

Heart-to-Heart with Madiou Williams

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By Amadu Massallay, Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Recently I spent some time with Madiou Williams the philanthropist and learned a few things about this young man that has done so much for our country in such a short period of time and will continue to represent and make Sierra Leoneans proud where ever they may be. Over the past 2 weeks we sat down on some days late into the night with interesting and personal conversations to the point where it became necessary to interview him. At the completion of his recent exercise in SL I was able to ask him questions about his work, like, foundation and future wife. Following below is that interview, which I have chosen to call Heart-to-Heart with Madiou Williams.

Amadu Massally (AM): Madiou, you started your humble life in Sierra Leone a long time ago, and left an early age but you have been prominent in development efforts to this poor African nation when you could have easily looked the other way. What is it about your native Sierra Leone that has recently seen you built a school there and over the past few years been involved in philanthropic ventures specifically targeting health, nutrition and education among other things?

Madiou Williams (MW) Sierra Leone will always have a special place in my heart. It is my birth home and one still has family residing here. I want to bring resources into Sierra Leone rather than take them out. Often times folks see Sierra Leone as a means to get ahead in life, but the country is still young in its development. Although rich in resources, these resources in my opinion should be better utilized to make the lives of Sierra Leoneans better. (Particularly the poor)

AM: Your foundation the Madieu Williams Foundation seems to be working well with The Healing Hands Foundation and how did all that start? And do you feel content with your relationship with them; can you talk about that a little bit?



Madieu Williams, left and Amadu Massally, right. Top: File photo of Mahdieu Williams.

MW: The Healing Hands Foundation and Madieu Williams Foundation partnered last year to do a medical mission in SL. One of the co-founders and I (Dr. Jaime Flores) are both Alumni of the University of Maryland. We met at an Alumni Gala a few years ago and hit it off. A few months later, we went to lunch and learned that we both have non-profit organizations. His focus is on medical mission to third world countries. I thought it was a natural fit to see if his group can come to SL to help with its health infrastructure. I am grateful to have a partnership with The Healing Hand Foundation. Anytime you can have groups of volunteer surgeons, doctors, nurses, dentists travel to SL and provide free services for the people it is a win-win for the people of SL.

AM: Being privileged to have one-on-one discussions with you on a very personal note, I happen to remember one that you shared about your mother (may her soul rest in peace). Can you tell us what influence her life has on you today? And how would you want her to be remembered?

MW: My mother is my motivation in life. She has molded the man that I am today. She has been instrumental in my development in life and will to help others less fortunate. I remember her as a self-less woman that put her children first. Her sacrifices and unconditional love taught me what's important in life.

AM: You are an accomplished NFL Football Player, what has playing professional football in a league like the NFL taught you about life in general?

MW: The NFL has been great and has provided me a platform beyond my wildest dreams. It has opened doors for me that otherwise would be closed. I am appreciative of the many opportunities the NFL has afforded me.

AM: I understand that this year you won the Walter Payton Award as Man of the Year for 2010 what does that mean to you?

MW: Walter Payton was an extraordinary man both on and off the football field. I am honored to be mentioned in the same breath as Walter Payton. I pray that I will leave a lasting legacy as memorable as he has.

AM: Now from my vantage position in Sierra Leone, I know of the work you recently did here at both Connaught and Cottage hospitals, where you came into town with some 40-odd medical doctors, dentists, nutritionists, nurses and other healthcare practitioners can you tell us what each group did at a high level?

MW: We had a group of surgeons and doctors at Connaught. We assisted with surgical procedures and facilitated educational learning with the doctors here in SL. We also had a dental team that performed dental cleaning and abstracts at the oral dental clinic at Connaught and Abigail Butscher Primary School in Calaba Town. While at ABPS, we also had eight volunteer teachers from US assisting the teachers at the school. At Cottage, we had a team of OB/GYN participated in medical procedures alongside SL OB/GYN personnel.

AM: Do you see yourself continuing to do these types of things; and if so, are there any bottlenecks to your work in Sierra Leone that you would like to see change.

MW: I would like to continue to these types of things because the country needs it (more of it). The lack of infrastructure is an issue for SL. There are some challenges to anything that is new and go against the norm. The mind set of our group coming in and taking over, for example. That is not the case at all. We are here to help and work alongside the doctors, nurses and surgeons in SL. In order for changes to occur, Sierra Leoneans have to demand more and hold each other accountable.

AM: Speaking to the Executive Director of The Healing Hand Foundation, Marco Avila, is it true that the missions you do too Sierra Leone cost more than 3 to 4 times what the organization(s) do in other countries? If so, why is that? And how can we minimize that so your organization(s) can continue to do good work here?

MW: Yes that is true. SL is an expensive country compared to other more developed countries. Although, it is an open market, there's still not a lot of competition in most markets. Therefore, business can charge whatever price they feel fit. One of the things that we would like to see in SL is to have corporate partners like we have in the states. Businesses in SL that can partner with us and help us broaden our outreach further beyond Freetown.

AM: I have noticed that you are close to your family members and go out of your busy schedule to spend time with them. Can you tell us why you are such a close knit family guy?

MW: I love my family here in Freetown especially my cousins. I have young women in my family and it is important for them to have a male role model. Often in SL you see young women clinging to older men for attention and material resources. I don't want that for my cousins, therefore I take time to spend with them and spoil them as much as I can so they don't have to rely on a man to do anything for them. Rather I want them to focus on their education and studies.

AM: What about your fiancée? Does she approve of all the extracurricular activities that you find yourself in? And are you ready for the wedding, which some of us have heard all about? Do you think that would change your life and slow you down, so to speak?

MW: My fiancée is extremely supportive of my activities in SL. She often travels with me to Freetown and has grown fondly of the country and my family. I am looking forward to starting the next chapter in my life. I am blessed to have someone in my life that loves and cares for me unconditionally. She's a special woman and I thank God everyday for bring her in my life. I am still young, so I don't see myself slowing down instead I anticipate it will make me more accountable as to how I spend my time. Also, I know you were moved by Bunce Island because as we did the tour I noted how somber you had become when you went almost all of your co-workers from the two foundations (The Madieu Williams Foundation and The Healing Hands Foundation), what impression did that have on you, if any? What message do you have for others who may have ancestry in Sierra Leone after that experience, although your story is totally different from theirs?

MW: Bunce Island was a moving experience. To have such a historic land mark in our backyard is wonderful. We learned quite a bit about SL and its history. I encourage more people in SL to learn more about the country's history and the impacts in today's life. Finally, having been reconnected to your native Sierra Leone, is there anything you would want to share with your kinfolk from that country knowing all what you know today about her? SL is a beautiful country and has lots to offer in its history. I encourage my kinfolk to come and explore SL.