

Wendy Williams: A Fan, a Dancer, a Star



CELEBRITY INTERVIEW

by Kam Williams

Born in Asbury Park, New Jersey on July 18, 1964, Wendy Joan Williams burst onto the TV landscape in July 2009 with the launch of her own nationally-syndicated talk show. Dubbed a “break-through in daytime” by The New York Times, “The Wendy Williams Show” is now in its third season and airs in 52 countries around the world.

“The Wendy Williams Show” is a reflection of its host, with its vibrant colors and upbeat soundtrack matching Williams’ own personality and energetic sense of humor. And the show’s focus on entertainment reflects her passion for pop culture.

By design, whenever she interviews celebrity guests, it’s from the perspective of a fan, as she asks the questions that her audience wants to hear. A lover of classic television, Williams’ style is inspired by her childhood idols like Dinah Shore and Merv Griffin.

Prior to makinf the transition to daytime television, Wendy built a devoted audience over the course of an enormously-successful 23-year run in radio. “The Wendy Williams Experience” was a top-rated, nationally-syndicated show which reached over 12 million people daily. In November of 2009, she was inducted into the National Radio Hall of Fame—one of only a handful of women to enjoy the honor.

Wendy recently competed on Season 12 of ABC’s smash hit “Dancing with The Stars.” Her other television credits include serving as host of Game Show Network’s original series “Love Triangle” and as a featured guest on ABC’s “One Life to Live” and Lifetime’s “Drop Dead Diva.”

She is also the author of the New York Times best seller The Wendy Williams Experience, as well as several novels including Ritz Harper Goes to Hollywood. Plus, she presently contributes a weekly celebrity hot topics column to the weekly entertainment magazine “Life & Style.”

A child of a teacher and a college professor, Williams earned a Bachelor’s degree in Communications with a minor in Journalism at Northeastern University, and she remains a very vocal education advocate. She credits the start of her career with the decision to take an internship at a radio station on St. Croix, Virgin Islands immediately following her graduation from college.

Wendy resides in Northern New Jersey with her husband, Kevin, and their 11 year-old son, Kevin, Jr. Here, she talks about her life and career.

Kam Williams: Hi Wendy, How you doin’?

Wendy Williams: [Laughs] How you doin’, Kam? You doing good?

KW: I’m awwwllright! Ann-Marie Nacchio, a loyal fan of yours from Philly, told me to start the interview with “How you doin’?” because that would probably help relax you.

WW: And it did! That’s the official greeting of the show.

KW: How did being raised by two educators shape you?

WW: I know firsthand that educators are the most overworked and underpaid people around. It influenced me in that it was always about family first, and education was right next to that. There was never any

question about whether I was going to college. And it was important to my parents that I get my degree in 4 years, because “Money doesn’t grow on trees.” [LOL] I will support my son in whatever he wants to do professionally, but he will go to college, too. My husband and I are in concert on that.

KW: How hard is it juggling your career and being a mom?

WW: It’s not easy. He’s in the 6th grade.

KW: Attorney Bernadette Beekman says: First of all, how YOU doin’? I have been a fan since the days of radio and I love your Jersey Girl approach to life! You have been on radio, TV, film and authored books. Which gives you the biggest thrill?

WW: TV. It’s the best, although radio was my first love.

KW: You were certainly no stranger to controversy when you had the radio show. Do you think that might have been because you were the first African-American host to push the envelope in terms of gossip?

WW: Well, there were definitely elements of my rise in radio that had to do with my being black. But going back as far as Walter Winchell, Army Archerd and Hedda Hopper, legendary wags would grab a radio microphone and talk about what Errol Flynn and other stars were up to.

KW: Bernadette would also like to know, what is your favorite charity?

WW: Big Brothers/Big Sisters because I love helping out kids. Anything with kids.

KW: Alan Gray asks: Have you had any guests who just weren’t very talkative? What do you do to try to get them to talk, and have there been any occasions where you couldn’t?

WW: No. Believe it or not, there are interesting elements in everyone. So, if I can’t talk to everybody for at least 7 to 10 minutes, then I’m in the wrong profession.

KW: Children’s book author Irene Smalls asks: Do you enjoy being a shock jockette and who are some of the celebrities you most enjoyed interviewing?

WW: That’s so funny! I enjoyed being what I was in radio, which some thought of as a shock jock although, to this day, I still can’t figure out what I’ve done that’s so shocking. [LOL] As to my favorite interviews, I loved having my mother and father on. I also enjoyed talking to Elmo, who’s a puppet. I found T.I.’s trying to be extra-cool very endearing. Tyra Banks was not the diva I expected her to be. I looooved talking to her. And Simon Cowell is a really nice guy. Yeah! He’s my fave, and he’s handsome.

KW: Irene also asks: What achievement are you most proud of, and what mountain do you still want to conquer?

WW: I’m most proud of our son, having suffered several miscarriages before having him. As for the next mountain, it takes so much to maintain what’s already going on that I don’t have time to think about it. But I want some more seasons of the TV show, I’d like to write another book, and eventually, I’d like to retire and take vacations with my husband like my mom and dad do.

KW: Professor/author/documentary filmmaker Hisani Dubose says:

I would like to know, what was involved in making the transition from radio, where you aren’t seen, to TV, where visibility is so important?



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WW: Lipstick, foundation, a strip of lashes, and developing the ability to edit what I would normally say. I was always able to finish a thought on radio, because I had 4 hours. A one-hour TV show is only 44 minutes of programming.

KW: Film director Kevin Williams asks: What was the biggest challenge you faced in making the move from radio to TV?

WW: Finding the fine line between satisfying a daytime TV audience and an afternoon radio audience. That involved editing down my delivery to under an hour. I’ve been blessed to have great producers and a great staff to achieve that. I have a small team but they’re very efficient.

KW: Jessica Kelly says: I love your wigs Wendy, but I want to hear more about your eye make-up. It’s soooooooo hot!

WW: [Laughs] Merrell Hollis has been doing my makeup since the beginning of the show. I just close my eyes and let him do his thing. He’s a genius!

KW: Aleesha Houston asks: What’s the last gift you purchased for yourself?

WW: A wig! [Giggles] I’m picking it up on Monday.

KW: Judyth Piazza asks: If you could

change one thing about the entertainment industry, what would it be?

WW: More Wendy! [Roars]

KW: Teresa Emerson says: “How you doin’ Wendy!” Who would you love to interview that you think may be afraid to come on your show; given your reputation for hard questions?

WW: I will take that as a rhetorical question.

KW: Lowery Gibson asks: What’s the real Wendy like, minus the wigs, makeup and “How you doin’?” Given that you had a breast endowment, do you recommend this cosmetic surgery?

WW: The real Wendy is a plain, regular girl with good skin. I do have hair, if he’s wondering about that. I have lots of witenesses to that. [Chuckles] And I’m a homebody. When I get off the phone with you, Kam, I’m going to the grocery store, because our power was out for 4 days. As for breast augmentation, I do recommend it for women over 30 who have a couple of extra dollars. But it’s not for a nutty schoolgirl who might just be doing it for a guy.

KW: Is there any question no one ever asks you, that you wish someone would?

WW: I have no answer. That’s a question I would really have to think about.

KW: The Tasha Smith question: Are you ever afraid?

WW: Yes.

KW: The Columbus Short question: Are you happy?

WW: Yeaahhhhhh!

KW: The Teri Emerson question: When was the last time you had a good laugh?

WW: A minute ago. I laugh all the time, loudly, with my mouth wide open, and all the way up to the tip of my wig. And I love just as hard. I only hope that people feel the passion when they watch my talk show. It comes from my soul. Kam, I can’t even describe to you what it feels like when I come through those double doors at 10 AM each morning. Sometimes, the emotions overwhelm me, and I start to cry.

KW: I heard that you’ve cried several times on the show.

WW: Please, are you making fun of me? [Laughs] I couldn’t tell you how often I’ve cried. Wendy Watchers know when it happens. And it could happen over anything. I could have something sad going on in my life... I could have my period... Women are emotional. At least I know I am.

KW: The bookworm Troy Johnson question: What was the last book you read?

WW: Oh brother, here you go. If you must know, my son was reading to me from a children’s book called “Mousetrap.” The last one I read myself was “Satan’s Sisters,” Star Jones’ novel about a fictitious talk show.

KW: The music maven Heather Covington question: What was the last song you listened to?

WW: “Headlines” by Drake.

KW: What is your favorite dish to cook?

WW: Mexican food is my absolute, #1 favorite food. But all the cutting and dicing

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