[MUSIC] You were listening to tell me your story where we connect to HLS staff on a personal level.

Hello everyone, this is Edgar Clay Video from HLS Human Resources Department. My pronouns are he, him, his, and today we're talking to Heather Williams From Clinical and Pro Bono office, who you tell us about her life, how long is she is in these positions at HLS and the work? She does. Thank you for joining us, Heather, and please tell me your story.

Hi, Edgar. I am the Hospitality Coordinator slash Receptionist for the Office of Clinical and Pro Bono Programs. I've been here for 21 years.

Twenty-one years at HLS?

Yes.

So you started a year before I did. Wow. Always in HLS?

Yes. I came in October of 2000 because I was temping and they actually liked me and they helped me. [LAUGHTER]

Who are these people? I believe you.

I was hired January of 2001.

You were hired first as temp for Clinic and Pro Bono?

Yes. They wanted me to temp for three months.

Three months only? Did you work somewhere else before or it was part of something that you intended to begin like a higher education or?

Well, I worked for the company, I think now is defunct, but it was, Oh, I forgot the name of the company.

It was administration?

It was like a Fortune 500.

Okay.

We used to do the payroll for independent contractors.

All right.

They started laying off and finally I got laid off. My daughter was very young, so I could eat beans for a year [LAUGHTER] but I needed to feed my child.

Right.

I signed up with a temp agency and I told them that I wanted long-term. If you're going to put me into a position, I want it long-term because I couldn't be jumping around and just in case my daughter needed me and I had to go to the school.

Yes.

I was working for the superintendent's office in Cambridge and that ended and they said, we have another job in Cambridge. Do you want to staying in the Cambridge area? I said, yeah, sure. It was Harvard Law in the Islamic legal Studies Program.

Islamic legal studies, Oh, wow. Where was [inaudible 00:03:07] at the time? Less that I knew, I'm sorry to interrupt you, but less that I knew they were in Austin Hall.

No, when I started they were in Pound Hall P501.

Where it's now is Program on Negotiation or, I think they are on the fifth floor.

Negotiations?

Program on Negotiation and Mediation program.

I believe so.

I think they are that because I was confused in terms of the alumni group that takes most of the Pound in a way. But you forget that we have cCommunication that's on the fourth floor, and then you have I think Program on Negotiation and Mediation are on the fifth floor.

Yes.

Number 4 or something.

Yeah. But it was P501 ILSP and that was just before 911 because of course 911 happened in 2001.

Yes. That is where you started temping?

I was hired then because January of 2001, I was hired, and then 911 happen in September.

Okay.

Yeah.

What's the change? How did you move around because you were in Islam Legal Studies?

Then an opportunity happened for me. Someone who was leaving the clinical department and I was offered the job and I gladly took it.

Meanwhile you just went through Elena Kagan said, listen, [LAUGHTER] we need more space. Would you please build WCC

I wasn't the one that [LAUGHTER] let me put it out there. I had nothing to do with that. But yes, we needed a clinical building because we were forever expanding.

Yeah and the student's needed as well in terms of how many classrooms that we have now. I was talking to someone before, I think was Susan Salvadore. Thinking back a little bit, this building was inaugurated in 2011, 2012?

I think it was 2012, yes.

I can imagine and I keep thinking, I never thought of it that before this big building, we would have Pound Hall with those classrooms. Then Langdell with the two classrooms in Austin Hall. Well, we had something Lewis and Griswold. [we had Hauser] Oh, yeah. Hauser we had these two have some class on the first floor only. But now, look how many were added to eight big one and then you have all the other rooms that we can use it for exam so the addition was really needed.

We asked, we did, we needed a lot of space.

Then having a whole wing just for the Clinical and Pro Bono, which was, and I think it is smart the way that they did as well. It works was independently.

Yes.

Then you can have access.

The idea was if the students were taking their clinicals, it would feel like a law office. That's why they have the locked door between.

The hallways?

Yes.

That connected the rest of the buildings?

Because we do have actual clients [OVERLAPPING]

Non Harvard affiliated, right?

Right. That come in. They come in through the six Everett where I sit and we get services from the students and of course their professors are licensed attorneys, so they get supervised.

That's another interesting point on that one. I was doing in our Halloween event. That was a walk with Monique. You saw walking around and I went on the third floor. I just showed him main office for Clinical and Pro Bono. I brought her all the way down to see where human rights and immigration officers are. When we were getting there, she said, "Why is this elevator four, do you have another one?" Well, this is, I would say the most exclusive just for OCP because they have their own clients that come through 6 Everett street and then they can have access to the clinical wing, all floors through that elevator.

It separates the clients from the actual students going to the classes.

Yeah. For everybody who don't have much contact with OCP and doesn't know usually what OCP does. Can you give us just a general view not necessarily?

OCP assists students to find opportunities working with clients with real-life legal situations. While they're learning and getting their JD, they get real-life experience through their clinicals.

Which is fantastic. He's another opportunity, I don't know regardless of how many chances or how many spaces exist for clients to come in or how often. But still is free service for the clients who come and look for a clinic in pro bono?

For the most part, yes. The transactional law clinic help people in various things but they do help with opening non-profit organizations.

They help with that too.

There may be a small fee but it's nothing like.

Nothing compared with someone that has to go through different ways outside and the [inaudible 00:09:08] is interesting because it's a double feature there. The students, whatever they learn in theory throughout the years with the clinicals, all the clinics that you have clinic in pro bono. With the assistance of their professor, their mentors, they're going to practice law in real cases, going to real courts and talking to real lawyers defending everything. At the same time that they are helping folks who need assistance from communities around Boston, to do that. The ones that I remember the most and I think in fact people a lot. You just said Transactional Law Clinic, Criminal Justice Institute is a big one.

But just vague. With the Criminal Justice Institute we get our cases from the court. We don't really get cases from random public inquiries.

Based on the Criminal Justice Institute, [OVERLAPPING] so those are cases that are already in court and then come through the criminal.

We will be the court appointed attorney.

Oh, I didn't know that. But then would it be different for example for Legal Aid Bureau that deals directly with housing that's claims would go.

Yes, we can read and I answer the public inquiries, like I will fill them and if.

For most of these clinics.

Well, no for each lab.

Each lab.

But because our number is the main number for clinical and pro bono, I get a lot of public inquiries on legal help. I don't refer them to attorneys. I refer them to agencies that are similar to our clinics.

That would happen when you don't have.

If there isn't a clinic that can help them.

But as soon as I have referenced. You know other organizations around Cambridge, Boston that would be able to help them.

[inaudible 00:11:14] in Boston.

Wonderful. That same goes for the immigration clinic based on availability and what they are working with. Do you know on top of your head how many [LAUGHTER] clinics we have?

God, you're killing me here. [LAUGHTER].

I don't mean to do it.

We have 36 clinics and 11 SPOs, which are Student Practice Organization.

The SPOs are to be parallel or similar in a way to the Dean of Students organizations. The students organizations that the DOS work with in a way. The only difference is that this runs directly with clinics in terms of law and practicing law. The other ones, I think they deal more with events, bringing in speakers and developing their own knowledge in terms of.

Yeah, you could say that.

I think. [LAUGHTER] Eleven SPOs I remember they increased.

I think we covered well our clinic in pro bono. We're talking here about five floors, the clinic in pro bono.

We have three floors.

Three floors?

Yes, and WCC. Plus we have 1607. Yes, we have.

Yeah, because the first floor doesn't count. The second floor is the events that you have.

Of course it counts.

No, I'm sorry. [LAUGHTER] My apologies. I'm so sorry. I have to re-frame and backtrack here. The first floor counts very much for everybody listening.

That is where you enter. [LAUGHTER]

Yes, on six average street, right?

There you go.

Where there is reception.

The lobby.

Rooms, lobbies and who is sitting in that lobby?

[LAUGHTER] I think I sit there.

Great. Definitely the first floor must count. We need to make that real here. Then you jump for the second floor that we don't have clinical occupying the space because the events [inaudible 00:13:39]

They take up the second floor.

Then you have the third.

The third, fourth, and fifth.

That's why everything why you've said that's true because I know that we go all day to the fifth floor and I completely forgot that we don't have the second floor but definitely we have the very important first floor [LAUGHTER] part. Do you like what you do? You enjoy working the job that you do?

I feel a sense of satisfaction when I can find help for the people that call because most of the calls that I get, people are at like widths and they're frustrated. They are just in need of legal help. There is a need for legal aid. There's a major need for legal aid and a lot of people fall between the cracks. It's like at least Harvard can fill a little bit of it. We can't do everything. We're not a law office.

You don't have the space or time or availability for everything that could be covered, right?

Right. But at least we do fill a void that there's a lot of people out there that cannot afford an attorney. I mean, some of the attorneys start at $300 an hour.

For someone close to be evicted or having serious issue with their housing situation.

Desperation is hitting really hard there.

Even though we're a clinic, we do not deal with medical issues at all. Nothing medical.

So just the medical part.

We don't.

Because you deal with a variety of legal issues that you help folks. Whether it's clients coming here, families for example, or like I said, the Criminal Justice Institute that comes via court cases that you take care. One thing that I remember when I was working in the Dean of Student's Office, and I was always trying to forward to you [OVERLAPPING].

Yes, I remember

Because you also receive a lot of letters from prison, from folks who are in prison that feel like they were in prison for wrong reasons and they send their message and then we send to the clinic in pro bono, you do the triage and then you send them to the right clinic to take a look and see if they can reach out and see what to do.

Because our Prison Legal Assistance Project, they help people who are incarcerated if they're being ill-treated while they're incarcerated, our students will reach out and help them.

We have a variety of things that we do, a lot of housing.

I believe you do. I have seen the way that you work and you're very careful about ODD information that [inaudible 00:16:58] you have whether VA made because every receiver, the mayor is receiving letters and you receive the folks that would go to the third floor asking where is the Clinic in Pro Bono and sometimes not very happy that you have to say, I'm sorry, you cannot access from this floor. You have to go down and go around the block [LAUGHTER] and don't forget the first floor, you will find them there.

Don't exaggerate. [LAUGHTER]

[LAUGHTER] Tell me a little bit about you. Are you from the Boston area? Are you from the New England?

I don't like talking about myself. [LAUGHTER]

Don't make me sing.

[LAUGHTER] I am what we call BWI.

What is a BWI? I don't know.

BWI is British West Indian.

Really?

Yes. I was born in London in the UK and my parents are from Barbados.

What a wonderful mix there. [LAUGHTER]

[OVERLAPPING] You were born in London but then your family moved to Barbados?

No, [OVERLAPPING] my parents were born in Barbados. They moved to London because back in the day, that was the easiest way to travel. They had me.

Yes, in London.

Yes, no doubt.

Wow.

Fun fact, my grandmother was here. My father's mother was here in America because she used to work for Marian Anderson.

Wow.

She was here and she was living here and she wanted all her sons here too. She sent for us and that's how we got here. [LAUGHTER] Marian Anderson sponsored our family, my dad, to come here.

For folks who don't know and probably some will be asking.

Oh, who's Marian Anderson? She was a famous singer. She was very famous, very well-known and it just so happened that she met my grandmother in Barbados. My grandmother used to cook for her and do different things and she used to travel with, well, she did-

The connection happened there in Barbados.

Yes, in Barbados.

Your grandmother came to work with her here in Boston?

In Connecticut.

In Connecticut?

Yes, she lived in Connecticut.

Of course. [LAUGHTER]

As a kid, I did not appreciate that. I did not know who she was. I mean, I knew my grandmother, but she was just-

Made no difference.

Yeah, because I came here when I was two. I was an infant. I was a toddler, let's put it that way. You just don't appreciate those things when you're a kid. [OVERLAPPING] As you get older.

When did you realize that? Was it much later in life?

Much later in life.

I need to touch this before we move because I want to still know how Boston happened to you. I know that you sing. [LAUGHTER] I'm curious just to make the connection that you have this person that was a famous singer that was connected to your family somehow. That in the beginning as a child didn't pay much attention. It's not bad.

This is interesting. Music happened in your life or do you still connect to her somehow or there was nothing to do with Marian Anderson?

Well, that has nothing to do with Marian Anderson. That was just a fun fact how we came here. But my dad, he used to sing with his brothers.

Oh, your father was a singer?

No, he wasn't. He was a preacher but he sang in church.

We used to sing during the holidays. You remember the reel-to-reel recorders?

Yeah.

He had one of those and he would make me sing with him on those reel-to-reel. That's when I was a little, really small. He had a beautiful bass voice.

Thank you for that. Because when you say he was not a singer. He sang in church. Is this a singer judging another singer, saying, no, he was not that good? [LAUGHTER] [OVERLAPPING] That's a no. He was no singer.

But I think because my dad loved to sing, he would sing in his sleep sometimes. [LAUGHTER] It's the funniest thing to watch when he's sleeping. You would think that he's awake, but he was singing in his sleep.

Your father was a pastor and singing at church? You noticed that you had some tunes there. That's how you started singing in church.

Yes and no, because I used to play the violin. I was classically trained.

Oh, there you go. Now it's getting bigger. She was just a singer and now she is a violinist player.

But I only played until I was in my 20s and I stopped.

You didn't enjoy as much or?

I loved it when I was a kid, but you have to- [OVERLAPPING]

You lose interest, right?

Yeah. You have to keep up with it too.

A lot of the brackets and all of those things.

I used to play in the Messiahs at a church but that just wasn't my thing anymore.

You kept going on with the singing and participating groups, choir, [OVERLAPPING] church, school.

Currently, right now, I'm in a group called The New England Gospel Ensemble.

You are?

Yes.

I need to ask them because I work with you all these years and [LAUGHTER] I didn't know that. I'm hearing about all these things today.

Because I don't like talking about myself.

But [OVERLAPPING] you grew up in an ensemble like you're saying, I want you to listen to them.

[LAUGHTER] I've been in that group for a good 25, maybe close to 30 years.

If I search online, I can find YouTube's.

Please don't. [LAUGHTER]

No, but you can.

Yeah.

I will. [LAUGHTER] I need to hear about that. I heard that you met with some famous folks and I'm just going to list here just a few of them, Mariah Carey, Patti LaBelle, and Anita Hill.

Yes.

How was it? If you can say a little bit. I just think that this is exactly the point of what you are doing in terms of this conversation about Tell me Your Story. Is this fact that people do is not with the intention to make anybody reveal what they are doing? But I just think that it's so interesting that you have these folks here and myself knowing you for so long used to know all of this. I wouldn't make you say, okay, let's go here. [LAUGHTER]

You're making it sound like they personally called me Boston. Boston is pretty small. Most of the people that sing in Boston have interacted with one another. But when celebrities come to do a concert, there are people that are contacted to see if they're available to sing behind this. I sing with the gospel night choir at Symphony Hall.

Always great to hear. When someone needs a backing vocal or group that can sing for them, that should be the group. [LAUGHTER] Because I'm telling, I understand that you are being humble and trying to make your, no, it's not a big deal.

It really is. [LAUGHTER]

I know Boston is small. But do you know how many calls I get for singing? [LAUGHTER] Just guess.

[LAUGHTER] They just don't know who you are.

I know that they know.

If they knew the melodious voice that you have. [LAUGHTER]

I can tell you for a fact that some friends of mine, when I say, oh, let's go karaoke or sing this, they say, no, let us do it. You just stay there and clap. [LAUGHTER]

Can I just say karaoke? I used to go and I'm like, I am uncomfortable singing karaoke, but I will go onstage with my group and sing.

That's lovely.

Karaoke is this-

I wish I had a good voice because I love karaoke, but [LAUGHTER] I'm not going to do there and embarrass myself and make people mad, so I avoid that one. [LAUGHTER] You have a contact with these folks.

Going back conversation in terms of your family came to Connecticut and how Boston happened.

No. Well, my grandmother moved to Cambridge. When we first came here, we moved to Cambridge.

Oh, first, Cambridge.

Yes, because she didn't live with Marian Anderson. She would go back and forth when we got to America.

We lived in North Cambridge and then my dad bought the house in Medford.

In Medford.

West Medford, as a matter of fact.

Which is a lovely area there. I liked that area.

Back in the day, it was predominantly black. There were a lot of black entrepreneurs that own their own businesses and lived in West Medford.

The entire West Medford area was predominantly black.

It was on the other side of the tracks. Yes, it was predominantly black.

Wow.

There's a huge difference.

Today. Yeah I know, it's very different. West Medford was very much a community because everyone knew one other's children and it was actually a neighborhood because everyone looked out for one another. Not to mention most of the people in West Medford were either related or, the kith and kin.

The connections to Boston area would be via because I know that the train tracks, the commuter rail go through mad for our West Matt.

Yes.

Will be mostly commuter rail train or you would have the buses as well because you still have the bus few lines there.

Well, West Medford it's very accessible because you have the 95 bus that goes from Sullivan station now it goes into Arlington.

Yeah.

But you could pick that bus up in West Medford square. You could take the commuter rail or the 80 bus [OVERLAPPING].

As far as the way up?

No. The 94 goes through West Medford.

Goes down, true.

Yes. But the 80 bus when I was growing up, it was the 80 bus and the 95 or the options. Sometimes you can take the 77 and just walk down Bates road and it goes right into West Medford.

Where did you go to school in your early?

My early [OVERLAPPING] Medford.

Medford. All the way through high school?

Yes.

When you say that West Medford the majority of folks leaving there were blacks. The school high school was also?

No, the junior high. No, it wasn't like all-black schools [OVERLAPPING] Yes.

There was a school the Harvey school that was right in West Medford. Yes, most of the West Medford children would go to that school and then go to the Brook School, which is further up on the high street.

That would be the high school?

Well, the Brook School was the extension because the Harvey only went up to third grade. Then when you went to fourth grade. Yes. Then the Hobbs was the junior high school there.

Is that one on Forest or not?

See the Brooks in the Hobbs used to be in the same place but they knocked down the Hobbs. Yeah.

Did you participate in that one on First Street, Forest High Street, the high school there?

No.

Which I think is interesting now he's a condominium.

Yeah.

High school but the theater, the Boston theater, whatever is bought it.

Yes. Well, they bought part of it.

Yeah.

For the, what is it? The Chevalier? Yes.

That's what would be the drawing afford his high school and became now part of the Boston theater group or?

It burned the Forest Street used to be where the Medford high school, but they had a fire and they built the one that's now on Winthrop Street? Yeah.

Yeah. All 38. Somebody yes. Farther down 38?

Yeah.

I think barter with Winchester.

Yes. That's where the high school is now.

Opened a huge area. It's easier access and everything I imagined in the past, how complicated it would be. Everybody trying to pick up their kids at high school or Medford square.

But yeah, no, I wasn't around when the high-school burn. Actually we were, but we came in the late '60s. Don't quote me on that.

Yeah.

I think my dad bought the house in early '70s.

Until when did you stay in Western Medford.

Until when?

Yeah.

Well, our house is still there. The family house is still there. My mother and my sister still live in the house.

Your mommy and sister still live there?

Yes.

That's lovely, give me address I need to go there and talk to them. [LAUGHTER]

It's 555 Main Street. [LAUGHTER]

Now everybody stopped buying [inaudible 00:32:09]. [LAUGHTER] so then you have your high school here. Then how was Boston and what memories you have in terms of Medford, Somerville, Boston area?

Because my dad was a preacher, most of my friends were church friends and we went to church in Cambridge, so a lot of my friends were Cambridge and Boston because there's a Mother Church in Boston that we used to go to as well. I never really had any problems.

Yeah.

A lot of my friends and I would take the tea.

Yeah.

I would take the T. That orange line when it was elevated.

Orange line was elevated?

Yes, it was elevated back in the day.

All the way to Boston?

You're making me date myself here [LAUGHTER].

I love these stories because we learned so many things that I had no clue. I would never imagine. The orange light was elevated?

It was elevated.

Chicago has to live in New York [OVERLAPPING].

Yes. It was elevated from downtown Chinatown going up Washington Street and it would come around what they used to call Dudley area.

Yeah.

Then it would go back down. Let me think. If we go back down into the tunnel, but it was elevated from Eggleston which is over the JP Roxbury line. But I can't remember if it went down into the tunnel. It went down into the tunnel and green street.

Because I think that's what happened in New York as well goes. New York still have the elevated ones, of course, going to Long Island, for example you come from [inaudible 00:34:09] to go up and then you'll see big part of Long Island from the top, it's really, really nice. Usually life around Boston from West Medford it was easy.

It was easy, yeah.

Probably much easier town, in terms of population, in terms of a traffic, you didn't have it too?

We didn't really have to leave Medford because we had the Bal-a-roue which was the roller skating rink or the wallets.

You had everything that you need in that area, right?

Yeah.

Very interesting. But for example the malls that you have, if you need something, had to go drive all the way somewhere to try to find them.

Yeah.

That's takes away that. Even what you call a square here in the US, for example Harvard, the square Medford square. I was like, where is this square? Because for me, I believe that a lot of folks from the Latin word would say, for us in square would have a square with the trees and benches and some churches around. That wouldn't be going to describe for us. But here say, go to Harvard to square it. Then they just bifurcation of the streets going everywhere and say, Okay, we're seeing here is a different it was it always like that or?

As far as I remember, yeah.

You go visit Barbados, your folks place or not? You don't go as much.

As a child. Our parents would make us spend the summers in Barbados.

What a sacrifice. [OVERLAPPING] had to go to Barbados. Mom, I don't want to go.

It's so funny because as a child you don't appreciate these things. I wish someone would pay for me to go to an island for two months now. [LAUGHTER].

How much change is.

It does because my grandfather lived there for a long time.

Yeah.

Yeah.

You still have relatives there?

Yeah.

Yeah?

Yes.

That's lovely.

Yeah.

Our Yvonne is from there, right?

Yes. [inaudible 00:36:29].

I always got in trouble because do you remember Laverne?

Laverne worked for facilities for a while. But Laverne was from Trinidad and Tobago.

Don't make that mistake.

Yes. Yvonne is from Barbados. Sometimes I would make this the so you are a? NO.

We are very proud of our island].

I know [inaudible 00:36:57] from Barbados.

Yeah.

That's different from en Laverne would be to say no I am from Trinidad and all that she was very proud of all that as well.

Yeah.

It just sounds very lovely. I think that's that's awesome. Heather. Thank you very much for a accepting this conversation. I were thinking about you and some folks that I have been working with for a while. We had a good relationship. You have a good friendship and working together here. I know how much I give you a hard time. [LAUGHTER].

Not you. You never given me a hard time.

I am such a shy person and I tell everybody that. But I loved the idea of talking to you and I'm really grateful that you accept to talk to. You are a wonderful person. I need to say this for the record.

For the record. Let the record stay. [LAUGHTER]

Again [OVERLAPPING] But know you are a wonderful, wonderful human being.

Thank you.

Every time that I need your help or information, we are always there and it's July and I hope you'll be [OVERLAPPING] [LAUGHTER]. Thank you for everything and thank you for the wonderful job that you do for Clinical and Pro Bono. Saying that from my own experience, work as front desk for facilities for DOS. I know how important it is the job with that folks do it from desk as being the first line

Frontline yeah.

Yeah. The frontline for everything that happened with the rest of the department.

I feel we set the tone for the office.

Yes. That first floor last one. [LAUGHTER]

That's right, but important first. [LAUGHTER]

Anyways, thank you very much and for everybody. Until Next time, I'll see you around. Bye, bye.

Thank you for having me Edgar, bye.

Bye. [MUSIC]