

QUOTE ME

Questions and Answers from Previous Interviews with Eva Greene Wilson

For those requesting interviews with Eva Greene Wilson, this set of questions and answers can serve as a guide to the type of answers you will receive and the tone in which those answers may be delivered. The answers given in this guide may also serve as inspiration for new questions for your interview. If you use any of the answers presented here as quotes for your publication, please see the endnotes to see where and when they were initially published.

1. What Caribbean Country are you associated with? ⁱ

My mom is from Trinidad, and my dad is from Tobago.

2. How does your Caribbean background influence your work?

I run a website called SocaMom.com which is about Caribbean parenting and family. I host events for Caribbean families, write books influenced by the Caribbean for children, and on SocaMom.com I present information on family friendly Caribbean events, music, and activities. This year I curated the Caribbean Gift Guide for the holidays, showcasing the work and products of people of Caribbean heritage, and we are currently working on building the Caribbean restaurant guide on the site as well. One of the most popular sections of the site is the Caribbean Culture for Kids coloring and activity sheet downloads. Parents and teachers enjoy sharing Caribbean culture with their children and students, using the free downloads as tools.

3. How did you come to create such an interesting business?

When I was growing up, my parents were very clear about the fact that our home was different from other kids' homes. It didn't take long for me to fully understand that the sounds, scents, and values in my house were different, and at times I felt isolated – until I went to visit family in Trinidad and Tobago. There, everything felt normal. The first time I attended a Carnival celebration in America, I realized that it wasn't just me, it wasn't just my house, there were people all over the country with homes just like mine, parents like mine, and a love for Caribbean culture just like mine. Once I had children, I wanted to make sure that they knew that side of themselves, and were able to embrace it, so I went on a mission to find Caribbean cultural activities for us to participate in as a family. It was difficult for me, since a lot of the activities aren't posted online – you just have to know someone – so I figured that once again, it couldn't be just me. That is how SocaMom.com was born – out of a love for Caribbean culture and a concern for parents who are looking for ways to connect their children to it in America and abroad, but having a hard time.

4. What were your biggest influences in organizing your business?

The biggest influences in organizing my business have been my husband, who is an IT project manager, and my cousins living here in the US. Without my husband helping me to get the website going and keeping me organized, there'd probably be no SocaMom.com as you see it now. He is also my camera guy when we go on the road, and he keeps me up to date with all the new gadgets that I'll need to stay efficient. My cousin is a chef like no other, so she makes sure that I have great content when it comes to food, and her husband and his family have been instrumental in our finding great content when we travel to Trinidad that we can bring back and share on SocaMom.com.

5. What were some difficulties or road blocks along the way?

How did you overcome these adversities? One of the road blocks for me has been my distinct lack of a Caribbean accent of any sort. I was raised in America, but in a small town in the Southern states where there was NO real Caribbean community. So unlike the kids in larger cities like DC, New York, and Miami, I only heard the accent in my home. That was it – and that wasn't enough to pick it up. Being American born has brought me praise from some for my dedication to the culture, but dismissal from others for not being what they believe is a REAL Trinidadian. I overcome this road block each and every time it is presented by just being as good as I can at what I do, and people continue to embrace me and the website. I feel that what I am doing is important, and have served as a liaison between the African American and Caribbean community several times since I have been working on SocaMom.com. As a first generation Caribbean American, issues like immigration reform still affect me and mine, so I feel that the way that I sound or the place I was born in no way invalidates my work.

6. What advice would you give to young women in the same industry?

I have three pieces of advice for young women who are interested in becoming bloggers. First – find a mentor who believes in your writing and your subject matter. It can be very lonely and discouraging in the beginning. Second – find friends who are blogging outside of your niche with the same work ethic that you have. It is surprising how diverse people's interests can be, and how that can help to grow your readership. Third – don't quit. There are people who want and need to hear what you have to say. Whether you have three readers or thirty thousand, your voice is important. Don't give up on your audience no matter the size.

7. Can you define Soca for those who may not be familiar? ⁱⁱ

"Soca" is a form of Caribbean music that I love. My family is from Trinidad and Tobago, the birthplace of Soca. Some people say that Soca is the SOul of CALypso. The beat is much faster than calypso, and it has become less political in the lyrics. Soca lyrics these days are pretty much about partying, dancing, and having a good time.

8. How has Soca and your upbringing in Trinidad influenced you as a person?

I was born and raised in the United States by my mom who is from Trinidad, and my dad who is from Tobago – one country, but two very different places. I heard plenty of Calypso growing up, so the sounds of the West Indies were always in our home. Soca is a relatively new genre of music. The first time I heard soca, my dad brought home a Byron Lee cassette tape from a visit to Tobago for my grandfather's funeral in the early 80's. I was hooked from the minute I hit, "play". The beat and the melody just made me feel good inside – like a happiness that I can't really explain.

I feel that my Caribbean American upbringing influenced me by making me a very optimistic person. As in many immigrant households, I was taught that with hard work, focus, and creativity, you can do just about anything in America. I was also very aware that I was just one generation away from a two room cinder block house with galvanized roof and outdoor plumbing. Just knowing that makes me a more grateful person, for where I am, and what I am able to accomplish.

9. At one point, you made the transition from being Eva to SocaMom. What inspired this new purpose and focus?

I was inspired by my kids. I remember when I moved to the DC area with my oldest son, we lived with family that was very much connected to the Caribbean community in the area. I didn't have that in SC. It was just so beautiful and comforting. Once I moved out on my own a few short months later, I was determined to keep that connection for myself and my son, but at the time, the community was (and at times still is) very much an offline thing. It wasn't easy to remain connected as a single parent, and the online resources just weren't there.

Once I got married and we added two more kids to the family, I just knew that there were more families out there like mine, so I was determined to do the work to find opportunities for parents to share their Caribbean culture with their American (or Canadian, or British) children, and make it available online. I felt like I had to do this for my children and for other moms like me.

10. If you had to describe SocaMom using five words, what would they be?

If I am describing SocaMom, the online personality, I'd say Caribbean (of course), American, geeky (I really love sci-fi and tech), genuine, and a storyteller. Describing the SocaMom.com, the website, I'd use Caribbean and American again, informative, educational, and fun.

11. We have a decent take on the general "mommy blogger community" in the US. What are the major similarities and differences that become apparent when you look at an international community? Anything unique to the Caribbean?

I don't know that there really is a Caribbean mommy blogger community because of the nature of Caribbean parents. There are Caribbean women who blog about parenthood, but not specifically the Caribbean aspect of raising a family. Caribbean parents seem to be more confident in their parenting. While American mommy bloggers offer a lot more advice to parents as far as what to do, in the international community, the traditions are passed down within immigrant communities, so what to do isn't really the question.

I deal more with people like me who have been brought up in Caribbean households, outside of the Caribbean, who feel like that connection is still important. They know what to do, because their parents did it, so I share how to do it. I present recipes for Caribbean food that "Americanized" kids might enjoy, books and educational materials that Caribbean parents can use to introduce the culture to their children, and Caribbean events that are family friendly. I also blog about current movies and events outside of the Caribbean ones because like it or not, the international community is influenced by American products, music, and movies as well, and my kids are very much American children.

I would say when it comes to moms of Caribbean decent, we are much more strict with our children when it comes to behavior in public, education, and manners. Caribbean moms are looking for more validation than instruction. I share my parenting experience, and it provides that validation for Caribbean moms and dads. Caribbean moms just want to see and hear that what they are doing, while different from the American norm, is still okay – really, that's all any mom wants – to know that they are doing a good job.

12. When it comes to the Caribbean, there are multiple identities at play – usually a mix between family style/upbringing, nationality and a Caribbean/West Indian collective. Do you find this popping up in discussions of parenting?

Some things are pervasive when it comes to Caribbean parenting, like family values, respectful behavior, the importance of education, and the joy of Carnival time. That is kind of the top level view. Then you have aspects of parenting that are specific to parents of different ethnic and religious groups. Then it gets even more diverse when you add the differences on each island.

It is particularly interesting when you think about the fact that the Caribbean is a melting pot of indigenous people as well as people from India, Asia, Africa and Europe. It creates an environment that produces such a unique and beautiful group of people. Then you transplant that melting pot into another melting pot, and what comes out is really extraordinary. The discussion doesn't really come up that often because I focus more on the similarities than the differences because that is what unites us and creates a true sense of community. At the end of the day, that is what I want to create, a community of Caribbean parents who support each other online and off.

13. Since you're SocaMom, it is only fair to ask – what are your three favorite Soca songs of all time?

Oh wow. Well, if I only get to pick three – Glow by Alison Hinds, Pump Me Up by Krosfyah, and Flag Party by Super Blue. Honestly, I really love the older music because I can share it with my children. Current soca tunes tend to have much more risqué subject matter that I don't feel is appropriate for children. That being said, I like plenty of other current soca, but I spend so much time with the kids, I really don't have a lot of time to listen to it.

14. In which part of the US are you based? ⁱⁱⁱ

I live in Washington, DC.

15. How does it feel to be the winner of the “Best Parenting Blog” and “Best New Blog” in the 2012 Black Weblog Awards?

I was kinda confused at first. I had no expectations of even making the finals in the best new blog category, because there were so many great blogs with large audiences. I figured I at least had a shot in the Parenting category, but never in a million years did I think I'd win for Best New Blog. It was pretty exciting. Winning both is still unbelievable to me, but I am really happy about the outcome.

16. How did you get into blogging?

I started many years back when I created a blog to get my brother married. It was in the early days of reality games, so I created an online one where ladies competed for my brother. It was all in good fun, and he's married now – no thanks to me! The idea for this one just kind of hit me one day, and I sat on the domain name for over a year. A friend of mine who blogs was going to a blogging conference in Miami, so she used it for an excuse to meet another one of our friends for a girl's weekend. She converted the both of us into bloggers, and I launched SocaMom.com last year.

17. You build websites, and you're a self-described geek, as is your husband. Did you build Socamom.com?

I did. Anything that is custom coded and complicated, my husband does when he has time. He makes sure that I have whatever software I need to do what I need to do. He may not be happy about supporting my shoe habit, but my technology habit, he is happy to support. Being able to do a lot of the work myself is a blessing. It keeps my investment low, and my ability to make changes and implement new features quickly, high.

18. Why did you decide to focus the blog on helping parents keep their children connected to Caribbean culture?

Growing up, other kids could just go across the street or across town to see relatives. We didn't have that luxury. I grew up feeling like my family was different – special – but isolated. My parents kept us connected through food, music, and stories, but there was no internet like there is today for us to really be able to see and hear what was happening up to the minute. I also grew up in the southern US where Caribbean culture was much harder to access, unlike in DC, Maryland, New York, and Florida. Once I was able to really experience Caribbean culture, it changed me, gave me a sense of belonging. I want other children, mine included, to experience that feeling. Greeks, Italians, and Hispanic people in America have that connection – first, second, third, fourth generation - they stay connected on purpose. So that is what I want to do with SocaMom.com – give parents the tools to start conversations about culture that they may not have even considered having with their kids.

19. You grew up in in America, and both of your parents are from Trinidad and Tobago. What was your childhood like in terms of how much your parents exposed you to Caribbean culture?

My dad had us listening to Calypso on his old reel to reel tapes, cassette tapes, and records. My mom made mostly Caribbean foods for dinner, and my dad made bake and saltfish for breakfast. It was like stepping out of America and into our version of a Trinidadian home when we walked through the door. There were words used in our home that I never heard anywhere else. I listen to tapes of myself when I was small that my dad used to make, and I had an accent until I was about four.

The first time they sent me to Trinidad with my grandmother, I was two. I visited a few times after that, but not as often as I would have liked. Family came to visit us fairly regularly. When I got older I went to Caribbean carnivals here in America. Sometimes it was confusing, because no one else I knew had a home like mine, but I wouldn't change a single thing about it.

20. How do you help your children stay connected to Caribbean culture, while growing up in the US?

My mom started it. She would stay with us for months at a time, and the first songs my oldest learned, were songs from her many soca cassettes and CD's. She continued that with all three of them. I could easily come home and find her and the kids in the kitchen dancing to soca and steel pan music while she makes dumplings. Right now, the boys play steel pan, and get plenty of Trinidadian food from the family that lives in the area.

21. Why do you think it's so important to keep kids connected to their heritage?

Other expats and immigrant communities in America, Canada, and the UK keep their kids connected through their schools, churches, and community centers, and that gives the kids a sense of being a part of a larger community that is bigger than the town they live in. There's something powerful about knowing where you come from. In a child, it makes them feel more responsible for who they are and what they will become, based on them knowing that they are the ambassadors of the culture and countries of their parents, grandparents, and great grandparents. They represent their home countries to the world.

When I saw how many American people of Caribbean descent, who may have never set foot in their home country, representing the country of their parents or grandparents, it let me know that it wasn't just in my head - Staying connected is important, and there are Caribbean families outside of the West Indies that feel like it is a priority.

22. You do some pretty good stuff, like worksheets, quizzes, colouring sheets, crossword puzzles, and other activities for parents to add Caribbean culture to their children's education, so that they can learn more about their heritage. Do you create these yourself?

Yes, I homeschool my three children, so I enjoy creating educational content for my kids. I expanded it to creating content for other parents and teachers who may benefit from it.

23. What sort of key topics do you base the content around?

My kids like games, puzzles, and coloring – as do most kids, so the first content we are uploading are activity and coloring sheets that help the kids learn facts about the countries in the Caribbean such as flag colors, national birds and plants, as well as governmental structure and history.

24. These activities are available only for exclusive members of Socamom.com. How does one become an exclusive member of Socamom.com?

You can log in using facebook or Twitter, or complete a short registration form to join. Joining is free.

25. Socamom sponsors offline groups for Caribbean parents in Washington DC and Brooklyn, New York. What motivated you to do this and what are some of the types of groups/activities you support?

Online communities are fantastic, but you know Caribbean people are experts in the art of the lime, and there's only so much of that that can be done online. You have to see faces, hear the laughter, and experience the music to really make a genuine connection with one another, and that's what I aim to do with the offline groups. In the beginning, I organized a lot of Mom's Night Out type events, but in 2013, we want to focus on more family oriented outings and activities.

26. Blogging is a huge commitment, and you blog basically every day. How do you balance it with work and family life?

I write first thing in the morning, before the kids get up, and after they go to bed. Work and homeschool go in the middle. Some stuff like housework can fall behind, but as long as the kids have a good quality of life, are educated, and fed, I feel like the scales are tipped in our favor.

27. The entertainment and gossip blogs Lava Lizard and Jayblessed.com –also run by Trinis in the US – were also nominated for “Best New Blog” award. And we’ve seen how successful Afrobella.com – from Patrice who’s from Trinidad, but based in Chicago – has been. How much potential is there for Caribbean blogs to make their mark in the very packed US blogosphere or media space?

I think there is always going to be room for anyone in any industry whose focus is on being innovative, creative, and hard working. Caribbean people are known for being all three, so I feel like there will always be room for Caribbean bloggers with good content in the US and abroad.

28. SocaMom.com is looking for volunteer community ambassadors, who will help with leading local meetup groups, planning local events, and helping more Caribbean Moms connect on and offline. How is that coming along?

People who are interested will be able to sign up online in January. Several people have expressed interest, and so far the program is looking like it will be a lot of fun for parents, friends, and children.

29. What are some Caribbean/Caribbean-American blogs that you follow?

One of my favorite faith based bloggers is Alison Hector from St. Kitts and Nevis. Her blog is LearntoEmbraceTheStruggle.com. I also follow Elle from CleverlyChanging.com. She was nominated for Best Parenting Blog in the Black Weblog Awards as well. I like to read Bee at '83 to Infinity who is Jamaican and Canadian. She was up for Best Writing in a Blog in the Black Weblog Awards. A lot of times, I find out that bloggers I have been reading are from the Caribbean after I have become a fan – I guess there’s something about people from Caribbean that just draws us to one another. So many Caribbean people have been able to be successful bloggers and entrepreneurs – it is a beautiful thing to be able to witness and I feel blessed to be a part of it.

30. What is the main goal of the (Anancy) festival? ^{iv}

I am a Caribbean American parenting blogger, and I approached Dr. Claire Nelson several months ago about doing a children’s event with the Institute for Caribbean Studies. When the opportunity arose, she contacted me, and I was happy to get involved. The goal of the festival is to introduce children to the wonderful Anansi stories. Many children have heard of Anansi with various spellings and stories. Even comic book characters have been based on Anansi! We would like to make the connection to the Caribbean for the children and parents who attend.

31. What does Anancy mean to you?

I grew up in a home that I knew was different. We ate different foods, had different sayings, and our own stories. I work very hard to keep my children and my readers connected to Caribbean culture, and I believe that the Anancy stories and this festival are an important and enjoyable way to connect our children to their heritage.

32. What does Caribbean American Heritage month mean to you?

Many of the achievements of black America can be attributed to a person of Caribbean heritage, and this is a fact that is often overlooked. Influential writers and thinkers of the Harlem Renaissance, proponents the Civil Rights movement, and many of today’s artists and entertainers have a Caribbean background. Caribbean American parents and children need to know how powerful their heritage is, not just as a person of African, Indian, Chinese, or other ethnicity, but as a descendant of Caribbean people. For America, I feel that it is important for non-Caribbean people to know that the Caribbean is more than just a vacation destination that produces beautiful music and beautiful people. It is a small place that produces beautiful minds as well.

33. Do you think there is enough being done to pass in Caribbean and African history to the next generation?

I think that as with any culture in America, the pressure to assimilate is there. Kids and teens, just by their nature, often do not want to stand out from the crowd as different, especially if they are new to the country. I have tried to instill in my own children that their Caribbean heritage is more than grandma and grandpa’s accents, more than great music, parties, and good food, but it is a work ethic, focus on education, and will to succeed that I feel is stronger in people of Caribbean descent in America than in many other immigrant groups.

34. What other projects and events are you working on?

I am a homeschooling mom of 3, working outside of the home, so I don’t have too many projects outside of educating my kids, my job, and my blog. I do online events for my blog, Socamom.com, including radio shows and twitter parties. I just completed one for the Universal Music, the Marley line of coffee and House of Marley.

35. When you are not busy with work and projects what do you do to relax?

I am pretty much always busy, but when I do get a chance to relax, I enjoy spending time with my family, experimenting with recipes with my husband, and dancing with the kids. We are a dancing family!

36. My favorite Caribbean author is...

Claude McKay. I find his story fascinating, and although I don't agree with all of his beliefs, his poems are beautifully written.

37. My comfort food is....

My cousin's roti!

38. If I wanted to impress someone visiting my city....

I would take them to the new Martin Luther King Memorial. It is really impressive.

39. Why did you decide to start blogging? ^v

Once I became a parent, and started meeting other parents, I realized that my style of parenting was different because I was brought up in a Caribbean household. I decided to start this blog to share resources for parents with roots in the Caribbean who are raising their children outside of the West Indies. I believe that giving children and parents access to their roots truly empowers and inspires them.

40. When people come to your blog, what will they find?

When people visit my blog, they will find a little bit of everything. I am a Caribbean American mom, who loves technology, sci-fi, and shoes, which means that people will find everything from Caribbean family events and West Indian recipes to movie reviews and fabulous footwear. One of the goals of the blog is to provide resources for parents raising their children outside of the Caribbean, so they will find plenty of activity and coloring sheets in my downloads section, a calendar with Caribbean events, recipes, and interviews with Caribbean parents. SocaMom.com is also my personal blog, so there are family stories and parenting advice as well.

41. What's the promise you make to people who visit your blog?

I can promise that my reviews will be honest and my shoes will be fabulous. Other than that - I don't make any promises!

42. What are your top blogging tips for other bloggers? ^{vi}

My top blogging tip for other bloggers is to check the demographics of your visitors, and check it often. Knowing your audience is key to attracting sponsors, cultivating partnerships, and creating content that speaks your mind and speaks to your readers as well.

43. Where do you see you and your blog in 5 years?

In the next five years, I hope to be the first place that parents go to find resources to help them connect their children to Caribbean culture and history. For parents who don't know where to start when introducing their Caribbean roots to their children, the games and coloring sheets have been really helpful.

44. Do you have something to offer bloggers to help them take their blogging to the next level?

I'm a huge "do it yourself" person when it comes to my blog. I am the graphic designer, the programmer (when the husband is busy), the photographer, the videographer, the recruiter, the editor, the everything. I can share with bloggers tools, tips, and tricks that have worked for me, and saved me time, energy, and money, without compromising quality.

Bio:

Eva Greene Wilson is the Editor and owner of SocaMom.com, an award winning website for Caribbean parents. Eva graduated Magna Cum Laude from North Carolina A&T State University with a degree in Marketing. She has been writing and telling stories since she was a child and has used her talent as a storyteller to entertain and educate the readers of her blog since 2011. Eva's work has been featured on BlogHer.com, and republished in print and online in b3 Caribbean Magazine and online in Outlish Magazine. She is the author of Anancy's Family Reunion, a new and imaginative take on Anancy folklore that reintroduces a new generation of children to a character deeply rooted in African and Caribbean oral tradition.

She has interviewed entertainers, mentors, and leaders in the Caribbean community about connecting children to Caribbean culture and balancing parenthood, education, and career. She has talked with former Essence Editor in chief Constance White, Fashion trailblazer Anya Ayoung-Chee, Jamaican TV personality and beauty queen, Kamila McDonald Alcock, Trinidadian stage and screen actress Hazelle Goodman, Former Soca Warrior and current ESPN analyst Shaka Hislop, CEO of the National Association of Black Hotel Owners and Operators, Andy Ingraham, and other.

In 2012, this busy wife and mother was honored with two Black Weblog Awards, Best New Blog and Best Parenting Blog. She sponsors two offline groups for Caribbean parents in Washington, DC and Brooklyn, NY, and hosts the annual Anancy Festival in Washington, DC with the Institute for Caribbean Studies.

Social Media:

Facebook - <http://www.facebook.com/socamomdotcom>

Amazon - <http://amazon.com/author/evawilson>

Twitter - <http://www.twitter.com/socamomdc>

Instagram - <http://www.instagram.com/socamom>

Pinterest - <http://www.pinterest.com/socamom/>

LinkedIn - <http://www.linkedin.com/in/socamom>

Youtube - <http://www.youtube.com/user/socamomusa>

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ⁱ Questions 1-6 were asked, answered, and published on CaribbeanGirlsUnite.com in January 2014

ⁱⁱ Questions 7-13 were asked, answered, and published on SociallyDiverse.com in March 2013

ⁱⁱⁱ Questions 14-29 were asked, answered, and published on Outlish.com in December 2012

^{iv} Questions 30-38 were asked answered, and published on Jamaicans.com in May 2012

^v Questions 29-41 were asked, answered, and published on BlackWeblogAwards.com in May 2013

^{vi} Questions 42-44 were asked, answered, and published on BloggingWhileBrown.com in May 2013