We're listening to tell your story where we connect with HLS staff on a personal level. Hello everyone this Edgar Kley Filho from HLS human resources department. My pronouns are he, him, his. Today we're talking to Kerri Brummel from Registrar's Office. Will you tell us about her life? How long has she is in disposition at HLS and work that she does? Thank you for joining us Kerri and please tell me your story.

Hi, Edgar, thank you for having me. My name is Kerri Brummel. My pronouns are she, her, hers. I work in the Registrar's Office. I've been there for about 8.5 years now.

But where did you come from? Are you from New England?

No. I'm actually from Southern California. I've been in New England for 12 almost 13 years now. My husband got a job at the School of Public Health. Right after grad school, so we hopped in a moving van and across the country. I've been here since.

Your husband is also from California.

He is yes.

Originally from there or?

Originally from there.

What about your family also all from California or different parts of the country?

I have family all over the country, but my mom is from Wisconsin, my dad is from Louisiana, and they moved. I think my mom moved to California in probably 1960.

Around 1960s. A nice time there children.

Exactly your are right.

A lot of things going on there. She was proud of that movement or not.

She says that she was a little bit older. Like she graduated in 63.

But how do you know a little bit if she enjoyed moving from Wisconsin to California's, life was different, she preferred the California in a way or?

Believe it or not, no, she preferred Wisconsin. She was a teenager when she moved from Wisconsin.

With the her grandparents.

She was my grandparents and they moved her from her school, all her friends. She just was not happy. Typical teenager fashion.

But you can see that. You are in a place, I assume whatever she was much calmer, slow pace, a life with all her friends. Then suddenly you go to California or whatever it was. I feel like California is always a little bit more energy.

It was an especially I think. They landed in Newport beach, basically California. Just was a different vibe than her mid-western.

What about your dad? You said your dad is from Louisiana?

He is yeah, so he's from Louisiana, but he didn't grow up in Louisiana all the time. His dad was in the military, so they moved. But he lived in California for a good chunk of his formative years. But then his dad passed away in 1970 or 71. My grandmother moved, she had 10 kids, so she moved them all back to Louisiana to be near her family. Then he spent a year, they're in school and then left.

Went to California.

Went back to California.

You were born in California?

I was.

Which town?

I was born in Long Beach.

Long Beach. How was live green up there on the beach?

It was wonderful. I grew up in costumes, which is it's relatively close to the beach. It's not like on the beach. But I did spend a lot of time on the beach.

Nice.

Then the other part of what I did is that. A young kid was spend time with them all. It was like the beach in the mall? Sometimes Disneyland.

I don't know. I always have this feeling because my family always lived in middle of the country as well are far from the coast. Going to the coast, always give you that vibe like, my God, if I lived here, would it be on a beach all the time. But I think the beach is also an easy way to get out or to be somewhere. Instead of staying at home on weekends. They know you have an entertainment, away, right? Regardless on what you are going to do there, right.

It definitely was something to do. You forget that there's other parts of danger or things to go see. Because the beach is right there and it becomes like a routine.

Exactly. But did you have a chance to travel back or either to Wisconsin or to Louisiana to see your relatives or was that a connection?

Yeah. Wisconsin no, because I think everybody moved out.

Everybody moved.

Yeah. Or at least the the part of the family that was.

Your mom's side.

My mom's side of the family, like her siblings, her mom and dad, and then I think my aunt and uncle. But we didn't have a large extended family on my mom's side, my dad's side, huge extended family. I did spend summers in Louisiana. I know it was a strange kind of thing because I was from California and it was one temperature. Like it's nice all the time. Then I went to Louisiana and it was just humid and gross.

Insects everywhere.

I got eaten by mosquitoes. I was covered, I don't think they weren't telling us to wear bug spray at that time right now.

Would you be the cool cousin that came from California to visit Louisiana?

No, not at all. I was younger. All of my cousins or older. No. We had fun. It was it was nice to see them.

Could you notice the difference between your Wisconsin side of the family and the Louisiana side of them culturally, how different was?

Absolutely.

Because Louisiana has very strong French influence, right? in general?

It does, my family and Louisiana are Creole. That's a blend of Native American, either French or Italian and African.

Mixture. We always called ourselves, Heinz 57 because we're so, there's so many different mixture of herbs in our family or the united Colors of Benetton. That was a popular one. All 200 of my extended family there are a lot of us.

But the music, the food is very different. I have been in New Orleans for not so much around Louisiana in general, just your other parts of it. But the music, I love it, It's feel is so that area. It's so part of that culture.

There's a Jazz Zydeco.

Zydeco, I loved it.

Me too. They actually have like hip hop Zydeco. I know. I did not know that, but I was going down a rabbit hole and they do. It's very interesting.

I had to buy CD or look at age in the time that Louisiana. I bought CDs there from Zydeco because I'd never heard before no jazzy as losing all of the things, you know, by Zydeco. I felt a wears his music because it sounds really French style. I haven't heard some French in that a country, if we can say a country, French. Because Canada also has some very strong French influence in the music from Quebec and my beautiful music, different rhythms.

Actually, yes. In Louisiana, the occasions actually left, I think Halifax, that area and move down to Louisiana. There's that blend of Cajun and Creole influences on the food, on the music. It's a great place. Wisconsin, I will say is also nice. I've only been there once driving through, but it's just very different.

I want to get to Wisconsin, some of the states in the center, I have not visited that part of the country, and some people say, “Why would you go there?” I really do want to go and see it. I think it's beautiful.

It is absolutely beautiful. The minute I drove into Wisconsin I was like, Oh, this is how these trees.

Changes things, right? How was growing up in California? School for years until you get your high school was easy. You were born there, so you're used to with the whole environment there but was easy thing or?

It was a little bit hard for me because I was a quiet, shy person.

Making friends was difficult?

A little bit, and I didn't. I went to a school where it was clicky and I just wasn't in the click. But I think with any young child or high-schooler, I had those insecurities and whatnot and the other people in my school may have also had those insecurities. I don't know how much it was me or how much maybe.

Was about them as well.

Exactly.

You're always project a lot. That's one of the things like how many securities, and you have a true here dam and be mindful of them, of course, to work them out. But usually, we project a lot in terms of a what the person, other people think and how they feel. That comes back like a…and is that I don't know. We are projecting that thing that they thinking about that and whatever you think that they are thinking is what's going to make us feel even more introverted or shy, and so you don't make a move, you just stay in your own.

I really did, and too with my big family. I was a little bit insulated. I didn't have to really go out and it didn't matter. I still had my bubble.

That's was so then you went through how was high school? It was okay. Or he still?

He was still. I went to the same school from kindergarten all the way to high school, I graduated high school from that school. I was around the same people all the time. From kindergarten till the 12th grade. I know it was it was interesting.

You felt like an outsider?

Absolutely. But I don't really know.

It was a public school?

No. It was a private school,

It was a private school?

Yeah.

Also that change them because that is a different vibe. How you feel in terms of if it is a private or public school?

It was a very denominational, and it had a very specific view of life.

Oh, that makes a huge difference Kerri.

Absolutely.

Because I was going to ask you, for example, if you had friends in your neighborhood, I would assume, well, maybe some of them, two of them would go with your public school. That's general, and maybe that would be different. But if you are in a private school where most of your folks, the people that are used through your closest friends, are not going with you. It's like you're going to discover a complete different new ways.

It was a private school. It was very denominational and I was a little bit rebellious, I just didn't have the same because I was exposed to my large extended family and whatnot, and I saw how they were. Some of the things that I was learning at the school didn't match, and I chose.

Then you feel you are contained. Boxed in? Would it be the same as going to a religious school sometimes?

Oh, it was definitely a religious.

Then now I understand how you felt because I'm not judging is just for a child that is used to have fun and have freedom in their own way with her friends, in her neighborhood. Then you go for a place that there's a completely different way of discipline and everything else I have to follow through. That is a difference there, to adapt sometimes takes time and sometimes not. You felt you were more rebellious and this is not much for me.

Exactly. Once I couldn't wait to get out of there. I went to a community college because I wasn't ready.

After high school.

After high school. The religious school, it wasn't the best academically, people more sent their kids there because of the belief system, and I didn't have that, so I couldn't wait to get out.

That's another thing. Sorry to interrupt you. Sometimes, people choose private schools because of the educational system that prepares you better to college. You didn't have that either? So Watson, that was in your benefit?

No. I went to and some kids though did go on and they were just better at school than I was. But the place wasn't really designed for.

To prepare you for that level that would change your learning capabilities.

Exactly.

In one way or the other.

Knowing that I needed to make stuff up. I went to community college. I loved it.

Really?

Yes. Because I was the first time that everybody was not in my business. [LAUGHTER] Because you've liked people. Really like…

I totally understand,

…hyper-focused on how you behave, how it may be that way in public school. I don't really know because I never went to one.

No, I went to one. Well, of course, that's Brazil. That’s a different story, but still

Oh, really?

There will always be disciplined. There will always be something they have to follow. But I think in general, the environment is more diverse and you'll have a better, wherever it is, when it is connections or not. But you feel we're not so far out from what we're used to. I think you have a completely different experience. You had an experience outside of school that was very much normal. Then you go to a school that you feel like, okay, now I'm in a different place here that I have to behave completely different than what I'm. That's good, and then when you go back for your community college, that you can breathe again, that you're yourself again.

It was wonderful. I even had a professor. He realized when he was in college that he wasn't a bad person. Does that make sense? It's like because you feel one if you don't follow. But it was like, Oh, I'm doing a good job. It doesn't matter that I'm not going to…

You don’t feel guilty.

…No. That's the word. Thank you. That that guilt was gone and I was validated. Wonderful.

That feel a relief for sure. Then we stay for how long and coming into college, how wrong?

Oh, my God. Three years. I was there for three years, so I had to do all of my lower division requirements are and I had to pay for college, so it was cheaper to finish all of that there. I was also there for three years because I had responsibilities at home. I got a car. My parents bought me a car after I graduated from high school, and actually, it was a thank God you graduate [LAUGHTER] here is a car.

Yeah.

Off in my head teenage brain. But they brought me the car. But with that, I had to take my brothers to football practice. I had to pick up my mom from work. That first semester at school was all about trying to figure out how to make all of that work. I took a really good class. I can't remember the name of it now, but it had to do with students of color. How we have our culture that are a little bit different from the normal kind of culture in the US. I didn't even think about it, but it was so true. I had more obligations to my family. Let's see, I have one sister and three brothers, two are younger. It was on me in the Creole African American culture, at least in my family. May not be this way for everybody else, but it seemed like it was from this class. It's like okay, you have to maybe you can't go to that family gathering every single time. It's a pick and choose. Like yes, everybody has a birthday. [LAUGHTER] You have to just pick, maybe go to grandma's and not the three-year-old cousin or something like that.

It's not just you saying that because it is more common than you imagine, I know that sounds like different. I think you're describing a family that's very close to what I know what families are [OVERLAPPING] Because I'm from a different culture, from Brazil, from a Latin word. Then I have a different view of what we learned and I also learned here is that there's lot more separate from State and church [LAUGHTER]

Oh, really.

No, I was just joking about this but it feels like it because I also was born in a family, two sides. Huge number of family. The gatherings and holidays and whatever religious holidays or whatever matter for them to get, everybody had to be there. Everybody had to help. I am also part of a family that because of economic reasons, we didn't have money. We were poor. Everyone has to help at home. All of us learn how to cook, how to do laundry, how to clean the house, how to take care of the younger brother.

That's wonderful. Okay, see you did learn.

We learned all of that.

Wow.

But when I came here and after my 30 something, is when I came really to learn how there are space for everybody. You don't have to be in every party. You don't have to be meeting with everyone. No, respect your own boundaries, your own space, and give yourself some because if you like it, if you enjoyed that, oh, go for it full. But if you don't, you are making yourself miserable, not being full with them as well. Then always not a good connection either. More or less feeling what you are dealing with, you've got a car but it's almost like, Hey, we bought a car. We need a driver.

Exactly. I became the driver [LAUGHTER]

Exactly. Had to help the family of course.

Yeah, and we worked it out. I fixed all of that and then transferred to [OVERLAPPING].

With this class and learning how to, and boundaries.

Yeah. Or giving my mom the car and getting a ride with a friend to class. Actually I met my husband at that time. We met in math class.

You took math class.

Yes, together.

Nice, Kerri.

What was it? Intermediate algebra.

Okay.

We both ended up majoring in Mathematics with an option statistics. He went on to get his PhD in statistics and he works for the Center for Biostatistics and AIDS Research over at the School of Public Health.

He finished his community college. He wasn't staying in school with you?

Then we transferred to Cal State, Long Beach.

He went to his PhD and you?

No, what did I do? I worked.

After you graduated, you worked for a while.

I worked for a while. Nothing spectacular. It was more kind of tap. It was money and that's what we need to pay the rent. But I also was in grad school for statistics. I realized the first day I was there that was not for me. Not at all. I think that that shaped my work here. Like have that empathy and understanding of our students and just trying to help them in a way that makes them feel comfortable and not stressed out. Does that makes sense.

It makes perfect sense.

Okay, good.

I want just to finish one thing. Because I want you to jump into that conversation about these students here until you got into Harvard. Both of you finish college. You keep working your, at the time, boyfriend goes through his PhD.

Yeah.

Then he finished his PhD and then is when you decide to move to New England?

Actually he got the job about three months before he finished his PhD. Yeah, I remember when we got the call, we were actually at the beach, parking the car.

Nice.

There were two jobs that he was going for. They both called. He hung up the phone with one of them, and then right after he hung up the phone Harvard called and you don't say no.

He was already happy with the first one I'm sure because he got something.

Exactly. But then when Harvard called because he did the, I'll have to think about this, all that stuff, instead of taking [OVERLAPPING].

He received that call from Harvard.

And he said, I will take it. Because we both said, like you have to take that if you get that. It was like a lark. We were just like, oh, you should apply for this job.

Let me think about this [LAUGHTER]

He didn't think he would get the Harvard job, but he did. The day he turned in his dissertation to the library at UC Irvine, we got into our U-Haul or [inaudible 00:26:29] whatever truck with all of our belongings, and drove across the country.

Ready to go.

It's packed and ready to go.

That's amazing.

Yeah.

How was he when he got the call? You were with him or you were waiting in the beach.

No, I was with him. Yes, we had just parked the car.

How was the reaction? Oh my gosh, we were elated.

That's nice. Because that's the good feeling, right, Kerri?

Yeah.

Because you work so hard. He studied for so many years, you have expectations in terms of I have this application, I have this job or that job. If that was the one that he was really look into and he received that call, that must be something really. But the idea that you all prepared, packed, is like a scene of a movie actually.

Yeah, absolutely.

You just stop by with U-Hall. Go to the university give the citation, and here we go.

Yeah.

How long did it take to get from there here?

I want to say it took us five days.

Was a nice trip?

It was it was a nice trip. I got to travel bug after that [LAUGHTER]. I like to go visit places like California, never really. If it wasn't Louisiana, then I probably wasn't going way back. But we drove across the country and it was amazing just to see what was out there. Although the route we took there was corn like from East Colorado all the way to New York.

That's what I heard and I went to see it [LAUGHTER]

Remember one of our students here that she was from Ohio. But was living in Pennsylvania and I forgot the name of the town in Pennsylvania that she told me that's close to the border. And then we were chatting and saying stuff and I told her, I really want you to go to see Ohio. I remember she said why would you go to Ohio? [LAUGHTER] Because I don t know. I just see that very flat and the skies. Oh no, there is nothing there. You can just go and see it [LAUGHTER] and now you're telling me, oh, after Colorado all the way to New York was just quiet.

I think it might have been just that major. You have to go and get lost and explore and that thing to see anything beautiful.

But I think in my curiosity goes also because of the movies. You see those movies in the middle of the country and those are long, straight lines, not necessarily paved highways, but farm part that you have in some time you have a crossing or something. Some of the movies depends on the scene. They show like wind at some there is not a nicer. Might be more of imagination again than anuthing else.

No, you definitely get some of that. I highly encourage you to do that.

I definitely will. How was getting in Boston? [OVERLAPPING]

I never been, no. He flew out had his interview and then he said he was like, Oh, I think you'll like this so I said yeah, because at that time we were married already. But at some point in grad school, we never married.

You drove arrived in Boston?

We did on September 25th 2010. I know the date [LAUGHTER]

Where did you where did you live first?

First, it was the best possible thing. I was from Orange County, California. It's like suburban place. Well, not everybody but in circles are like, oh my God, LA like that so dangerous. Like there's that attitude in the cities. I'd never visited LA and stuff. I had family there and whatnot. But to actually live in a city? Never. I hadn't thought about it. I was going to live in Orange County my whole life.

Was that a easy way to leave?

Oh, yeah, lot of people don't leave.

I can see that so when you got here?

We had a temporary housing in on Commonwealth in Back Bay.

Back Bay?

Yes, it was right by all the shopping and I was like, Oh, [LAUGHTER] I like this. Before I had any work while he was working, I was able to just explore all of the Back Bay, the Charles River and it was just amazing.

You would walk around the whole thing and lovely.

You didn't need to get in your car and drive away.

How long until you get your first job? Did you work before you came to Harvard or how was it?

Oh, yeah. I worked for a company for three years and I liked it. I was a data steward. I did a lot of work of with like analysis. Computer analysis or more statistics?

More statistical and more just like making sure the data integrity is there.

Which was something that he studied, right?

Yeah.

Related what you did before.

Yeah. But I hated it just wasn't something because I didn't really love statistics.

You can say you hated, there's nothing to do with the company work or people who were there. It's just something that you didn't figure it out at that time.

Yeah.

It really didn't care much about math. Maybe you spent a good chunk of your studying life pursuing something that is, that now I like this and then we're going to realize maybe not.

Oh, yeah like at 30, from 18-30, I definitely changed.

Which it's a good thing?

It is. You can't be stagnant.

It doesn't matter how long you are saying, inside a place in your life. If there is a change, embrace it.

Oh, absolutely [OVERLAPPING]

Just don't need to be feeling miserable and unhappy your whole life try to see what other things, right?

Oh, absolutely.

How did that change? When did you realize that say, okay, my turn is here.

Not sad, I wasn't my vibrant self.

Did your husband notice it?

Oh, absolutely.

Yeah, definitely he noticed that I was miserable and so I left that company. And he said, you still need to work. [LAUGHTER] and I also had to work.

Afar from being in Boston is not the easiest place to live.

Exactly. Then we have to travel back to California a couple of times a year. You have to work. I was fine with that because I wanted to but I didn't know what I wanted to do, so I just reverted back to what I would do when he was in grad school and I went to temp agency and then actually it was the Harvard temp agency. He said, check it out and so I did my first placement at Harvard was far, I think it's called lapse last bow. Or they gave scholarship to Latin American, Central and South American students to study in the US. I think some at Harvard but I was only just like processing.

Still related to statistic data?

No, not too much. It's more administrative.

It was a little bit of a change?

Absolutely. Yeah, there was a change. And then my second placement for the Harvard temp agency was the Registrar's Office. I've been there ever since.

How was the change the first weeks or something. Did you notice a change or was you?

No, I noticed a change. I was at the front desk, I know you know the front desk. People would come in and it was just like, hi, how are you telling me all about yourself? Oh, I get to talk to people, that a thing because so with statistics and stuff, you have you and your computer and you have to concentrate a lot. But no, I had to. I think it might be because I'm from a big family. Like I need people. My husband doesn't he works at home on his computer.

Confined doing whatever he is.

Exactly shut him in a room with his computer. Give him [OVERLAPPING]. No, he's not. That's the funny thing. I am so nervous, but I need to be around people.

Let's start a theory here. [LAUGHTER] I think I'm hearing you say and if you're like I'm looking in the mirror as she's talking like, it's me there. I feel like because we are introvert who are shy people, yeah. And we live so much inside of ourselves that we are desperate [LAUGHTER] in need of people to talk to. Oh, no. You need to be in a safe space, like behind our desk division in between me and that other person. Then a few more confortable then we started talking and nobody going to talk anymore just as you're [LAUGHTER] and your husband, people like your husband, that I believe that we envy a lot because you want to be extroverted. But they are the ones I think they talked too much there so out there that in general they do the opposite. They need to be for the job that he does or whatever it is. Sometimes they've said, you know what, I can be recruited. I don't need anybody else because there's a lot of other options. I didn't know. I was just thinking about this. I asked him, what does he do? Is he introvert or extrovert? Truth to that because my husband Brian is also an extrovert. He can talk to people and he choose comfortable. He can dance, it, can do whatever in public, which I wouldn't just be being inside of our shells [LAUGHTER]

I think that's why, yeah. When you see the students come in your field, going back now to what you just said a little earlier, I think that's the perfect situation. You have been there. You went through some experience that were not nice. That you felt like was not okay. Then you relate to, I don't know, save is too much of a stretch, but you can give to these students coming here the best of you because you will relate to them. You understand. The younger Kerri there that we went to school, totally understand you coming here and feeling like, this is Harvard. Feels a little bit far from your reality, so I'm digressing.

No.

You felt you'll start feeling better when you start work for a Registrar's Office?

I did and actually my mother worked at a university and she did the same thing I do at the registrar's office. As a snooty little kid. [LAUGHTER] I'm not doing what she's doing.

Exactly. I will do everything different. [LAUGHTER]

I wanted to be the professor. Now, I'm doing exactly what she did and it's wonderful. I feel like, sorry mom. [LAUGHTER] I didn't tell her like, that would.

She'll probably be like, I told you so.

She does.

I knew that would be feeling good but she didn't want to listen.

Exactly.

But I'm glad that you found because, Kerri, you are very good on what you do.

Thank you.

I remember calling Registrar's Office. I remember working at DOS. We had to exchange a lot of things because both offices get involved with almost the same area because obviously it's just related. We were in constant communication with the registrar's office. Every time when I reach out to you it was always pleasant. You have what it takes to be at front desk. I'm sure the students loved you because they also need that person on the other side when they are going to ask because sometimes we judge students, I would say, because of Harvard and Harvard Law School, the level, what it is. But a lot of people forget they are still, in my point of view, I'm much older. They are kids. They also have the insecurity coming here.

Absolutely.

If you have the people who empathize with that, that has understanding of what they are going through, I think the communication happens much easier. I think we have a lot to offer and with our experience when you try to understand your other side.

Exactly.

See how they were. I'm glad that you did. Now you are in a much better place?

I am. I'm the Academic Services Coordinator now. I help with cross registration. That's the main chunk of my job. Getting our students into other classes in other schools, and then getting students from other Harvard schools into our classes.

You're still connection with the students somehow but also dealing with data? [OVERLAPPING] Your experience from his school now. Be more in touch with people.

All of the Excel work that I was forced to do in my graduate school with statistics and just statistics in general, it's like, okay. This helps me just make some things with the cross registration process go faster.

That's wonderful. How is the relationship with the registrar's office?

It's a really good relationship. I think we all work really well together and everybody just joins in and helps when they need to. If somebody has a lot of work happening. If there are busy times happening. They can pull somebody in who isn't busy in their cycle to help. Does that make any sense?

Makes perfect sense. When you have a good team, because sometimes one is not around or if you can support each other and everybody has their own personal life as well.

Absolutely.

When you can support each other and make that environment because you spend a big chunk of your life.

You do.

In that space and eight hours per day, at least in that space. It's nice when you can create a good environment, a good relationship with your coworkers. I don't know how you do that with Sam Fitzgerald

[LAUGHTER] You two. I swear.

I don't understand. I'm glad that you do, [LAUGHTER] but I don't know. Sam is a different story.

You two, I'm going to put you in a room [LAUGHTER] You got to work that out.

I wonder what people to say, “what happened with Sam Fitzgerald and Edgar that they don't get along?” You don't want to know. It goes all the way back to the candy bowl from DOS.

My God.

When she was trying to build her own candy bowl for Registrar's [LAUGHTER] Office, she would go there to spy on my candy bowl and then buy different candies just to attract different audience. That's what we used to joke about. We were candy dealers. That's the whole thing. But I love Sam, she's wonderful. Kerri, I think this is a wrap. Thank you very much.

Thank you, welcome.

For being here.

I really appreciate you accept the invitation. I want to talk to you for a while. We share the same experience being at the front desk, which I think is a fantastic experience for someone. I'm so happy that you told your story and a way of someone who spent a chunk of your life thinking about one goal and then realize, I don't know if that's the best. Try something different then, I found my way here. This is what I like to do and keep going exploring. I wish you all the best, you know where I am if you need anything. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Edgar. It's always nice to talk to you. This is a great conversation. [OVERLAPPING]

Either way, it's the same here. Awesome. For everybody out there listening, until our next time. Bye-bye.