[MUSIC] You are listening to tell 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, and today we are talking to Mauricio Gonzalez from Custodial Services. Will tell us a little bit about his life, how long he is in this position at Harvard University and the work that he does. Thank you for joining us, Mauricio, and please tell me your story.

Hi Edgar. Thank you for having me here. It's more than a pleasure it's an honor to be here.

Thank you.

Well, I was born in Colombia, Medellin.

Colombia?

Yes, sir. Medellin Colombia.

How long did you live in Colombia before you came to US?

I went there until I was 25, 26 years old.

Twenty five. Medellin is a big town. It's not a small one, right?

The capital is Bogota and second city is Medellin. It's one of the cities more powerful in Colombia.

The economy is the strongest.

The economy is very strong. All the singers coming from Medellin, we have the culture in there. The people is more warm, the people is more helpful and they had the beautiful parks. The culture is very different than the rest.

But the nature also is beautiful around Medellin?

Yes.

That landscape and everything.

Yes.

You are talking about a strong city. I think in Medellin for Colombia is like Sao Paulo to Brazil. Because the capital is Brasilia and Sao Paulo is the biggest powerful town with the biggest population that really all the work and the economy runs around that big town. I think that what it is. Now that you're saying that Medellin is known for the cultural aspect, the music and everything else. Where is Shakira from?

Shakira is from the coast. She is from Barranquilla.

Barranquilla. Not necessarily from Medellin?

Yeah.

Who else is famous from Colombia that you can refer to?

Well, from Medellin we have Maluma.

Yes.

We have Maluma, I have a few nice singers.

Famous people.

Carlos Vives. We have an artist like Botero.

Botero.

Botero is from Colombia too, and we have a nice musicians.

What's the music vibe in Colombia? I'm just asking this because Brazil, if you refer to always what comes to mind is Samba or Bossa Nova. What would it be Colombia?

Because we are a lot culture up there so all the cities have different styles. Pretty much the Vallenato, Salsa.

Because salsa is quite a few countries in Latin America?

Yes.

Salsa is very common.

Yes.

Salsa, rumba, merengue.

Merengue, yes. Merengue would also be in Colombia?

Yes.

Merengue, Salsa, Vallenato and Cumbia.

Cumbia, I have heard a lot. All of them more like dancing style, like a cool dancing moves a thing.

Cumbia for us is like ranchera for Mexicans. They had a nice dress, the color is nice beautiful.

The way that they presented themselves more colorful and more engaging.

Yes.

That's nice. How was life growing growing up in Medellin?

It was a very tough time back there because there was the war from the drug dealers and the government.

At the time?

Yeah, the Pablo Escobar and those kind of things. It was very tough for young people but after that, everything getting better and better. I grow in very small family, we are just three brothers and my mom. I never met my dad, they got divorced when I was two years old. I never met him and my mommy was dad and mom at the same time. It was really tough for her but she gave the most that she can to take care of us. And made sure we are very nice guy, very nice dad.

She raised you well?

Yes. She raised very well and know we take care of her.

That's wonderful.

Yes.

Did you have many cousins?

No, I only have one uncle, but he was not very close to us because he lived in another city.

It was basically your mom and your two other brothers, so all brothers?

Yeah.

You are the middle one or the?

I'm the younger.

Younger one. The baby or the mama's boy.

I'm the baby.

The three of you and your mom were the ones that had worked together and growing up?

Yes.

She raise all of you through work.

We went through a very hard time because we were too young. My mom never worked because my dad never let her work. I was two years old, my other brother was five and the old one was seven years old. My mom don't have experience to work.

Out of nowhere she has to start working.

Which is do a make up and hair take care

Really?

Yeah. She graduated for that. She also sold stuff in the house like cloths.

Everything that she could to help the house.

Everything she can do to feed us.

She maintained the house, that's wonderful.

Yeah, she was.

It's interesting. You are describing something that's very similar to my story as well. Growing up my dad was the one, of course, I think most of places in Latin America from Central South America. The man at the time is the boss of the house does everything. My dad used to take care of everything, including shopping for the house. Mom wouldn't go out at all much unless he would take her to dinner somewhere. It reached a point later when he moved from the south to the center west or Brazil where we are now in the '80s that somehow flipped. The work for him was not as much that was a crisis in terms of construction. Then I was working somewhere else in administration offices. My brother was working somewhere else and mommy started doing not that she went to learn somewhere, but then governments things that you need to do or going to the supermarket. Mommy started going on her on and somehow she got knowledge of these things and she figured out everything. When time came to retire, she was able to help my dad to retire. He never went to the government other than just sign papers. She was the one who went after everything. We have adopted brother with disability that she also helped to figure out his paperwork on her own. My mom has the fourth grade school. Out of my dad's control when you're living in the South, suddenly she is this woman that out of nowhere goes everywhere and know how to talk to people and figure out things which I always admired. I wonder if she had a chance to go to school and do something. When you describe your mom, I feel like the same.

I think we are so proud. We had those mother in those times.

Yeah, a strong mother.

Today, it's very hard to find.

How much they took care of their kids?

Yes.

Doing the right thing was not our job, you better do the right thing. [LAUGHTER]

Sometimes, I know where the belt come from and the sandals too.

There's even a joke about the sandal. When a mother threw a sandal it doesn't matter how far you run if you turn corners it is going to hit you.

Oh yeah. [LAUGHTER]

I always think that it's funny.

I have in there.

It's true. [LAUGHTER] Then when did you come to US?

That was another story. I turned that when I was 20 years old.

20 years old?

I was 19, it was close to 20. I was very young, I had no experience so I had to decide still in the school or take care of the baby. My mom say no, you had take care of the school.

You were married already?

I was.

My mom take care of the baby while I'm going to school, but it's still not really good help as I said to mom, you know what, I think I had to quit the school and get to work so I can help you and help the baby. Pretty much I was a single dad.

Single dad?

Yeah. My son's mother, she left and left the baby with me.

Yeah.

I say to my mom, you know what, I had to do something because this is going to be a tough time.

Yeah.

I got the opportunity to come to US to work and get better opportunity.

For your family?

To my family, correct.

Yeah, so that's what you did?

Yes, so after five years, I brought my son here.

You brought your son?

Yes.

With you?

Yes, I bring him with me, now he's 31 years old.

He's 31 now?

Yes.

Wow.

He's a marine retire.

A marine retired, he is a Veteran?

Already.

That's wonderful.

Yeah, he was in the service for 12 years.

Twelve years.

He got a couple [OVERLAPPING] thank you very much.

That's wonderful.

He got medical retirement, he got a couple issues in Afghanistan, but he's doing well, but he had a medical retirement.

Yeah.

Now he's retired, he gave me a grandson five years ago.

Wow, so you are a grand-dad now?

Yes.

Now you can spoil your grand kid, that's wonderful.

Yes.

What did you do before you work in different places here in US before you started working at Harvard?

Yes, when I came here, my first job, he was a dish-washer in a restaurant here in [inaudible 00:11:45] square.

You did?

Yes.

I did that too when I arrived here. Dish-washer, right?

Yes.

Funny, I don't know if it's for you, I want to hear all your story, but that was something that was not common in Brazil at all, and I was so happy that I learned how to do, was not easy because it was very hard that thing, sure.

Yeah.

The fast pace of putting all these things together, put inside the machine and then taking it out and then put them in place, right?

Yeah, it's not easy, it was very hard. In Colombia I never used those machines.

Exactly.

Where are things I see.

Yeah.

We had to try it, I learned too fast.

Did you do prep work too, like a [inaudible 00:12:26]

Yeah, I started there, I was dish washing for three months.

For three months.

After that, I moved to make pizzas.

Oh nice.

At the same time I was working in making pizzas, but when somebody call out on the grill, so they moved me to help the guy in the grill. I learned the grill too.

There you go.

After I moved to the grill, I gain more money. That time it was $12 an hour, something like that. It was very busy place and after that I learned make pasta and now I cover everybody, every coleague, I covered it.

If someone doesn't go to work, at least you know how to do.

Yes.

Do you really know how to do it, you prepare the dough and you then open the dough for pizza, everything?

No, I just opened the dough.

Someone's prepares dough.

Yeah, because we don't have time to do that because it was very busy restaurant, so they had everything ready, so just just open it up [OVERLAPPING]

You really know how to open the whole thing and make that round?

I only made in a wood stove.

Because I see some guys doing here in Harkness when they are doing pizza there.

Yeah.

I always want to learn how to do those things because I think it looks really complicated how to manage that and open make that nice circle the way that they do and they threw out to the air.

It looks complicated, but it's very easy.

You get involved, it's very easy to use.

What you're describing, Mauricio is pretty much what sometimes I try to tell all the friends in terms of work. There is a mentality sometimes when you are working somewhere that if someone says, hey, can you help me with this part or can you learn this one to help me out with this? Certain people have the mentality that if I say yes, I will end up doing that for a long time and I'm not going to be paid for that. It can be true, depends on where you work, but you miss a big opportunity to learn more skills that's going to help you out later in different things that you're going to do. You're just describing exactly that, that you're on dishwasher, then you learn how to do pizza, then you went to the grill, then you went to the pasta. You have four different skills, really.

More than a quality is something when you want to do something, just don't think just the money, just think that you can learn for the future. If you don't have the opportunity in the place you are, somebody has the opportunity and he's going to give it to you.

Yes.

For nice example, after the restaurants, I started making details on the cars.

Yeah.

I get the opportunity to work in Audi dealership in Brookline now is in Herb Chambers. Herb Chambers in route nine.

Where I bought my second car, I think.

Yeah. Before it was in route nine in Brookline?

Yeah.

It was an Audi and Volkswagen dealership. I started washing cars there, and I moved from the details to the Audi because I was thinking always I want to learn something, I want to get better benefits. I start washing cars for maybe two years. Same thing happened in all my jobs. The dispatcher, he was from Cabo Verde and he need a liver transplant.

Oh, wow.

I always had to take him to the hospital two or three times a week. When he was in the hospital, I was doing his job for a couple of hours until he comes back from the hospital. After he was out for one week. I covered him for one week, so the manager see me, I have a potential to learn.

Yeah.

They trained me for three, four weeks, and after he had to move to Florida for a liver transplant.

Oh, wow.

He retired basically, so I started doing his job. I did it for 10 years.

Ten years.

I was a dispatcher. It was very hard. I don't say it was easy because it was maybe 20 technicians.

Wow.

It was only two people who speak Spanish. It was me and one technician. He was from Mexico. I say, well, I have to improve my English, so I started going to Brookline High School in the night to study some English.

There was a program for English as a second language.

Exactly.

Wow.

I would work until 5:00, I get classes from 6-10, and next day the same thing. I did it for maybe two years until I get to improve my English. Wow.

This is my story in that dealer.

The same thing repeats again. You are in a restaurant and goes from dishwasher to taking care of pizza and then to the grill, and then to the pasta. Four different skills there. Then you are washing cars?

Correct.

Then of course, that is all the things that you have to take in consideration, the opportunities when they present themselves, right?

Yes.

If they present themselves and you take advantage of the moment because you couldn't say, oh no, I can't do this. I'm not going to [OVERLAPPING]

Don't make me wrong. I was very scared.

You're scared, exactly.

Because I said it was going to be easy. I see those technicians, it's very hard to communicate with them because there was from the Caribbean and from Portugal. There was from Russia, Vietnam, all countries in the world, and it was very hard to me to understand what they say, but as soon as I used to do it, I started getting used with them.

Right.

Yeah. Sometime my own boss say, "Oh, I was talking with whatever technician and I don't know what he's saying, can you talk to him?"

Go there and talk to them.

I go talk to, oh, he want this, he want that. I don't know how you understand me. I had to push myself to listen to them.

Sometimes that's what it takes, sometimes people get caught up in whatever it is that they think it is an accent or difficulties to understand. That means approaching, oh, so you're already catching up on all that.

Yes.

That's so wonderful. That's exactly what I sometimes talk to folks.

In 2010, they tell us they're going to sell the dealership to Herb Chambers, but Harry chambers is going to bring their own people.

Their own group.

I say, well, I'm going to move out to another place.

I started working with dining services in Harvard.

Harvard Dining Services.

Harvard Dining Services.

Our HUDS?

Yeah, in HUDS.

Oh, great.

I worked for HUDS. I worked for Adam's House. That was my my house and I was rotated because I was a part-time. I had to get calls to get hours. They sent you two different buildings.

What happened if you were working for the dining services during the period of summer, you are laid off because the students are not here is that what would happen that time or not?

Yes. That happened at the time, yeah.

Because I know some other folks that work there. During the period that you are well, they help if there are opportunities in other places they try to find something that you can do through that period of time. But from probably end of May all the way to beginning of August, you are not working and then they call you back when orientation is returning, right?

Yes, that's correct. I always have two jobs back there. I worked for a catering company. I used to do catering company when HUDS is closed.

Also that's what you did during the layoff period you would go for these other.

When I met my wife in Columbia, I had to brought them here. That was in 2014.

I had to find a full-time so I can make the request to brother for immigration. They asked me I had to have a full-time, but I was a part-time, but with HUDS is very hard to find a full-time because it's about a lot of people with seniority.

I applied for custodial. There was the only place I can have a full-time. This is why I started working in custodial.

That's how you started to work for custodial?

Yes.

Compared to the dining is easier or more difficult?

Is little more difficult. This is a good point. Sometimes people see us because we are cleaners, we clean office, we clean area, we clean bathrooms or whatever. People think this is normally good job. You know what I mean? Even they look you like, I never do this or why are you doing that when you say what somebody had to do it. Is nothing can do with me.

It's a job like any other.

It's tough job. I mean, it can be a better job than other ones. I think Harvard gave me an opportunity [OVERLAPPING].

Just the perception of a status or sometimes.

That's correct.

One thing that I can tell you Mauricio, I don't know if you know my story a little bit, but I'm very open about this. I worked for the landscape when I started. I still love that job. The reason I stopped mostly and I was looking for a different one was the winter. Honest to God. I learned how to use all the machines and everything that needs to do. But there were days when big blizzard would come then you feel like, what am I doing? Because it's so tiring and is so cold my goatee would be completely frozen like I don't know piece of ice and everything, my eyebrows and everything. But other than that, other than the heavy winter when the winter was really tough, cutting grass, raking leaves, doing the gardening, but I loved everything. I never did any of those machines when I'm in Brazil. Never even know what the work for. We learned all of them here. I worked with wonderful people. US citizens are other different folks from different countries as well. I learned a lot and I am so proud of that. Sometimes what you're just describing the vision of someone thinking their custodial service. That's why I wanted to talk to you and if I have a chance, I'm going to talk to others, is also that visibility. They know how many custodial have in our school? That's on my following up question with what you just said. Working here now because you are working under custodial services, how is your interaction with people? It's good? I know that you you help with our HR office. I know that you have a good group and feel free to say, how you feel about this. But it is a good experience throughout the building where you were most. First of all, which buildings you clean more so it's a Hauser and WCC, how is the area?

I got my area of work is Karkness.

Karkness?

Karkness.

The cafeteria downstairs, all the hallway.

In the concourse in the first floor.

Here is where their restaurant is, the box cafe, the Harkbox cafe, and also Hauser.

Hauser. How is it the whole building all floors?

Yes.

We take care of in the morning. We take your office too and [OVERLAPPING]

Very early in the morning.

Financing too, HR and finance too those two offices. That's pretty much the area we take care of.

I know that I see you there, you and Elsa. But usually when you go to clean upstairs, the folks are already there. You have interaction with the administration or is just you're getting clean and get out.

In the morning because it's too early we just take care of the bathroom making and surely is no leaks. Because sometimes the pipes is broken or if the faucet is not overflowing so we have to make sure everything is fine. We clean the entrance for leaves or any leaks. If it rain dry the windows, things like that. That's pretty much with the cleaning.

Before the folks come to the office and then if you find something wrong, you report to your supervisor or you'll report to Facilities directly?

We, if it's an emergency, I call my boss right away, or sometimes had to call someone in Facilities and telling this and is still happening right now take care of it right now and after call my supervisor telling him this and this, this what's going on and they take of it and we catch a couple of things.

Your people in the building general talk to you, say good morning, say hi or they?

Yeah, pretty much everybody, yes.

Nice that's good. Another thing that I was going to ask, how is your interaction, do you have interaction with the students as well or not so much because you have specific areas that you work?

No, we have all our interaction with them.

Good interactions?

Really good conversation.

That's nice

Very interesting, I also made really good friends.

That's nice.

They gave me their numbers, they call me for Christmas, they [OVERLAPPING] already graduated, they already working. Some of them, they back to their country and working with the governments, yes.

They still keep in contact?

They still call me.

That's wonderful.

I was in vacation now last December 2022 and I get some messages from them from Kenia

That's wonderful I'm so happy.

From Kenya.

Really?

Yeah from Kenya, from Armenia, Iran.

That's really [OVERLAPPING].

Or Panama too I'm sorry I forgot.

Do you find or have met students from Colombia, as well that are here as a student?

Yeah, last year I get a few. I met one already this year.

Is a good connection?'.

Yeah. Really good.

Because that is connection. Because a different from your country that is this I don't know, I think for them more than for us because they are here in a different level working, studying at HLS. But it's still feel like they need some connection here just to, I have met some of the Brazilians students throughout the years then in the year too. It's really nice to have them here.

I'm more happy seeing them coming to study here and thinking, when they go back, what they can improve their, what they can do better for the country. I don't know if all of them are going back to work there, but at least would be interesting.

I have also feel invitation to visit them. [LAUGHTER] They say Mauricio we want to come over, I want you meet my family because I always take care of those students, sometime is my daughter, my sons. I mean, because we see them how they suffer, because they are by themselves.

That's what are my feeling as well. I think that are different ways to see this students, they are Harvard Law School students. We see the importance in everything. But more than that, they're just kids and they are many of them in even more if they come from different countries to study here regardless of their background. They are still kids, they are afraid, they are scared of or whatever or what they are doing, how they're going towards if they're going to pass, if they're going to succeed. There is a lot of things there. Anything that we can do to make them feel comfortable, it is nice. I think, about myself being here for so many years. My family, my entire family is in Brazil. Nobody else is here. Having a connection, have someone that you trust always feel good. One curiosity if you can, you don't need to answer me is just me being nosy here. You said that you met your wife in Colombia?

Yes.

But you lived here for quite awhile. Was meant to be you went to visit your family or I went to vacation in Colombia or [OVERLAPPING]?

Well, I was by myself in here and one time I went to visit my family and I met this girl. We used to be a friend we were too young.

Oh, you already knew from?

Yes.

Oh, she was 12 I'm like maybe eight years older and the her?

Then I met her again and we start talking and this and that and she still single.

After you leaving here you went to spend vacation?

Right. We start talking. After that she get pregnant. I brought her with my son, my second son.

That's amazing. That's a really beautiful story.

Yeah and we still here.

When did you get married?

In 2011.

2011.

Yeah.

That's a really beautiful story, Mauricio. What's her name?

Monica.

Monica. Is she happy here, far from home?

Thanks, God. She liked the cold weather.

She does?

Yeah, she does.

Oh, my goodness.

It's not something like she like it, [LAUGHTER] but she can handle it. [LAUGHTER] She say, well, this is for some months, it's not the whole year. But this is one of the things I was worried about.

She is Colombian.

I know. It's beautiful there.

Colombia is right on top of the Amazon. Really, on Ecuador line?

Ecuador. Yeah.

Brazil, just the Northern part. But where my mom lives in Center West, there's a tropic that passes through. It's extremely hot, too. But Colombia is really part of the whole of Amazon forest and everything.

Here we have all kinds of weather. We border with Brazil, Ecuador, Venezuela.

Yeah. What about soccer? How is soccer?

Soccer, oh, man. [LAUGHTER] No, maybe talking about Brazil, man. [LAUGHTER] It still hurts. We have a good team.

Yeah. You have had some really great teams.

I think the problem with the Colombian soccer is all the good players we got, they sell it for the other teams in the world.

Became business model, so that's what it became. Brazil, the same.

That's the problem.

Ligia, from HUDS and cafeteria is from Colombia too?

Yeah. She is from Colombia but she is from Calli.

Calli is another big town too.

Yeah, that's a big town.

It's not as big as Metagene but it's a big town.

Yeah, it's a big town too. Where she is from is the part of the country where they dance more salsa.

More salsa. Funny thing about Lidya here, we talk a lot about traveling and every year she goes somewhere. Her husband and her kids. My God, she goes everywhere. Her and her husband goes to places that I am afraid to go because I feel like I'm not going to be able to speak the language. They went to Europe, Italy, France and I say Ligia, how was it? That was great. We took this or did that. We rented a car and then another year she went to Dubai?

Yeah.

You went to Dubai and she's showing the pictures and amazing things and say, Oh my God, I always love to talk to her because she has to figure out where she was next vacation. She took an amazing vacation to Mexico

Yeah. Well, also, she went to Medellin for Christmas.

Oh, she did?

Yeah.

She is everywhere.

I don't have the opportunity to meet her out there, but I mean, it's just really close.

Tell me something. You can wrap up our conversation. You happy now after all your journey, working here at Harvard, doing what you need to do?

I am really happy.

Yeah.

I am really happy. I'm very proud to be part of this family, like is Harvard for us. One of the thing is, I just want to let my coworkers know and all the people in this, in this place that is only one life. It's no reason to don't be happy.

Yeah.

People don't have to pay the price for some of them, they had a mistakes or whatever problem you have.

If you have problemd, just keep it at home.

Yeah.

Come to work, do your job in a good mood.

Enjoy the option that you have.

One of the things I learned, Edgar, in these vacations in Colombia, that was I met my best friend. He is father of three daughters. His wife, three daughters, between five years old and 12. He work for the minimum payment of the government. This is like $300 a month.

Brazil the same.

I say to him, and one of the things that impressed me is that he's smile. He was happy all the time. I say, Juan, how you do that to be happy every day. You have in this live like really tight. He said Mauricio because life is only one. I have to take care of my daughters and I do the best I can for them. In one week, if we can eat meat for two days, we enjoy it. The thing is we are together. We have good health and that is it. The life is too short to think things. There's not going to do nothing for us. I mean, that's just life. Oh my God. You are amazing. I learned a lot from him.

Mauricio, that's the same in Brazil. I go there once a year because I want to see my mom. My mom is 90 this year. I always go there and I know what they go through. There are quite a few of my relatives through the work that they do and how much they have to work to get a salary. Like to say that $300 per month is not per week is per month.

That's correct.

To manage life. Every time and then you go the happiness, the party, the getting together. When you say party is not absurd party is just a family gathering and barbecue. But the music is playing, everybody is dancing and singing and drinking. It is even with all that that you feel like, how can they manage to go through. This is another quality of, I think the Latin Americans in general. I'm glad that you mentioned the same about Colombia, but Brazil happens with the same. Is this being satisfied with life?

Yes.

Understand what the meaning of life is instead of giving so much value for material things or whatever, is that you think that's important. Fancy shoes or fancy clothes or fancy cars, that after you are gone, they're going to stay here, you are gone.

Every time when you go there is a good moment for you to reevaluate what you value because you get used to this life.

It is. I can't thinking different. My mind just get to washed and I start thinking differently. I see the life different and I already told some co-workers. I say listen, every day we had to do the best we can, not because we are a custodial. We are not less to nobody. Let's do the best we can. Let's work together. Let's get this job done. This is what we get paid for.

Yeah. You know, the job that you do, the custodial does here, it is an amazing job. That's why you're tagged with other folks that you work together. You are in our offices, in our lives every day. That's why I got the list of names from the custodial that you have and send show via newsletter for the entire school, for the entire HLS. Because people get to know how long I was calling you Ricardo.

Ricardo [LAUGHTER]

I don't know why. I was looking at you, I knew Elsa, but then you are just Ricardo. Then after I've gotten everything, what did you change your name and now you are Mauricio? You were just fine, not even contest me in that sense. I hope it helps you and I really want you to know that everybody, whether they say it or not, but I know for a fact because I talked to a lot of people and they're always the same, how much they appreciate the work that custodial does here.

Thank you so much.

You know, and everything that you always going to keep our school do amazing the way that it is. The job that you do during commencement during orientation for our students. That's one arrive on other one saying goodbye to HLS when they have their families come before their graduation. Everything that you do. Mauricio, thank you very much for stopping by to come and talk to me. I really appreciate. [OVERLAPPING]

Because I really honored to be in this conversation with you.

My pleasure for everybody out there. I'll see you soon. Thank you for listening. Bye bye. [MUSIC]