In the course of *Rocks*, Joegodson will describe from his perspective how this book came into being. Beforehand, allow me to briefly introduce ourselves from my point of view. My intent here is to answer questions that might nag at you and distract you from his story.

Joegodson and I met in Port-au-Prince in January of 2006. The city was, literally and figuratively, on fire. The popular classes were in a death struggle with the powerful for control of the country. The battlefield, this time, was an election. The poor won what turned out to be a Pyrrhic victory. Joegodson will describe the circumstances of our meeting in that context. He also describes how we exchanged our maternal languages in a fair-trade deal: English for Creole.

Four years later, the earthquake left Joegodson homeless and jobless. Everywhere there was work to be done. The Haitians had all the skills needed to rebuild their country to their taste. But there was very little money in circulation. Especially in the city, Haitians needed money to survive. The formal economy was organized around sweatshops subcontracted to supply multinational clothing corporations with merchandise for sale in the consuming countries, like the United States and Canada. (Joegodson will describe the wages and conditions there.) Meanwhile, Joegodson was a talented furniture maker. He had friends in desperate conditions who were skilled tailors and artisans. We considered the possibility of establishing a kind of fair-trade enterprise to connect Canadian consumers with Haitian workers. While he organized them into a potential workforce, I researched in Montréal the logistics of establishing an import business. This project had been thrust upon me, however, rather than chosen. The idea of handcuffing Haitian workers to a capricious foreign market seemed short-sighted to me. The Haitians
would still be dependent on the wage for their survival, except that it might come more directly from Canada. But they were desperate.

In Canada, I worked with Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada to learn how goods are imported from the “least developed countries.” I discovered that products from peripheral countries are exempt from tariffs. The government claims that this regulation is intended to help the poorest countries develop their industrial base. It was easy to see, however, that the policy was a gift to the wealthiest multinational corporations that exploit the most vulnerable workers in the world. Not only do they have negligible production costs but the government allows those products to enter Canada as if there were no border. It is as if the production was located in Canada; however, they do not have to pay any of the social wages that Canadian workers had forced on the capitalist class over centuries of struggle. The environmental and social costs of production are displaced to the Global South, when possible. Nevertheless, and regardless of the real effect of the tariff exemption for products manufactured by Haitian workers, would it be possible for us to actually benefit from it?

We came up against obstacles in both Canada and Haiti. In Montréal, I researched the viability of retailing furniture, clothing, and art. For practical advice, I went to see an entrepreneur who imported similar merchandise from Africa. Several years earlier, I had purchased from him an attractive plant stand made by Moroccan artisans. He had installed in the boutique a video that showed the actual production process; I remember having watched how the Moroccans produced the stand. Now, years later, I found the shop had expanded. It was still full of attractive furniture from around the world, but no longer did the proprietor promote the fair-trade aspect of the enterprise. The store manager told me that few customers were interested in the production process. In fact, promoting merchandise in terms of fair trade could actually handicap items otherwise in demand. Price was the critical factor in moving merchandise. Ultimately, we would be in competition with the multinationals.

Meanwhile, there were bigger obstacles in Haiti, where it is extremely difficult to register a company. Moreover, the Haitian customs office is rife with corruption and controlled by powerful interests that operate in the shadows. Joegodson had already been forced to pay bribes
to customs agents for things I had sent to him in Haiti. More ominously, the customs office was in the hands of the same people who controlled the assembly industry. In his first term as president, René Préval had unsuccessfully attempted to make Haitian customs accountable. Any successful effort to raise the Haitian workers to a decent standard of living would undermine the formal economy controlled by the people on whom we would be completely dependent to export products. Joegodson’s friends were not concerned with these complications; they just wanted decent wages. Beyond that, Joegodson and I would be on our own.

At the same time, Joegodson and I were already working together on a blog that we set up so that he could describe post-earthquake conditions in Port-au-Prince. A few times, people who followed his writings sent him money. In his text, he talks about how he put those gifts to use. It was clear that these readers were not wealthy and were making financial sacrifices out of compassion for his ordeal. They encouraged Joegodson. He liked organizing his thoughts to produce posts for our website. And so, we devised the project that has culminated in this book. It was the one thing that we could produce that, as Joegodson put it, “allowed us to exploit each other equally.” I was enthusiastic about the idea. The voice of the most vulnerable link in the global division of labour is silenced in the consuming world. Members of the growing global pauper class — slum dwellers with no prospective source of income — are systemically shut out of discussions about the future of the world. When they appear, it is through the voices of academics, journalists, authors, activists, and filmmakers. In Haiti, the literacy rate is approximately 50 percent. Even for the poor who are literate, like Joegodson, books and journals and Internet access are extremely rare. There are many reasons that the poor don’t enter into our consciousness. Sometimes, it is because we would rather not hear them. But even where that is not the case, no infrastructure exists to support their intervention in the world of ideas, let alone policy. How would Joegodson have written his narrative alone in the circumstances that he describes? Even the pens and paper would have represented a big investment. Where would he have sent it for publication? The cost would have been prohibitive even if he had found a potential publisher. How would it have been received? In the culture of celebrity, who would care about the lives of some nameless slum dwellers? Beyond all of that, we are speaking of a world that,
until we began to post items on our blog, was simply not within Joegodson’s field of vision. Our world is constructed of many solitudes.

And so, Joegodson sneaks us into his social circles in Cité Soleil, Delmas, and Saut d’Eau, and we have a chance to see how life is experienced there. He is not speaking for Haitians any more than I am speaking for Canadians in this preface. We are both critical of our compatriots and reject the proposition that anyone could speak for everyone. Joegodson describes how Haitians act within the context of the choices before them. The value of appropriating the voice of the victims of global capitalism is that you can portray them in a way that serves your agenda. I find Joegodson’s story happily devoid of the sentimentality and romanticism with which opponents of global capitalism discuss the world’s most exploited classes. It is equally free of the demagoguery used by proponents of the empire to justify suppression of the subordinate classes that try to improve their position or free themselves of capitalism altogether. Those creations are instruments of a political agenda. Joegodson speaks about life in Haiti from within Haiti. Those familiar with the writings of Gary Victor, Danny Laferrière, and Edwidge Danticat may recognize his Haiti. He has not written fiction, however, but a memoir through which he has tried to describe his actual experiences, as well as those recounted by his friends and family, as faithfully as possible.

From a logistical standpoint: we wrote Rocks in the Water, Rocks in the Sun in Haiti in the fall of 2011 into January 2012. Joegodson formulated the story by choosing experiences from his life and the lives of his family and friends. They cooperated. We changed their names for obvious reasons. We spoke in Creole or French and I wrote in English; in that way, we could both express ourselves most freely. We both thought it best to publish in English. We went over every passage together. I tried to minimize my role as mediator as much as possible. However, the fact that we discussed our project constantly over the months of its creation means that I played some indeterminate part. If he had worked with someone else, the emphasis might have been on other aspects of Haitian life. In other words, this is one of a number of memoirs that Joegodson might have produced. There are many more books to be written by each of us.