[00:00:04]

You are listening to tell me our story where we connect to HLS staff on a personal level. [MUSIC] Hello, everyone. This is Edgar Kley Filho from HLS Human Resources department. My pronouns are he, him, his. Today we are talking to Matilda Matovu from CEEB. Who will tell us about her life, how long she is in this position at HLS, and the work she does. Thank you for joining us, Matilda, and please tell me your story.

[00:00:41]

Thank you, Edgar. Thank you for having me. Like I've mentioned, my name is Matilda Matovu. My pronouns are she, her, and hers. I guess we could start with I've been at HLS for almost five years now.

[00:00:56]

Five years.

[00:00:57]

Yeah.

[00:00:57]

What's your position there?

[00:00:59]

I work in the Office of Community Engagement, Equity, and Belonging, and I am a program administrator for our student.

[00:01:05]

Program Administrator and you're here for five years.

[00:01:07]

Yeah.

[00:01:08]

Let's try to go back in time a little bit and tell me a little bit about your background. You are from Massachusetts area, where are you from, if you can tell us a little bit about your family history.

[00:01:22]

Sure. I'm not originally from the Massachusetts area. I was born in Uganda, Kampala to be exact. It's the capital there. It's a smaller East African country. My family and I moved to America when I was about three, so we've lived in and around the Boston area basically my whole life.

[00:01:42]

You're born Uganda, but were raised here.

[00:01:44]

Yes.

[00:01:44]

There is not much memory of your life there, two years old?

[00:01:49]

Yeah. My life there not so much, but my parents are what we would call fobs.

[00:01:55]

What? [LAUGHTER].

[00:01:57]

Fobs are fresh off the boat. It's a loving term for immigrant families, usually from African countries, that bring their way of life to America. Even though I did not grow up in Uganda, my home was very much infused with Ugandan culture and I was brought up that way. For example, I didn't really eat American food for the first part of my childhood. I think the first time I had McDonald's, I was like 13.

[00:02:26]

Really?

[00:02:26]

Yeah.

[00:02:27]

The entire time since you were born until around 13 years old, most of your food is prepared and made in Ugandan way with your family culture?

[00:02:39]

Yeah. No, my mom was very strict about not having us eat fast food. She had some worries about it, so I'd used to pack lunches and have butter sandwiches. It was a little bit different when I was an elementary school for sure.

[00:02:54]

How was the experience of you interacting with the kids with their whatever sandwiches that they bring sometimes?

[00:03:04]

They had peanut butter sandwiches and I had rice and beans. [LAUGHTER] My food smelled a little differently and I spent a lot of time explaining to people what I was eating. Also just by the culture of food in Uganda, there isn't a lot of meats, proteins. When I was younger, I was a vegetarian by choice. [LAUGHTER] I had a lot of vegetables, a lot of beans, a lot of rice. For some reason, I didn't like eating beef or chicken.

[00:03:33]

Really?

[00:03:34]

I eat some of it now, but I definitely am still not a seafood person, unfortunately.

[00:03:39]

Did your parents feel like, she's a rabble, we shouldn't be eating meat. [OVERLAPPING]

[00:03:44]

Definitely, I was the rebel in the family. [LAUGHTER] They always use to question me because whatever you usually make it comes in a stew of some sort, and I loved the stew. I would always put that on whatever I was eating, but I didn't care for the beef.

[00:03:58]

You'd put the beef aside?

[00:03:59]

Yeah. I remember one time I was also not the healthiest child. My grandmother at one point was living with us and she was the one cooking all of our meals and she would make me eat liver once a week.

[00:04:10]

My god. Yes, I know exactly what you're talking about.

[00:04:13]

To help me. That was not a fun experience. It definitely was a push and pull between me and my grandmother, but I eventually got in place where I didn't have to be force-fed.

[00:04:24]

Isn't that interesting? Because it's the same thing. You're saying things about your upbringing. That's so close to our experience in coaching Brazil as well. I'm not saying that you have the regular breakfast style that US has, the culture here has. But for us, for kids, a regular thing to eat in the morning would be we have in Brazil the French bread as a little row cracking on this. It was delicious. It's simple but delicious. Then you have that with butter and coffee, even when you are young. Not necessarily, like you said, rice and beans and bringing it to school. But my mom and dad who were raised and lived in farms for many, many years, that would be their breakfast: rice, beans, boiled cassava, also another things. The reason that they eat and I always ask them, how would you eat that in the morning? But they said, well, that's how our upbringing was. Working in farms, you didn't have the time to be eating just bread or something. You have to prepare that, go to the yard farm or where you should work, and eat that. That was their way. Then when you talk about liver, same with my family. They used to liver and other things you don't need to mention much, [LAUGHTER] but I always feel like, no, thank you.

[00:05:54]

Yeah. No, we utilize all parts of animals. I want to say to your point, both of my parents were brought up. They went to boarding schools, and boarding schools in Uganda at least have more bland food. They used to eat porridge all the time for breakfast. When we came here, it was a treat if we got oatmeal for breakfast, but most times we were eating porridge for breakfast or having a butter sandwich. To your point, we're eating the same things our parents were brought up eating as well.

[00:06:25]

Isn't that interesting? Because it is. I like sausage, or chicken, pork, or beef like a real dinner, well done, a stew, all good. But all the other things that you are familiar with like my parents, no, thank you very much, you can enjoy that. I'd be happy that you really enjoy those things. But it's funny, like the comparison that you go through. You said that your parents went to boarding school there.

[00:07:02]

Yes.

[00:07:02]

Do you think that was a different way that they explain to you? Was a different style of going through school related to the rest of the culture?

[00:07:13]

Yeah, I would say so. I should say culture in America. Back home in Uganda, everybody goes to boarding school. That's just the standard. Day schools would be considered the international schools, where international students would go and parents who only wanted their children to go for the day. Most people, especially my parent's generation, went to boarding schools and they'd come back on holiday breaks. I've heard lots of fun stories about them going to a boarding school. But coming here, I think my parents definitely struggled to find similar education here because boarding school in America is not the norm. Yeah.

[00:07:53]

For the first all throughout elementary school, I was in Catholic school and it was a very, very strict Catholic school. That was probably the closest they can get to a boarding school experience for us without actually sending us away somewhere and spending however much money.

[00:08:10]

Was also a shocking in terms of a cultural aspect or not? Not maybe for you, but if you are having influence from your family, having a very strict Catholic education could be a little bit off.

[00:08:23]

Yeah. No, I think it was difficult for them because they were young at the time it was me and my younger brother. Imagine a 19, 20-year-old mom with two small kids and her husband moving essentially across the world with very little knowledge of where they were moving to only what they've heard of. Obviously because of colonialism, they speak English fine. That wasn't too much of a language barrier, but obviously there's an accent there. My mom, I think, was a bit better. If you heard her speak now, she probably sounds more British than anything. But my dad had a very thick Ugandan accent, so everything was very hard for him to get out. Me and my brother used to have to translate essentially for whenever we would go out somewhere.

[00:09:15]

Really?

[00:09:16]

Because he would just get so frustrated having to repeat himself. He would say something either in Luganda, which is our language, or in his English that we understood and then we would translate to whatever it would be, whether it'd be like at a restaurant or if we went to a store or something. We always joke now, me and my siblings, because our parents still do it. Our older generations of our family still do it. The way you translate certain things in English from Luganda is a little backwards. When you say I can hear a sound, technically in Luganda, it'd be like you smell us out. They would confuse the senses with what was going on. If they were smelling something they'd be like, I hear that smell. Or if they heard something they'd be like, I can smell that sound.

[00:10:03]

We have something similar in Portuguese.

[00:10:05]

Yeah. Just the way that it translates in English, the way that they were thinking about it, they would always mix up their senses. It's a fun little thing now.

[00:10:14]

It's interesting because Brian and I talk sometimes. We joke about this, of course, but there are some expressions in Brazil that's so common to us. He and I started paying attention, yeah, it doesn't make much sense when you are listening to a song or someone talking on the radio or whatever he is and you are not directly looking. But it's common for us to say, can you see what you're saying? Do you know that kind of things that. I know I can hear what you say, but not see. But for us, it's all there.

[00:10:42]

Yeah. The senses get all jumbled up in English.

[00:10:45]

There are a quite a few, now you are saying that is funny. A lot of the things that you say, we use the senses more in terms of can you.

[00:10:54]

Experience.

[00:10:55]

Experience the whole thing instead of being a literally about can you see now. I want you to pay attention to that.

[00:11:01]

Yes.

[00:11:02]

That's another thing.

[00:11:04]

It's like they speak a third language?

[00:11:06]

[LAUGHTER] Exactly. That is a whole connotation that's missing here in conversation. Your relatives is still all back there?

[00:11:14]

Yes. My parents were the rebels that moved us here. The majority of my family still lives in Uganda.

[00:11:21]

Come to visit?

[00:11:22]

They come to visit, yes. We haven't visited and they remind me of that often. [LAUGHTER] Eventually, I will make my pilgrimage back to Uganda. But the majority live in Uganda. I have a few relatives that live in the UK. But here I just have my immediate family, so I have my younger siblings and my mother and my grandmother lived here.

[00:11:44]

Your relationship with them coming from Uganda having still live in the culture there, is there a.

[00:11:52]

I won't say conflict. Everybody is going to be treating each other politely, to be nice, to come and visit. But can you sense the difference in terms of the way that they come to see you or to be with you and the way that you are feeling here or when you were a teenager?

[00:12:08]

No, I think this goes back to my earlier definition of a fog, [LAUGHTER]. They still exist. Ask your African friends about them. I think there's the American mentality of how we work, how we live regular life. The comforts that we experienced here. There is a parallel universe outside of the US where those things do happen, but they're in a very different concept. Not to say that my family is super well off in Uganda but they're pretty well-off. Generally most people who have large homes have house help. That's a regular thing. My family will come here and they will ask where our help is [LAUGHTER]. We can't afford that in America, unfortunately. It's little things like that where their comfort or things that they're used to aren't reflected here and it doesn't match up with what they believe America to be. Then I'm sure if I would describe my family's experience in Uganda, it wouldn't match up to what Americans think about Africa and what is there. I think definitely when I go there I'll be living a little bit larger.

[00:13:21]

There are two things that I cannot forget to ask. One is, have you visited other areas near Uganda?

[00:13:27]

Oh, yes.

[00:13:28]

You have? [LAUGHTER]

[00:13:30]

This is why my family's a little upset.

[00:13:32]

I am with them. I am right there with them. She's going all over Africa.

[00:13:39]

I'm a bit of a traveler to be fair. I visited Ghana most recently and they were a little upset that I made it to the west coast of the continent and didn't take the extra couple of hours over to be there. The west coast in Ghana to Uganda is about 5 hours. It is not a small flight.

[00:13:58]

It's my choice.

[00:13:59]

But does my family care about that? No. [LAUGHTER] they made it known to me that next time I should make that journey. [OVERLAPPING]

[00:14:07]

My God, we have so many similarities in terms of, it's interesting. Family usually they say more about moms. They say moms are all the same. They just have different addresses but they all think the same. I could say the same about families. When I go to visit Brazil, we go once a year. My family lives in Central West of Brazil, so would be by car if you have to drive, at least for the closest relatives in the south or even south east would be 24-36 hours driving.

[00:14:42]

Driving.

[00:14:43]

You would have at least 3-4 hours and if you have changing flights. Every time when I go that is all these massageses, you come here. You cannot come this year and I'm saying, my mom is 90. I want to be with her because they're going to stay that long please. Sometimes there are some really harsh push back, like someone, I'm never going to talk to you. I'm sorry. We figure that out. I try once in awhile to go to a different place, [OVERLAPPING] but it's the same thing that you are explaining there.

[00:15:13]

A part of me is I think, very similarly to people here that they don't understand the concept of distance. A five-hour flight, It's long. Like five hours from Boston, you could go to California, and it takes about I would say like 10-11 hours just to get to the west coast of Africa. But they don't care.

[00:15:34]

They have to blame regardless.

[00:15:38]

I think it's nice. It's a fun banter amongst the family. But it's to your point, it's one of those things where people will be like, I'm never going to talk to you, they will, you just have to call them.

[00:15:49]

Another thing that you were mentioning there, the help in Brazil is the same. It's a third world country. But I think that somehow it helps the economy in a way to move as well [OVERLAPPING]

[00:16:00]

It does.

[00:16:03]

It help communities around to have a job that in general, because of education level, because qualification, everything else they don't have, or even the distance to go somewhere to do something. A help is very common in Brazil as well.

[00:16:18]

To your point, in back in Uganda, you have to pay for education. K-12 is not expected. Not only do you have to pay for education, but if you're a family with lesser means, you have to prioritize which children can get education. This is probably why I'm very focused in education. A lot of girls don't make it past the first couple of years. It's unfortunate that in some of these places they have to make those decisions.

[00:16:46]

Those choices if you know, would men have an advantage if they have to choose a child, to go, the man or the girl because of her work market place.

[00:16:55]

I still think Uganda in general is a very patriarchal society. It does have hints of matriarchal undertones, where certain things are reserved to the women of the family to manage. But in general, if you're going to have to choose who the priority is to get educated, it's most likely going to be the male. If it's not, the male will be the oldest. In the case that you have daughters and only daughters you'll send the oldest to school. Or you find, like family will get together. It's much more community-based. Your local family will come, like your neighbors will help. Because you have to pay school fees and you have to wear uniforms and you have to buy those uniforms. For them in Uganda, the educational barrier isn't just getting access to the education, it's getting access to the things that you need to simply be in the classroom.

[00:17:48]

I agree. Another thing that I recently was paying attention, I was amazed by I wasn't invited to go to the international party for the graduate program. Visiting all stands. In Brazil there was one of our towns what they call the Festival of nations? There were many different nations there. I cannot remember having an African nation represented. That's why this was a surprise for me because when I was in the Ghana stand here, what was the other one?

[00:18:30]

Nigeria maybe.

[00:18:31]

Nigeria. The rice and beans and chicken.

[00:18:36]

All that was brought over.

[00:18:37]

But all the same that you eat every day in Brazil? What my family makes since I was born, is the same thing that I saw in those trays. For me it was a cultural shock again because I feel like hold on a second. That was my food. I was telling the kids my god. [OVERLAPPING]

[00:18:58]

It is the same food.

[00:18:59]

I am home here because that's what, you know.

[00:19:01]

I think it goes back to how we're educated on a global scale. I think when you dissect some of these countries, especially when it comes to America, Latin America, the Caribbean. A lot of the basis of our food culture, our general culture comes from African nations, specifically West African. But they won't tell you that because it's coming from a colonial mindset.

[00:19:26]

Yes.

[00:19:26]

I think it's great to your point that more people are learning about different cultures in Africa. There's significant work for people to decolonize the structure of history like, how did rice make it to the Americas? How did beans make it? Like certain ways that we make our food. I think it's also [OVERLAPPING].

[00:19:47]

And seasoning and everything, the way that it's prepared.

[00:19:48]

Seasoning I think it's really interesting that in Brazil, obviously the influence with Spain and Portugal, but no one thinks about the fact that they colonized Brazil. They were indigenous people there before them. They brought people in, so the mixing of cultures and food. Brazil is unique in and of itself because it's input is from so many different places in the world.

[00:20:09]

And the influence. This one I know and I had the experience because it is one of the things that fascinates me how strong the influence of African religions were in Brazil and they needed to accommodate that influence, Otherwise you would lose your [OVERLAPPING] after end of the slavery. They need to adjust that and accommodate that huge amount of people that would work for us. Candomble, Quimbanda and Umbanda all from African countries.

[00:20:43]

Even the saints in the Catholic Church were made to compare and match the deities in those religious African cultures. The difference is the celebration of those deities in the African religions are incredible. If you ever go to Brazil, please ask someone to take you to a Candomble ceremony, a religious ceremony. You are going to see how beautiful the sounds are incredible, the drums.

[00:21:13]

The music.

[00:21:14]

The clothes that they use for those deities to present themselves. You have to see. I wish they could do that in a large scale in a movie or something that could be more.

[00:21:26]

Something representative.

[00:21:27]

Yeah.

[00:21:28]

Yeah.

[00:21:28]

It's just incredible thing.

[00:21:29]

I will say one thing that Africans do well, and at this point, I'm not just you got it, I'm definitely Pan-African.

[00:21:35]

Yeah.

[00:21:36]

We celebrate so well. I think if you look across the continent, weddings, funerals, birthdays.

[00:21:43]

Everything is beautiful.

[00:21:44]

Everything is lively and colorful, and community-based. For example, if you were to get married in Uganda, I'm not just getting married to somebody.

[00:21:53]

Yeah.

[00:21:53]

My family is getting married to another family.

[00:21:55]

Yes.

[00:21:56]

All of our extended friends are now coming together. The wedding isn't just for the people getting married, but it's for the community, and how great the community has now been enriched by this union. Culturally, I think Africa is so rich.

[00:22:10]

It's incredible, it's beautiful. We need to go a little bit in terms of the last time when you were talking about your experience here in the US, 13 years old until you have your McDonald's and everything, went to a Catholic school.

[00:22:28]

Yeah.

[00:22:28]

After you finished all that experience, where was your high-school and how was the high-school experience?

[00:22:35]

We moved out of Catholic school when I went into middle school. I went to middle school in Woburn.

[00:22:44]

Yeah.

[00:22:44]

It was just a small town. It's actually where I currently live, fun fact. But I ended up doing the last few years of my high school in Tewksbury, which is a little bit in Northern. I should say, North of Boston. My graduating experience was not the best. I have to say high school was challenging for sure.

[00:23:04]

Yeah.

[00:23:05]

Just for demographic purposes, there was 200 kids in my class, my graduating class. It's a very small class already. It's a small town, so these particular students had gone all the way from kindergarten now to graduating seniors in high school together. Coming in liters, obviously a challenge. I was one of two students of color in that class,.

[00:23:27]

In 200?

[00:23:28]

In 200, and I was the only African student.

[00:23:32]

Wow.

[00:23:34]

I think the other student was of Latin descent. Maybe Portuguese. But yeah, so to say culturally diverse, it wasn't [LAUGHTER] Definitely was a challenge navigating that in high school and then coming out of high school, I went to the great UMass Lowell [LAUGHTER] I say it's the flagship. I understand there's this little place called Amherst, but UMass Lowell was where I ended for my undergrad and that was an amazing experience.

[00:24:07]

What's the difference? Amherst is a little bit West,

[00:24:11]

Yeah. Amherst is in the middle of nowhere [LAUGHTER] It is the biggest.

[00:24:18]

Amherst if you're listening [LAUGHTER]

[00:24:20]

Yeah. Just know that I think UMass Lowell is better. I'm biased. I said every reunion. The UMass system is huge. There's several schools. Amherst is the biggest and it's considered the flagship. UMass Lowell, obviously it's in Lowell Mass. There is the Dartmouth campus, the Boston campus, and then there is the medical school more step. I ended up honestly 20 minutes from where I graduated high school.

[00:24:48]

Wow.

[00:24:49]

But I made it an extreme effort to stay on campus and have the traditional college experience, and I think that helps.

[00:24:54]

Why do you say that the Tewksburyt, sorry, I understand that diversity was not there.

[00:24:59]

Yeah.

[00:25:00]

But 20 minutes different. All West of Massachusetts, we would assume that would be the same experience.

[00:25:07]

Yeah.

[00:25:08]

We're trying to say Amherst is completely diverse, is a more welcoming community.

[00:25:13]

I can't speak to Amherst diversity. I've heard that they are quite diverse just because they have a lot of international students but in the case of UMass Lowell, Lowell itself as a city is very diverse. They have a very large Cambodian population, Asian population in general, lots of African communities are centered in Lowell. I'm pretty sure they have a pretty good Latin American community as well.

[00:25:38]

Very big, yeah.

[00:25:40]

It's more of a mixture of different Latin American communities. Even going to UMass Lowell, it was dramatically different from my high school experience because I was exposed to so many other people that looked like me and didn't look like me. I think it was the first time that I really met a significant portion of anybody else's culture because Tewksbury there was nobody else.

[00:26:03]

Can I ask one thing that I get it, I am a person of color. I know exactly how it feels, but for someone who cannot understand, we're still talking about in terms of diversity, inclusion, and belonging.

[00:26:15]

Yeah.

[00:26:16]

You were just describing from one point or another, how does it feel for someone, a person of color, black person to be in a community, that's only in 200 just two are of color. I think you gave me already that information, but how is it to be there versus to be in a place that you look around and you feel what's the main feeling in terms over?

[00:26:45]

I should caveat to say that UMass Lowell is still a PWI (predominantly white institutiion).

[00:26:48]

Yeah.

[00:26:48]

It's still predominantly white but the difference I felt is in one place, so in Tewksbury took spray, I was not seen and UMass Lowell I was. I was able to build community with people that looked like me, eat the same food as me, understood the same jokes as I did. That was not reflected in my high school career. I think when you were that young to feel like you're the only one. Though, I'm sure there are plenty of other students of color that were probably the only ones as well. It's more impactful. Your world is a lot smaller at 18 compared to when you were in college. It breeds a lot of self-doubt. It breeds a lot of insecurity and it was definitely something I had to work through and learn or I should say, unlearn when I went to college. I think my mentality in high school, thinking back to like 18-year-old me was I need to do better. I need to be 10 times better.

[00:27:51]

To achieve something at that level.

[00:27:53]

Just say even be. If you were to go back and look up some of the accolades, I'm a very humble person, but I did a lot and I overachieved a lot. I think if you look at what happened in college, I continued that, and I kept doing more and getting involved and feeling as though if I wasn't doing anything, I wasn't doing anything.

[00:28:16]

Yeah.

[00:28:17]

That's not necessarily the best mentality to have because then you're constantly putting yourself down. By the end of my college career, I definitely had some great advisors and champions teach me how to be a bit kinder to myself.

[00:28:31]

How was getting out of a Tewksbury experience, and then getting through orientation in UMass Lowell?

[00:28:41]

No, I think getting out was like freaking out. It was like a sigh of relief, almost. I think a lot of times I said I was okay when I wasn't okay, when I needed support, and I just didn't reach out for it. I think by the end of my time at UMass Lowell, not only did I have people that I could reach out to or lean on, I had people that would help me if I needed help without me asking. I think that's important.

[00:29:10]

You noticed the difference as soon as you've got to do orientation.

[00:29:13]

Yeah.

[00:29:13]

Then you say like, hi,.

[00:29:15]

Oh yes.

[00:29:15]

I'm Matilda.

[00:29:17]

Today I am a much more extroverted person, but 18-year-old me that went into UMass Lowell was very scared. She was very insecure. For example, the reason I'm in higher ed today really is I was a work-study student and part of the first week of orientation events is anyone who didn't have a job had to go to this work-study fair. I walked in, there's a bunch of different offices and campus life groups that are hiring students for work-study specifically. I walk into the gymnasium and the first table I see this woman calls me over. I was in there for maybe five-minutes. She asked me my name, asked me how I was doing. I was like, I'm okay, I just got here, I just moved in, I have to get a job. She starts talking about her office, it was the Dean of Students Office, and how they needed a front desk person. I was like, that seems interesting, I've never done that before. She's like, well, do you want to and I got hired [LAUGHTER]

[00:30:23]

A 10-minute conversation she said, you're perfect. A week later, I went in for my first shift and I met the Dean of Students, the Associate Deans. The way that works at EMS old, this is the person that oversees all the student organizations, student life in general housing, those types of folks. That became my homebase, my soul, my anchor. Through that experience of just meeting someone great, Her name was Kiki. She exposed me to higher ed and what that world could be like. That's how I got involved on campus.

[00:31:03]

Kiki was also a person of color.

[00:31:05]

Kiki was this little petite white woman, blonde hair, blue eyes.

[00:31:10]

Really.

[00:31:11]

It was amazing. I would've never thought. If you went and looked at our office, it was easily one of the most diverse offices. Out of nowhere, like you would not expect that she would work for a that she did.

[00:31:27]

She just looked at you chat with you for 10 minutes and now you wouldn't be a good fit for this office.

[00:31:32]

I think she felt the fear. But also I feel like there's a little bit of they probably needed a front desk person. I was the first person that she saw. But we had a really good conversation and I was telling her at the time I was pretty mad thank goodness. I did not go with that. [LAUGHTER] I was telling her I had a plan and this is what I was going to do in four years and I just need to work X amount of hours and I have steady blocks planned and I was essentially telling her my academic goals plan. Just like you're really organize your details. I was like, maybe. She's like no, I think you'd be really good for our front desk. She was probably one of the first people that tell me to not downplay my skills. She was able in that conversation to source out that I can be detail-oriented when given a task I can complete it. These are simple things for a front desk person. I had never been in a front desk position. I was confident enough to answer questions directly. She said I was a good fit. Turns out I was a good fit. They kept me around.

[00:32:43]

I think it's interesting. I believe this person is the experience that she has with studnets might be phenomenon and she could read easily and I think she did note being respectful enough to see all your plans as a here. Here my steps and yeah.

[00:33:01]

You'd be great.

[00:33:02]

Bro you are going to be great on that one. Let's just start here just to try it.

[00:33:07]

I will say she did ask a funny question. I'm like, Oh, it's student orgs. All you interested in unlike I haven't looked at any of them. I just said what we're going to change. [LAUGHTER] One of my first tasks was going through in writing up a list of all the student orgs that we're active on campus and then choosing two to visit each week. They'd have like weekly meetings and it was my job to go to check in on them. Now realizing she probably just wanted to get me to get out of my like academic side and just see other students and see what else was available on the student service space. She definitely snuck in the fun for me because I think if I look back, my first semester was lonely. I email. Honestly, it was very indicative of what happened or my experience at Tewksbury. By my second semester, freshman year, I was on an executive board. I was working on running programs for different student orgs. I had all these friends like that Kiki it was the shift for me and I'm forever grateful for that.

[00:34:17]

You just needed time to get used to saying. Is just that feeling. Is it really what it is, so they trust this. I need to give yourself a little bit time and when you feel like okay, now I can go for then you're like, okay, that is not going to conquer.

[00:34:35]

Exactly.

[00:34:37]

It was a great experience all the way through.

[00:34:39]

No, it was I think a big reason why I really appreciate my role now, because I think one person can really have a major effect. Do I think Kiki realizes how much she's influenced my life? Probably not. I haven't spoken to her and probably 5, 6 years.

[00:34:56]

But she is amazing that you are doing exactly the same work that you're doing there.

[00:35:02]

I'm not personally be like, hey, what organization you're part of, you're not a part of any. Let's see what we have that you might be student [OVERLAPPING].

[00:35:09]

When you graduate, you didn't graduate of came straight to Harvard, did you?

[00:35:13]

No, I graduated. I'm like actually say the year because that's not important information for us, but I did graduate from US Law. It was wonderful. I didn't have a job right up. I was having a lot of fun my last year as a senior, I was the vice president of our class. I was in leadership of two major organizations. I was running our only student organization or student-focused programming center. I was just living life as a student with all this extra power and I was like, I'll worry about that when I graduate. Graduation, I was on the stage with the chancellor. That was fun. Then I think you'd probably hit me like a week after graduation. I think I need to do something. I didn't have a job lined up. [OVERLAPPING]

[00:36:09]

Were you still living with your family or not.

[00:36:12]

Yeah. Initially, I went back and I moved in with my mother for about a month-and-a-half. Because as I mentioned earlier, I started off as pre-med. I thought I was going to be a doctor. It was roughly around sophomore year that I took organic chemistry too. I learned no, I am not going to be a doctor because I can't cry every night over a chemical reaction because I'm having a chemical reaction and it's negative. I learned that halfway through. I'm sorry, I actually ended up graduating with a Masters in biology and political science. That is to say, I graduated with a lot of credits. I didn't mean to do that, but I didn't know what I wanted to do. I was floating and I really enjoy political science and history so I taking those classes. I still had done all this work for a biology degree and I didn't want it to go to waste. By the time you get to your junior or senior year of your bio degree, it's the more fun classes. Like evolution classes and how do trees grow. I know some people are not interested in that. I was at the time. I liked constellation. They said I still want to study this type of stuff. Like I really enjoyed physics. I don't know why I couldn't get past organic chemistry, but it was not God's plan. When I graduated, I had this degree. I gave myself six months to find a job. I started applying. I started utilizing my network.

[00:37:52]

I told myself, if I didn't have a job by Christmas, I was just going to go get a master's. We're just going to go back to school. [LAUGHTER] That seems like a safe plan for more education. I got a job working for a staffing firm two days before Christmas. I went to work and I worked at a staffing firm, a pretty large one. I worked in HR for about, let me not lie to you, it was about three years.

[00:38:20]

Three years?

[00:38:21]

I worked in HR. It was a full cycle recruiter. I got to utilize a lot of the same skills I was utilizing when I was a student org leader and a leader on campus. I was talking to a lot of people, ask them what they were interested in, pairing them up with jobs. The staffing agency that I worked for contracted with Harvard, so I got to talk to a lot of people at Harvard.

[00:38:43]

That's what happened?

[00:38:43]

A lot of hiring managers. Funny enough, one of the hiring managers was your coworker. I don't know if she's here. Ms. Burrows Trina.

[00:38:55]

Trina, yes. [inaudible 00:38:55]

[00:38:57]

She was someone I worked with when I was at Ron's dot and then I saw position opened up and I applied here and she was the person that hired me. Trina, shout out to her. She was also majorly impactful of my life.

[00:39:11]

Trina, she has that tone that makes you feel like [OVERLAPPING].

[00:39:18]

Calm. She made everything super easy. When I originally applied, I didn't realize that she was the recruiter working on the role. She came to me and she was like “hey, did you apply for this?” I said, yeah, I think it'd be a really good role and I'm trying to get out of recruiting. I said okay. I did an interview the next week. My first job at HLS was with the Dean's office. I then met with the leadership there and that worked out really well. I think it was in a span of like a month, I was hired. Then December of 2018 is when I came to HLS

[00:39:54]

How long have you stay in that position until you move to CEEB?

[00:39:57]

It was almost three years. From 2018 to when we came back in 2021, August. I was working at the Dean's office and then in 2021 August, I moved over it to CEEB.

[00:40:15]

Went back to work almost a full circle with the same experience that you have in the Dean's Office in Lowell, right?

[00:40:24]

I'm in the same space I was when I was 18. But except now I am a professional staff for student.

[00:40:33]

But experience that you got there and what you can offer for the students where you work here, it makes a huge difference. If you speak the same language.

[00:40:45]

I think it definitely helps me, informs me on decisions, on how I decide to communicate and educate students on what they should be doing. I will say forever and a day that the leadership in student or the Dean of Students Office at UMass Lowell is the best that I've ever worked with. No offense to my current team. But they taught me so much about how a lot of this is just having conversations with people and building that rapport and having people trust what you say and being aware of the fact that students come in with problems and issues and they don't have the full scope of the picture.

[00:41:21]

Exactly.

[00:41:22]

Not that they need the full scope of the picture, but you should be able to communicate with them in a way that they understand that you were always trying to be on their side? That's my goal now.

[00:41:32]

Just see that, for example, you had your own experience there. There are certain things that maybe as the students, they can come and say something that, I've been there. I know a little bit how it works, but it can't tell you decide and how it works here. Also welcoming students from different backgrounds because there is a lot of heavy weight in terms of being at the law school or being with the Harvard brand, that's scares a little bit of people in terms of do belong here? Do I feel I'm part of this? I think having someone with experience that can at least [OVERLAPPING].

[00:42:06]

To that last point you just made, my first event working at CEEB was our affinity work weekend. That's where we invite all of our students, identify with any affinity to come and meet and begin the building blocks of finding that community here at HLS. Going to Harvard is an extraordinary feet. Go into Harvard Law is an extraordinary feet. I can tell you every conversation I had was, I don't know if I'm supposed to be here. I had to keep reminding everyone that our admissions team doesn't make mistakes. You're here because you are more than qualified to be here. In fact, I know that you've done more than the average student to be at HLS. I'm reassuring them that you might not feel comfortable right now, you might not know your place at this exact moment, but it's new. Then following up with those students to find in six months, they have friends, they have community, they settled into their dorms, they've settled into Boston because most of them are not from here. I think that's a nice arc to see.

[00:43:09]

It is.

[00:43:10]

Because I know it can be really difficult here for our students. I think the academia is very challenging. I think equally they are very hard on themselves and breaking that mold of like, you can have fun while you do this. You could be respectful to everybody that you do it with.

[00:43:27]

The first year, because like I said, firstly, the 1L year, the first year that seems academically is the heaviest, like you said.

[00:43:34]

Yeah.

[00:43:35]

That's where you need to give the biggest support. You will get easier after you pass this first product ones needs to go through. This is wonderful. I think that's our wrap-up. Of course. We went over a few 10, 15 minutes of the time that we're supposed to.

[00:43:59]

You can just cut it out. [LAUGHTER].

[00:44:01]

No, we're not. Matilda, this was lovely. Thank you very much for accepting to participate in this conversation. I think your background story is phenomenon. I was trying to do this with you, because of the schedule and everything else we had to do this few times. But I'm so glad that you did. You know how much I admire you. I have to say this publicly because I just tease you every time but you are wonderful person to be a coworker, a friend, and I'm so so happy that you accepted that.

[00:44:38]

Thank you. This has honestly been the biggest pleasure to sit here and talk with you. I think this podcast is doing a lot of really good work. I love listening to it, and I'm so appreciative that you asked me to be on it. I just want to note for everyone that's listening that Edgar is said that he loves me.

[00:44:53]

I do.

[00:44:54]

Anytime you might see him say something disparaging, he's just joking. [LAUGHTER].

[00:44:58]

Yes. For Matilda's relatives in Uganda, I am with you. If she goes to anywhere Africa, she should go first to Uganda. It doesn't matter if the five hours distance, I'm there with you.

[00:45:13]

I don't want you jumping on top of my family. I think I love you, but still don't take their side. [LAUGHTER]

[00:45:20]

I know. I have just said that for them because they are lovely too. For everybody out there listening, thank you very much. I will see you around. Bye, bye.