[00:00:04]

[MUSIC] You are listening to Tell Me Your Story where we connect to HLS staff on a personal level. Hello everyone. This is Edgar Kley Filho from HLS human resources department. My pronouns are he, him, his. And today we're talking to Brione Merchant from HUDS, who will tell us about his life, how long he's in his position at HLS and the work that he does. Thank you for joining us Brione and please, tell me your story.

[00:00:40]

Thank you for having me. It's always good to talk to you about man. Wwhere we want to start.

[00:00:47]

Tell me a little bit about your family history. Where were you born?

[00:00:51]

I was literally born around the corner at Cambridge City Hospital. I'm a Canterbrigian through and through.

[00:00:57]

You are a Cambridge born?

[00:00:58]

Third generation Canterbrigian. My son was born in Cambridge City Hospital. He's forth generation. Unfortunately, we can't afford to live in Cambridge anymore because we don't make six figures. But originally born and raised in Cambridge. My grandfather was born in Cambridge. My mother was born in Cambridge. I was born in Cambridge. My son was born in Cambridge.

[00:01:16]

All the way back to your grandfather born here. How is your memories of growing up in Cambridge? How was Cambridge then?

[00:01:24]

Way better than it is now. Cambridge was the most eclectic, interesting place ever when I grew up in Cambridge. We were different. I'm 43 years old. Like we were the first high school to handle out condoms to the students at Cambridge Ridge & Latin, like it was on 90210.

[00:01:46]

You were part of Cambridge?

[00:01:47]

I went to Cambridge Ridge & Latin. I don't even wait for one year though, because after that, we moved to Boston and I found out that I was smart. [LAUGHTER] Or the Boston public school system is terrible, one of the two and you can take that however you want to. But in Cambridge, I was a C student. I moved to Boston and I was on the honor roll.

[00:02:05]

Really, why you consider that? Why was that?

[00:02:08]

Because the Cambridge school systems way better than Boston is. I was doing stuff in high school that I was doing in seventh grade in Cambridge.

[00:02:15]

That was the difference that you think it is?.

[00:02:17]

Yeah. Big time.

[00:02:19]

Are you still live in Boston?

[00:02:20]

No, I live in Medford.

[00:02:22]

Now you leaving in Medford. But tell me about your time in school. You said that you grew up in Cambridge, then moved to Boston?

[00:02:32]

Well, I moved to a couple of different places. I mainly lived in Cambridge. I went to school in Haverhill Mass for a little while. That was interesting. I moved to Haverhill for a little while with my mom. Obviously I was a kid. I think she just wanted to get us out of the city. But it was definitely interesting. Was definitely an eye-opener. Then we move back to Cambridge and then right around my sophomore year of high school. Oh, no. Actually, that's not true. My freshman year of high school, but I was still going on Ridge. We move to Boston, but I was still going on Ridge. But they found out that I live in Boston, in Cambridge does not follow they're very strict about people not living in Cambridge come sending their kids to school again.

[00:03:19]

How was it changes? When you were in Cambridge high-school, time that you spent here until they found out that you've to finish in Boston, what was the difference? Were you more familiar, was a better place or was the friendship or high school in general was better in Cambridge than in Boston?

[00:03:41]

It's a two-fold thing. The education was better in Cambridge, but it was better for me to go to school in Boston.

[00:03:49]

Why?

[00:03:49]

Because I didn't grow up in Boston. I grew up in Cambridge. I knew everybody so it was easier for me to get in trouble in Cambridge. By the end of my freshman year of high school by the end so Cambridge had two lunches. They had A-lunch and they had B-lunch. It's usually a half an hour in between both lunches. By the second half of my freshman year, I was coming to school at A-lunch and leaving at B-lunch. [LAUGHTER] I wasn't even going to class. I was just coming to hang out with the kids at lunch.

[00:04:21]

It's just you have fun with them.

[00:04:23]

Going and being a knucklehead with my friends.

[00:04:29]

I thought it would be the opposite.

[00:04:31]

Because I was a Cambridge kid, I didn't know anybody and I always shy. I really didn't talk to anybody. Had nothing to do besides my schoolwork so I just started doing that and it was easy. I was just like, are we really doing Hamlet? I did this in 8th grade [LAUGHTER] I'm a junior in high school [LAUGHTER].

[00:04:53]

But then in terms of [OVERLAPPING].

[00:04:58]

Wait, hold on. I'll put in this way. This is the best way to describe the difference. In Cambridge, I was a C student in Boston kids use a copy of my work.

[00:05:08]

Really.

[00:05:09]

They're like Brione what was the answer to that? Really bro, you don't know this? [LAUGHTER]

[00:05:16]

On the other side, that's where I'm curious about because it's at here you knew everybody was easy to get in trouble then because you were not from there. You didn't have as many friends. But how was your relationship? Did you feel that you fit in or it was [OVERLAPPING]?

[00:05:29]

Oh, no. I never felt like I fit in ever. But the interesting thing is like, as I think back on it. By the time I graduated, I knew a lot of people I was necessarily consider myself popular. But people know me.

[00:05:46]

But then you were already in a completely different place from the beginning?

[00:05:50]

Yeah.

[00:05:50]

I'm asking because my dad in Brazil when I was from early grades all the way through high school. My dad was a construction guy and moved a lot from town to town. You have homestead in one town, but then you'd be moving all places. I will just start half of the year in one town and end in the other one. That for me, it was always, you had to do with what you have to do. I finished the year, whatever happens in whatever grade I had. But it was always inconvenient. Because when you are getting used to one place, you are going to start again in another place where I was a pain in the neck and make friends or adjust for that town where whatever the mentality was, did you see the difference between Cambridge and Boston?

[00:06:36]

Big time. I definitely saw there was a big difference. It's just the mindset and the way kids thought and spoke was just different. I took the intelligence that I had and the intelligent place that I grew up for granted. I'd never and again, like I said, I didn't know I was smart until I got to Boston. I was just like, oh, you all stupid. You know what I mean? Like just even having a conversation with people who are just like, that don't know.

[00:07:07]

That's a different vibe completely.

[00:07:09]

It's just like, oh, wow. Oh, really?

[00:07:14]

What about family? How many can you say a little bit in terms of how many siblings or how big of a family you had?

[00:07:26]

My immediate family, my mother's kids. It's a very interesting thing. Technically, I only have a brother. But I tell everybody I have three siblings, my brother and my sister. Because I grew up in a time where gay marriage really wasn't a thing and my mother was gay. I grew up in a household with two women, but the other one was my aunt and my sister was my cousin and they share, slept in the same room. It's always less like, it was one of those things where you just like [OVERLAPPING].

[00:08:01]

Not to be able to open completely.

[00:08:03]

They didn't want too open. Especially be in women of color. They were worried they're going to get the kids taken away and all stuff like that. I have a brother and sister.

[00:08:14]

You have a brother and a sister.

[00:08:15]

Yeah.

[00:08:17]

I assume that the regular brother, sister growing up into whole problem of life

[00:08:23]

My brother is 10 years younger than me.

[00:08:25]

Ten years younger?

[00:08:26]

My dad died when I was 13, so I'm closer to his father than I am his brother. But me and my sister were only like eight or nine months apart. All we did was fight. [LAUGHTER] That was it.

[00:08:38]

Sounds very close to my story too [OVERLAPPING].

[00:08:41]

The thing was like me and my sister would fight, like physically fight, but nobody else could put their hands on my sister. Don't even look at my sister.

[00:08:49]

It's so interesting. [LAUGHTER]

[00:08:50]

I will row you up in a ball and throw you out the window.

[00:08:53]

This is more or less, my sister is older than me about few years. We were both the same way. It's a strange thing. We used to fight a lot. Then when time came for her to leave and I stayed home, do you know, she got married and such. We always loved each other of course, but you miss more. I don't know if you miss the fight or if you need whatever it is that [OVERLAPPING]?

[00:09:19]

You realize you took to whatever you guys had for granted and you didn't realize how much it meant to you until it was gone.

[00:09:26]

Exactly, and I have a younger brother, 11 years younger than me. I think the same story as well. I helped take care of him a lot when I was growing up because he was the baby brother. In many situations when I was in my 18, 20 years old and I used to bring him with me. People think that was my son because we were, similarity were there.

[00:09:51]

I also know that you have a child you just mentioned that as well in the beginning of our conversation here. How is your relationship with their kid now, or you can tell us about?

[00:10:04]

I have no idea, I have a 12-year-old. [LAUGHTER] 12 -year-old's don't talk.

[00:10:09]

Yeah.

[00:10:10]

He doesn't talk, all he does is watch TikTok videos and play video games. That's all he does. This is how a typical conversation goes with my 12-year-old. What are you doing? Nothing. You're hungry? Yeah. What do you want to eat? I don't know. You want to go out? Yeah. Where you want to go. I don't know.

[00:10:30]

You have to define the whole map.

[00:10:31]

Oh my God, it's like pulling teeth. [LAUGHTER]

[00:10:36]

It's the same everywhere, it doesn't matter.

[00:10:38]

I'll give him, He's a good kid. Don't get me wrong. He's just 12, just 12 -year-old's are just moody.

[00:10:47]

Have you ever seen yourself in him or not?

[00:10:49]

All the time.

[00:10:49]

Yeah.

[00:10:50]

Oh yeah, everything that annoys me about him is me [LAUGHTER]. It's the parent genes like it's so true. Oh my God, get off the damn TV, this what my mother used to have to go through?

[00:11:01]

Exactly, that's what I going to say. Do you see for example, now because if people complain “all the teenagers now, because of the social media, because of phones”, I don't know. We were the same, just in a different time in life.

[00:11:14]

Different time, we just did different things. Again, the things that annoy me the most about my son are the things that annoy me the most about myself. Stop procrastinating, let's go [LAUGHTER].

[00:11:25]

Figure it out.

[00:11:25]

Right.

[00:11:25]

He's doing well in school?

[00:11:29]

Up and down, yeah. I know for me, I wasn't a great student. It took a while for it to click for me, so I'm hoping something similar happens for him. I'm assuming something new because, you know you get to, I think once you get to like 19, 18, all of a sudden you're like, oh wait, this is really not that hard.

[00:11:53]

I mean, it is I think a difficult time when you think about your 11, 12-years-old until you get you're sad. Well, but it is a different time of discovery and trying to figure out what you like. We're just describing a child, right? I think the spirit such a… I think it is amazing, but at same time so conflicting for them and I think for any parents, would it be a difficult time as well because it tends to forget how we were. I am glad that you said that you see the things that you don't like or you see annoys you in him. It's part of who you are. You take care of him since what age?

[00:12:34]

Well, I've taken care of him as his whole life, but I have sole custody or primary custody, excuse me let me be specific. I have primary custody of my son, I've had primary custody of my son since he was for four. Before that, I had joint physical custody and I had joint physical custody since he was nine months.

[00:12:57]

Since nine months?

[00:12:58]

Yeah.

[00:13:02]

How was, well let me rephrase this. When you start taking care of your child, your baby nine month old, you have support from your family around you?

[00:13:14]

Oh, yeah. Big time.

[00:13:15]

You did have? Because one of the things that nowadays people complain a lot. Again, going back to my relationships in Brazil, that's the best analogy that I can make is here everything for many people who don't have a family support around them is babysitter or childcare and the whole problem that comes with that and is still having to work. In Brazil, when my sister was living nearby and she had two kids. Oh my god, they were home. Me, my mom, dad and my brother is we must take care of them like our own brother and sister and help with that. It is a good support system that allow the person.

[00:13:59]

Right.

[00:13:59]

You did have, for how long?

[00:14:01]

I did have a very big, I don't know if big is the right word, but it was big for me. I think it was emotionally and physically very important. I had my aunt Doreen, my mom, my cousin Tracy, which she used to always help us out, take care of my son.

[00:14:29]

Yeah.

[00:14:30]

My sister, my sister's husband.

[00:14:32]

Wow, nice.

[00:14:34]

Yeah, there was a lot of people.

[00:14:35]

You all lived nearby in a way.

[00:14:37]

Yeah. Well, we used to all live nearby. Yeah. Everybody else, my family passed away, but yeah, it's been a crazy two, three years.

[00:14:48]

Really Brione, I'm sorry.

[00:14:50]

December of 2020, my grandmother passed away.

[00:14:57]

Oh, wow.

[00:14:57]

February of 2021, my uncle passed away. May of 2021, my aunt passed away. Then in October of 2021, one of my best friends died of a brain aneurysm.

[00:15:12]

Wow.

[00:15:13]

Right and then my cousin Tracy, the one who used to take care of my son. The day before my grandmother passed away, her daughter committed suicide.

[00:15:24]

Oh, wow, Brione.

[00:15:25]

Right, so then that was May 2021, October 2021, it was January of 2022. My mother was diagnosed with a brain aneurysm and she just passed away in December.

[00:15:43]

I'm so sorry.

[00:15:44]

Yeah, so it's been a rough couple of years.

[00:15:47]

Very intense two years. It sounds like a circle of folks that you grew up or with, that's suddenly are all.

[00:15:55]

Yeah. I think the thing that is very poignant right now for me is, I know I'm not, but it's just a very lonely feeling.

[00:16:08]

Yeah.

[00:16:08]

You know what I mean?

[00:16:10]

Yeah.

[00:16:10]

You're the matriarch of your family now, there is no more calling your grandmother or your aunt or your mom. There's no more of that elder statesmen, there's no more of the old wisdom coming in. You're the elder statesman now, you are the wisdom and it's a very new reality to be in. It's been difficult, but I've been in therapy for a couple of years so.

[00:16:35]

Yeah.

[00:16:36]

I would have lost my mind if I wasn't in therapy.

[00:16:40]

Therapy is one of the options that you've found that wouldn't be helpful in this case?

[00:16:44]

Yeah. I think especially our generation, mental health was not really a thing.

[00:16:51]

Yeah.

[00:16:52]

Especially being a man, you're taught to you're supposed to man up and you're supposed to be strong and all this other stuff. Thank God, I started therapy like a month or two before all this stuff started happening. It was almost like support.

[00:17:07]

Preparation.

[00:17:07]

Right. You know what they say, God don't give you anything you can't handle.

[00:17:12]

Yeah.

[00:17:14]

These are the things that I've gotten from therapy. The first thing that I got is having a neutral party to talk to is super important and I think people think because it is a neutral party or because they don't know them, that they don't feel comfortable talking to them. But you will find that it's easier to talk to somebody that you don't know than it is to talk to somebody that you do know. It's for multiple reasons, but I think the biggest reason is, because you care about that person.

[00:17:41]

Yeah.

[00:17:42]

Right and they care about you.

[00:17:43]

Yeah.

[00:17:44]

They don't want to see you hurt, so they're just trying to fix it and then you see that they're uncomfortable or they're feeling some type of way so then you want to shut down and it just doesn't work.

[00:17:53]

Yeah.

[00:17:53]

When you're talking to a third party somebody, they just let you talk.

[00:17:56]

Yes.

[00:17:57]

All of a sudden that pressure is not there and all of a sudden you're just like, oh, [NOISE] it all comes out.

[00:18:05]

Because usually the feeling is exactly what you described, right? Is an accumulation of energy and emotions that you have, that you don't need a formula to fix, you just want to talk about.

[00:18:17]

You just need to get it out, right, [OVERLAPPING] and again, men from my generation, we don't talk about our emotions.

[00:18:24]

Yes.

[00:18:24]

We don't, we try to pretend like we don't have any and that's the one thing I'm trying to not do as I get older. Because I'm realizing what a detriment that has been to me over in my life and then just acknowledging certain things that happened in my life and forgiving myself for whatever in those moments. I think the biggest one, the best example I can give of that is I recently, like when my mom passed away, we found out two days before she passed away because she was on life support that we're going to take her off.

[00:19:02]

I don't know if it's the right word, but there's just the way I'll phrase it, is I had this epiphany because I'm sitting in my room and bawling my eyes out, but it was because I started thinking about 13-year-old me, my father passed away when I was 13 years old. I remember sitting in a church downstairs in the bottom level and then the doors were open. I remember sitting in a chair and just staring out the door and just being lost. Just felt lost, had no idea how I was supposed to feel, what I was supposed to do, how am I supposed to go on? I had no idea. I was completely lost and I thought to myself, how did that 13-year-old boy get here? You shouldn't be here. You should be just strung out on drugs or locked up or dead or something. How are you working at Harvard Law raising a 13-year-old by yourself? You shouldn't be here, you shouldn't be doing any of that. I don't know how you did it 13-year-old Brione, but thank you [LAUGHTER]

[00:20:09]

That's a good [OVERLAPPING].

[00:20:10]

Because if you weren't as strong as you were, I wouldn't be here right now. I have no idea how you did that, but thank you.

[00:20:17]

Did you ask yourself and looking back at 13-years-old in front of the church, or looking in the horizon, not knowing what you feel where are you able to cry at a time, or did you have emotions? [OVERLAPPING]

[00:20:32]

Honestly, and this is one of the things that I'm realizing go into therapy and I'm starting to realize that that's where my emotional break happens. Like I think that's where I packed up my emotions and stuck them in my suitcase. [LAUGHTER] I've never learned how to deal with my emotions. Again, one, we don't teach men how to deal with their emotions. That's the first and foremost thing. I think that's the biggest thing. But two, also me not doing it at all. Me not even trying, I don't even want to go there, I don't want to feel those emotions again, I don't want to be that scared again. I'm 43 years old now on my back, 30 years later and it's time to unpack the suitcase. I've just been trying to unpack the suitcase and not be afraid to fail things and it's not easy [LAUGHTER]. But yeah, just trying to unpack this case.

[00:21:33]

But it's necessary.

[00:21:34]

But it's very necessary because it has to do with quality of life.

[00:21:43]

Realize you just unpacked some of the factors here, having all these important figures in your life, suddenly realizing that they are gone, and you are in a position that feels like you are the elder now in terms of being 43 years old, that have to look around and see these folks, these loved ones near you and realize so how did I get here? Finding that those answers that you probably know all around, but just need to bring it out and be fine with whatever it is that you are going to find out and talk. Of course, you have 12 years old. I think maybe this is like you said, is an epiphany, and maybe like you said, getting into therapy before your grandma passed or your uncle when this whole two years process you started was a message sent somehow? Maybe now is your chance to prepare yourself to give support for your kid in a different realm that's not nine months to 12, is going to be a different and maybe you'll be able to give that support and have those conversations that you didn't have a chance to have.

[00:23:00]

Well, that's the goal. That's what I would like to do. I tried to communicate with my son. I think the biggest thing for me and my son is, one is communication and two is how we communicate. It's like we're going to speak to each other respectfully. You know what I mean? We're going to speak to each other respectfully because I have seen in other people raising kids around the same age as my son, like they want to talk to their kid like they're the worst person on the face of the planet, but they expect to get the respect them just like how does that work? You know what I mean? How do you talk to your kid like they're a piece of garbage, but they're supposed to talk to you like you're a queen. No, we're not doing that. I will speak to you with respect and you would speak to me with respect and that's how we're going to do this.

[00:23:45]

Is what you give that you get back.

[00:23:48]

Then the other thing is just trying to not bottle up his emotions. You know what I mean? If you're angry, you can be angry now. Again, this is the way I have it. You could be angry. You could be as angry as you want to be, we can talk about it all day, but what you're not going to do is be angry and start punching holes in my wall and doing stuff around my house. That's not happening. [LAUGHTER] You know what I mean? There's a difference between being angry and disrespectful. You know what I mean? Make sure I set those boundaries. That's something that I've been talking about a lot in therapies setting boundaries. There's nothing wrong with setting boundaries like this and this is the boundary that I need to set because if I don't, then things go wrong. Or it puts me in unsafe emotional space, I don't really know if that's even the right thing to say, but I'm just going to use it. [LAUGHTER] Trying to do those things in my own life, for myself and friends and all that other staff, but also with my son.

[00:24:43]

Because I think that is always that confusion in terms of oh, I need to be my children's best friend.

[00:24:49]

No.

[00:24:49]

There is a difference there. You are their parent first and formost. You can be friends in a way that you can find there, but before anything else you need might be that figure that they're going to respect for until they grow up.

[00:25:01]

Listen, I don't need to be my son's friend.

[00:25:04]

He can find quite good friends out there.

[00:25:07]

You guys play, he'll have plenty of friends, he only has one father.

[00:25:09]

[LAUGHTER] Exactly.

[00:25:10]

You know what I mean?

[00:25:12]

We talked about you working at HLS. When did you start? What did you do?

[00:25:19]

September of 06.

[00:25:22]

06? At the time who were working for Harvard or at Harvard like working for a contractor?

[00:25:27]

I was working for Sodexo at Harvard. I've been at Harvard Law for 16 years since 2000. Yes, it's 2017 in September. I originally got hired because I was a bartender. I went to the Harvard bartender school.

[00:25:51]

Oh, wow.

[00:25:52]

I got a Harvard degree. [LAUGHTER] I regret.

[00:25:58]

You got a degree at Harvard?

[00:26:01]

Believe it or not, I live in a house to this day with a friend of mine I went to high school with, my buddy Josh. His father was a chef and his father actually got me the job here. He recommended me because they were looking for bartenders, like I know this kid, like he's a really good kid, like I should give him a shot. I went in and I interviewed and I was hired to run the air quotations. You can't see them pub [LAUGHTER] which the pub was just a coffee shop. After five o'clock, we used to serve beer and so that's what I was hired. I was hired to serve beer after 5:00. I used to work at night shift that we used to work from, I think I came to work at 1:00 or 2:00, and I would get off at like 10:00 or 11:00 or something like that.

[00:26:51]

That's true Brione, I've forgot about that.

[00:26:53]

I used to work with Anne Legensky, because the cafeteria used to be open until 11:00 or 10:00 or something. No. I was up until 11:00, she was up until 10:00 or 9:00 or something like that. She would close and then clean up because she had to clean up the place, put all this stuff away, and Anne was an older woman, she was in like her 60s or something like that. She passed away like five years ago. She would close and then we would leave. It just became a thing because just the way I was raised and my mom raised me to be a gentleman, there was no way I was going to let that woman stand at the bus stop at 11 o'clock at night by herself. I would always go out there and staying out there with her no matter if it was sunny or cold, we be out there freezing. [LAUGHTER].

[00:27:38]

Oh my God.

[00:27:39]

It's 20 degrees in January, waiting for Anne's bus and I had to make sure she got on the bus.

[00:27:45]

That's nice of you.

[00:27:46]

That's that's what we did. We did that for a very long time.

[00:27:49]

Then from Sodexo changed to RA.

[00:27:52]

Sodexo lost the account, RA came in and that's when everything really changed. I think Harvard did that because they were getting ready to do the renovation, like I was here before they built the largest team-building where we had the load and dog now was actually a street that went from Mass Ave to Evertt St [OVERLAPPING]

[00:28:11]

Jarviss round.

[00:28:13]

It was just there's little hook shooting that was there for no reason.

[00:28:17]

Then you have the three houses and you have the wires in the garage.

[00:28:20]

Then the garage. I missed the day when they were tearing down the garage, but yeah, so Restaurant Associates came in, and Restaurant Associates is a high-end cafeteria chain. They really are, and I give Restaurant Associates a lot of credit. They really did a good job of making us professionals. You know what I mean? It's something that I think we've taken for granted for a long time and I know people come in and they see it like, oh, I don't think people really understand the level of work that goes into what we do.

[00:28:56]

Yes.

[00:28:57]

You know what I mean? I'm not just talking about the food, like we think about the way things are presented. You know what I mean? We try to present things in a certain way and make them appealing and like, we want you to come in and feel like you are in.

[00:29:16]

I want you to come in and not notice.

[00:29:17]

Yes.

[00:29:18]

You know what I mean?

[00:29:18]

Yeah.

[00:29:19]

Like when you come in, and you're not noticed, that's like the biggest compliment in the world. Because that means it's not out of place. It's not uncomfortable. We want you to come in and just be very relaxed and be very eased.

[00:29:29]

But nobody knows how much work was put into.

[00:29:32]

How much work gets put it in, how much thought gets put it into the present. Just walk into the cafeteria and just look at how we present the toppings for the salads. I can just put four little things on the counter. I'm going to need to put them on tiers and level them off and put them at angles. And we do that, so it gives us certain flair. We want it to be eclectic.

[00:29:55]

It's a presentation.

[00:29:56]

It's a presentation. You are at Harvard Law, we want you to feel like you were at a big time cafeteria and at a big-time school.

[00:30:01]

And it's interesting that even if you don't buy the things that you see, that thing gives you the feeling. Sometimes you don't even notice as much, but it's just that good sense of, oh, that's cool. That's beautiful, that's [OVERLAPPING].

[00:30:15]

Exactly.

[00:30:16]

You have nothing to do with that directly but offers an impact one. I talked to Carey Anderson from Facilities. She said more and meant more or less the same thing that you said in terms of the good thing about everything that Facilities does is if there is no problem, that's our job. I was telling her exactly the same that I will tell you. This is why I wanted to talk more about folks because for people to learn and to know that there is all this background, and how much effort is put into something like I said sometimes to take for granted. Because you just see the end product. It's beautiful that you see the end product. But we also need to think about how much effort these workers put.

[00:31:05]

Put in.

[00:31:06]

To put that run and make that presentation.

[00:31:08]

How often have you gone into the bathroom in this dirty? I've never gotten in a dirty bathroom in this place ever.

[00:31:13]

Exactly. Good point.

[00:31:16]

Ever.

[00:31:16]

Yeah. Or how early people come to this place, and they find already all cleaned out because these kids are here. I say kids because I'm much older than them. Custodial.

[00:31:28]

Right. You guys don't see that the custodians are upstairs sleeping in the room, so they can get up every two hours and shovel a pathway so you guys don't have to worry about any snow when you walk by.

[00:31:39]

Yes.

[00:31:40]

You know what I mean?

[00:31:41]

Yeah.

[00:31:41]

You don't see them using the poles to measure the table, so they're exactly the same distance apart from each other, so there's enough room for people to pass through. You know what I mean?

[00:31:51]

All day.

[00:31:52]

They'll break down one setup a put up a whole another setup in 20 minutes, and it'll look like nothing ever happened.

[00:31:58]

Yes. And when everybody gets in, it's just beautiful and okay.

[00:32:03]

I understand that people come for the professors, but they stay because we're good at what we do.

[00:32:10]

Yes. Very, very true.

[00:32:12]

Because if there was no food and nobody cleaning the toilets, I don't care how good your teachers are, nobody's coming to the school.

[00:32:18]

[LAUGHTER] Yeah.

[00:32:20]

Nobody wants to go to the bathroom in a dirty toilet.

[00:32:23]

Yeah. If you found this place in this completely disarranged, it wouldn't make any sense. That's the point of the entire community working together to make this place what it is.

[00:32:34]

Exactly.

[00:32:35]

Yes, you would have phenomenal professors here, in fact, record the best in the entire country. But you also have phenomenal crew, phenomenal staff to be able to make the place run. And that's what I think is really important.

[00:32:48]

I think the biggest thing that people don't get about this place right now, and I don't know how it was before I got here, but I know right now, I don't think people really understand how much of a family this whole school is. You know what I mean?

[00:33:03]

Yeah.

[00:33:03]

We all talk. I talk to the people in the Facilities. I talk to the people in the office. I know what a whole bunch of people in the offices. I always talk to the people. I don't feel out of place here. You know what I mean? I come in and-

[00:33:16]

That's what I was going to ask you. My following questions would be how you see, not in terms of a judgment over the difference, but how is your relationship with faculty? The staff in general? And I mean staff from administration level, custodial, trades, and then the students.

[00:33:36]

As far as the professionals go, I probably have a handful of professors that I'm-

[00:33:40]

You know directly.

[00:33:41]

That I know directly that I'm cool with, that I speak to whenever they come in. Gabby is probably my favorite of all.

[00:33:48]

Oh, yeah?

[00:33:48]

Oh, that's my girl. [LAUGHTER]. We've been friends forever.

[00:33:52]

She's wonderful.

[00:33:52]

Yeah, she really is. But as far as I can't even, Yvonne, Christina, and Catie and you and Josh, I can go on for days.

[00:34:05]

But there's a lot of other folks that come through that sometimes it doesn't talk much.

[00:34:09]

Right. You got Mark and Matt and John and John.

[00:34:13]

Quite a few Johns.

[00:34:14]

There's quite a few Johns. Right, exactly. You know what I mean? But they always come in and say, hey, Brione. How you doing today? Blah, blah, blah, what's going on? I'm going to a concert. I'm going to do this. What's going on with you? How's your son?

[00:34:24]

Nice. The students?

[00:34:27]

The students, oh, I get along with most of them. I serve coffee, I'm their best friend. Like I tell people all the time. Nobody gets mad at me. I serve coffee, food, and booze. The three things everybody loves. [LAUGHTER].

[00:34:42]

Well. It started with the coffee and ending with booze, that's the most important really.

[00:34:46]

Right. Give me a coffee. Okay, now I'm going to eat. All right, now I need to drink.

[00:34:50]

Yeah, that's true. Because the students, it depends on the time that they're going through. They really need that coffee to get all their academic achievement that they have to go through. Outside Harvard in your leisure time when you're not taking care of your kid, what's the fun? Reading, watching movie, watching series?

[00:35:08]

I'm a photographer.

[00:35:09]

You are a photographer?

[00:35:11]

I am a photographer, yeah. I do photography.

[00:35:12]

Yeah. How is it you work with photography outside here?

[00:35:17]

So a lot of people don't know, I went to Mass College of Art. I was a film major.

[00:35:21]

Really?

[00:35:22]

Yeah. This was back in '98 to 2002. So this was right as like the digital stuff was happening and coming in and starting to be-

[00:35:33]

Accessible.

[00:35:34]

Accessible is probably the best word. And actually the quality jumped. That's what happened. The quality jumped from this really grainy bad photos to like all of a sudden this actually almost looks like a real photo.

[00:35:50]

When people started talking about pixels.

[00:35:52]

Megapixels.

[00:35:52]

Yeah.

[00:35:53]

Oh my God. This camera has eight megapixels. [LAUGHTER] It was like the coolest camera in the world.

[00:35:59]

It's amazing, Brione, because before that we just knew photograph and the photos that you received. Then suddenly we started buying cameras, now your phones and everything. What are these pixel or how many pixels in your phone or this or that. Then you think that you were an expert, but you just know what pixels are, barely.

[00:36:17]

Right, barely. Right.

[00:36:18]

So you take your course.

[00:36:22]

I learned how to do multiple things. I learned how to actually edit on, I forget what the name of the machine is, but I actually learn how to splice film, like to watch film, cut film. I learned how to splice film. It sucked. I don't know how people did this back in the day. It's the worst thing ever. But the digital stuff was starting to come in too, so we also started working on this machine called the Avid, which was this big, huge machine. I had three-quarter inch decks, and you had to get your film transferred over to the three-quarter inch deck and then put it in the deck and then that will go into the computer, and then you could edit it on the computer. So we learned how to do that and that was cool in my last year there, that's when Final Cut Pro came out and that just changed everything.

[00:37:06]

Even now, it's still changing. I was just talking to someone about this new thing that they are talking now, my God it's going to sound so aging, but the ChatGPT, that's the new big deal that's coming out in terms of digital things and communications and searching tools and everything, it's going to revolutionize the way that you see things and work with things, which is another jump. I think we were talking, and I know exactly what you're saying when you start with, I think for music would be when you left the tape and went to CD.

[00:37:40]

CD, yeah.

[00:37:40]

And then you go to the Apple product.

[00:37:44]

Right. It was like moving from CDs to iPods. It's just like, wait, I don't have to carry around this big book of CDs?

[00:37:51]

We thought that CDs were great, and then you get your iPod, and you're listening to something. Oh my God, this is amazing. Anyways, so we're talking about that new change. With photography, back to you, you working outside.

[00:38:05]

I try not to do events because they are tedious and annoying. But if the money is right, you can get me to take pictures of just about anything.

[00:38:14]

Exactly, yeah.

[00:38:14]

I'll do weddings. I try to do bigger events. I'll do smaller events for friends and family because I can only charge like 3, 4, $500, like it's not worth the headache if I'm going to have to take like 500 photos.

[00:38:27]

So you are a freelancer and once in a while you have these companies that reach out to you to do something?

[00:38:34]

Yeah. I've been publishing a couple of magazines. I do a lot of fashion photography.

[00:38:38]

Oh nice, Brione.

[00:38:38]

Yeah. It's just way more fun. I'm an artist. I like to create. You know what I mean?

[00:38:45]

Yeah.

[00:38:45]

And I think that's why I don't like events. It's not creative enough. I want to create something. That, and I'm a little bit of a control freak, especially when it comes to my artwork. So me being able to sculpt everything the way that I want it to be, the light, the model, the clothes where we are, I want to do all of that when I do photography. When I, when I do my photography, I want to create things that make people stop.

[00:39:13]

[OVERLAPPING].

[00:39:14]

You know what I mean?

[00:39:14]

Right.

[00:39:14]

Like in any way, shape, or form [inaudible 00:39:16] oh, wow, that's nice. If you're scrolling on your phone, oh wow. That's a nice picture. I want to create things that make people stop.

[00:39:23]

Because you put that thing together, you work around to make the art to be rich.

[00:39:28]

If my name is going be attached to it, it's going to be the best thing that I can do.

[00:39:31]

That's a nice, I'm happy for you. Brione, I think this is a wrap. I really want to thank you for coming and talk to me. I think it's wonderful. I'm thinking about this for a while. I didn't know how to approach it. I remember that I mentioned this to Yvonne once. You know Yvonne?

[00:39:49]

Yeah.

[00:39:50]

Oh, no. Talk to him. He's cool.

[00:39:54]

Yeah, easy for you to say, Yvonne. No, no go there.

[00:39:57]

Another one I call her auntie for a reason. She grew up with my uncle.

[00:39:59]

She is. I love that woman so much. Anyways, thank you very much for coming and stopping by and talk to us. I hope all is good. If now that I know what you're going through, you know where I am if you see me around, if you need to chat, just to chat, just to vent it out, please let me know. I will be always available.

[00:40:24]

I appreciate that. I really do.

[00:40:25]

Thank you very much, Brione. And for everybody listening there, I'll see you around. Bye-bye. [MUSIC]