[00:00:03]

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

[00:00:18]

Hello, this is Edgar Kley Filho from HLS Human Resource Department. My pronouns are he him/his. Today, we are talking to James Kerwin from Program on Negotiation, who will tell us about his life, how long he is in this position at HLS and the work he does. Thank you for joining us, James, and please tell me your story.

[00:00:45]

Well, thank you, Edgar. I really appreciate this opportunity. It's wonderful to sit down and talk with you.

[00:00:50]

Thank you.

[00:00:52]

Yeah, you're right. I've been with the Program on Negotiation, and I can't believe it since the first week of December 2001.

[00:01:00]

2001. 22, 24?

[00:01:01]

Yeah, it's been almost. 22.5.

[00:01:08]

Going to 24 already.

[00:01:09]

It doesn't feel like that long.

[00:01:11]

Amazing. I've been here since 2003 and I feel the same, so fad. But you have been always in Program Negotiation?

[00:01:21]

Yes, and my title when I began was Assistant Director, and then it became Operations Director. But I really think of myself as an Assistant Director. There are some HR terms that sometimes get thrown around. But I've been in that position, and really, it's been a privilege because I get to work with great professors and staff.

[00:01:46]

That program is amazing. Let's go back. All the way back and then until you get back to Harvard Law School again. Your family history. Is your family from New England, from a different part of the country, or anywhere else? What you can tell us about your family history?

[00:02:06]

Sure. Well, my parents were New Yorkers.

[00:02:09]

New Yorkers?

[00:02:09]

Yes, and I was born in New Rochelle, New York, just outside of the city and my father's family have been there for a number of generations.

[00:02:18]

Really?

[00:02:19]

Yeah.

[00:02:20]

Generations?

[00:02:20]

Yeah. My mom's side, my mom was from the city, from Queens, but my grandfather came over from Ireland in 1917.

[00:02:32]

Ireland.

[00:02:33]

I could become an Irish citizenship if I chose to take the time.

[00:02:38]

Have you been there?

[00:02:39]

I have only for four days. I have traveled around the world, and I always fly over to Ireland and see that it's green and everything looks fine.

[00:02:50]

What part of Ireland do your ancestors came from?

[00:02:53]

My mom's father was from a really rural area called County Leitrim.

[00:02:59]

Leitrim, I think have been there.

[00:03:03]

Irish people haven't necessarily been there. It's in the Republic of Ireland and the town he was from Ballinamore only has 900 people.

[00:03:11]

Nine hundred, it must be amazing.

[00:03:14]

Yeah, I've only been once for four days to Dublin because I was able to on the way back from Paris, stop and not get charge any extra on eringus they let you stay for four days and that was great.

[00:03:28]

Yeah, that's what I did interesting because then you take advantage and go around and walk around town. But it's good to know that your folks came back from there and lived in New Rochelle, right?

[00:03:40]

Yes. I was born there and then when I was four years old and my older brother was eight, we moved to Cape Cod.

[00:03:49]

Cape Cod.

[00:03:50]

I grew up on Cape Cod. I went to public school there. I only had 50 kids in my high school class.

[00:03:57]

Fifty kids for the entire class.

[00:04:00]

5, 0. But we were a big class. The class behind me had 36 kids and our 53 of them were foreign exchange students, so it was a really special place.

[00:04:11]

How was going to school there from the early grades all the way to high school?

[00:04:18]

You know everyone and everyone knows you, and I still have so many friends who I've been friends with since kindergarten which is wonderful.

[00:04:27]

That's wonderful.

[00:04:29]

But for me it was a little strange. I couldn't wait to leave, even though it's a beautiful place and people want to go on vacation there from all over the world. Maybe it's because it was the New Yorker in me. I really wanted to get out of the small town and go to the city and be in that. I loved my summers, but it used to be that the Cape in the off-season was really desolate. People would leave for Florida or whatever. You didn't have as many activities. Things would close down. It was a different time then that there weren't as many activities in the off-season as there are now.

[00:05:07]

Would it be most of during the winter?

[00:05:09]

Yes. They call them snowbirds.

[00:05:12]

That's what happened with a lot of people from Maine as well.

[00:05:16]

The summer is completely busy, and then it would get incredibly quiet and we would be the only house on our street, which was called Toby Turtle Road.

[00:05:25]

But then you went all the way to high school, 50 people in your entire class?

[00:05:31]

Yeah, a few people came and left.

[00:05:35]

Then college?

[00:05:38]

Yes. I went to Brown in Providence and loved being in Providence, and I spent my junior year at the American University in Cairo.

[00:05:49]

Oh, wow. How was that experience?

[00:05:53]

Well, I'd always been interested in the Middle East since I was in high school because my junior year in high school. I became as I said, we had three students in my senior class who were foreign exchange students. Well, in my town, we had an AFS, American Field Service, Student Exchange Club, and a lot of foreign students would come and stay with us and not many local students would go abroad and a teacher said to me, "James, you should apply to go abroad. I put down that I go anywhere in the world, and I went to Israel. I went to Israel for a summer. I was an exchange student in Israel, I had wonderful host parents. Stay with the family outside Tel Aviv and I got to see a lot of the country because my host father was a hydrological engineer and we'd go in and we'd inspect dam sites, other things around the country. But that got me really interested as well in the other side of things and trying to learn more about Arab culture and so when I went and studied at the American University in Cairo, I studied Arabic, I studied Middle Eastern politics. I think the thing that shocked me the most about Egypt and Cairo was I didn't realize how poor and the poverty, I always thought of Saudi Arabia and the wealth of the Arab world. I hadn't necessarily thought of the developmental economic issues like [OVERLAPPING].

[00:07:23]

In Egypt.

[00:07:24]

Yes. Because Cairo is a really large population of people.

[00:07:28]

That's I wonder, too. But would you say that typical situation like I would say for me, would be a common place for the third world countries where the big towns like that would have a nucleo or like a center where upper-level society would live, and then the outskirts of the metropoles would be mostly from poor folks? Is that the same?

[00:07:54]

Well, there are neighborhoods that are very wealthy within Cairo, and then there are some outliers. It's a real mix across. I was in a European neighborhood called Zamalek and I could walk to downtown. That was along the Nile, and that was great. It was probably about a half hour, so taxicabs were so cheap. You could just yell where you were going, and sometimes somebody would already be in the cab, but they were going the same direction. You could just jump in.

[00:08:28]

Being an American in that time in Cairo, Egypt, never a problem? You never felt unsafe? Or, you know.

[00:08:36]

It's interesting you say that because it was 1988/89. There was a time where I remember we were in our apartment. I had moved out of a dorm into a apartment with two American students, and it ended up being a great deal for me because the university was charging me a lot of rent for the University dormitory. But then when I went and lived with the American students, it was like $85 a month.

[00:09:04]

Oh, wow.

[00:09:05]

It was a nice place. We had a chandelier. We had carpets.

[00:09:10]

Off campus.

[00:09:10]

It was off campus. It was in a nice, probably upper-middle-class neighborhood.

[00:09:17]

But even then, sometimes down our road, there'd be a boy who would be leading sheep. You're in the middle of the city, and you just have everything going on. You have people maybe on a donkey, and then you have the cars, and you have the the mopeds and the scooters. A little bit of chaos. The traffic there was just a little bit chaotic.

[00:09:43]

You asked me about feeling safe. I pretty much did feel safe, but there was a time when we were told to stay in our apartment because it was the anniversary of the American bombing of Gaddafi's compound in Libya and the State Department just called us up and said, Everybody should just stay home tomorrow. Do board games, cook.

[00:10:06]

Because the celebration is about that?

[00:10:09]

Well, there could have been, and it wouldn't necessarily be Egyptians. It might be [OVERLAPPING].

[00:10:15]

Other, that's for sure.

[00:10:16]

But as far as feeling safe, though, I always pretty much did. If anything, I didn't feel safe in the traffic. It's chaos. I even had a friend of mine who came from my hometown. He was a graduate student there at American University studying Arabic from University of Michigan. He actually drove one of those Trabants from those Eastern European cars and he had a bumper sticker for the Red Sox because back in the day, the Red Sox had only gotten to penance. They never got to World Series and he drove like a Bostonian, and it was crazy. People used to just look at him and go, ahh.

[00:11:01]

Can you make it. It's interesting because this is the same thing.

[00:11:06]

Going back to Brazil, there now scares me more. I'm driving here, I drive everywhere here, and if you like that's, in a different way and people complain sometimes about traffic in New York or Boston, so they have to go for one of go to Sao Paulo, Rio.

[00:11:26]

I've been to Rio and Sao Paulo. I went in 2001, a good friend of mine had lived there and worked as a journalist and then she said to me, hey, let's go for Carnival. I survived 10 days of Carnival, we gathered up about 20 other friends we had 24 of us, because I traveled a lot with her.

[00:11:51]

But it is a great experience, isn't it James? Carnival is a beautiful. I think if you want to immerse in Brazilian culture, a lot of people just see the parade that big parade, but if you go to the small neighborhood to have a sense of what Carnival is and how people engage in that sometimes feel like, okay, why am I here in this situation? It is a good way culturally to get immersed in that experience.

[00:12:19]

Well, we really got immersed because we also danced in the Sambadrome. We were part of Salgueiro school, and where you had to learn the song, and we practiced before we left Cambridge.

[00:12:33]

You went to the parade?

[00:12:34]

Yes and then we danced.

[00:12:36]

That's fantastic.

[00:12:38]

It was amazing and I don't think we got on to go through the Sambadrome which is like the size of, for people who don't know

[00:12:46]

Did rehearsals?

[00:12:48]

We rehearsed here in the states and that was before Zoom. We had friends who were Brazilian here in Boston. There are a lot of Brazilians and they helped us actually get it set up. We went to Brazil like we had an apartment style hotel. It was really great. We had costumes that were sewn in the favelas. We were helping the local economy in that way. We learned our song, the steps. I mean, really we looked like we were out of Las Vegas or something, it was incredible.

[00:13:25]

The costume are amazing, is interesting that they, I think the majority of that's volunteer work from the favelas from the community, the folks there because they are so devoted to each school. The least that the person that comes from outside needs to do is to really have the lyric because otherwise, they're going to notice that you are not just not involved, not engaged. It's interesting to hear that you have that experience. That's really interesting. We need to go back because I have a question.

[00:13:55]

Sure.

[00:13:57]

So, you drove around with friends or your time in school there. You had the chance and time there to go to the big historical place and visit the pyramids.

[00:14:10]

Yes, we would go to the pyramids just to play soccer because Cairo is such a big city, there isn't much open space. Sometimes we would just pass each other in the hall at the university and be like, soccer at LRMR the LRMR are the Pyramids, and it was just like yeah, yeah

[00:14:28]

My dream is to go there and visit. I have such a fascination for the monuments, but with you studying there and going to play soccer, I just imagine being there and just because that's a huge monument and beautiful too.

[00:14:43]

The other thing that I would do too is get out of the city because Cairo is a big city and a lot of people are speaking English or they're seeing tourists. Sometimes I'd just get on a train and get off in the middle of nowhere, and I'm 6'5. I'm tall, I'm exotic and kids would just swarm me. They all wanted me to sign their soccer ball or something, but it also helped me with my learning language because then the kids will correct you if you're incredibly strong

[00:15:12]

Yeah, they're very honest

[00:15:14]

But it's a great way to learn the language because you're not going to do that when you're in a big city and people are talking English.

[00:15:19]

Were you also able to be fluent in Arabic?

[00:15:23]

Well, it probably takes like three years to really be fluent and I'm studying what's called the Fusha language, the written language and not the Ammiya, so the spoken is a little different. The written is more like traditional Arabic and then the spoken is more like the Egyptian dialect, but most people understand the spoken because Egypt is also the movie capital of the Arab world. What would happen to me is because I was studying the written, I would talk a little bit like a cleric, people would even say that to be like the cab driver, I'd be embarrassed, I'm like, I know I'm speaking Fusha traditional language, and they go, no, you speak like a cleric.

[00:16:03]

That's interesting. There is a written language and the spoken language, they have a different in a way that you communicate in that sense.

[00:16:12]

Yes, although whereas I found if I went to the West Bank, Jerusalem, East Jerusalem, whatever. The spoken was more similar to Palestinian Arabic.

[00:16:24]

Really?

[00:16:25]

Yeah, so that was easier for me in some ways because then I felt like there wasn't as much of a disconnect because it's like as if I was speaking English saying, were does thou go with, that thing. I mean, people will understand it, but it's just a little awkward.

[00:16:41]

Well, that brings back to the Portuguese speaking because that's what we always say, I think 90% of the Brazilian population doesn't speak Portuguese the way that we're supposed to. We speak in a different way than whatever Portuguese is written and looks so beautiful, in novels and everything else. You learn faster, I'm just comparing because for me coming here, not speaking English as well, I felt like getting away from the Brazilian community and immersing myself in the American culture. I learned faster than if I had, trying to figure out. Being there in connection with the folks helped you out.

[00:17:25]

Incredibly, and then just realizing I needed to get out of the city, where there was so much English being spoken and just really connect with people in the countryside. That was amazing because I'd go armed with my polaroid camera, and I did look like a little bit of a magician, because then I could take a picture of a farmer and his daughter and hand it to them and then it would develop right there. It was like magic. I think that if every American had travel with a polaroid, I think we'd be really popular around the world.

[00:17:57]

Even for them, it's such a beautiful gesture too because if you can give that picture, for that moment that you were there. I can't stop thinking that you were really brave to be going to take a train going somewhere in a small village just to meet people. Which is a beautiful gesture, but I would be so reluctant to do this.

[00:18:19]

Well, I think somebody once said in their house, I got, because there's Arab hospitality, there's all this hospitality and it's real. I got invited to have lunch with this family. I'm getting a little, and then I went and we talked and it was really wonderful as we ate, and they wanted to know how many brothers and sisters I had, and I said, I had one. They said, only two of you? I said, yes, my parents both work, and it's difficult. Then they were like, but you're traveling alone. You're not traveling with anyone else? I said, no, I'm traveling alone. And the gentleman said, you never travel alone, you're traveling with God. That empowered me as a traveler to be like, you really have to not only trust yourself, but you have to feel comfortable with what you're doing, stay alert, but just.

[00:19:24]

Do you have a sense that the same sense in Egypt as going to Brazil because you made note of something that for me is very important in countries like, I would say, comparing Brazil and Egypt in a way. The population embrace anyone who gets there. I think Brazilians in general are also known to be very welcoming people. There is no formality. If you arrive there or if I bring someone is part of the family already. They're going to invite, you want to eat with us, you want to drink or, you know, did you have that experience in Brazil, as well? Was a little bit different?

[00:20:07]

Well, because it was a group of us traveling, but my friend had lived there and so we were in Rio for most of the time. I did end up taking an excursion to Sao Paulo. It's a long story, but wow, what a big city that is. Makes New York look like a little village. My goodness. But my favorite part of Brazil, and I knew this would be my favorite part, after Carnival ended, my friend had set up a visit to the Island of Parati.

[00:20:37]

Wow, Perche, you went to Parati?

[00:20:40]

The UNESCO village for people who don't know, no cars and I'd like to say Parati is the sound of the hoofs of the horses, and the clink of wine glasses.

[00:20:52]

Looks like they are lost in history. Did you have a chance to go to Petropolis, up to the hills?

[00:20:58]

No, unfortunately.

[00:20:59]

That's another very historic place where the royal family had their palace and now is a lot of more suburban area grew a lot, but it still have the big monuments and palaces and everything. Going back to your experience there in your college, so you spent a full year?

[00:21:19]

I did. I'm really glad I did the full year because Cairo assaults the senses. It's a chaotic wild place, which I embraced, which I loved, but in January term, we had a break. Rather than go back to the US or go to Western Europe, I went to Turkey and then went down to Syria and Jordan and Turkey was just amazing.

[00:21:47]

I went over there too.

[00:21:49]

I thought Turkey should be like Arabic and it's not. I did a lot of pantomime, which was a lot of fun, did a lot of traveling and that a friend was supposed to go with me, and then she missed the flight.

[00:21:59]

Wow.

[00:22:02]

Then I was on my own, which was fine, because sometimes when you're on your own you meet different travelers and all that. But what it taught me was, I need to get out of Cairo more and get into the countryside. That's why I really got hooked the second semester doing that and that made all the difference because I felt like I came back. Cairo is such a enormous city and the horns honk all night and all that. It was really nice to get used to going out to the countryside.

[00:22:32]

Get to know people and connect with them one way or another. I think that's the most beautiful thing that you can do. I think you have that opportunity to learn from those regions because sometimes big towns disguise a lot. It's similar or the life is in that hurry that you don't enjoy as much. When you go for small towns or different places, you have a different reality check. I think connections are different as well, because people I think, they pay more attention on you or they have more time for you as well. There is a little bit more of a different vibe.

[00:23:13]

Although I did learn at the end of my stay in Cairo, a friend came over to visit who was on their way to Kenya and wanted to come to Egypt. It was July, and it's really hot there in July, I would have been out of there. But because my friend was coming to visit, I stayed, but I went away for a while to Greece and then I came back, and when I came back, I'd really been gone for about three weeks or so. Some of the local shopkeepers and everything, they'd see me and they said, oh, we thought you left without saying goodbye. I wouldn't do that.

[00:23:51]

That's really nice.

[00:23:52]

Even within a big city, you can have your little neighborhood.

[00:23:57]

You said that this is near where you used to live off campus?

[00:24:01]

Yes.

[00:24:01]

That area.

[00:24:02]

That area.

[00:24:03]

But I have to tell you a really amazing story because it ties in Harvard Law School. The last time I was in Egypt, well, I left Egypt in July of 1989. The last time I was in Egypt was July of 2019.

'19?

[00:24:21]

It was affiliated with some of my work at the program on negotiation. PON had a group that we used to work with that would bring teenage women from the Arab world to Boston to learn at different universities, different skills and they would come here to Harvard Law School and we'd teach a segment on negotiation.

[00:24:46]

Wow.

[00:24:47]

Well, then it got difficult for them to travel here. There became some restrictions and other things, and it was 2019 and so what happened was this group in Boston called Empower Peace or Women to Women was their program. They would then bring the training from the US over to Egypt, or Saudi Arabia, what have you, Bahrain. They asked me to go and teach a module on negotiation and it was exactly 30 years since I had been there and it was in my same neighborhood. Probably about 60 young women, probably 16 -18 and it was really special. What was funny was I was teaching and behind me there was some poster in Arabic. One of the young students, she said, you studied Arabic, what does that say? It really had been 30 years and so I started just reading the Arabic, I think that's what it is. They're like, that's very good.

[00:25:59]

After 30 years.

[00:26:00]

After 30 years, it was still a little bit there. That was just a really fun memory and then of course, who knew that was going to be right before COVID.

[00:26:08]

In the same year that we stayed in general, that's what happened?

[00:26:12]

It was that July 2019, so really, a 30th anniversary.

[00:26:18]

But I mean where you went back. The same area.

[00:26:21]

Same area called Zamalek but it was near a police athletic club, that thing. It was a little bit of a quasi military establishment and actually talk about maybe not feeling safe. The organizers did tell the students, don't be posting on social media because this is an American training, and there might be some people.

[00:26:44]

Also, because the social media changes a lot. That's right. From the time that you were there and for the time that you go back in 2019, even from 2000 something from 2019, social media exploded in different ways that the connection and visibility of exposure and being targeted somehow because it's easy to see where you are. It's been a year there which sounds amazing and you travel a lot. Then you come back to US.

[00:27:16]

I finished up my senior year at Brown and one of the things I did at Brown, as you might be able to tell from my voice is that I was a radio DJ, a news DJ and when I left my sophomore year the summer before, I went abroad to Egypt. I was the morning news guy from 6:00 A.M. - 9:00 A.M.

[00:27:41]

In the radio.

[00:27:42]

On the radio, I'd be the one saying, good morning. It's 59 degrees on the east side of Providence, and I'm James Kerwin with the BRU News.

[00:27:52]

For how long did you do that?

[00:27:53]

I did that second semester of my sophomore year, then my summer of my sophomore year and then I went away junior year, and then when I came back senior year, nobody had wanted to do morning news. I'm a morning guy.

[00:28:06]

That's cool.

[00:28:10]

You would play music you would chose subjects to talk during the transmission, how did it?

[00:28:16]

Well, I was that darn news guy. I was focused on delivering the news. My colleague, Karen Bryan, who went on to be a MTVJ and now she's on WWE. She's an announcer and all that. But she would be the Rock DJ in the morning or William Rivera was another one. We had a lot of fun because then I'd read the news, we'd tell what we said was a kicker, some fun story in there. Then we'd have the banter in the morning and we had our own personalities, and that was a lot of fun.

[00:28:55]

You were the news person? You delivered the news. Local news, worldwide news?

[00:29:01]

Both. I did some reporting, and sometimes we would do hour long news magazines. I think one of the news magazine that was the most fun for me. It was called Sunday viewpoint and I did one on private investigators in Rhode Island.

[00:29:19]

Wow.

[00:29:21]

It was a lot of fun because I asked this is in the '80s. I asked one private eye. I said do you ever get in high speed chases? You see this on the TV all the time and his classic sound bite was, listen, I don't drive a Ferrari. I drive a Dotson and he goes, you can't have high speed chases in Providence. There's a stoplight every other block.

[00:29:45]

funny.

[00:29:46]

I interviewed a Woman and it was great, because I said to her, because I had three gentlemen and then this woman, and I said why would I choose you and not one of these guys, one of these hot shots or something? She goes, well, I can go into an office and they just think I'm the temp there. I've got access to the filing cabinet. I picking up the phone. I know who's calling. She goes, I can learn a lot.

[00:30:14]

That's true. It sounds like we enjoyed that.

[00:30:18]

I did.

[00:30:19]

But why didn't you pursue it?

[00:30:22]

That's a great question, and I sometimes ask myself, but maybe and I could have. I could have been the news director. There was no doubt about that if I had stayed my junior year here. But maybe it was that there was something in the Middle East that I left behind and I wanted to know more about the Arab world. Maybe sometimes when something comes too easy, like being a news director or something like that. Maybe I wanted to go the Robert Frost poem says, The Road Less Traveled. I have no regrets about any of that.

[00:30:57]

What do you consider your attraction for the Middle East culture in general? Whether it was Israel, Egypt, or other areas that you visited. You considered that was a coincidence, was the person, the professor, the teacher who said, you should apply for this course overseas program. Go there and stay a semester and you end up returning, or there is something you that really likes the language, the culture, the writing.

[00:31:29]

Well, I think as a high school student being in Israel, and I still have my scrapbook where I wrote to my host parents because I was outside of Tel Aviv in a city called Peratt. I have in my scrapbook. Going to Jerusalem for the day, we'll be back by dinner. What an amazing city, and you go to a city like Jerusalem and it changes.

[00:31:51]

History it's in every corner.

[00:31:54]

It's and it feels a really holy place. I got hooked right from then, felt to know more.

[00:32:10]

What about food? How was or how is your view in terms of having the experience of Irish descendant Folks, American food going to Israel then Egypt, going to Brazil because you had your experience there. How does this in terms of your taste?

[00:32:33]

Well, I was so lucky when I was an exchange student in Israel, my host family, they were originally from Romania.

[00:32:42]

From Romania.

[00:32:43]

A lot of Eastern European dishes.

[00:32:45]

That's another different, completely different, background.

[00:32:47]

A lot of pickled vegetables and all kinds of things and then also dinner was just a lighter. Lunch would be the big meal huge meal. I would start eating and then thinking I was done, and then the next course came out.

[00:33:05]

The more coming out and then at night would be a lighter one. It's interesting. That's not the case for Brazil, I think, which a lot of people might get surprised about this when we tout them. The rice and beans lunch and dinner can never miss that, and then you have a salad or meat or whatever it is. But there's no distinction about being light or depends on the level of society that you are or how cation is because in general, it would be always heavy lunch and dinner, the same thing people have. But I know that some cultures have a heavier lunch, which makes a lot of sense throughout the day. You are walking, you are working. Then when you get to dinner, a light of one because it would be easier for digestion and sleeping as well. That the way. But you can definitely see the difference between food in Israel, US, Egypt, Brazil, how diverse they are.

[00:34:09]

I mentioned Turkey earlier, and Turkish food is unbelievable.

[00:34:15]

That would be the same for the main course or dessert or anything, bread, the different styles as well.

[00:34:21]

That's right.

[00:34:22]

That sounds like a great experience, James.

[00:34:24]

No, it was a great experience and Brazil, also you go to the buffets and all that.

[00:34:29]

Brazil also depends on the region of very diverse type of food. If you go out of the rice and beans. If you go to the south, southeast, northeast, north or center West, they are completely different. You are going to have different foods anywhere you go there. Northeast have very different ones from the south completely, which is more, I would say south will be more based that where the gauchos are barbecue and everything else. But different main courses and desserts as well, varies a lot. You graduated in college back at Brown, and what was your goal leaving college?

[00:35:18]

Well, so my major was international relations, and part of that was just history, political science, and economics. Then you had to have a mastery of the language and actually, I was able to test out of French because I learned French when I was in high school.

[00:35:36]

You also speak French.

[00:35:37]

Yeah. What's ironic is instead of going back to the Middle East, when I was in Egypt, a friend came and visited me when she was on her way to Kenya and she said, James, come to Nairobi because she was working for Voice of America. We've worked at the radio station together. She'd been an intern in college in Voice of America in Nairobi and they offered her a position when she graduated, and so she went. She had the company car company house. She was a year older than me and so when I graduated, she said, James, come out here. You have a place to stay. I've got a Subaru when goes on Safari. What I did is I sold my Apple Macintosh computer. I sold it on graduation day in Westerly Rhode Island. I drove all the way down and so now I had the money to go there because I got a ticket on LL, the Israel Airline round trip to Nairobi. I show up and since I had done some radio, I was trying to do some stringing, some freelance work, and all that. But then there was a coup attempt. It was the year of living dangerously, if you remember that movie. My friend, we would go up to Mount Kenya because since she was a foreign journalist, sometimes they would blame the journalists for what was going on. The government would blame saying, Oh, the journalists are doing this and so we'd climb Mount Kenya, which takes three days to go up and one day to come down. We'd be once we got up to the top you'd start and be about 60 degrees, you'd go up to the top and there was snow. But we felt they're not going to follow us here, maybe we're just a little too paranoid. Maybe it's safe to go back down and everything will be fine and there was violence and other stuff. Then we did a dry run of going to Uganda just to see, can we escape if we need to what would be the process, the checkpoints and all that. The temperature got a little too high so we did end up going to Uganda. I came back and went to an island off of Kenya where she had some friends, and they just put me up. It's a Swahili island.

[00:38:10]

You didn't have much time to visit around or.

[00:38:14]

Shockingly, I did.

[00:38:17]

Even with everything going on?

[00:38:18]

Even with everything that went on. Everything that went on.

[00:38:22]

There is a fight going there. Now, let's go see a safari here, my God.

[00:38:26]

The funniest thing was this island Lamu, which is actually close to Somalia. My friend, she wanted me to return this guitar pick to Omar on Lamu. She had since she was fleeing to Uganda, she had what I called the 52 pick up list of these are all the things I need to close out my life here. One of them was return the guitar pick and her name was Monica. When I go to Lamu I meet Omar and it's this green little guitar pick and he's Monica remembered me.

[00:39:00]

What I think is interesting, James, that you chose all these places to go. Whether it's Middle Eastern or Africa. Of course you are a stand out, no other. Look like you are advertising here I am. God sake. You come back from Africa, and...

[00:39:25]

And…

Our conversation with James Kerwin continues. On the next episode. Make sure to turn in.