[00:00:03]

You are listening to Tell Me Your Story where we connect to HLS staff on a personal level. Hello everyone. This is Edgar Kley Filho from HLS Human Resources Department. My pronouns are he, him, his. Today we're talking to Sama ElBannan from Defenders. Will you tell us about her life, how long has she is in this position at HLS, and the work she does? Thank you for joining us Sama, and please tell me your story.

[00:00:42]

Well, thank you for having me and giving me such a wonderful opportunity to share my story with the rest of our beautiful community. Again, my name is Sama ElBannan. I work at Harvard Defenders. I'm originally from Egypt, I grew up in Egypt, went to high school in Egypt and then I left I went to the United Kingdom. I got my Bachelor in international relations from Kyiv University, then left to beautiful England, moved to Kentucky.

[00:01:19]

Kentucky.

[00:01:19]

Yeah, it was a big change and we lived in a dry county. I got my first Master's there. Later on I moved to Boston. I would say Boston is really home, I spent a good portion of my life in Boston and I got my second Master's at the Extension school.

[00:01:41]

Wow.

[00:01:41]

I'm very grateful for that. I have one-and-a-half siblings of each. I have a brother-and a-half and a sister-and-a-half.

[00:01:53]

That's interesting. [LAUGHTER] I want to know more about how do you have a sibling-and-a-half and a brother-and-a-half?

[00:02:01]

I have two full brother and sister from both of my parents and the halves are from my dad only. [LAUGHTER] They are actually very interesting because they are half Asian, they are half Filipino, so they are Egyptian Filipino and so it's a very nice mix.

[00:02:24]

Yes. I want to go back and start over again because you gave us a timeline and then my mind goes on and on. Now I need to rewind.

[00:02:37]

Sure.

[00:02:38]

We start from Egypt. You were born there. Tell us a little bit about your childhood there, which town you lived when you were in Egypt.

[00:02:48]

I'm from Cairo.

[00:02:49]

Cairo?

[00:02:50]

I'm from a district called Heliopolis. It's quite a nice place. What I remember from my childhood, I switched schools quite often. I went from French to English to English again. Spent some good years in a French Catholic school learning English, so it's a little bit confusing. [LAUGHTER] I am not actually Christian at all, but we still went to a Catholic school because it's a very good school.

[00:03:24]

The school system was good?

[00:03:26]

Yes, absolutely. I still have lots of friends from school or the five different schools that I went to. What I remember about my childhood that I spent a lot of time outdoors. I taught myself how to bike. I wasn't a really trouble causing kid or anything, but I was very independent. I did so much for myself by myself.

[00:03:53]

Was there a good group of kids around like a mini family with many kids?

[00:03:59]

Our house was always full, and we always have people. We always had cousins and cousins and cousins and so they would come and spend the whole summer with us, like two, three months and we get up in the morning and we open the door and run and go. When I say it was full, I'm talking about we were sometimes would be seven, eight cousins plus me and my sister. My brother was much younger. It's really a lot of different age groups while we're all cousins and we had so much fun. That's what I remember mainly and I wish that kids here had more of this.

[00:04:47]

Exactly.

[00:04:48]

I feel like I try to do more of that for my son instead of watching TV and playing games. I don't really want him to compete so much because what you learn from life skills and going out and playing with flowers and butterflies and all this stuff is way more important than taking him to an after-school academic program.

[00:05:17]

The need to have those A's and A+ and everything else that's sometimes is so in one direction I would say, for these kids to be competing at school and sometimes lacks the opportunity to see the outdoors, to enjoy. We have some similarities in our child childhood because I also had that chance. My relatives, aunts and uncles would come usually because of a celebratory occasions. Brazil being a big Catholic country, they would come for Easter, for Christmas, and New Years. Those were the big days that they would come in big number like you just described, everybody, they know sometimes mom because she's the older of all her siblings, so they would all come into mom's house and then at where we have all the foam mattresses all over the living room. Everybody's sleeping together. All the beds were taken already. That's what also I remember having my cousins and friends and neighborhoods and having a lot of fun going out to play, which nowadays you see much less compared with the childhood that we had and you are describing as well.

[00:06:37]

Yes. A very pro collective societies, not individualistic societies, because I think a big contribution to the mental health crisis we're in is there is no community support, there isn't enough sense of belonging. That's why whenever I try to do something here as well, my mind really goes for like, I want to build the community, I want to go to work and know that this is my family and I want other people to feel this way. Because the importance of it for me is much more than that's hangout. It actually contribute so much to your mental health, emotional health, and you learn from people.

[00:07:25]

It's the human connection that's important in that part.

[00:07:29]

I think it is the most important thing.

[00:07:31]

You don't need to have a special occasion for that, you can create.

[00:07:35]

Every day is an occasion.

[00:07:36]

Exactly. You can have lunch or not even lunch, you can have a coffee or you can just meet somewhere and just chat with a really nice group of folks just chatting about whatever it is that you come up with.

[00:07:49]

This is one of the good things about the Egyptian community and communities that are similar in culture. Because you don't need to pay a therapist to talk to, everyone is your therapist. You can call anyone.

[00:08:06]

There you open about everything.

[00:08:09]

You can go buy cheese from stores and just chit-chat with the guy about your life [LAUGHTER] problem.

[00:08:15]

Exactly. That's true. Then you go you said that in part of your early years in Catholic schools, that goes all the way through high school or there was a difference?

[00:08:27]

I went to a different high school. I went from all girls Catholic schools to a mixed boys and girls so I was very shy. I didn't know what to do. [LAUGHTER] I had boys in the class. We were 13 boys and three girls, including me. [LAUGHTER] I was a very good students not academically, I was okay academically, I was never the best or anything, but I was a little on the shy side, especially the first year. I see them and that's cool. Meet some friends that I'm still in touch with. Then moved to the UK.

[00:09:15]

To compare the behavior and socialization in a way of high-school kids were okay for you because you said you did well with academics and you were a little bit shy. But in general with overall, there was easy few years in high school until you left or there was drama like you hear about? You hear bullying or people getting trouble, causing trouble? How was it?

[00:09:51]

I didn't really hear the word bully until I moved here.

[00:10:02]

One of the things is we all came from the same socioeconomic class and people like parents knew each other. It was like a bigger family. Were people sarcastic? The crazy things.

[00:10:19]

Joking around.

[00:10:20]

Yes, it's part of the culture who were very big on sarcasm, dark jokes, and stuff like that. I don't know how it is now, but growing up, no, we do not have this as a problem.

[00:10:36]

I did not have either. I always ask you this question, just to have a different perspective from people from different parts of the country or the ones who came from different countries. Of course, we are talking about generation gaps as well different aspects of it. But yes, the jokes, the sarcasm, but never to the point of creating animosity that people didn't know you would completely eliminate someone, what they call today, nowadays, canceling someone in social media would be something that aspect. There were jokes that would go away and suddenly we were all involved in different projects inside of the school and was fine. Then you finish your high school and go to England?

[00:11:22]

Yes.

[00:11:23]

To have your college.

[00:11:24]

Yes, my bachelor's degree.

[00:11:27]

What did you choose?

[00:11:28]

I picked international relations.

[00:11:31]

International relations.

[00:11:31]

I wanted to do international law at some point. But my mom said, what are you going to do with that? Now I know the answer. I'm Middle Eastern. I would have studied international law in the UK and I would have been somehow Clooney just like Amal Clooney, [LAUGHTER] she's Middle Eastern and studied international law [LAUGHTER] in England. I missed my opportunity.

[00:11:58]

Was a big change having childhood and high school in Egypt, like you said families knew each other, was an easy process all the way up to finishing high school. When you get to England and go to college, was it a cultural shock or not? Was it easy to transition? How did you do?

[00:12:18]

It was not an easy transition. I did learn English in school. But again, I wasn't fluent. I remember when I landed at Heathrow, I come out of the airport, I look at the sky and say, why is the sky so low? Because of all the fog and the weather. Big hit for me was the weather in England, very dark and gray. That was not the best for me. I end up surrounding myself with a bunch of wonderful people that I'm still in touch with and actually, I do go to Europe and we do family gatherings until now. But for some reason, I emerged within the Greek community and Greeks are very similar to Egyptians.

[00:13:16]

Very similar to Brazilians too. Interesting.

[00:13:20]

The food, the dancing. I became one of them for my 3, 4 years in college. My last year there I was the international students president and the Greek community was a big part of why I succeeded because they always elected Greeks in that position so they can have more votes.

[00:13:44]

Nice. Then you have in that way, representation of some sort because you found a connection with the Greek culture.

[00:13:53]

Yes. Absolutely. I have some Greek in me, but I'd still say I'm 100% Egyptian. [LAUGHTER] But I felt a lot of comfort and I think because of all the joy and again, the Greek culture is also very collective and that's what made it easier for me in England because it was a big shock. I would say culture shock.

[00:14:24]

One thing interesting when I was here already when that movie came out, My Big Fat Greek Wedding.

[00:14:30]

Oh my gosh. [LAUGHTER]

[00:14:33]

I couldn't ever say, wow, this is like a the... Was all about Greek families. But I felt like are they inspiring a Brazilian friend that I know.

[00:14:42]

You don't eat lamb. [LAUGHTER] That happened to me in Greece because I actually don't eat lamb. [LAUGHTER]

[00:14:49]

I don't either. It's interesting how much they know the similarities are there. When I say being open, just say whatever you want, and is not with the intention to offend anybody, but it's just the culture.

[00:15:04]

Yes.

[00:15:04]

You're going to say it's like, you don't eat lamb. What's wrong with you? [LAUGHTER] Already all implicit in that sentence. I was so happy I watched the entire thing was laughing about the little habits, about the spray things that they believe that's a good thing.

[00:15:22]

Yes. Everything is Greek. Everything is Egyptian. [LAUGHTER]

[00:15:26]

That was amazing. Then I totally get when you say that, although you were in England and cultural shock was there when you find a community that is so similar to yours, it feels more like a relief.

[00:15:40]

Yes.

[00:15:40]

At least I have that to give me support.

[00:15:42]

That explains why you don't have the British accent. [LAUGHTER]

[00:15:47]

What year was that and when did you move to US?

[00:15:51]

That was in the late '90s. I moved here exactly 23 years ago.

[00:15:58]

Your family went straight to Kentucky?

[00:16:01]

My family was already here, so I was the last to join. I did like the US, but I always preferred the European lifestyle and I really wanted to stay there. But then it just worked out that I was destined to be here.

[00:16:25]

Better to come in this way here.

[00:16:26]

Yes. It was good with my family. [OVERLAPPING] Your family was living in a small town, in Kentucky when you first met them or not?

[00:16:35]

Yes.

[00:16:35]

How was leaving London with that environment and then going to a small town? Even Cairo.

[00:16:43]

I'm from a big city. It's a little complicated when it comes to living in Kentucky because I did not like it for sure. It was a big culture shock. Well, first of all, my dressing style was really a problem because I was used to wearing certain things and heels and so on. Then my sister said, what are you doing? I'm like, I'm going up to class. [LAUGHTER]

[00:17:12]

You don't like lamb.

[00:17:13]

She was like, well, change in shorts and flip-flops. [LAUGHTER] You're not going like this to school. It was a big shock.

[00:17:28]

You mentioned before that you were already getting yourself into the first mater's degree.

[00:17:32]

Yes.

[00:17:34]

Wow.

[00:17:34]

But what I would say about Kentucky, that I'm grateful for the experience, and people there were very kind. Usually when people immigrate they go to bigger cities and I feel that I was lucky to get a different experience.

[00:17:55]

Going through a smaller one.

[00:17:56]

Smaller one, and see different American lifestyle. I say I'm torn about Kentucky because I didn't like it because it wasn't my style. But I liked the people there and actually, my mom passed away there.

[00:18:20]

I'm sorry.

[00:18:21]

It was a hit and run by a drunk driver and the community there was extremely supportive.

[00:18:33]

That's amazing.

[00:18:35]

We were not in Kentucky at the time. My mom was still there and what they did for us to help us go through the whole situation was really impressive.

[00:18:48]

The whole town was our family when this happened.

[00:18:53]

Well around you and surprising you in that moment. Which is very important.

[00:19:00]

This is one of the things that, I will never forget how kind and supportive the people were. Yes, when I first moved there, as a person of color or a different religion or coming from the Middle East people, were not very comfortable at the beginning. But once the know you, they are the most loyal.

[00:19:22]

Again, once the connection is made and have a chance to learn about the other person is not as strange as you think they were.

[00:19:30]

No, it's not transactional anymore. Very kind people.

[00:19:35]

That's what the part of inclusion that you always tried to talk and belonging. If you don't have the opportunity to exchange experience with the people who are different from us. You are so used with the group that you belong to, what chance that you have to get rich in terms of a cultural aspect. That's a perfect example of that in terms of you coming from a different country, being from a different culture and having a sad experience related to your mom passing. Then the community to come together to say, hey, we're here for you.

[00:20:14]

My mom was a very visionary woman, very smart. She was a lawyer. She was an entrepreneur. We had a theater back home in Egypt, she managed it.

[00:20:29]

Wow.

[00:20:30]

With all that, you think should be a tough career woman? Oh no. She was good at work. She was also very soft. When she was in Kentucky, she would cook for people. She was getting her masters. She was 63 and she decided to go back to school. She is an inspiration for me. Because at that age you think, what am I going to do? She was, yeah, let me teach English as a second language. I'm going to go get a masters. [NOISE] She would go to the lab, if she found one of the students should worry if they are hungry and she would feed them. She was a very kind woman. Definitely I feel very blessed that God gave me a woman like my mom.

[00:21:25]

That's wonderful. Sounds like a wonderful person. You have a good chance to spend time with the her and enjoy that friendship, that motherhood, that for you.

[00:21:39]

I wish she stayed longer. Because I was relatively young, may be 25 when she passed on.

[00:21:48]

Then from Kentucky, you stay there for a few years?

[00:21:52]

Not long, just a couple of years and then I moved to Boston.

[00:21:56]

Boston. Why Boston?

[00:21:59]

[LAUGHTER]. Apart from my head, I had high-school friend here. My sister also moved to Boston. But I think what I fell in love. It's funny I like the red bricks, it reminded me of England [LAUGHTER]. I didn't travel very much back then in the United States. I only did the Midwest and may be California once. [NOISE] Then Boston, I'm no, definitely want to move to Boston. I do love Boston. I think Boston is a very unique city. You can walk to places.

[00:22:45]

I tell everybody I have been many places in US. If we talk about moving somewhere, there is never a conversation or a warmer place here where?

[00:22:54]

Now Portugal [LAUGHTER].

[00:22:56]

Yeah. But no. There is something that holds me back here. I think might be the same situation with you is just. The cold and everything you are complain about. Snowy storms and is snowing there. I don't care.

[00:23:12]

It's warmer than it used to be [LAUGHTER].

[00:23:15]

Are we lying to each other. This is our reason, oh, now is much warmer, you should stay longer now. That's great. Then you move to Boston and you go for another master's degree? No. The master's degree I got back in 2011. That was 11 years later, yeah.

[00:23:33]

What did you do before you would join Harvard? You had other different jobs before.

[00:23:38]

I was in hotels. I worked for Marriott. Marriott was actually one of the best companies I worked for in terms of training. They gave me the best training. Invested a lot in me. I think pretty much everything I learned from work ethics to how to be effective time, management, it's because of Marriott.

[00:24:03]

What kind of a training was? There would be someone coming to teach in a company where you work. Or you wouldn't be sent somewhere to learn?

[00:24:12]

Both. I had five promotions in eight years where I was with them. It all depends on the position. There were two positions where I was a manager and they sent me a week long training. May be in DC or somewhere. You meet with other people from all over the United States. There was frequent trainings, where they brought people who are experts in the field to teach us about things. Great company. I don't know how it is now. But they didn't give us a lot of benefits. I had only 10 days of PTO. If I was sick, I had to go to work because they wanted to keep my vacation, it was very small. Then I worked for Height, the Height in Cambridge. Briefly for the one at the airport I did the Hilton in Washington DC, the one where Reagan almost got assassinated. I did a lot of events. I did something for Nancy Pelosi, I did Colin Powell, people like that. I have to say this on my cover letter, I did write Nancy Pepsi [LAUGHTER]. But that was a mistake.

[00:25:43]

[LAUGHTER]. Nancy Pepsi.

[00:25:47]

Yeah. Once I had my son, I was, I can not do hotels anymore. I loved the challenge. Too much time. I wanted to get in higher education for very long time. Because I really loved the mission of higher education. But got tons of interviews, but was never hired. Continued my career in hotels. I remember 3:00 A.M. I woke up and holding my phone and my son's crying and I'm trying to soothe him. I found a job at the medical school I applied for it. I got an interview. Then I got hired.

[00:26:35]

Oh, wow. medical school.

[00:26:37]

Yes. That was a beautiful job. I loved that job very much. It was basically continuing education but for international doctors. We got to travel a lot. I went to Malaysia, China, Dubai.

[00:26:57]

That was part of your job?

[00:26:59]

Yes. Interact with a lot of people from different places. We had workshops in Japan, India. It was really nice. Because I finally understood why sometimes you don't get what you want in life right away, it's because you're being prepared for it to succeed.

[00:27:17]

Yeah. I agree.

[00:27:20]

Fifteen years in hotels made me shine in their job. Because I was able to do it and do it well. Because I learned in hotels. I always say may be I wanted to work for Harvard. I was applying for 12 years and after 12 years I got a job. But I was being prepared for it. That makes me always think of that one of the biggest things that makes people's life easier is to accept and be patient. Things will come to you.

[00:27:58]

Invest in your career. Like you said, you worked in a different place or got your training. You invest in that career as well. That gave you support and structure that when another opportunity came, was like I said, perfection. You fit really well. Be patient.

[00:28:19]

I got my masters. I got the certificates in event planning. I was always working on advancing my career. That's one of the things my mom told me. If you get your bachelor degree and stop, you will not remember anything. It's you never learned anything. You need to continue, get certification, read books, do things.

[00:28:42]

Yeah, that's a great advice and it's very true that as well. What year you started to medical school?

[00:28:51]

I think it was 2016.

[00:28:54]

2016.

[00:28:54]

Yeah.

[00:28:56]

Did you work in a different part of a university before you move to HLS or not?

[00:29:06]

Just medical school. Then I came here. I worked for an alumni relations. Which was great team. It was two floors of people that they can interact with and I'm extreme extrovert. It was heaven for me [LAUGHTER].

[00:29:30]

Would not be so much happening for me, but yeah, I can see for the extrovert that would be perfect.

[00:29:37]

Yeah. It was great job. Again.

[00:29:42]

One of the things that I would definitely say that when I took that job, I stepped down because it was less in grade and also less than what I'm qualified to do. But I had to do it because I was going through some personal things where I had to re-evaluate my life.

[00:29:59]

Yeah.

[00:29:59]

Take a pay cut, stepped down. I did that a couple of times in my life where I stepped down and took a pay cut and people always say, why do you do that? This is crazy. It's going to look bad on your resume. Actually, I think it's a great thing to do when you feel unstable in your personal life because you will be fine later. But if you need to take time now to take care of yourself, you do it. I stayed there for three years and one of the people that really helped me was Pete.

[00:30:41]

Pete Mumma.

[00:30:42]

Yes. [LAUGHTER] My boss was Uta but she was out and at the time there was emerging leaders and I asked if he can help me get into the program and he helped me. Through emerging leaders, I met Denarris, who was actually the Program Manager for Harvard Defenders and she's the one who told me about Harvard Defenders. I think in a way I was very grateful for Pete helping me because he helped me go outside of like I worked most of my career in for profit companies so they always push you. They want you to do more and [OVERLAPPING] get more training and advance because you bring back money. I feel it's a little bit different here and I felt he was investing in me and that's why I'm very grateful because if it wasn't for him, I wouldn't have expanded my network and met Denarris and learned about Defenders and I did tell Denarris if you leave tell me because I want your job. [LAUGHTER]

[00:31:53]

I am here just so you know Denarris. I'm really here just to take your job. Whatever it takes, I'll be patient. [LAUGHTER]

[00:32:02]

It took a couple of years. I actually said that to her in her office. [LAUGHTER] Speaking about visualizing. [LAUGHTER].

[00:32:10]

Exactly. Memorizing that outtake. That job outtake. That job. No, I know what you mean.

[00:32:16]

Yeah. That's why no one is welcomed in my office. [LAUGHTER]

[00:32:21]

You are not going to stay here. Thank you.

[00:32:23]

You're going to add it whatever. [LAUGHTER].

[00:32:25]

Exactly. But it is something that you have in your mind that's true. But of course, like you said, everything in time change. I have the same approach. I was in facilities and I was in one position there for almost 8 years. When I heard about the opportunity in Dean of Students office, that was in my mind for a long time as well. I want to go there. I thought that I always want to try that opportunity to work with the students and that group sounded interesting. I had learned and I had done so much in facilities as well and I couldn't see much more where to go there in a away in my mind. Maybe I had. I just decided to make a change and I also took a lower grade. But I was fine. I just want to try something new. I just want to try something different of what I was doing it at the same time and was completely different Facilities to DOS dealing with management in general and one clientele, if you could say and go into DOS and dealing directly with the students and other aspects of Harvard Law School was a great experience and I really enjoy it as well. You are right. Sometimes re-evaluate. People are so focused again, the same thing that we are talking about your kid not being so focused in grades and going in one direction only but enjoy life in all aspects. For us is the same. Sometimes taking a pay cut or taking a different approach to the career that you are, is just some way to reinvent yourself or re-evaluate or try something different just to see how it goes. I think it worked really well for you. Maybe didn't work for the Denarris, but [LAUGHTER] that's it. You're talking about emerging leaders. That was a good experience as well.

[00:34:30]

Absolutely.

[00:34:30]

Inside of the Emerging Leaders.

[00:34:32]

Absolutely. I love the program. It's supported by staff. It's an impressive program and I feel honored that I was a part of it and it did help me a lot. There's lots of good sessions. I got to meet a lot of people. Also they did some personality tests, which was extremely helpful for me.

[00:35:00]

Oh, nice.

[00:35:02]

I don't remember the name something blue, but it actually tells you what are the best things about you and what are the things you need to work on and it's very detailed, it's impressive. It's expensive.

[00:35:14]

But it was a good opportunity.

[00:35:17]

Yes.

[00:35:17]

Brought a lot of clarity. I think I took something like that many years ago. The options for me was to be a psychologist, a teacher, a priest, a pastor. Say, okay, so I guess I have to talk to people, that seems to be but was not exactly what I have in mind, but somehow they were right about that. I want to ask and now you are in Defenders.

[00:35:45]

I am at the Harvard Defenders, correct.

[00:35:48]

For how long have you been there in this position?

[00:35:50]

Almost two years.

[00:35:51]

Almost two years. Defenders, can you say a little bit about Defenders? What's the program about and what it does?

[00:35:59]

Harvard Defenders, we're under the pro Bono office.

[00:36:04]

Clinical and pro Bono.

[00:36:05]

Correct. It's a student front organization is one of the oldest. Every year we have about 80-90 students. I'm the program manager there and John Salsberg is the clinical instructor.

[00:36:21]

Great.

[00:36:23]

What we do is we're presenting low-income clients in short-course criminal cases.

[00:36:31]

Wow.

[00:36:32]

Every day I come to work, I feel very blessed to be there and impressed by the work that students do, because without them, we will not have this organization but it's amazing because I think what's unique about defenders is we really have a strong community. It's people come to the office and this is a second home for them. I think it's very unique. Some of the cases are really difficult than this. You see the students are emotionally [OVERLAPPING] involved and I try to step in and be of support. I don't think it's an easy job, it's very difficult, especially they are still young. They're beginning, they haven't even started their career. It's really amazing.

[00:37:24]

I think it's fantastic when you look into Clinical and Pro Bono offices, how many clinics they have? How many chances the students that come to this school have to join them and then going to learn in this specific views that they probably are more attracted to? Whether it's Legal Aid Bureau or Defenders or the TAP program, or Criminal Justice Institute.

[00:37:53]

Yes.

[00:37:53]

There are so many clinics, so many different ones and the opportunity is there for them to invest and practice and also with the support of the staff and the guidance of the professors who run those programs as well. That gives them information, so I think is beautiful. One thing that I would like to ask you, just to go back again, we chat a little bit about the Egyptian culture but I always like to ask when I have the chance to talk with folks from different countries. How was food for you? How was prepared everybody getting together, someone or would buy somewhere?

[00:38:36]

Growing up in Egypt, and again, I know there were some changes because of globalization and extended work hours but back then lunch was around 3 o'clock and that was our biggest meal. We didn't have cell phones at the time, not that I'm that old. [LAUGHTER] TV was not on. Everyone's sat on the table, we eat together. The social rules was no one calls you at lunchtime and no one knocks on the door at lunchtime. It's not polite.

[00:39:13]

Interesting.

[00:39:14]

We eat together at lunch and sometimes they do siesta. After lunch.

[00:39:22]

In the Latin world we used to have that as well.

[00:39:24]

Yeah. My dad's side of the family were very much into the siestas but not my mom's side. I was never into the siesta, so I'll just hang out and play for a couple of hours. Dinner was usually light. For us, was yogurt with cheese.

[00:39:44]

Not such a meal that would be cooked and be prepared.

[00:39:47]

We'll still eat together, but it was not the big meal for us, at least in the household. I find it better because you don't want to eat a big meal like we do here at 6 or 7, we have the big meal and then you sleep. [LAUGHTER]

[00:40:04]

That's what the people say. Brazil has, since I was a kid, I remember that was a common thing. You would wake up in the morning, have coffee or whatever was with bread and anything else there but then you'd have lunch. You would have dinner. Would it be the 12, 6, 7:00 PM I would say that would be the best for dinner. That was a regular thing. Then the big events are celebration that would be much bigger in terms of preparation and all sorts of things. But dad was a big fan of the siesta. Mom never did. Rarely, and he would always complain you should take a nap after lunch because it's good for your health. I think he was right in many ways. I'm not a very big in terms of that. You have a kid. How old is your kid?

[00:40:54]

My son is eight years old.

[00:40:56]

Eight years old. What's his name?

[00:40:58]

His name is Adean, and Adean is not really an Arabic name. It's a word that means religions.

[00:41:08]

Okay.

[00:41:11]

I'm really big on loving different cultures and different religions and I wanted to find him a name where it makes his life easier here. I just wanted a name that sounds-

[00:41:27]

Easy to say?

[00:41:28]

Easy in both cultures. I don't know, like when I was six months pregnant, I thought of this name and I'm like, maybe I should name him Adian. It sounds like Eden an English, but sounds like Adian in French.

[00:41:43]

In French, which is fancy.

[00:41:45]

[LAUGHTER] Sounds fancy. And Adian in Arabic, and now everyone asks, what words did you come up with that name? [LAUGHTER]

[00:41:55]

I just like the way that it sound and was easy to say. Is there a meaningful your name?

[00:42:02]

My name?

[00:42:03]

Yeah.

[00:42:04]

My name means sky.

[00:42:06]

Sky.

[00:42:07]

Yeah. Also as a verb, it can be elevated morally or intellectually. Growing up, my name wasn't very common in Egypt but it's very funny because his name is religions and my name is Kai and it sounds like you're getting into a temple or something. [LAUGHTER] Very spiritual family.

[00:42:37]

Yeah, it is. Your brothers and sisters have names with meanings as well? Is the tradition, is a cultural thing to choose names based on meaningful?

[00:42:49]

My two siblings who are here in the US, the full siblings. My sister's name is really funny it's Samah.

[00:43:00]

Samah.

[00:43:00]

Yeah. So it's the same like mine, but with an H at the end.

[00:43:04]

Same spelled? Oh, with a H at the end.

[00:43:06]

At the end. It means forgiveness. Then we're very spiritual family and then I have just my brother, Joe. My other two siblings just have regular names. I don't mean to be sarcastic or making fun or everything but then you have Sama, which is a sky or elevated. You have Samah, which is forgiveness, and have Joe? Thank you, Joe for your presence. You have forgiveness, and sky, and Joe.

[00:43:45]

He is younger. [LAUGHTER].

[00:43:49]

That's what always happens with the younger ones.

[00:43:52]

Yeah.

[00:43:52]

No, but that's wonderful.

[00:43:54]

But I'm very close to my siblings and I think like my life would not be the same without them and my brother even though he's much younger than me, but I feel that he contributes so much to my life. I am so grateful for his existence and I'm very blessed to have my sister because we're close in age, so we share a lot-

[00:44:25]

That's the one who told you you're not going to school dressed like that? [LAUGHTER]

[00:44:28]

Yes. Flip-flops Sama.

[00:44:33]

That's lovely.

[00:44:35]

My sister actually did something really cool for me. When my mom passed away, I was super depressed, all of us were. Then she said she worked for a new station at the time and she ran into a program where they were looking for people to run the Boston Marathon but they were looking for people who never exercised in their lives. She said, why don't you do that? I know you feel depressed because of Mom why don't you do it? Everyone always asks, why didn't she do it? I don't know she delegated, I guess. [LAUGHTER]

[00:45:15]

I was wondering because you explained first that the reason they were looking for someone who don't exercise? I was wondering, did she do that because she really wants you to deal with depression because you were sad or you don't exercise, go do it?

[00:45:27]

Both of us didn't. [LAUGHTER] I went for the interview, I didn't think they will pick me and they end up picking me.

[00:45:37]

Oh, nice.

[00:45:38]

It was part of a NOVA program on PBS and I got the honor to run with the President Bacow. He was at the time the president at Tufts University.

[00:45:50]

Yes. He came from Tufts, yes.

[00:45:52]

So we were 13 people and 12 of us had different life stories.

[00:46:02]

Backgrounds.

[00:46:02]

Yes. All of us except one person finished the marathon and the person who didn't finish it, she didn't because there was a big problem that cost her not to finish it. Definitely my brother and my sister, I'm very grateful to have them. I couldn't ask for more.

[00:46:27]

That's great. Doing that exercise helped you with the depression and feeling sad? Did that help you to channel that?

[00:46:37]

Yes, definitely because I learned something that you'll face a lot of problems in your lives it's how you accept and make the best out of the experience. Will I ever completely get over how my mom passed on? No, because she didn't just die in peace in her bed, it's was very [OVERLAPPING] tragic experience. But I learned that I can be resilient, I can channel my energy, I can do something useful, I can inspire other people and after that marathon, my friend decided that she wanted to run it because of me and then her friend ran it with her and so on. I just felt like, is it small contribution to others yes, but it is a contribution.

[00:47:31]

There is always a contribution. I don't think contribution can be measured at all. It has a meaning to that we can think that you are doing a little and for someone receiving might have an enormous impact that we don't know at the time and maybe someday we will, maybe not, but it is always something. When you do good, when you help, when you're trying to be supportive of someone, that is a meaning that's beyond measurement. I don't think that is such a small or bigger one. People have an impact in our lives and we are going to have in other people's lives as well for different reasons than what we think of.

[00:48:12]

Yes.

[00:48:12]

When you receive, there is a meaning that just we know and it's sometimes hard to put in perspective are trying to explain what it means because it's inside of us, it's our dimension. When we do, we think that, oh, that was nothing, and for someone receiving that is a different dimension.

[00:48:32]

I'm a big believer that the more you give, the more you get.

[00:48:36]

I believe so too. I think it's very important. Sama, thank you very much for participating.

[00:48:45]

Thank you for having me.

[00:48:45]

For accepting to come here and talk to me. I enjoyed very much our conversation and I hope it was easy for you too.

[00:48:53]

Yes, thank you so much for having me.

[00:48:55]

You're very welcomed.

[00:48:56]

I know this is a lot of work for you, so I'm very grateful that you brought this to HLS.

[00:49:02]

Thank you.

[00:49:03]

And you're helping us learn about each other, creating stronger community.

[00:49:08]

I hope we can listen to each other and learn about each other because it's so rich and we can do much better. Thank you very much. For everybody else out there, thank you for listening. I'll see you soon. Bye bye. [MUSIC]