[MUSIC] You are listening to Tell Me Your Story where we connect to HLS staff on a personal level. [MUSIC] Hello everyone. This is Edgar Kley Filho from HLS Human Resource Department. My pronouns are he, him, his. Today, we are talking with Dianne Ribeirinha-Braga from HLS Housing who will tell us about her life, how long she is in this position at HLS and the work she does. Thank you for joining us, Dianne.

Nice to be here, Edgar.

So, tell us a little bit about you and how you identify yourself.

I identify myself as a first-generation person. Pronouns, she and her. I'm a wife, a mom, and an employee here at HLS.

Hum, tell us a little bit, I know you for a while, for at least 20 years, I would say. [LAUGHTER] [NOISE] Has been a while. But I know that quite a few folks don't know about this. So, tell us about your family. Where you come from, Dianne?

I have a dad who was born in Portugal, in the mainland Tras-os-Montes. After the military, he migrated over to Brazil, met my mom, and had my sister. When the military took over in Brazil, that's when my father felt that it was not a safe place for him, his wife and his young baby. I had an aunt that was already here and my dad asked if they could sponsor them to come and be here in the United States. My parents arrived in 1964.

'64. Interesting. I have two things about that. First, what's your father's, mom name, and your sister?

My father's name is Manuel.

Manuel.

My mother's name is Helena.

Helena.

My sister's name is Lucilene.

Lucilene. It's interesting that you mention, in one aspect for a lot of people, given the political climate that you are, is still today in Brazil.

For sure.

Your father has to move and felt that he needs to move from Brazil in '64, that's when the military took over, right?

Correct.

Kind of a revolution that happened. A lot of famous artists were exiled to other countries and all that kind of thing that happened. He had to come to US with your mom because he did not feel safe there. Just using that makes me think, oh, my God, someone felt unsafe enough to move to a different country because of the condition in the country. Right now, a new generations of people who are celebrating the Brazil politics right now, many of them in a good sense feels like, no, it would be okay if you had that kind of environment. They don't know. But different perspective, different vision, different experiences, right?

Absolutely.

Another thing that's interesting, I think, talking to you about is, when you talk to other folks, whether they are from different backgrounds in terms of a culture, you have a very interesting one. People would think, of course, based on misconception that because Portugal and Brazil, both are Portuguese-speaking countries, that, oh, it's the same. Talk a little bit about how you perceived your father's Portuguese culture in difference of your mom's Brazilian culture?

When my parents arrived here, there were no Brazilians.

Oh, wow.

Absolutely none.

That was a paradise. [LAUGHTER]

My mother was really engulfed, and my sister and I in the Portuguese community, which at that time was mostly in Cambridge and continues to be in Cambridge. When my parents arrived here, they moved to a fourth floor walk-up in North End because North End was predominantly Portuguese back in those days.

Really?

Yes.

Then became the Italian.

Yeah, they were there. The Portuguese were growing in quantities.

Number.

Yeah. But what happened was a lot of the Portuguese were able to buy houses quickly. My father was only in North End for two years and then he bought his first home. [OVERLAPPING]

Wow, that's very interest to think in that way.

Yeah, my mom's building was all Portuguese. All of them were Portuguese.

In North End?

In North End, yeah. It was four apartments to one shared bathroom.

Four apartments for one shared bathroom?

Yeah.

Wow.

Interesting. Just one bathroom for four apartments.

Wow. That's very.

I hear my sister took a lot of baths in the sink because it was just easier than to take her to find time to give her a bath in the shared one. My parents talk about a lot of the things that they endured.

Difficult in the beginning, right?

Very. My father, before he left Brazil, he was a bakery owner, which was very good status in Brazil. But before that he was a truck driver, so he drove a lot of 18-wheelers from Sau Paolo to Rio.

In Brazil he was a truck driver.

In Brazil, yes.

Here, when he arrived, he went straight?

From here he went straight to work at Pier 4, which is no longer anymore. That was mostly all a lot of the friends that my parents have and still today, all worked at Pier 4.

What was Pier 4.

It was a restaurant.

Oh, a restaurant. Okay.

It was a restaurant. It actually has a lot of history in it. It was in Boston and with the blizzard of ‘78.

It was on a boat, the restaurant was in a boat.

Wow.

The boat sunk with the blizzard of '78 if I'm not mistaken. Then the building just continued on as a restaurant. They housed a lot of Portuguese people. I've beautiful pictures of that.

Which area, in Boston or Charlestown?

By the waterfront.

Waterfront?

Yeah, by the waterfront.

That's really interesting.

We really didn't have any exposure to Brazilian family, tradition.

But mostly Portuguese.

Yes, mostly Portuguese. My mother only had black beans when she would go back to Brazil. There was no black beans, there were no avocados.

Was not a common thing here yet.

No, not yet.

Because were not in the region.

Interesting. No black beans, no goiabada, no [inaudible 00:07:04].

All those very common things in Brazil.

All of those daily things. She adopted the Portuguese, and her parents were Portuguese, so it was not uncommon.

For her it was not that difficult.

It wasn't too difficult. You know what I mean? But I think what was difficult was the isolation here. You know what I mean? Come to a new country.

Live here and try to...

They arrived in December.

Was the winter already full blast.

Terrible weather.

Can you imagine your mom leaving Rio, well, 40 would be around 95, 100 degrees summer. Because she came in December, summer in Brazil, full summer.

Yes.

Then straight to the cold.

Straight to the cold with her little pencil skirt and little heels and her little pill box. Yes, that's my mother. [LAUGHTER]

Very interesting. Then you're born here, your sister born here.

No, my sister came with my parents. My sister was two years old.

Oh, that’s right, your sister, Lu was born in Brazil?

Yes, in Brazil.

Nice.

You were living in North End?

My parents were.

Then, when my mother got pregnant with me,

they bought a house in Somerville.

In Somerville. Where nearby Somerville?

Right by the Mount Vernon.

By Sullivan Station?

Right. We used to walk to Sullivan Station every Saturday, take the train. My mom was a seamstress by trade. She would buy a couple of yards of fabric. We'd come home, and she'd make a dress for Sunday mass.

Where did she work?

She worked for Priscillas of Boston, the bridal gown company.

The building that you used to pass by bus and see Priscillas, right?

Yes. That's it.

Right by Sullivan area.

Yes, it is, yeah.

Oh my God, I remember.

Right by the straps building, that area. She worked there for about six years or so. Then she ended up leaving due to some medical issues that I had and then stayed with me for a number of years. Then she got a job at Radcliffe part-time.

Harvard?

Yeah. Dining Services.

Wow. Your mom started working for the dining services at Harvard.

Mom is the legacy why my sister and I are here, and many other people are here. [OVERLAPPING]

She preferred to leave this seamstress work to go to work with the dining?

Yeah. It was really hard, the seamstress work was really really hard. It was all piecework and my mom has never been a healthy woman, so she wanted something with a little bit more benefits, more better health coverage, that kind of thing then with me and everything.

How long you stayed in Somerville?

We stayed in Somerville till 1980.

1980. Then I went to high school in Medford.

Then we moved to Medford.

You moved to Medford.

We moved to Medford.

How was Medford when you moved there?

How was Medford.

Because now it's very basically

It's like Somerville, right?

Yeah. Now it's Somerville.

Bougie Somerville. Bougie Medford. Medford was tough. There was a lot of issues at the high school when I went.

You have a problem with high school?

Yeah. Because I was raised so differently. When we were in Somerville my mom never let us go outside and play. She just never trusted the neighborhood that we were in. Again, [That might have been] cultural thing. You know what I mean? She just didn't trust anything. She was just really scared. [OVERLAPPING].

It's might they have come from Brazil as well. It's very common for people in Brazil to have that in terms of neighborhoods and how to behave. It's very common in terms of how the culture there coming from Rio more than in any other place, which is more concerning in terms of many aspects of that. Do you think that your issues in high school were culture related or just the regular high school kids that you see in movies in America?

Fifty-fifty.

Fifty-fifty.

Because I disappeared when I left school. I go home. I would do what I needed to do for my parents and that was it. There were no movies, there were no going out after school. As you get older that's the way it is. You know what it's like to be a good kid for a European family, right?

Yeah.

So you don't push the envelope. My sister and I were pretty well-behaved from my mom and from my dad.

Raised by Portuguese and Brazilian parents?

Yes. Exactly.

At that time as well, in the generation I think the education in a way that they perceived raising kids, discipline was a little bit tougher than we see today.

Much more.

You mentioned that your mom started working at Radcliffe for the dining services. When did you start working at Harvard?

I started working in 1983 [LAUGHTER].

'83?

I was 16 years old. Yeah. Mom had a good reputation. She was a very good worker. She worked for a woman who is very well known in dining services for people who've been there for a long time. Her name was Mrs. D'Andrea. Mrs. D trusted my mother implicitly whenever she said, oh, I have this person or a friend of mine who is looking for a job. Mrs. D would always trust my mom and my mom probably put about 15-20 people over at the Business School. She worked at Radcliffe part-time then when she found a full-time job over at the Business School, over at the galley.

But it's still dining?

It's still dining services.

She put in so many people there. One year, I was in high school obviously, and I was working in a nursing home. I was coming home all bruised because I was making beds, and I was all bruised my legs because the hospital beds were. My mother's like this is not good. I'm going to get you another job. [LAUGHTER] She did. She got me a job working at the Business School Saturdays and Sundays from 6:00 in the morning till 3:00 in the afternoon and I quadrupled my hourly rate.

Really?

Yeah.

How old you were, 16, you said?

Sixteen.

Sixteen. Working twice a week?

Yes.

At Business School?

At the Business School.

What exactly did you do there?

I was a cashier, and I was a front order cook. So whenever someone was missing I went in the dining. [OVERLAPPING].

In the dining services part of it.

Yeah. Like what we have, the box here. You know what I mean? The grill?

Yeah.

That's so I would do the grill, I would do the register. Whatever needed to be done for that day.

Next year you are 40 years, here.

Yeah.

Wow, that's amazing. That was the first job. How it went from there. How long did you stay in this position?

I was in there for a long time because I went to Mount Ida College, so I did that. I was in high school then I went to Mount Ida, and then I started thinking that I would need another job when I graduated [LAUGHTER] Mount Ada. I applied for a job at Widener Library as accounting assistant 1 back then.

What year is that?

I think that would have been '95, probably, '95, '96. But I stayed with my kitchen job until much later.

But you increased the hours there?

No. Just Saturdays and Sundays.

Just Saturdays and Sundays?

Just Saturdays and Sundays and then I worked at the library. I worked 15 hours a week. Between those 15 hours and then those two 8 hours and then college. I was pretty busy. I was also married too at the time.

So you worked twice a week in the dining services as cashier.

Three days a week.

Then 15 hours.

In the library.

Which would keep you under 20s or?

The only thing that was union was the kitchen. We didn't have a union here, so there wasn't any conflict.

Okay. So the fact that you were not- [OVERLAPPING]

Now we're unionized. [OVERLAPPING]

So maybe because of you, they changed now. [LAUGHTER].

Maybe. [LAUGHTER]

Then after that, where did you go?

I went to work for FAS Office of the Registrar. I worked for them for about two years. I was a supervisor of exams back then. Exams were very analog back then.

I know.

This is before Memorial Hall was converted back to a dining hall. I would be in charge of organizing all the exams for the undergraduate school. I would get a list of all the classes and a number of students. Nothing was really computerized back then.

Memorial Hall could fit 400 students, so we had to have 200 students going west to east and another 200 students going east to west. The students who were facing each other couldn't have the same exam style. You had science going one way and English going another way. It was really interesting.

Very interesting.

Very interesting.

What was the reason to have this 400 with two different exams going?

It was just final exams or midyear exams. So their exam.

That was the room for them to take the final exams?

That in addition to the science center and a bunch of rooms in the yard.

They didn't have enough classrooms at the time for the exams to be taken at the classrooms?

I'm not sure if that was it. I think this was just the tradition.

Or is the easiest way to control-

Maybe.

-crowd and apply one exam. Very interesting.

I would have to hire 200 proctors.

Two hundred?

Two hundred proctors and train. [OVERLAPPING]

To help with the entire [OVERLAPPING].

Yes.

Wow.

It was a busy job.

Was there take home exams at that time?

No. I remember we used to have probably a four-foot safe in the registrar's office. The faculty assistant would come in with like, I'm not kidding you. [LAUGHTER] They'd bring this briefcase that they were [LAUGHTER] chained to their wrists, and they would hand me the exam. [OVERLAPPING]

Really?

I'm not kidding. Yeah.

It's like a movie [LAUGHTER]

They would give me the exams and I would look over the pages and I would sign that I received four pages of science and biology, whatever and sign off on it, put it in the safe then I would have to order x number of coffees to the university's copy center. Nothing I had ever experienced.

I'm curious, because you have such a good program with accessibility, HLS nowadays. As far as you can remember, any accommodations?

No.

Or people with disability do is studying or taking exams at that time that you remember?

Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

Nothing.

Nothing.

What a long the way?

For sure. Now that I think about it.

Interesting.

Not even testing accommodations, you mean not just physical accommodation?

No.

I don't remember anything like that. Nothing like that.

They should have their time to get there.

That's it.

The time to have their exams done.

Exactly.

Leave, but nothing else other than that? You had the proctors to help, which we still having here around.

They still use them here.

I think Meghan Mycroft that I talked before at the Registrar’s is the one that manage all of them, what she needs. But that's an interesting, 200 proctors.

Two hundred proctors.

Wow. Then after you're finished with the registrar's?

I went to go work for Harvard real estate, which is now HUH, Harvard University Housing.

Now is Harvard University Housing. What year was that? Do you remember Dianne? more or less.

Harvard, I went to a real estate, oh my God and I came here in 2001 so back in the 90s.

Yeah.

Then you stayed there for 12 years. What was your work there? What did you do?

I was a contract administrators, so I would put out a bunch of contracts out to bid custodial, elevators, trash, landscaping. I would put those all out to bid for best services, so we would bid them out every three years.

Is more or less administration level what facilitates does or not.

Facility uses a lot of our tradespeople to do that stuff. We use our custodial people, we use our plumbers and electricians here, but in real estate we always contracted out. We didn't really [OVERLAPPING]

Often outsource.

We use all outside vendors. We only use inside vendors when we had no other practical choice, it wasn't even about money or anything. We manage the church in the yard. That comes under HUH. At least it did back then, I don't know if that's still there.

Because it changes so much.

Obviously, a building like that, you're not going to get an outside landscaper because the trades are already in the yard doing the landscaping.

Doing everything.

But anything that we could do outside and we were very competitive. Like I said, we bid everything every three years. We never even purchased anything without bidding it, if we had to buy refrigerators for the apartments [OVERLAPPING]

You would?

Bid, we would call three vendors. They would have to fax over us a quote, it was very procedural and we had to staple everything, get the signature and that only then would we order stuff.

Then you left there and came to Facilities here at homes all in 2001.

Yeah, 2001.

What did you do in Facilities? What was the main job there?

No longer contracted administrator, I took a finance role which was brand new to me. I had an exposure to finance in the terms of contracting and budgeting and all that other stuff. But to be the soup to nuts person for all payments, everything going through that was [OVERLAPPING]

Different process.

That was very different.

Another gcuriosity of mine. When did you first hear about the 33 digits billing code for Harvard.

I was here before it was 33. I was here when it was seven.

Do you remember more or less when moved seven to 13?

Of course, it was horrific.

Really?

Change is hard.

Yes.

Change is very hard. You know what I mean?

But I'm surprised It was a seven already in place when you [OVERLAPPING].

It was seven. No, sorry. It was seven digits at real estate,14 digits for the university.

For the university.

That's what it was, I'm sorry, I misspoke. Then we went from 14.

To 33.

To 33.

That's how the university was already expanding that sense because to go to 33 well, of course, I started to see how the finance was going and what would be the best way to apply, but you were involved with finance for so long. I have to ask that, not to go over the 33 digits, but we know that the first three digits [OVERLAPPING] here is your tub and every school have their own.

Yes.

But what's complicated is, do we have or maybe I'm going too far in that area. Now that we have 33 schools, we just have 33 digits that expand from the tub.

It's 33 digits, seven segments and the seven segments to speak to one piece of the accounting. Once you learn what those seven segments are, it is really easy. Really is easy and it provides an advantage of looking at your finances in a very micro manner and also in a very top-level manner. I was one of those rebellious people that was, you people are crazy. [LAUGHTER] But once things got explained, my sister also works for the university and she's always had a finance job. Once she and I had it out one weekend about this 14 to 33 thing [OVERLAPPING]

Had nothing to do at home [OVERLAPPING]

No, but we have to talk about work.

Netflix, let's talk about finance.

No there wasn't any Netflix [LAUGHTER] back then. But it totally made sense and I think that's what it was. I think they just probably didn't have the right people to explain what it is because without those seven segments, I don't know that I could have done as good of a job in finance work for facilities as I have because I really understood it and I knew how to get granular, and I knew how to get 10,000 foot view. You know what I mean. If you understand it, you know how to use it to your advantage, then it's very good. [OVERLAPPING]

That's easy to have a better view on finances and how to handle that because sometimes can be very [OVERLAPPING]

Intimidating.

Yes, 33 digits, Oh my God. When you have and then you have the variations in whatever, use it for activity for this and that. I remember few, I didn't work with that at all. In DOS it just with petty cash and dealing with the orgs there [LAUGHTER] Oh Lord, that was something. The difference in the change in terms of everything. Back to facility so you worked with facility in finance for how long? Until?

18 years.

18 years in Facilities. Then from Facilities you went to?

DOS.

From DOS and that DOS is still finance?

Yes. Different finance.

There are differences in each of them. Right. But department culture, whatever you do in terms of work culture, that would be the best way to do. Student affairs that you would say has a completely different approach in terms of how you work with them.

Yes.

I know how you work with administration. Then in certain aspects of other ones so it's good to have a sense of not every department is the same at all and it depends on department.

You will need to find your own way to figure out how to behave, for lack of a better word, how to behave or how to ask questions. I was trained very early [LAUGHTER] that, never assume always listen.

Yes.

Process and then approach. Thank you Ed.

Did you enjoy working with students at DOS?

Absolutely.

Would just say that to work and not, also not DOS per se, but working in this level with the student affairs is completely different as well from everything that you did before.

Absolutely. Because I think my other positions were really behind the scenes. Working in facilities my clients were the staff members. In facilities were the vendors, yeah. But mostly the staff there, the staff in facilities, they needed a report or they needed to find out how to handle a certain payment process. When we went to go build WCC, we needed to work on what would be, we would need to start building a budget. Because now we're going to have this massive building we have to do a lot of analysis on our current buildings to figure out what money we're going to need for this new building. It was a lot of behind the scenes. I really didn't interact with staff. I definitely didn't interact with students. The same was true of when I worked for real estate. My customers were the managers that I did their contracts for. Same thing in the library. You know what I mean? I worked in finance. I was processing payments really behind the scenes. I think the Dean of Students, other than the kitchen which I really loved because I enjoyed even at 16 servicing students who were twice my age.

Oh yeah. You had a contact with the students. Yes.

Working with students that were twice my age. You know what I mean? Sometimes I thoroughly enjoyed it.

But you see what difference there? There it's a service that you would see them every day.

Food is different. It's nurturing.

It's just a momentarily passing by, hey, hi, how is the customer service as well? But this one was the one that you even have to find translation for what you are doing or even what they were asking of you. Because I think that would be things that they didn't understand, that they didn't know at all.

Of course.

Then was a process of both of you trying to engage and discover everything.

I think during my interview process, I was told that I would have a lot of teaching moments.

Did that become true?

For sure, yeah. Definitely.

Did it change your perception in terms of the students affairs?

I think so because I'm very conscientious of the people I serve and when I'm serving a particular group, I'm committed to them. I put away anything that I might have thought was true of that audience before and I'm here to learn and I'm here taking on a new job. Someone took a chance on me and so I have to be diligent and I have to be sensitive. I think yes, I definitely do think that when you're not in student affairs I think you can have preconceived notions.

Yes.

I think when you're in the thick of it even though I was only in the financial thick of it, there was a few instances that I was involved in things to help a student and so forth. But the majority of what I was assisting with was financial pieces with donations and finding out where their money was, [LAUGHTER] that kind of thing. Even at that level, I was very sensitive to these people who are trying to do good things and I need to provide them with as much support as I possibly can so they can go do what they're here to do.

I think from anyone working in student affairs, that is not a parenting style but goes that human relationship that you really need to empathize.

Empathy is a very big piece of what, you have to have that.

Yeah.

You have to.

You understand where the need come from. It's not just the misconception with spoiled kids trying to give you a hard time in the work that you do. It's really doing their best to be successful.

Because you're only seeing them in that one facet.

Yes.

Having that empathy needs to be part of your uniform.

We stay in DOS for few years and now you are working with?

I do HLS housing.

Housing.

Housing.

Which is close to dealing with these students the same way that you do. Housing is housed by Facilities Management office?

Yeah, it's nested underneath there.

That's there, but have a student affair component?

Yes.

That you need to have that relationship?

Student life.

Student life. How is that? It's a new challenge, was a new challenge to deal with anything?

I think I treat the students the same way, the same level of empathy and so forth.

We're entering the second year that housing was taken from Dean of Students and placed under Facilities which by the way belonged in facility 16 years ago.

That's good mentining because when I arrived in facilities, I think in one year or less than that when we lost and went to DOS.

Yes.

But the housing was sitting in Facilities before.

Exactly. After a 16 years hiatus it returned back to facilities. But what didn't return was the RA experience. The RAs continued to stay with Dean of Students as a residential life thing. I think I'm working real closely with Tara Townsend and she and I are doing our best to make sure that we can make sure that no one gets missed and everyone has a voice and that things are going smoothly in that area.

That's another thing that we tried to talk in terms of a campus community. That's exactly what we need to have more access to is to, maybe not necessarily that you work with you. Because of the circumstances of the job that you do, you have to work with Tara or you have to report or talk. The DOS has also to reach out to you in different aspects because of the common work with the students housing in general. But I think that's another aspect of what you always talking terms of engagement, right? How many folks in our campus that we don't meet or don't see on a regular basis? You should try, you should have that connection at least for whatever reason. Not necessarily work related but it would be nice to understand.

Better understanding.

Yeah. Because I think that makes a difference. When we talked here a little bit before our perception of what one department does is so far out sometimes of what really is. Talk to Meghan Markov and the reason that I wanted to talk to Meghan, working in DOS and helping with the exams process and what we call the system that we have for talk desk. I saw how much registrar's office does. Sometimes it feels like it's in the background and people don't notice how much. Then you have the career services. You have OPIA, you have the Financial Services side, you have the Clinical and Pro Bono. Everybody or every department has their own culture and their amount of work that they do. Facilities for example, we just see facilities from the back end there or when you need something. Something's broken, call facilities or there is something happening, call facilities. But that relationship is not always easy because everybody is so busy. But the perception of what they do or they don't do is also there. I think having a more engaging community and that's my point in terms of what this project is in order that we can come up with is to really hopefully bring a little bit more light in terms of what do you do, who you are. I think that's important as well because you had a chance that not so many, and I did not change as many jobs. Well, I'm here half of the time [LAUGHTER].

Don't make it sound like I job hop. [LAUGHTER]

In 20 years you have a chance. But changing positions and going to different, you'll learn so much in terms of which one is and you grow with that one as well.

Absolutely.

That is a lot of growth. I think we covered a little bit. I hope you have other opportunities to talk about other things as well, Dianne. Thank you very much for accepting the invitation. I knew that that was good history there to learn from you. I really appreciate everything that you do and the time that we worked together.

Thank you.

I hope you enjoyed as well.

Yeah, it was fun. Time traveling is always fun.

It is.

Besides showing you how old you are. [LAUGHTER] It's good to know that. [MUSIC]

That comes with experience as well Dianne.

Exactly. Thank you very much and it was fun.

Thank you. For everybody listening out there, I'll see you next time. Bye bye. [MUSIC]