy was walking down the street, and a policeman caught him, he said, the policeman said, "I don't want you to go down that street, you know." Him said, "Why, why you don't want me to go down that street, officer? I been in United States 17 years, unh? In New York, and you telling me I can't go down that street?" (speaks other language) So, he said, "All right," so he went down the street. Then, the policeman said, "Thief," policeman call the thief, said, "Come here, I want to talk to you," said, "Officer, I don't do nothing!" Then him say uh, you know, "You see that man going down the street there? I want you to jook him for me." "But officer, if I jook him, you're gonna carry me to jail!" So, said, "No no, if you don't jook him I'm gonna carry you to jail." And then he said, um, officer said, then him said, "Look, officer, I can tell you something..." "What, what you want to tell me now?" "I jook him already. Next time he put anything in his pocket, him going to find out that I jook him already." I love to hear the Jamaican accent—if, anywhere in the world I am, when I hear it, that West Indian accent, I approach the person and, try to communicate with them. Yeah well, I don't know what else I should say, in the, other than, I went to a church in Jamaica, and, they asked me to say something about, myself and my country, so I said, I have one great problem here in Jamaica, you know? I think I told you this before, and the problem is that I'm in love with Jamaica, that is my big problem, because if, you know, if you love something, you got to come back to it, and that's, that's what I'm saying, I'm going back to Jamaica I can't say anything about Barbados, because I've never been to Barbados, I plan to go there this year, by way of Jamaica, I go Jamaica first, then I go to Barbados.

INTERVIEWER: Did you find that Jamaicans knew about Panama and Panamanian—

SEALY: Oh yes, oh very much so, they, they know all about Panama, and many of them have told me that they had uh lost relatives in Panama, like my grandfather came here and never went back to Jamaica, you know, they were very much uh—another thing, this guy, the same guy that told me the joke, he said, look, when you go Jamaica, tell me something, I tell you something, you know, the ladies there, not like in Panama here, you know, you have to be properly introduced. I said, yes? When I went to Jamaica now I was a little bit skeptical about talking to the ladies, but I do my exercises in the morning, you know, while I was doing my exercise, I said, I want to talk to them mon, you know? So, I said, hello, how are you? "Hey, how are you?" and they were all, all of them very very friendly. One of them in a store, I said, do you mind if I tell you you're beautiful? "Oh

yes mon, tell me, tell me right now.” But I really, I really love Jamaica, and another thing, is that they had a, at this hotel, I don’t know how they got wind of it, but, the first trip to Jamaica last year was my anniversary, my wedding anniversary, I don’t know how they got wind of it but, they gave me a cake about that big, and champagne, they call me downstairs from my room upstairs, and, and told me, look, we have something here for you, and I walked in the room and there was this big cake, and champagne, you know, I said, whoa, and uh, my wife had never seen me cry before—mm, tears in my eyes—because when my grandfather died, I couldn’t come back to Panama, I was in Spain, and I couldn’t make it back. Unh, it really did hit me. Wonderful, wonderful memories of Jamaica

INTERVIEWER: What was your relationship with your grandfather like, is, is it through him that you think you learned that love of—

SEALY: Well my grandfather raised me, my grandfather and my grandmother on my Jamaican, on the Jamaican side of my family, they raised me, you know, so I uh, I was really attached to my Jamaican side of my family. Yeah

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm. So tell me what, what sort of music did you listen to growing up? Was it Jamaican music or what—

SEALY: Oh, music, music. Me love me Calypso, mon—oh yes, I love my Calypso, yes, that is my first love in music, Calypso—not so much the reggae but the uh authentic Calypso, what I call authentic is, is old time Calypso, you know, something like “The Sparrow Sings,” you know? I, I really like that, that’s what I have at home, mostly Calypso music, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember particular songs or particular lyrics that, that always stick in your mind?

SEALY: Yes, uh. (sings) “She is my only Mona Lisa / and I will love her with my heart forever / she is my only Mona Lisa / and I will love her with my heart forever / I don’t know if she really love me / my friends, them say that I am lucky / not only speaking of her charms and beauty / she got a Mona Lisa personality, cha cha. Yes, that, I, I really love Calypso music, yes, and uh, I don’t know. Well, I’m pretty sure that you do know that Calypso was sung by the not-too-good element in Jamaica, so my grandfather didn’t like me singing Calypso, cause he said that that’s, them rough people music, you know, you understand what I mean? Yes, but I love Calypso I was in Ethiopia once, and I heard, this Calypso music, you know, and I just, the music just drew me to this room, you know, the guy was playing Calypso music, you know, I really am attached to it, Calypso music, love it, love it, love it.

INTERVIEWER: It’s interesting, because it seems like you’re someone who’s traveled a lot and been away from Panama so long, but yet you seem to be, still be so rooted in your West Indian ancestry, what is your relationship to Panama, you think? How would you characterize it?

SEALY: Well this is where I was born, my wife is Panamanian also, you know, but uh she's a, Latin derivative, you know. She has learned to cook West Indian style, you know, sometimes I told her, my grandmother you know... She doesn't like that when I tell her that, "You know, my grandmother didn't cook like that..." but she has learned, she knows how to cook anything West Indian, she knows how to cook it. Yeah she speaks English, too you know.

INTERVIEWER: How did you—

SEALY: We've been married for 47, almost 48 years now. When I was going to get married, my grandfather told my grandmother told me, she said, "You going to marry that Paniaguan?" Said, I said, well, that's the one I like, that's the one I love, so here I am, after 47 years.

INTERVIEWER: How did you meet her?

SEALY: In a mango tree. I, I didn't like to climb trees, you know, so I waited until she climbed the tree, and asked her to pick some mangos for me, and she did when I was going to ask for her hand in marriage, you know, her mother was a very aggressive person, you know, so I was afraid of approaching her. I walked towards her mother, and I looked at her mother's face, she puff up like a bullfrog, you know (makes ballooning sound) I said, uh, she said, (speaks Spanish), "You came here to ask for my daughter's hand in marriage?" said, "No senora." She said, "Are you sure?" I said, "I don't want her hand, I want everything." I not—I noticed a little smile on her face, "Gotcha."

INTERVIEWER: Did you have children?

SEALY: Only five and they're all in the United States, all of them, all doing well. All doing well, thank God, yes.

INTERVIEWER: How do your children identify themselves, do you think?

SEALY: Well uh—I have five children, and they're all different, every one of them is different, but all of them would like to come back to Panama one day, they come and visit, you know. Uh there's only one, who is married to an American lady and, who seems more inclined to stay in the United States, but all the others would like to come back to Panama, and live, mm-hmm.

INTERVIEWER: Do they, what is their lang—do they speak both English and Spanish?

SEALY: I insisted that they spoke both languages, while I was in the military I was stationed here for a total of 12 years, 6, went away, came back, 6 more years, so, they, they, all of them speak languages, fluently. One of them didn't want to speak Spanish, so I snatched him out of the American school, and stuck him in the school downtown, and he speaks Spanish.

INTERVIEWER: Do any of them speak Patois?

SEALY: Yes, they, they, they—they attempt to, especially Felicia, my youngest daughter, she sometimes I call her on the phone and she speaks to me, oh speaks Patois, yes.

INTERVIEWER: And what about the grandchildren?

SEALY: Grandchildren, I have, let me see—7, 8, 9 grands—9 grands, all of my family, all of ‘em are in the States, none of ‘em are here. I hope someday, or one day, uh right now I have a couple places in the interior, you know, as an investment for them, to attract them to come back to Panama one day.

INTERVIEWER: So what specific message do you think you would wanna, that you wanna communicate to the other generations, whether the generation older than you, or the generation younger than you?

SEALY: Be proud of your heritage, who you are, what you are, I was in a hospital one time, this lady comes to me, uh and, she said, one of her kid in the neighborhood, who is of West Indian background, she’s Latin background, you know, he was having a problem in school, because of his West Indian background, so I said, do you know who Marcus Garvey is? No. Do you know who Kofi Annan is? Said, no. I mean, uh—that is his problem, he, he doesn’t know his heritage, he doesn’t have enough pride in his heritage, so that now, when he passes by my house, he says hi to me, uh she asked me if I would have him come to my house, you know, I said yes, and I spoke to him about all these great black people, or, West Indian also, and then uh I, I told him that I would give him a test. So he brought six of his friends, you know, his six friends and him, you know, and I gave them a test, and he got the best score, and I had a, a globe that I gave to him, and he, I could see it when I go down the street where I live, he has it in his window, real pride, real proud of that, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Excellent, excellent. What was the last grade of school that you completed?

SEALY: College. Georgia Military College, Georgia Military College

INTERVIEWER: And what, where do you live now?

SEALY: I live in Alto de Balbuena, which is, on the way to airport. Yeah, pretty nice neighborhood, I like it

INTERVIEWER: is there anything else that we hadn’t touched upon that you would like to share with us?

SEALY: I am very proud of my West Indian, background. Uh, a guy asked me one day, a professor in the university here, he said, “Your last name is Sealy?” I said yes. Said,

“That’s not Panamanian.” I said, “What do you mean, it’s not Panamanian?” He said, “What I—I said.” “What is your last name?” he said, “Rodriguez,” I said, that’s not Panamanian either. Your last name is European, just as, as my last name is European, same thing, what is the difference? You know and he, “You’re right, you know.” Yes, that’s about all I have to say 3 2 1 go.

INTERVIEWER: So, do you like to eat? what are your favorite foods? You said that your wife cooks but what do you like?

SEALY: Akean, Akean catfish, yes all the West Indian foods, the way it, West Indian food is cooked—I love it, I really do, you know. Rice and peas, with coconut, cooked young chicken, I think you called it brown chicken, you know, love it, when I was in Jamaica, I uh, I liked the uh juicy beef patty, and the um what is these places, that you go to, uh island - island grill? Island grill, yes, oh I used- I go, I went there every day when I was in Jamaica, the lady asked me what I would like for breakfast, at the hotel, I said I want a Jamaican breakfast so, she gave me green bananas, and Akean catfish, you know. When, when I first call, she said uh, “Look, I can get you into the Kingston Hilton.” I said, “I don’t want that, I wanna go, I wanna go someplace I can eat with Jamaicans, and speak with Jamaicans, I wanna open my door in the morning, I don’t wanna hear somebody talk like they’re from Michigan or New York, I want (speaks Patois), you know what I mean?” Say, “Okay.” And she got me this, this hotel, really nice, really nice place, I really really really loved it, there were nice people, and people talk, I’ve heard some people talk about the bad things in Jamaica, everywhere you go you have bad things, and, and good things, you know. I have not yet experienced the bad things in Jamaica. That’s about, that’s about it.

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INTERVIEWER: Good morning.

SEALY: Good morning.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in the interview, we appreciate it, the project will definitely benefit Panamanians of West Indian descent and people of African descent hopefully more broadly. I will be asking you a variety of questions about background, culture, family, et cetera. So tell me about your, where you were born, and what it was like for you as a child growing up, what are your memories, what was, what was it like?

SEALY: Well I was born in Geurreros Hospital, right up the street from here, 1937. Yes, and—well, what more should I say, about—where I was born? I just said it—and, uh my parents, okay, two different sides, one side is Barbadian, the other side is Jamaican, traditionally, you're not supposed to get along—but uh Mom and Dad got along pretty well. I went to school in what used to be the Canal Zone—yeah—and uh, I graduated from La Boca High School, from there I went to United States, supposedly to study, but I was too smart for that, see, my uncle told my mother what I was doing, and I had to join the U.S. military uh, so that I would support myself—to support myself. in the military I traveled—all over the world, I would say, you know, and, after the military, I worked with U.S. Military Customs, so uh—and at this job, I traveled all through Central and South America, so I have a pretty good knowledge of the uh culture, traditions, of all these countries. Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Wonderful.

SEALY: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: So tell me more about your, what the job was like—what you liked about it, what you didn't.

SEALY: Okay my job was uh, in Customs, my job was to, uh inspect all these troops that go into these different countries, before they go back to the United States, so that they wouldn't have to go through a port of entry, they just go straight back to their bases—that, that's just the gist of my job, you know—inspecting for drugs and, and, other illegal objects going back to the United States.

INTERVIEWER: So your employer was the United States?

SEALY: Yes. U.S.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

SEALY: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: And what was that like for you as a, as a Black Panamanian, working for the U.S.?

SEALY: Well uh, you know, all these different countries are different, we call them Latin American countries but, they have a lot of different customs, and a lot of different languages, you know, that there are spoken in these countries that- not Spanish, you know. I did pretty well because I, I speak Spanish, and English both, but there are countries like um,—let me see if I can remember right now—like, Surinam, for example, in Surinam they speak this Africanized Dutch, and I, I was completely lost, you know—I had to do a lot of drawing, you know but I got along pretty well, I do, I'm a pretty good communicator, you know, so, uh I didn't have much, many problems.

INTERVIEWER: So tell me what you remember about your childhood? What is, what is one memory that stands out for you?

SEALY: My childhood?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

SEALY: Well, I was raised by the Jamaican side of my family, see, and they uh—Jamaicans are supposed to be strict, they were strict, but neither my grandmother or my grandfather ever put their hand on me, they didn't need to, because all they had to do was talk and that was it. So I had a pretty good childhood, I think, you know.

INTERVIEWER: What, what sayings do you remember?

SEALY: Uh—

INTERVIEWER: From them.

SEALY: If it—if it, uh, if it cheap, it no good—if it no good, it no cheap. Oh, if it cheap it no good, if it no good it no cheap—did you understand what I said? If it's cheap it's not good, if it's not good—if it's good it's not cheap. I remember that all the time because, when something is reduced in price, I take a very good look at it, because there's some reason why it's been reduced.

INTERVIEWER: Now tell me about your grandparents, then, what were they like?

SEALY: My grandparents, my grandmother's name was Daisy, my grandfather's name was Cordova, you know, they say in English, Cordova in Spanish, where he got the Spanish name from, I don't know, but I did, I do—I did notice in Jamaica, there are a lot of people with Spanish names in Jamaica, you know, I didn't know that before going there this last time, but looking in the telephone directory, I noticed that and uh, they came from uh, the Western part of Jamaica, Black River, St. Elizabeth Province, uh Province you call it or—Parish, is that it? Yes and most of the fruits and vegetables in Jamaica, well I'm familiar with it, you know, so, I really had a nice time in Jamaica, and I'm going back again, went twice last year, and I'm going back again.

INTERVIEWER: So what is your, what, how would you describe your connection to your Jamaican ancestry, or your Barbadian ancestry for that matter, you, you say you've fallen in love with Jamaica?

SEALY: Oh yes yes.

INTERVIEWER: Tell us—tell me about that relationship.

SEALY: Well, before going to Jamaica, like I said, I've been all over the world, but in Jamaica I noticed that—in the bank, I went into a bank—and all the people, from back all the way to the front, were Black, you know and that's, to me was unusual, you know uh, some places you go, you see one or two Black people, or you might see uh, some Black taking care of the customers in front, but when you look in the back, you see some European, you know. It wasn't so in Jamaica, I saw, everybody from back to front were Black, you know and that made me proud of being a Jamaican, of Jamaican descent.

INTERVIEWER: Who were your best friends in school, do you remember?

SEALY: My best friends?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, when you were, when you were a kid.

SEALY: Oh yes, uh—by name or—I don't know, they- well, my friends, where I grew up, most of uh the students, were of uh West Indian descent, on the Canal Zone, I don't know if you've already been told this but uh, most of them were of West Indian descent, and when I went to, to Jamaica, I dropped a coin, and, I was with a taxi driver, so he was going to bend down to pick it up, so I said, (speaks Patois), he said, “You talk my language?” I said yes, because my grandparents spoke like, spoke like that, and I'm quite familiar with the Jamaican way of speaking, Jamaican accent.

INTERVIEWER: So you also speak, you can speak with a Jamaican accent, you can speak Patois?

SEALY: Sure, sure enough. ... But this guy told me one time, he said, he was coming out of this house, and as he came out of the house, he saw his wife, and he said, (speaks

Patois), and uh, he said, you know, you know, the woman love me so much, you know, and she believe me you know. And I said, you believes she believe you. [Laughs]

INTERVIEWER: Speaking about that, did you ever hear about the uh, the phenomenon of the two families, the Colon men who have a family here and a family in, in Jamaica?

SEALY: Well that's quite prevalent, I think in the Caribbean, you know, because I, I—anytime I ask my grandfather about his background, you know, why he came from Jamaica here, and never did leave here to go back to Jamaica, I always thought there was something there that he didn't, didn't want anybody to know about. [Laughs] Yeah this guy come back from—this guy came back from Jamaica, you know, I, when I was in Jamaica the last time, and he told me about this story, he said that this guy was walking down the street, and a policeman caught him, he said, the policeman said, “I don't want you to go down that street, you know.” Him said, “Why, why you don't want me to go down that street, officer? I been in United States 17 years, unh? In New York, and you telling me I can't go down that street?” (speaks other language) So, he said, “All right,” so he went down the street. Then, the policeman said, “Thief,” policeman call the thief, said, “Come here, I want to talk to you,” said, “Officer, I don't do nothing, I don't do nothing!” Then him say uh, you know, “You see that man going down the street there? I want you to jook him for me.” [Laughs] “But officer, if I jook him, you're gonna carry me to jail!” So, said, “No no, if you don't jook him I'm gonna carry you to jail.” [Laughs] And then he said, um, officer said, then him said, “Look, officer, I can tell you something?” “What, what you want to tell me now?” “I jook him already. [Laughs] Next time he put anything in his pocket, him going to find out that I jook him already.” [Laughs] I love to hear the Jamaican accent—if, anywhere in the world I am, when I hear it, that West Indian accent, I approach the person and, try to communicate with them. Yeah well, I don't know what else I should say, in the, other than, I went to a church in Jamaica, and, they asked me to say something about, myself and my country, so I said, I have one great problem here in Jamaica, you know? I think I told you this before, and the problem is that I'm in love with Jamaica, that is my big problem, because if, you know, if you love something, you got to come back to it, and that's, that's what I'm saying, I'm going back to Jamaica. I can't say anything about Barbados, because I've never been to Barbados, I plan to go there this year, by way of Jamaica, I go Jamaica first, then I go to Barbados.

INTERVIEWER: Did you find that Jamaicans knew about Panama and Panamanian—

SEALY: Oh yes, oh very much so, they, they know all about Panama, and many of them have told me that they had uh lost relatives in Panama, like my grandfather came here and never went back to Jamaica, you know, they were very much uh—another thing, this guy, the same guy that told me the joke, he said, look, when you go Jamaica, tell me something, I tell you something, you know, the ladies there, not like in Panama here, you know, you have to be properly introduced. I said, yes? When I went to Jamaica now I was a little bit skeptical about talking to the ladies, but I do my exercises in the morning, you know, while I was doing my exercise, I said, I want to talk to them man, you know? So, I said, hello, how are you? “Hey, how are you?” and they were all, all of them very, very

friendly. One of them in a store, I said, do you mind if I tell you you're beautiful? "Oh yes man, tell me, tell me right now." [Laughs] But I really, I really love Jamaica, and another thing, is that they had a, at this hotel, I don't know how they got wind of it, but, the first trip to Jamaica last year was my anniversary, my wedding anniversary, I don't know how they got wind of it but, they gave me a cake about that big, and champagne, they call me downstairs from my room upstairs, and, and told me, look, we have something here for you, and I walked in the room and there was this big cake, and champagne, you know, I said, whoa, and uh, my wife had never seen me cry before—mm, tears in my eyes—because when my grandfather died, I couldn't come back to Panama, I was in Spain, and I couldn't make it back. Unh, it really did hit me. Wonderful, wonderful memories of Jamaica

INTERVIEWER: What was your relationship with your grandfather like, is, is it through him that you think you learned that love of—

SEALY: Well my grandfather raised me, my grandfather and my grandmother on my Jamaican, on the Jamaican side of my family, they raised me, you know, so I uh, I was really attached to my Jamaican side of my family. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm. So tell me what, what sort of music did you listen to growing up?

SEALY: Oh, music, music. **[talking over interviewer]**

INTERVIEWER: Was it Jamaican music or what—

SEALY: Me love me Calypso, man—oh yes, I love me Calypso, yes, that is my first love in music, Calypso—not so much the reggae but the uh authentic Calypso, what I call authentic is, is old time Calypso, you know, something like "The Sparrow Sings," you know? I, I really like that, that's what I have at home, mostly Calypso music, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember particular songs or particular lyrics that, that always stick in your mind?

SEALY: Yes, uh. (sings) "She is my only Mona Lisa / and I will love her with my heart forever / she is my only Mona Lisa / and I will love her with my heart forever / I don't know if she really love me / my friends, them say that I am lucky / not only speaking of her charms and beauty / she got a Mona Lisa personality, cha cha. [Laughs] Yes, that, I, I really love Calypso music, yes, and uh, I don't know. Well, I'm pretty sure that you do know that Calypso was sung by the not-too-good element in Jamaica, so my grandfather didn't like me singing Calypso, cause he said that that's, them rough people music, you know, you understand what I mean? Yes, but I love Calypso I was in Ethiopia once, and I heard, this Calypso music, you know, and I just, the music just drew me to this room, you know, the guy was playing Calypso music, you know, I really am attached to it, Calypso music, love it, love it, love it.

INTERVIEWER: It's interesting, because it seems like you're someone who's traveled a lot and been away from Panama so long, but yet you seem to be, still be so rooted in your West Indian uh, ancestry, what is your relationship to Panama, you think? How would you characterize it?

SEALY: Well this is where I was born, my wife is Panamanian also, you know, but uh she's a, Latin derivative, you know. She has learned to cook West Indian style, you know, sometimes I told her, my grandmother you know doesn't cook this, you know. She doesn't like that when I tell her that, "You know, my grandmother didn't cook like that." [Laughs] but she has learned, she knows how to cook anything West Indian, she knows how to cook it. Yeah she speaks English, too you know.

INTERVIEWER: How did you—

SEALY: We've been married for 47, almost 48 years now. When I was going to get married, my grandfather told me, grandmother told me, she said, "You going to marry that Paniaguan?" Said, I said, well, that's the one I like, that's the one I love, so here I am, after 47 years.

INTERVIEWER: How did you meet her?

SEALY: In a mango tree. I, I didn't like to climb trees, you know, so I waited until she climbed the tree, and asked her to pick some mangos for me, and she did. When I was going to ask for her hand in marriage, you know, her mother was a very aggressive person, you know, so I was afraid of approaching her. I walked towards her mother, and I looked at her mother's face, she puff up like a bullfrog, you know (makes ballooning sound) I said, uh, she said, ... "tu ... aqui? A pide el mano a mi hija, no?", "You came here to ask for my daughter's hand in marriage?" said, "No senora." She said, "Are you sure?" I said, "I don't want her hand, I want everything." I not—I noticed a little smile on her face, "Gotcha." [Laughs]

INTERVIEWER: Did you have children?

SEALY: Only five. And they're all in the United States, all of them, all doing well. All doing well, thank God, yes.

INTERVIEWER: How do your children identify themselves, do you think?

SEALY: Well uh—I have five children, and they're all different, every one of them is different, but all of them would like to come back to Panama one day, they come and visit, you know. Uh there's only one, who is married to an American lady and, who seems more inclined to stay in the United States, but all the others would like to come back to Panama, and live, mm-hmm.

INTERVIEWER: Do they, what is their lang—do they speak both English and Spanish?

SEALY: I insisted that they spoke both languages, while I was in the military I was stationed here for a total of 12 years, 6, went away, came back, 6 more years, so, they, they, all of them speak both languages, fluently. One of them didn't want to speak Spanish, so I snatched him out of the American school, and stuck him in the school downtown, and he speaks Spanish.

INTERVIEWER: Do any of them speak Patois?

SEALY: Yes, they, they, they—they attempt to, especially Felicia, my youngest daughter, she sometimes I call her on the phone and she speaks to me, oh speaks Patois, yes.

INTERVIEWER: And what about the grandchildren?

SEALY: Grandchildren, I have, let me see—7, 8, 9 grands—9 grands, all of my family, all of 'em are in the States, none of them are here. I hope someday, or one day, uh right now I have a couple places in the interior, you know, as an investment for them, to attract them to come back to Panama one day.

INTERVIEWER: So what specific message do you think you would wanna, that you wanna communicate to the other generations, whether the generation older than you, or the generation younger than you?

SEALY: Be proud of your heritage, who you are, what you are, I was in a hospital one time, this lady comes to me, uh and, she said, one of her kid in the neighborhood, who is of West Indian background, she's Latin background, you know, he was having a problem in school, because of his West Indian background, so I said, do you know who Marcus Garvey is? No. Do you know who Kofi Annan is? Said, no. I mean, uh—that is his problem, he, he doesn't know his heritage, he doesn't have enough pride in his heritage, so that now, when he passes by my house, he says hi to me, uh she asked me if I would have him come to my house, you know, I said yes, and I spoke to him about all these great black people, or, West Indian also, and then uh I, I told him that I would give him a test. So he brought six of his friends, you know, his six friends and him, you know, and I gave them a test, and he got the best score, and I had a, a globe that I gave to him, and he, I could see it when I go down the street where I live, he has it in his window, real pride, real proud of that, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Excellent, excellent. What was the last grade of school that you completed?

SEALY: College. Georgia Military College, Georgia Military College

INTERVIEWER: And what, where do you live now?

SEALY: I live in Alto de Balbuena, which is, on the way to airport. Yeah, pretty nice neighborhood, I like it

INTERVIEWER: Is there anything else that we hadn't touched upon that you would like to share with us?

SEALY: I am very proud of my West Indian, background. Uh, a guy asked me one day, a professor in the university here, he said, "Your last name is Sealy?" I said yes. Said, "That's not Panamanian." I said, "What do you mean, it's not Panamanian?" He said, "What I—I said." "What is your last name?" he said, "Rodriguez," I said, that's not Panamanian either. Your last name is European, just as, as my last name is European, same thing, what is the difference? You know and he, "You're right, you know." Yes, that's about all I have to say.

INTERVIEWER: So, do you like to eat? what are your favorite foods? You said that your wife cooks but what do you like?

SEALY: Achee, Achee and catfish, yes all the West Indian foods, the way it, West Indian food is cooked—I love it, I really do, you know. Rice and peas, with coconut, cooked young chicken, I think you called it brown chicken, you know, love it, when I was in Jamaica, I uh, I liked the uh juicy beef patty, and the um what is these places, that you go to, uh island - island grill? Island grill, yes, oh I used- I go, I went there every day when I was in Jamaica, the lady asked me what I would like for breakfast, at the hotel, I said I want a Jamaican breakfast so, she gave me green bananas, and Achee and catfish, you know. When, when I first call, she said uh, "Look, I can get you into the Kingston Hilton." I said, "I don't want that, I wanna go, I wanna go someplace I can eat with Jamaicans, and speak with Jamaicans, I wanna open my door in the morning, I don't wanna hear somebody talk like they're from Michigan or New York, I want (speaks Patois... from Mandeville), you know what I mean?" Say, "Okay." And she got me this, this hotel, really nice, really nice place, I really really really loved it, there were nice people, and people talk, I've heard some people talk about the bad things in Jamaica, everywhere you go you have bad things, and, and good things, you know. I have not yet experienced the bad things in Jamaica. That's about, that's about it.