[00:00:04]

You are listening to tell me a story where we connect to HLS staff on a personal level.

Welcome back to the second half of our conversation with Reem Al-Khalqi.

[00:00:22]

The way I felt the next day walking around the city again, walking around at the town again. If no one stood up, if everybody just ignored, I don't know if I would have been feeling comfortable the next night just going to Walmart again, [LAUGHTER] it would have felt scary. If somebody comes in to text me, no one is going to stand up and that's not a great place I want to be in.

[00:00:43]

That's beautiful. That's really, really nice because for example, when you are talking about here in our community, talking about diversity, inclusion and belonging. That's what community should be. We can give room for someone to not understand certain things and have the chance to learn about things. We cannot give room for prejudice and for simple reasons, you decide that you can get to another person and judge that because of her appearance or because of her culture, because of her accent, because of anything. Once you are in the same environment that allow us to be together here. That was a good moment, I agree with you. It's a beautiful moment where the community just said, hey, you are one only here having this attitude, three of us nearby are telling you back-off because this is not okay. I agree that makes a difference in your life. I think another good influence in our lives because you mentioned your mom a few times and coming for a master's degree and then going back to Yemen, coming back for a PhD. Hey, what did she study PhD for?

[00:02:02]

Instructional design.

[00:02:03]

Instructional design. What's your mom's name, if you can say?

[00:02:07]

My mom's name is Heyam Abo Alasrar she works here.

[00:02:10]

We should invite her to come. She's going to be here for your Harvard. I'd love to meet her. That's wonderful. That's awesome. Now that you mentioned your mom's name, your name. I hope this is not offensive, but I love meaning in names when I know that some cultures have many names. Reem has a meaning.

[00:02:36]

Yes, it does.

[00:02:36]

It does.

[00:02:37]

It does.

[00:02:37]

What does it mean?

[00:02:39]

Reem is a faun. It's a gazelles baby.

[00:02:43]

Really?

[00:02:44]

Yeah. And it's usually used in Arabic poetry because fox usually have big, wide, beautiful eyes. You'd always see them used as a description when in a poem there's a compliment to a woman's wide beautiful black eyes. It would be like it's like a Reem.

[00:03:03]

That's really, really nice. Your mom's?

[00:03:06]

My mom's name is one of the many ways in Arabic that's love. It's one of the highest levels of love actually, [FOREIGN] it's hard to translate.

[00:03:18]

It might be because we have a word in Portuguese that's not translated, even I think in Spanish, there's a word that we call [FOREIGN]. [FOREIGN] is everything that's in combust. That means missing someone in many different levels. But is not I miss you, is the feeling that I'm going through about missing you. If I say I have [FOREIGN] of you, there is so much there that you in our culture you understand, you really miss me. Because it's true. I think you are talking about a word in that sense, when that is really difficult to translate what means that kind of a love is like a sublime in a away.

[00:04:06]

I think it's more like a state of love. It's not like a verb or you say I love you [OVERLAPPING] You would say let's say something like, I'm at the highest level of losing my mind in your love for something like that. Losing myself in your love I think.

[00:04:28]

That's beautiful. That's really beautiful. What about your sister?

[00:04:33]

My sister's name is Noha and I think it means like smartness and something related to the brain.

[00:04:39]

Is she smart really?

[00:04:41]

She is very smart.

[00:04:43]

Nice. That's really cool. I love this meaning because I think that they add a different characteristic for the person because it's like you're carrying your culture with you in your name, because of the meaning and everything that represents I think is really, really, really cool. You go to high school, every high school, you are lucky everything was great because a lot of people their highschool is so difficult.

[00:05:12]

It comes with it's struggles [LAUGHTER] But I would say overall it was okay.

[00:05:15]

It was good.

[00:05:16]

I think at every point of my school life I was compared it with Yemen.

[00:05:21]

Good point.

[00:05:22]

It's not that Yemen was bad at all.

[00:05:24]

No. I know.

[00:05:24]

It's just that studying in the US opened my eyes to so many things. It opened my eyes to a different learning style, a different teaching style. I think it was since fourth grade that I decided I wanted to be a teacher because I was so in love with the way my teachers here in the US were providing me with information and teaching me.

[00:05:50]

That's really nice. I agree with you. College. How was college, you went to Ohio School?

[00:06:03]

During my high school time, I learned about something called the dual enrollment program. It's a program where you can start taking college courses while you're still in high school. It would count for both. It would cover your high school graduation requirements and it would also cover some of your college requirements. I applied for that program twice and I couldn't get in for various reasons. Then another third time senior year, I got in and I started doing my dual enrollment program at Ohio University. That was my freshman year.

[00:06:37]

Nice.

[00:06:39]

2015 is when I started. The end of that year I was told that, I'm no longer a high-school student, so to continue studying, I have to have a student visa, and I had independent visa under my mom. The fastest route for me at that point was to go out of the United States, request a new student visa, come back in and we couldn't go back to Yemen because the situation there was just getting worse. Crazy story actually when in 2008, we got our visas, my dad, my sister and I. The next day the US Embassy was bombed. But it wasn't a guitarist. I was an active board stored by the parts were fighting.

[00:07:28]

In Yemen?

[00:07:29]

In Yemen. In Sana'a. It felt surreal like I was just there yesterday. That's when it felt like things are not going well. To get my student visa I go to Cairo. A city that I'm very familiar with because my grandparents lived there and we go there every summer to visit them and so on. Also where I stayed there for six months after we left that one year back to Yemen.

[00:08:00]

Yemen to Egypt, free entry, you can go back?

[00:08:07]

Used to be.

[00:08:09]

There was a change after all change.

[00:08:12]

There was a change. A change happened a couple of years back because the situation in Yemen got so bad that people were escaping and going to Egypt a lot and they wanted to put some control on that. Now you need a visa to go there. You need to have some residency card to stay. All of these processes suddenly came up. I don't recall that we ever had to apply for visa stage. I think even when we escaped in 2011 when we left Yemen, it was a decision that we made suddenly. Let's just go right now. We went, we didn't have to do any preparation beforehand.

[00:08:49]

Then you got the student visa?

[00:08:52]

No.

[00:08:53]

Oh, no.

[00:08:55]

I go to my appointment and I'm under 18, so my parents has to come with me. We go in and the US officer was misinformed that a PhD takes only three years. When he learned that my mom is in her sixth year or fifth year, I think at that point, he was like, you're just tried to perpetuate your studies and you just want to stay in the US for the longest time possible without creating excuses. You can go back as a dependent, but you can't go back as a student, which to me at that time was like, that doesn't make sense. I'm going to be there anyway. Let me benefit from it. Let me study. But I didn't want to fight it at that point because I wasn't sure if he was aware I had a dependent status and I was afraid that if he knew he could on-the-spot just rejected and I'd be stuck in Egypt and my mom and sister would have to go back to the US.

[00:09:41]

Yes.

[00:09:41]

I just kept quiet at that point. I tried to appeal for that decision, it didn't work. We go back to Ohio University. I speak with my international advisor and they tell me, you can request a change of status from within the US. But that means that this year you don't have your student visa. l tried to fight there to select me. I was learning about sanctuary campuses. I was learning that there are some campus who would not necessarily follow the rigorous law. There's a law I think. There's a law where you're not allowed to let students who don't have a student status study, and so campuses would not follow that.

[00:10:27]

Because you need to have a student visa. If you are international, you need to have a student visa of some sort so you'll be able to be justifying that you are in the country for that purpose.

[00:10:36]

Yeah. Some campuses were becoming sanctuary campuses because I think also Daca recipients at that point in the same position they needed to study, but they didn't have the right papers. What do they do? Do they not just study? Some campuses were opening up. I tried to talk to my advisors there, to the people in the Ohio university to help me out. The solution that we reached is that I could study part-time.

[00:11:05]

Documentation.

[00:11:06]

While my status change was being processed. Trump becomes president. First thing he does is the travel ban. That just messes everything up for me.

[00:11:17]

Wow.

[00:11:18]

People think that the travel ban affected people who were coming from outside the US. But it also affected people who are in the US. It affected me directly because at that point I wanted to have the students status to complete my college degree, but I couldn't because they halted, they stopped all the processes in visas at that time. For any visa actually, for any change of status for people who are not from the US. When I was following up, I remember the USCIS officer just saying, ''Hey, I think you're not going to get your thing, you're not going to get your visa. It's better for you to apply again and see if that's going to go through because everything that's in process right now has been stopped and basically terminated.''

[00:12:05]

Wow.

[00:12:07]

That was a year after. I got that response a year after the initial application time. I speak with my advisor again and she says we can apply again. Let's try this again, but you can't study anymore. You continue your part-time work. I tried to fight for it and the response I got was basically you can go ahead attend classes, but we're going to have to report you if you do so.

[00:12:35]

It would be worst.

[00:12:37]

Yeah, which would be worse. I was like I'll wait. We're not going to be in any courses this semester and l'll just wait. During that time, my mom finished her PhD, my sister also finished her master's at the same time. There was no reason for us to stay in Athens anymore and so we moved to Boston. I started applying to universities here. I applied to Northeastern, I applied to Lesley, and I applied to the Boston University and Lesley had great scholarships, so I accepted their offer and I went to Lesley.

[00:13:08]

Lesley.

[00:13:08]

Yes.

[00:13:09]

Nice.

[00:13:09]

That's [inaudible 00:13:09]

[00:13:10]

Yes.

[00:13:12]

It was great. People there were very nice, very supportive. The international advisor, they're also trying to help me out with my papers and I was able to study part-time again.

[00:13:22]

Wow.

[00:13:23]

Which was good. But after some time, the travel ban I think it was turned down by Congress, I believe. Then it was reinforced again. There goes my paper again. [LAUGHTER]

[00:13:38]

Oh my God, Reem.

[00:13:39]

It's rejected again for the third time this time.

[00:13:44]

At this time, you're thinking why my mom and my sister can start and finish their course and I can't.

[00:13:49]

I think if it wasn't for the travel ban, things would have not been so complicated honestly. I think this is directly an effect of that.

[00:13:55]

Wow. How many people probably was in the same situation?

[00:13:59]

Yeah. People were saying Reem speak up at that time. You should speak up because people are not aware that this is happening and I don't know why, but I didn't speak up at the time.

[00:14:07]

How many wouldn't? Because you're facing that and how many things we were trying and nothing was coming out as positive? I think undermine your motivation even. I think I'm just want to see where it goes because you are also dealing with your own emotions and frustrations and everything that's going through at that time. I can see both sides.

[00:14:34]

What's funny also is I think during my high school years when I was applying for the dual enrollment program, I was thinking if I apply three years in advance, I'm still in my sophomore year in high school, so I could start taking college courses then that would leave me with just one year after high school to complete in college. Then I am done with my mom and my sister. We're all done so we can go back home. The officer really misunderstood that we're trying to stay here unnecessarily when what we're trying to do is gain our education then go back because it was starting to become, I think, like a plateau in terms of the events not being too scary and not really going better, it was just staying same.

[00:15:16]

Staying in the same situation.

[00:15:19]

The US officer in the embassy did not actually ask me any questions. I think he only asked me one question is, where did I apply? I think I said Ohio university. He looked at the paper and then all the questions were directed to my mom and he just paused at the three-year understanding that he had and it ended very quickly.

[00:15:38]

Wow.

[00:15:39]

It's crazy because such a decision that he made affected me.

[00:15:44]

Yes.

[00:15:45]

So much. It really turned the path that I was going.

[00:15:52]

That can change someone's life. You have that power there and you are using that for what benefit? You get your visa? You didn't?

[00:16:02]

I didn't.

[00:16:02]

So, how are you feeling?

[00:16:03]

Third time it's rejected. They sent me a paper of rejection. You can appeal. l'm like, I'm not going to even appeal this anymore. I won't even try. It is what it is I give up at this point. I didn't know what I would do because I did feel very frustrated and depressed at that time because everything that I could do, I felt like I did. Trying again didn't seem like it was going to change the results. I think the more rejections you get on your record as a non-immigrant, the less likely that you would get an acceptance afterwards. I thought there's no point in trying anymore. My aunt also, by the way, went to Harvard Kennedy School, the MBA program. My mom also when we came to Boston, was going there. The rejection came right around graduation time. When students here graduate, the Harvard Arab Association holds a special Arab graduation for them. The person that was sitting next to my mom was a Yemeni student. She was from the extension school.

[00:17:06]

Wow.

[00:17:08]

My mom learns about it and they meet and great and it's all nice and beautiful. Then when I received my rejection letter, my mom says, I learned that Harvard has an online school. I'm like, cool. You could go there. You could study, you could look it up, look at their programs, see how it goes, see if you like something there that you'd like to study, check it out. I think Harvard.

[00:17:33]

Studying at Harvard.

[00:17:34]

My Lord.

[00:17:36]

I think my immediate reaction was no. [LAUGHTER].

[00:17:38]

[LAUGHTER]

[00:17:38]

No thank you. I didn't feel prepared. I didn't feel like this was something that was for me. Given my beautiful results from the standardized testing, I didn't feel like I was prepared for it. But it then I started learning about Harvard Extension School. I liked the idea of earning your way, taking courses, seeing if you can manage the workload, seeing if you're up for the challenge and I tried it. The first three courses I took, there's a certain GPA that you need to meet in order to get admission. I did those three courses and I didn't meet the GPA.

[00:18:20]

Wow.

[00:18:21]

Initially it was another frustration right from the start. [LAUGHTER] I think it was the combination of courses that I took was not well-balanced. I was like, this is just going to be like any other school and we just take three courses and start and they were heavy marching.

[00:18:39]

Academically there. A lot of reading.

[00:18:43]

I couldn't afford the time for all of them. I tried again, take more courses, tried to fix that mistake, and on the second time, I get it. I get my admission to Harvard Extension School and I started my journey here.

[00:18:59]

Wow. You've finished your college degree through the Harvard Extension School?

[00:19:06]

Yes.

[00:19:10]

After all you have been through, and even doubting yourself in Harvard. It's interesting, redeem my experience in the DOS and trying to deal with the students. We're talking about US citizens that didn't go through any of the barriers that you faced in your life. But coming here, the same impression that you had like, oh, Harvard and I don't even bother because it's a different size. They also feel the brand is so heavy that that feeling, feeling like, why am I here? One thing that I always try to tell the students that we had a chance to talk, that they feel like they don't belong and I always try to tell them find a way to belong because you are here. If you are here, if the admissions office evaluated everything and allowed you to be here, that is a huge percentage of the certainty that we have all the qualifications to be here. Just find a way to belong because that's what it would take for you to finish what you need to think.

[00:20:21]

That's a great advice.

[00:20:22]

Three years go so fast. But I say that because I also have the same feeling. The imposter syndrome kicks in really strong. For us, we come from a different country, you come from a different upbringing, whatever cultural thing that you bring with us in our accent as well always sounds like a barrier, they have to be fighting against. Then when you have a new opportunities that you have a better position or a better job, or you have a different opportunity side of, you still question yourself, is it true or they're doing this because of whatever? There is always that question that you will have to be fighting. Why other people maybe don't need to worry about that as much. This is wonderful. Then you graduated from Extension School and, how did you get to ITS? How long it took it? When you graduated you started in which year.

[00:21:26]

I attended the May '22, graduation but I actually finished my studies in December of 2021. As soon as I finished my studies, as soon as I finished my classes and then received my final grades I started applying for jobs. There was a software developer position at the ITS and I applied. I was at that time also evaluating offers. I was evaluating an offer from Canada actually, and it sounded like maybe I should move to get a more stable status, to get a more stable non-immigrant status in another country because things don't seem to get worked out for me here in the US. I'm on a temporary protective status right now. It's something that gets renewed every two years. They re-evaluate the situation in Yemen there, like, you have many people in the US deserve to be protected for further time or can they go back to their countries? There's always that period of nervousness. Are they going to end our status here? Because if they do, we have to leave in three months.

[00:22:28]

And go back?

[00:22:29]

They give us a three month period and then you have to go back. We've seen that happen to other countries across the years. I think Nepal is one of the countries where they just ended it. They said you have to go back and it's scary.

[00:22:43]

It is.

[00:22:43]

It's scary because we we know that we're not immigrants here. My family, we know we're not staying here forever. But it's also like not having control over when you go back and knowing that suddenly you can receive it for this as it's time for you to go back, it's very scary.

[00:23:00]

With everything that you have conquered here already. At same time, depends on how the situation is there as well. You are going to be sent if it may never happen. If you need to go back, what country are going to face. Well, what situation you are going to be living in when you are already have your lives established here and everything that you have aiming for.

[00:23:27]

I think this is an interesting point, that sense of belonging. For me, I have a philosophy about this, that the sense of belonging, something that you built as a child, wherever you were born, wherever you were. That's what you know as normal, that's what you know as home, that's what you know as your first interaction with the world, I guess you're right. I don t think somebody can belong to two different places. I think you can only belong to one.

[00:23:59]

What happens is a very interesting concept, but I have to go back and ask you the place that you knew, the place where you live, the place that you grew up, you start changing a lot. That's not the same place anymore. Belonging is a space in time now, because, let's suppose that you would go back to the place that we belong, and that goes to a very deep psychological trying to figure out, for example, we're thinking about Freud in the inner child and everything else.

[00:24:40]

The place where that child was happy, changed in many different ways. If you go back now, in a different age, we will find that same place or is just a wishing thought?

[00:24:55]

I don't think so. I think at this point if I go back, I would be foreign to everyone there and things there would be foreign to me as well. It's not the same place anymore. It's not the same type and the expectations would be different. I would expect to go back and hope to go back to find it the same, but I know for sure that it's not going to be the same and I think that's normal. You'd need to adapt.

[00:25:19]

Would need to adapt.

[00:25:19]

You need to readapt to everything.

[00:25:22]

But even that idea of readapting to something means you're not going back to exactly where you felt you belonged. I think this is a trade-off that we immigrants and non-immigrants pay when you leave our home countries because you can't really belong to the place that you're going to. You'll always feel foreign, you always feel like you are different. Maybe some people would think otherwise. You would get to a point where you would feel like you're part of that community. I think the community also always helps, of course. But I think the first place that you lived and a place that you initially called home, that's the place where you would always feel like you own that place.

[00:26:03]

I get you. I know what it mean. One thing that I'm missing. Why software developing course? What attracted to this? If you can tell me, you said that your mom, her PhD was in?

[00:26:21]

Instructional design.

[00:26:22]

Instructional design. Your sister?

[00:26:26]

Public administration.

[00:26:27]

Public administration. What attracted doing software developing or being a developer?

[00:26:36]

I think I mentioned this earlier that ever since I came to the US, I really wanted an inside different teaching style. I said I want to be a teacher. Up until high school, I was so determined, I want to be a teacher and in high school years, people are freaking out, what should I do in college? What should I study? I didn't go through that period because I knew exactly that I want it to be a teacher. Then I applied to universities and I started getting pamphlets of the majors that they have and I see all of these different things and I'm like, oh my God. [LAUGHTER] As a kid I was always asked. "Do you want to be a doctor or a teacher? " I always chose teacher because I didn't like doctors. But I didn't know there were other options. [LAUGHTER] I really didn't do any research. When I received the list of majors that are in Ohio University, I was reading through each one else like that is so cool. You could study this. You could do this. I think I've also went through different major choices. I tried communications and I tried sociology and I tried psychology. What took me to computer science was not feeling satisfied in any of these previous majors, to be honest and my sister saying, hey Reem, you should try out computer science. It seems like it's the big thing, it's evolving, people are talking about it. You might like to be a programmer and I said to my mom, my initial reaction is, no. [LAUGHTER] I don't want to spend my entire day in front of your computer coding. I don't think I want to do that. [LAUGHTER] Then it really begins with CS50. I started taking Harvard's intensive introduction to computer science. The famous CS50 course, and I love it. I liked it so much. It was enjoyable. I wasn't ready enough to make the decision that okay, CS is my major. I took a few more courses. I took some AI courses. I took some data science courses. I did not declare my major as computer science until my senior year. [LAUGHTER].

[00:28:36]

My God.

[00:28:37]

Because I think I wasn't seeing anybody around me who was a computer scientist. [OVERLAPPING]

[00:28:43]

You wouldn't find anybody. [LAUGHTER]

[00:28:45]

I'm not even going to say it nicely around me, meaning in the Arab community or even in Yemen community. I didn't know anyone. Maybe they were there, but I didn't know anyone.

[00:28:54]

Wow.

[00:28:56]

Sometimes you feel inspired by people around you in what you do. [OVERLAPPING]

[00:28:59]

Yes.

[00:29:00]

When I was looking at the people around me, I was being pulled to different interests. But computer science seems like a logical, nice option. Why not? Even when I had actually completed a lot of the coursework for that degree, I was still very hesitant to declare it until senior year and my academic advisor was like Reem, it's time. [LAUGHTER] You have to.

[00:29:25]

I think you should put a name on tnis. [LAUGHTER] Oh, my God. Then you finished?

[00:29:32]

Then I finished.

[00:29:33]

How long it took until you got a job here?

[00:29:38]

When I applied in December after finishing my studies, I think I started working in March. Three months.

[00:29:45]

Really.

[00:29:46]

Between the beginning of my job search and when I actually received my.

[00:29:50]

It wasn't easy adaptation to the, ITS group was getting to know people. How is the relationship there? Is a good environment?

[00:30:01]

It is an excellent environment.

[00:30:02]

Is it?

[00:30:03]

I think like you said, being at Harvard, the name is heavy. The reputation that Harvard comes with this heavy. But also what would I do with the name if the pupil and the environment wasn't good? What would I do if my manager, my teammates, the people that am working with, the clients, if it was hard for me to deal? When work in this environment, it wouldn't be the greatest thing to just say, Oh, I'm from Harvard. I think everybody that I met at ITS since Day 1, just made me even more happier about being here.

[00:30:37]

That's wonderful.

[00:30:38]

It made me more excited. Made me more grateful for being part of this community and funny enough when I was going to Leslie, I would walk Mount Auburn Street from the beginning from Harvard Square station all the way to Leslie. I would pass by WCC every single day.

[00:30:55]

Wow.

[00:30:56]

I remember looking at this building and saying it must be really cool to be inside it. Must be really cool to work in this community. To me, it feels like this ending from a movie. [OVERLAPPING]

[00:31:06]

Isn't that interesting? [LAUGHTER]

[00:31:08]

Yeah.

[00:31:08]

Like it is almost making whatever is the energy of default processing didn't realize becoming real. Like passing by, imagine, how would it be to work in a place like this or and then end up working here and with a big department and doing something that was I think, oh, software developer. I loved the name. I think it's a phenomenal job. [LAUGHTER] It's so far from whatever I would ever think about trying because I don't understand. Is a lot of technology and everything else that were involved. Now, you are also helping with the Accommodate process for accessibility in HR, which is a very cool experience and to watch everything. I think interesting when we have those tasks up in terms of values for any story that you have to have to prepare and develop there. Laurie, Sasha, Carolyn and now, Martha, we are always,, Oh, what number you give to that? Honest to God, I always wait until someone from ITS says something. [LAUGHTER] This would be easy. This would be difficult. Now, this is a little bit. Then I can have a sense of what number more or less that would be, otherwise, I'm completely lost. Then I see you, Lily, Panna and what's the name of the other person? I don't like her much.

[00:32:45]

Lynn.

[00:32:46]

Lynn. [LAUGHTER] I don't get along with her much. [LAUGHTER] Talking about the technicalities of a certain thing and I've just watching us. Oh my, what language. There is a language inside of another language and also work with Lynn. That's impossible. [LAUGHTER] I have to give you praise the youth that have to deal with Lynn all the time. [LAUGHTER] Because such a difficult person to work with every day. But now, I think is a great group.

[00:33:12]

There are a great group.

[00:33:15]

Someone told in one of our podcasts, I think was Sherif or somebody else. That feels like this is the heart. I was asking in terms of if law school was human body, what part would be ITS? I think they said that would be the heart because it is really where everything poses and distributed.

[00:33:37]

It's for operation. [OVERLAPPING] ITS is everything else.

[00:33:40]

And I thought, well, that's a good concept. I don't know what HR would be, but it is interesting.

[00:33:46]

[inaudible 00:33:46].

[00:33:46]

I'm glad. [LAUGHTER]

[00:33:51]

Outside work, what is fun? What is things that we enjoy other than software developer situation, what are things that you enjoy that's easy?

[00:34:04]

I enjoy a painting.

[00:34:06]

You do?

[00:34:06]

Yeah, I like to paint.

[00:34:08]

You think you are good at it?

[00:34:10]

No.

[00:34:11]

No?

[00:34:11]

I just enjoy it. I think we've all seen art that doesn't make sense to us, but it would be very valuable. [LAUGHTER]

[00:34:18]

Hey, you never know.

[00:34:19]

You never know.

[00:34:20]

But because you say something, I enjoy painting but I don't pursue, I think I should do more because I think it's such a nice things. It's therapeutic in a way and there is something that we express there. I like crafts in general. Do you know anything that we worked with our hands or crocheting, cook, carving wherever it is. You have many paints that you already have or you do once in a while or [OVERLAPPING]?

[00:34:49]

Once in a while. I wish I paint as much as they say that I like to paint [LAUGHTER]. I don't paint that often though. I did do a painting in last week and that's why it's fresh in my mind. I like to paint. I enjoyed it a lot. Like I said, it's therapeutical, so it's something that you just take time off and stop thinking about anything. You're drawing something from your mind or you were having your reference image, so you don't really think of anything else except to this painting to the image that you have in your mind.

[00:35:19]

Do you do follow for example, a shape or drawing landscape or abstract, What do you enjoy more?

[00:35:29]

Often landscapes.

[00:35:30]

Landscapes?

[00:35:31]

Yeah. I like to take reference photos from anything that I see. Sometimes I would see like an image while scrolling through Instagram like this would be a great thing to draw, this would be good to paint.

[00:35:42]

Cool.

[00:35:43]

I would just screenshot.

[00:35:44]

In your mind, what are colors that attract you more? You feel like is a colorful landscape or a more. I'm just going through the question of are you attracted to the background in Yemen, the pastel or the beige colors or you are heist die with greens and more vibrant colors?

[00:36:07]

Thinking of the things I have, I would say pastels, I'd say things that are less colorful maybe.

[00:36:15]

Do you think that has a call for the background?

[00:36:19]

Probably.

[00:36:20]

Interesting.

[00:36:21]

Probably. I never thought about this. This is awesome.

[00:36:24]

Because I feel like it depends on what part of you are screaming there. I think painting has a feeling like music has as well. It depends on what. I feel like who is painting is Reem here leaving and working at HR or is the child in Yemen and the student are going through neighborhoods. I think that's a very interesting part because a lot of the things that I sometimes like goes from memories of childhood and places that I lived in Brazil. That's also very green, very nature in style. Your mom, your sister, your family all happy here?

[00:37:05]

Yeah. My dad is also with us. I realized I didn't mention him a lot. I think my dad had the greatest responsibility of making sure we all have our education, affording for us a good lifestyle while also helping us afford good education in the US. He had the hardest part I think.

[00:37:25]

It is. Because it is culturally and beautiful respect to invest in his family. Although I would say that's not fair because it's three against one.

[00:37:38]

[LAUGHTER] Yes.

[00:37:40]

What choice he has? They're telling, let's go drive, let's go.

[00:37:46]

I think I'm very lucky that my dad also valued our education and that's why he was always supportive.

[00:37:51]

That's my point yes.

[00:37:54]

It's very available to see him support my mother financially, but also support her to continue her education always and support my sister and support me. Both the families from my mother's side and my dad's side, valued education, I think it painted a great expectation for me as a daughter of this family. Expectation for where I would go, how far I would go in terms of education that I would one day become financially also independent.

[00:38:22]

Yes.

[00:38:24]

It's a great environment for me. Also growing up, I think I remember seeing my aunt, my dad's sister's name on our Arabic books. She was one of the content creators for the book. So every time I would open up say hey, that's my aunt. [LAUGHTER] As a kid it was something that always points out for my classmates.

[00:38:42]

It is a good reference to think about.

[00:38:44]

It's a great.

[00:38:45]

One thing that I didn't ask, now I have to ask before we wrap up our conversation. You still have a good relationship with your relatives in Yemen? If they are or any other part that they might be living. Do you still have that connection, contact and chatting and cousins from childhood and everything?

[00:39:03]

Relatively, Yes. I think it's become harder over the years. We didn't instantly have that connection, I think is just social media, for example, we didn't talk in recent years and a lot of my family members in Yemen did not. We can communicate with them as often, so I'd lost contact with them for a long while until communication channels became more open, communication channels became more available between both parts. We do communicate every once in a while and I think unfortunately, it's taken away from how close we could have been. Those years of not being as connective took away from how close we could have been.

[00:39:49]

But I think we also changes Reem. I'm going to tell an example from our own culture here. All my relatives, they are still there. But it is something magical about your childhood that you experience and you leave and it stays there. Because life change and we grew older and everybody gets their own families and go to live their own lives in different places. No matter how much you try to reconnect again, other than your closed ones like my brothers and sister and my nephews that I grew up close to them. Everybody else, there is this huge distance, like what happened? Life happens, yes. But why we're missing that part. I feel like sometimes you only visit them back in your memory. That's really great time that you had. Then after that, everything changed. Do you have a notion that you are going to be an amazing influence for a lot of girls out there. Being a software developer in a world that's mainly I think dominated by men in general because of access and everything else. Your dared to go there, you are say, hey, I don't care, this is a place too, I want you to have a piece of this cake here. It is a huge achievement.

[00:41:15]

I hope to be, I aspire to be. Like I said, I couldn't go to computer science and pick it very easily because I didn't know anybody around me. Not a man, not a woman, and definitely not a HRV. I think it would be very valuable for me to be that person. It would mean a lot to me that someone looks up to me and says, this is a person I look up to. This is a person that I think I want to take the same path, I want to try the same journey. I hope to be a source of inspiration for other women.

[00:41:48]

I think you are. Thank you very much for coming. I'm so happy really that you came and we talked. I really appreciate that you participate in this project. That I really want people to get to know everyone and have a chance and I think your story is phenomenal for that.

[00:42:08]

Thank you so much for giving me this opportunity.

[00:42:10]

It's my pleasure and really it's me who have to thank you very much. For everybody out there, I'll see you around until next time, bye bye. [MUSIC]