

Samuel Pletain

France



Interviewer: What is your country of origin and what does it mean to you?

Samuel: I am from France and I like France a lot. I'm proud of where I come from. I grew up in a city called Nice, which is on the coast of the French Riviera, next to Italy. It's my favorite place in the world. I like France as well because there's a lot of different countrysides that you can go and visit and you just travel a few hours and you can be very different from one place to the next. It's a small country compared to the U.S. but there's a lot of really cool stuff like food and just the people. The people are really nice.

Interviewer: When did you come to the United States?

Samuel: I moved to the U.S. about two years ago. I came here because my wife is actually from the United States. We decided to come and give our kids the experience of being here.

Interviewer: Who helped you come to the United States?

Samuel: Just my wife.

Interviewer: What was your life like before you immigrated to the U.S.?

Samuel: I lived in the Paris vicinity- A big city with a lot of people, the pace is really fast. I used to work for the LDS church as a Translation Manager. My daily life was walking to work, it took me 15 minutes, and then I would work on making sure that the things that the church needed translated was done, and then I would come back and be with my kids – I have three kids. It was just a chill life compared to a lot of people in the area because I was really close to my work. Usually, people commute for about two hours a day in the Paris area and I was lucky enough to walk for just half an hour a day to go from work and to my home.

Interviewer: What is the story behind your name?

Samuel: My mom picked my first name because she really liked a character in the Book of Mormon named Samuel. My last name is 'Pletain' and it means 'cloth traders.' That's what my ancestors used to do back in Belgium because my dad and sisters are from Belgium.

Interviewer: What traditions have been passed down in your family?

Samuel: I don't know if we have any traditions really. We celebrate Christmas as a family. I'd say that's probably our main family tradition. When I go back to see my parents, usually I stay for a week or two, in the morning we go get food at the bakery, like fresh bread and pastries, and we eat it together. It's kind of like a ritual in a way, I don't know if it's really a tradition. But, I don't really feel like I have a lot of traditions. It might be just because my parents both come from different places from where I grew up and so there's no deeply rooted things that we do as a family.

Interviewer: What does the 'American Dream' mean to you?

Samuel: Oh, interesting question. So in my head, the ‘American Dream’ is coming to the U.S. and just working at something that you really want, something you really want to accomplish, and you work hard for it. With passion and drive you can succeed and have a better life than what you had before. That would be my definition.

Interviewer: Do you still work for the LDS church?

Samuel: No. Now I'm a data analyst for a startup called Particle in West Jordan.

Interviewer: What does Particle do?

Samuel: We scrape data. We grab data from websites every night all over the internet, mostly from clothes stores, and then we have an app where our users can go look and see the prices, the colors, and the different kinds of products so that they can launch new products themselves.

Interviewer: When in life have you felt most alone or connected?

Samuel: I think the most alone was probably during COVID. My wife and my kids came to the States first, during COVID. My wife got a job offer as a French teacher here and we wanted to go to the States for a little- That was in our plans. We felt this was the opportunity for us to do that. Due to her offer, she needed to be here in two weeks. So she just packed her bags and went. Our kids went with her as well. But I was not legal in the U.S. yet, so I had to stay in France for a little bit. And on top of that, we had COVID lockdown. So I was pretty lonely in my house working all day and just FaceTiming with my kids and my wife. I feel the most connected when I go and visit with my childhood friends. We're really close. We used to do a lot of things together. Now my friends back in France live a little bit of everywhere in France. So we try to see each other and when we do that's when I feel the most connected.

Interviewer: What's the meaning of ‘being welcoming’ to you?

Samuel: I think it's really important to ‘be welcoming’ because I grew up in a place where there's a lot of diversity because it's close to Italy, and also you have a lot of people who come from different countries in Africa, like French-speaking Africa. I feel like if you are not welcoming you miss out on opportunities to meet people. I feel like life is about meeting people and having experiences with them. So I try to be welcoming to people because people were welcoming to me.

Interviewer: What was the most shocking thing about coming here?

Samuel: The fact that I couldn't walk to the shops. I remember it was my second day or something so we only had one car and my wife needed it for work. I looked at my phone, I looked at Google Maps and I'm thinking, ‘It doesn't look that far.’ So I took my kids for a walk to this playground because it looks like it's close. And then it took us 45 minutes to get there by walking, and it was so hot. And I had a two-year-old who was dying and I had to carry him. So I was like, ‘All right, never again.’

Interviewer: What is your favorite holiday?

Samuel: I will say Halloween because I was born on October 31. Here it's very different than in France. In France, people don't really do trick-or-treating. And so I feel like it's a cool experience. It's cool doing that. I like that.

Interviewer: Going back to when you said you felt lonely during COVID when your wife was gone, was there anyone that made you feel less lonely?

Samuel: Because of COVID I was working remotely. We had online meetings with my coworkers. So that was one thing. Back in France, the lockdown was pretty harsh, you couldn't leave your house except to go get groceries or for some other exceptional reason. I was lucky enough that where we were living was an apartment complex that had like an acre of land connected to it. So I could go out in the forest and all that. A lot of the neighbors that I didn't know before, apart from saying, 'Hi' in the hallway, we actually got to connect because everybody just wanted to go outside their apartment. We would meet in that little forest playground and I got to connect with them. I feel like that helped a lot- To get to meet and know them.

Interviewer: Because you got to meet more people, would you say COVID was a good thing or a bad thing?

Samuel: I think it depends. For us, it was a good thing- My wife got a job because of COVID. so I'm here because of that. Like everything in life, there's always good and bad. But for us, in our life, the good outweighs the bad.

Interviewer: Was it easy for you to adapt to life here in the U.S. when you first arrived?

Samuel: Yes. I've been around people from the U.S. since I was very young. So I'm used to the way people are and the culture. And I feel like the media also helps. When I was in high school, when I was 14 or 15 years old, I decided to teach myself English because I wanted to watch TV shows and stuff. And in France you have to wait a year to see them because they need to be translated. I like the culture here, so coming here wasn't as big of a culture shock as it can be for some people. But there were still some things, like the food and stuff, that you need to adjust to. I miss cheese. Cheese in France is very different than here. And it's not as expensive as well.

Interviewer: How many languages do you speak?

Samuel: Only two: French and English.

Interviewer: What object tells the story of your life?

Samuel: I would say computers. Since I was 11/12 years old, I've always liked computers. In my family, I am the only one who understands computers. I would tinker with the family computer when we had problems and stuff. That led me to want to go into programming, and that's what I do today.

Interviewer: What do you like about Utah?

Samuel: I like the fact that there's a lot of playgrounds around- It's awesome for kids. I was a stay-at-home dad for two years waiting for my Green Card and I got to explore. That was a game that we had, where we went to and explored playgrounds. There's a lot of cool things. Also, I like the people in general, because they're really friendly. In France, people are friendly, but they're more reserved. So like if you're in a line at the mall or something, people don't usually don't talk to each other. Whereas here, you can have people start a conversation with you about random things and it's a lot of fun.

Interviewer: I've always heard that French people don't really like Americans, is this true?

Samuel: So I feel like for the older generations, it was probably true, because, in general, Americans are a lot more extroverted than French people. Extroverted people usually tend to take some space, but French people are taught from a young age in school to stay in their box. In my opinion, that would be the reason why. But I feel with technology and the internet, it's changing, because there's a lot more exposure through social media. A lot of people my age, don't have any problems with Americans. Because of the things the younger generation sees, they want to come and visit to see what America is like in real life.

Interviewer: What are your hopes for your community?

Samuel: We have a nonprofit with French people. I feel like it would be a good thing if we would do a lot more. Right now we do events where we gather together, but we don't really share our culture, and so I think that would be a nice thing for us to start doing more. Because I feel like people know about France, but usually just about just Paris, the Eiffel Tower, and all the monuments. But France is a lot more than that. There's a lot more diversity than just Paris. If you actually go to France one day, you need to go somewhere else than Paris. Stay in Paris for a couple of days and see all the cool things, but then you need to go to the countryside because that's where you'll find the cultural beauty. It's outside of Paris.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about your hobbies?

Samuel: I like to program, I code on the side. I like board games as well. Coming here there's a lot more people playing board games which is really cool! I also like watching soccer on TV. I don't do it as much here. I used to do it a lot before, when I was single. But ever since I got married and had a kid really fast, not so much. I think when you have kids, you don't have as much time for your hobbies. So board games and coding are definitely my main hobbies right now.

Interviewer: What's your favorite board game?

Samuel: My favorite is a board game called 'Splendor.' It's really fun. It's a good game to introduce people to board games.

Interviewer: What's your favorite soccer team?

Samuel: My hometown team – Nice. They’re top three in France right now, but they’re not on the international scale yet. It’s not the PSG.

Interviewer: What is something that you like about Utah?

Samuel: I like the fact that you actually have all four seasons here. Where I grew up, we have a long summer, it starts in April and goes all the way until October. We don’t really have a fall. And winter is not really winter, because it’s still warm, but it’s colder than summer. Here, you actually get to see the transition. I like the mountains. I went on a few hikes which is a lot of fun. Something else I also like is that it’s a very family-friendly state. I’ve only been to New York and San Francisco, but I feel like it’s a lot more family-oriented here.

Interviewer: Would you like to go back to your country?

Samuel: I would like to go back at some point, probably when I retire, just because the food is so good. Where I am from, in my opinion, is one of the nicest places in the world. A lot of people in France actually go and retire there because it’s next to the beach and next to the mountains. In the winter, you can go skiing and the weather is nice. Our plan for our family is to stay here for five to 10 years, and then we’re probably going to end up in Asia at some point because my wife is in love with Malaysia and Singapore, and then probably after that go back to France.

Interviewer: What do you think makes Utah different from other places, especially to immigrants?

Samuel: That’s an interesting question. I feel like people are really friendly here, and open. There’s also a lot of work opportunities because the economy is pretty good in the State of Utah. That makes it an attractive place to come to. I don’t know a lot of immigrants, I know some. From the ones I know, I feel like the communities that are here are strong. Even though there’s a culture shock and it’s different, they can still have support from people who experienced the same thing and they can go and talk to someone in their mother tongue, which is nice.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about your religious or spiritual beliefs?

Samuel: I am a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Always been. My parents met missionaries before they got married and were converted. It makes it easy for me to be here as well. But it is very different. Growing up in France, not a lot of people are members of the Church, so I felt like an outsider in some ways. In France, a lot of people are either atheists or Catholic by tradition, so they don’t necessarily follow church principles. For example, drinking alcohol and smoking is very normal, not everybody does it, but it’s accepted in the society, but I don’t drink and I don’t smoke. So growing up, people ask a lot of questions and you feel like an outsider in some way. But coming here it’s a little bit different because as you walk around, there’s a church every block or so. That’s something very different.

Interviewer: After coming here, was your job-hunting experience easy or hard for you?

Samuel: I feel like I was lucky- I got a job really quickly through networking through a friend of mine. But I think the job hunting experience is very different. In France, network is important, but it is not as important as it is here in Utah. Here, I feel like it's a lot more about the people you know and they will help you have an interview. If they have a good word for you, you're higher on the list of potential candidates. Whereas in France, it's a lot more about having a diploma. And that's another thing that is very different here in the States- People give you a chance a lot more easily. Whereas in France, if you don't meet the criteria – remember I was talking about being in the box? – if you are not in the box, then it's very hard.

Interviewer: So would you say the people are very harsh?

Samuel: I wouldn't say harsh. They like their rules and they obey the rules. So strict is a better word.

Interviewer: Did you go to college?

Samuel: I did. I have a two-year degree in Computer Science back in France. Four years ago, I went back to school. So right now, I'm pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science.

Interviewer: Did they accept your degree from France?

Samuel: No. I started over at BYU-Idaho Online. I have like ten years between the two, with no experience in the field. So I decided just to go back because tech is a field where everything changes really quickly. Hopefully, I should be graduating in the spring of next year, or fall.