

BIG E PERSONALITIES

The Streets Were Hot: One Petty Officer's Story

Story by Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Gregory White



Photo by MC2(SW) Brooks B. Patton Jr.

USS ENTERPRISE, At Sea – Once upon a time, not too long ago in the Republic of Haiti, chaos filled the land. Citizens rioted in the streets. People killed and people died in an attempt to overthrow their local government.

Gean-Claude Duvalier became president at the age of 19 after his father, Francois (Poppa Doc) Duvalier, the self-proclaimed “President for Life,” passed away. Many people were dissatisfied.

“I lived in Haiti for nine years and during that time I saw nine presidents,” said Hospital Corpsman 1st Class Judith L. Wesley, an independent duty corpsman aboard Enterprise. “Every year someone else would come in. People wouldn’t like him. People would be exiled. People would die. He would be thrown down. It was a vicious cycle.”

Wesley was born in New York, but soon moved to the Republic of Haiti where she spent much of her time growing up.

Wesley recalls going to school in Haiti. She said school

normally started in October, but during election times things would often get so bad children did not go to school for days, weeks and, sometimes, months. People described the streets as being ‘hot’ during these trying times.

“I would go to school until a riot would occur,” said Wesley. “Schools would shut down for months so long as the streets were hot. The ‘streets are hot’ meant that people were out there rioting, shooting, and going crazy.”

Wesley moved back to the United States when she was a senior in high school. After finishing high school, she enrolled in college. Times were often difficult then, too. Wesley was working three jobs in order to pay rent, pay bills, pay tuition and pay for books and supplies. She chose, however, to make the best of things.

“I don’t feel like I’ve had many tribulations,” said Wesley. “I feel as though I may have had set backs, but my parents taught me that when you get knocked down, you get back up. Some days you have food, and some days you don’t, but

BIG E PERSONALITIES

if all you had was bread and water that day, then you had food.”

It wasn't long before Wesley realized that she could not afford to keep going at the rate she was going, so she searched for better opportunities.

“One day I saw a commercial that said ‘let the Navy pay for college,’” said Wesley. “I said, ‘OKAY!’ and did just that.”

“My experience in Haiti actually shaped me and helped me to grow into a person who was well prepared for the military. I've seen dead bodies and I've seen people killed as a kid. Now, when I see it as an adult, it doesn't faze me too much at the. I can say that was an experience that my parents didn't expect for me, but I saw it, I lived it, I overcame it, and now I'm here.”

Wesley has been in the Navy for 14 years now, and she has plans to retire after 20. Her first duty station was in Okinawa, Japan and her first school was physical therapy school.

“Right after graduating from physical therapy school the attacks of 9/11 occurred, we had a lot of injured and wounded service members come to the hospital,” said Wesley. “I had the opportunity to perform physical therapy on them and it was very fulfilling. In dealing with their injuries, surgeries, amputations and burns, I learned to become very patient and compassionate with patients as they proceeded through physical therapy. Those were some of my most fulfilling times as a physical therapy technician.”

Wesley later served five years in San Diego as a physical therapy technician before moving on to become an independent duty corpsman.

Wesley said she likes basic sick call and treating patients for their illnesses. She enjoys learning about new diseases and trying to figure out how to help people.

“In the midst of this I've learned that, even though I am not a doctor, I'm still a provider, and we cannot cure everybody,” said Wesley. “Certain things that we find, we have to contemplate how to tell people what they have and might have to live with, as well as ways to help them cope with that kind of news.”

After becoming an independent duty corpsman, Wesley later traveled to Texas to teach combat casualty care to new doctors, nurses and medical corpsmen who were preparing to deploy to warzones.

“I taught them how to get out of the comfort of being in a sterile hospital and how to treat patients in dirty places with no lights and minimal supplies,” said Wesley. “I taught them how to improvise with basic materials to treat patients out in the field and on the front line.”

Finally, when her time as an instructor drew to a close, HM1 Wesley reported to aircraft carrier USS Enterprise (CVN 65). Enterprise is her first ship, and not only is she

the ship's independent duty corpsman, but she is also the president of the Multicultural Heritage Committee aboard Enterprise.

Wesley said she was shocked that she was nominated to be president of the committee.

“I never showed up to the meetings,” said Wesley. “I maybe went to three and then helped organize the observance for the Caribbean Heritage Month. Next thing you know, I was running the whole thing.”

Because of her experience in Haiti, Wesley speaks fluent French and Creole. She has a deep passion and understanding of people and culture, and she hopes to do a lot of fun things with the committee during Enterprise's last deployment. She believes that there are many people on Enterprise with interesting cultural ideas, talents and histories and she hopes they will be willing to share in upcoming events.

Wesley wants to spend her next tour in the Navy with the Marines “green-side.”

“I want to go out with the Marines so that I can say I've pretty much done everything in the Navy,” said Wesley.

Wesley finished her Bachelor's degree in Clinical Health Sciences this year. She has been an instructor. She has been overseas. She has been on a ship. She has done a lot of things and she has done them all well because of her drive and perseverance.

Wesley said that she wants her three daughters to know that life isn't always easy, but that nothing is impossible.

“I set goals,” said Wesley. “Either I reach them or I die trying.” ☺

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Do you or someone you know have an interesting story to tell?

If so, contact MCSN Brian Reynolds via email at reynoldsb@cvn65.navy.mil