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## Damon Wayans Interview, Comedian Releases Serious New Book 'Red Hats'

Damon Wayans Chats About Men in Mid-life Crises, the Red Hat Society and Comedy

By Shamontiel

Comedian and actor Damon Wayans is back on the literary trail with his new book "Red Hats: A Novel" 11 years after his *New York Times* best-selling book "Bootleg." While his first book was comedic, the "In Living Color" and "My Wife and Kids" star took a different route with his May 2010 novel.

During his book tour, he took time out to speak with AC Arts & Entertainment Contributor Shamontiel to discuss his mid-life crisis, comedy, acting, The Red Hat Society and family life.

**Shamontiel: Your first book was "Bootleg" in 1999.**

**Damon Wayans:** "Bootleg" was me doing stand-up. I knew it was going to be funny because I was on stage with the material and then I transcribed it, put it in book form. "Red Hats" was different because this was storytelling, and it's writing something which was new to me. It's not just women. I was writing about a 64-year-old woman.

**S: What happened with the delay? Why 1999 then 2010?**

**DW:** I was writing other things, and I was a little insecure with my writing.

**S: You were insecure even though the first book was a *New York Times* best-seller?**

**DW:** I was writing a movie that didn't do nothing. You know, when your own family don't come to see your movie, that kind of hurts your ego.

**S: All right, but the book did okay. So the first book was comedic and the second book is really serious. This lady in this book is trying to commit suicide. What made you decide to get so dark?**

**DW:** I don't know if it's more dark. I think that we don't really start living until we start thinking about dying. I think that anybody who is over 40 thinks about death a lot more than they did when they were 21. You know, you're invincible at that age, and I went through a mid-life crisis. Some of the emotions that I was dealing with was pretty dark so I kind of infused those into this character of Alma.

**S: So if you went through a mid-life crisis what made you not pick a male character?**

**DW:** It was easier to open up as a woman, and I think that if I would have...you know, guys just don't open up like that. That's why men go through mid-life crises. They don't have no support system cause they don't understand that they need to talk. You can't call your boy up crying talking about your heart is hurting. He don't want to hear that.

**S: (Laughing) All right, I got you. Wait a minute, why did you go through a mid-life crisis? Your career is pretty successful. What happened?**

**DW:** That's not a mid-life crisis. A mid-life crisis is the day that a man looks in the mirror and realizes he's no longer invincible. You see death in the reflection. That Grim Reaper looking at you going, "I got you in 20 years." And you try to fight it. You try to work out, but you start seeing that your chest turns into breasts. That reality of "I'm no longer cool" kicks in. It's depressing to men, and men tend to act out. That's why they go for younger women and sports cars and all the things that they think help them on an external level to feel better about themselves. But the truth is it's an internal thing that you have to confront.

**S: So how does The Red Hat Society fit in? These characters are based around The Red Hat Society, correct?**

**DW:** A fiction version, but it's almost—not to disrespect them—it's almost like if I would have set it at a college. The college is the background. It's really a woman's story, and it's about a woman who is basically...life just deals her several blows, and she's forced to come to terms with all her demons. She has to confront them and get over them so that she can learn how to be loveable so that she can be loved again.

### Takeaways

In Wayans' book, The Red Hat Society saves his main character from dying.

Damon Wayans' mother is a member of The Red Hat Society.

Kim Wayans is "the heart" of the family, according to Damon Wayans.

**S: How were you introduced to *The Red Hat Society*?**

**DW:** The Red Hat [Society] is a beautiful organization with like 800,000 women around the globe. My mom joined them, and then when I was in Paris I saw like a thousand of them just walking around, and I was tripping out. And when I came back I saw my mom had joined them. I was like, "Okay, there's something here, something interesting." I zeroed in on the character Alma and put a nice supporting cast around her. I almost wrote it like a film.

**S: Have you talked to any *Red Hat Society* members? How do they feel about the book?**

**DW:** They love it. They've been coming out to book signings, and Sue Ellen Cooper, who founded [The Red Hat Society], really embraced the book and gave me a nice quote.

**(Note to Readers: Sue Ellen Cooper had the following statement about "Red Hats: The Novel." "We are delighted that Damon saw the power of the Red Hat Society sisterhood, one that touches his mother and hundreds of thousands of others around the world. Our hope is that women of all ages will embrace the power of the Red Hat Society and enjoy reading the book.")**

**DW (cont.):** Debra Granich, who is the COO of The Red Hat Society, invited me to this pajama party that I'm going to go out to in July. I have their full support.

**S: Are you going to be the only guy there?**

**DW:** I really don't know. I don't know what they've got planned. They're going to be in pajamas. I don't know if I will be, but... (Laughs)

**S: So you're not going to go with the flow?**

**DW:** If they want me to be, I'll be, but this is their thing. I'm just coming there to talk about the book and meet and greet.

**S: Okay, so out of acting, comedy and writing, which one do you like the most?**

**DW:** I love stand-up. I'm always going to love stand-up because it's instant feedback right then and there if you're connecting to your audience. When you write a book, especially a book, it's like, "How fast do people really read?" Six months later somebody says, "I finished your book." Oh. Okay. I hope people come out, buy the book and post comments online. Let me know how you're feeling it.

**S: So you like doing stand-up the most. Which one do you think you're the best at?**

**DW:** I think I'm really starting to become a good writer. Stand-up is basically writing, too. You have to write that material that you perform. Going back to *"In Living Color,"* I was doing a lot of writing and I wrote *"Mo Money."* I wrote *"Blankman."* I co-wrote *"Major Payne."* I wrote a lot on *"My Wife and Kids,"* so writing has been a part of my life as much as stand-up. But I love the stand-up because right there the performing of it, it beats everything.

**S: You said you were writing "My Wife and Kids." There was definitely comedy involved in that. What was your favorite part of doing that sitcom?**

**DW:** I think the family, hanging out with Tisha [Campbell] and George [Gore II] and Jennifer [Freeman] and little Parker [McKenna Posey]. We really created a family, and everybody, with my writers. My show was run amazing with Don Reo, and we just had fun. If you read the credits on *"My Wife and Kids,"* it's all Wayans. We had nieces and nephews and brothers and cousins and everybody was in there contributing. I just think it was amazing the work we got done in the little bit of time we did it. We did 125 episodes in four and a half years. That's a lot.

**S: How did your family feel about you wanting to be an author? Did they expect that? Did you write when you were little?**

**DW:** No. They think I'm crazy. They'll be like, "Man, you better get your behind on stage and do that stand-up." They don't know that the beast within, which is the creative thing inside of me, I have to express that. The only one that I actually let read this book was my sister Kim because I knew that Keenen and Shawn and Marlon would clown me. They would call me all kinds of names.

**S: What did Kim say?**

**DW:** Kim was like, "Damon, this is a beautiful story. You should write it." I let her read the manuscript. Kim is the heart of the family. If she likes it then I know it's good. If she didn't like it I would've never finished it.

**S:** So when people read "Red Hats" what do you want them to come away with?

**DW:** There's a couple of themes. One of the themes is if you want to be loved you better be loveable. Work on it. Another thing is words are powerful, and you have to be careful what comes out of your mouth because they live forever. People wonder how do they go from a relationship where it was all love at first sight and everybody was happy to, "I can't stand you and I want out." That's usually from words. Less actions and more words that were spoken, that hurt, that can't be repaired. You can't take them away.

**S:** Between television sitcoms and movies, which one do you prefer to do the most?

**DW:** I like doing television because if you do a movie you don't know where you're going to be. I think it's because I have children and grandchildren. I don't want to be away that long. I like television because I could hire all my family. Everybody's around me, and I can get a lot of work done and get home early.

**S:** I know the Chicago event at Border's was canceled next week. Is there any chance Chicagoans will see you before 2010 is over?

**DW:** Oh definitely. I'm doing my stand-up so I want to do some book signings while trying to coordinate it so that it works while I'm in town. It should be sometime this summer.

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