[00:00:03]

[MUSIC] You are listening to tell me your story where we connect to HLS staff on a personal level. We are back with the second half of our conversation with Patricia Alejandro.

And that's what sack to my mind saying this is exactly what you're saying in early beginning in terms of college, Harvard College would be the same. What are the programs that people should focus on to allow students to have tutoring or mentoring would be the most important one in a serious level for the students [NOISE]. Hold on we have to stop here. This means that you have to go out.[LAUGHTER]

[00:00:58]

I think we have a real fire to fire alert.

[00:01:04]

We have is now.

[00:01:05]

We have to go.[LAUGHTER]

[00:01:06]

Let me block this. [NOISE]. It's so sad.

I think I was talking about schools thinking about having better programs for mentoring for tutoring people and figuring out that kind of stuff. Which sometimes makes me feel like one specific department like a DOS, for example, where students could go and ask general questions. Is there space for that, because sometimes I feel like some of our students, still my experience at DOS. I would see them at orientation. I wouldn't see them till graduation, they would come to pick up their tickets. Some students I would see more often because of their involvement with orgs, journals, and other activities. Some just didn't want to deal with any of that, so they would not be part of a DOS that you would remember. Then you just saw them in the end, which is interesting. Maybe they were totally fine, they figured out their way and they didn't want to get involved with anything and didn't want to know about DOS, which some people think that in the past mentioned that felt like a principal's office. [But does feels like that, sorry]. [LAUGHTER] But then we were all there trying to, what events can you create? What is in that anyway. I'm just thinking about it would be beneficial for colleges and grad schools have a space that offer that support. I think here, you have more because you have section leaders, you have the BSAs, you have different progs, and the organizations where I think students can learn a little bit more. I might be wrong. So, overall, the experience at DOS was great. Was a good one.

[00:03:11]

It is good. I had very little, again, guidance, but had a great time.

[00:03:15]

You figure out your own way.

[00:03:16]

Yes. It's, I've been to the fifth and 10 year reunion, and the 10 year one wasn't the same weekend as my Harvard five year one. I'm sorry. I had to go to my 10 year one because I knew that the folks who show up, you end up reconnecting a lot with people. Even people you didn't know that well, because they're more grown up, and just having a lot more vulnerability about their life, sharing a lot more and then, there's a dance party at each reunion and people dance at least people don't have kids yet. [LAUGHTER].

[00:03:44]

That's really nice.

[00:03:45]

We're out dancing and we have just lots of good friends, lots of good people. It did foster an idea that you could do anything, whether or not that's true for a lot of folks, but you could explore a lot of different things. Many people were very creative about the path they've taken, and I'm really good friends with many. You've known some of my longest friendships are from college and we've seen each other go through not so pretty times, like uglier times and harder times and been there for each other throughout the last over a decade. It's good that, I think it did foster a good sense of community for a lot of us, at least. Saying again, I know folks who didn't have the same experience. But I looked out and I found really good friends and people, that we could support each other during the harder time.

[00:04:39]

Do you think that exactly what you said, foster a sense of a community is what brought you to the 10 year reunion versus five years grad law school. Is that sense of what you all went through a lot together at that time?

[00:04:56]

Yeah. There's good people and friends. Maybe even folks that I'm not close to and don't stay in touch with, but I would love to see again because I know that they're good people. It doesn't feel, grad school reunion at least still feels very much like schmoozing and networking versus seeing your friends or folks you'd love to see.

[00:05:14]

When you went to Yale, did you have already a sense that you were going to be a lawyer in your life?

[00:05:19]

I have no idea.

[00:05:20]

Really?

[00:05:21]

No.

[00:05:22]

How did that shape up? What was at least if you went with an intention or more or less, say, maybe I'm going to follow this path. How that changed?

[00:05:32]

I was studying a lot of conflict genocide. A lot of this was even though Cuba has been through a lot of conflict, not necessarily genocide. I coming from a very polarized society and that I had experienced firsthand some of those human rights violations and so I was drank. I still, I think, my early 20s wasn't able to free myself and make a choice I wasn't free from all this trauma to some extent and all this personal history. I was very much in the human rights space. That was one. I took a couple of classes that were taught for undergrads from the Yale law school on the alien tort statute and how to prosecute these international human rights crimes. Part of me was maybe law school is a thing, where you do this justice work. Then I also went to I didn't even go to the full talk. It was like the Yale International Relations Association Student Org was organizing a talk with William Uri, who co wrote and still does a lot of writing in the negotiation space. That's when I first heard about his work and it was the first time I sat across from someone and I just thought, this is the work I want to do. Then I picked up getting to yes, which is the best known negotiation book, perhaps out there. In the back, it said, part of the Negotiation Program in Harvard Law School. I was like law school is a place you go to again, I had very little mentorship. I just made the idea of if I want to do this healing work, which I consider very much, community building healing. I was interested. I started realizing I was more interested in how do you prevent conflict and how do you heal and reconstruct after conflict and in so much of prosecution of the wrongdoers. Though that's part of the justice process for many people and for democracy. But it was more interested in, how do you prevent it? How do you rebuild the before and after. I read that book and it said law school. I was like, law school and Harvard seems to be it. That's when I started focusing more on law school.

[00:07:46]

But why not Yale law?

[00:07:48]

I did apply to Yale. I just did not get in.

[00:07:51]

Even being already a co register there.

[00:07:55]

I was, again, I had a lot of mentorship and no extra money to be taken private classes to study for the LSAT. I was testing myself and I was doing pretty poorly on the test score when I was a student, a senior. I talked to a Yale professor and I wish I remembered her name. She gave me really good advice. She said, this is a professional degree, and a lot of people do it without knowing why they're doing it and then they forget. She was very vulnerable. She told me she took her first year off or she had to take a break during her first year after her first year in law school because she had gone straight through. The date was just tough. It was tough and to make a very informed decision. For some reason, I remember like tearing up and feeling really seen because I didn't really know what I was doing. [LAUGHTER]. I ended up getting a job. This is like the beautiful time when I had no law school no debt yet. Such debt. I kept studying just studying on my own time. I took a little break and started studying again for law school so I could take the set and well enough to go. Yale law school is very small. I'm glad I did not go there. Small, going back to New Haven again.

[00:09:03]

That's what I heard.

[00:09:03]

New Haven. I would happily go back and so Harvard, being a bigger school having the Negotiation Program, that was really my goal, and I was wait listed at Harvard, actually, and then got off the wait list. [LAUGHTER].

[00:09:17]

That was fantastic. You didn't have space in between. You left college at Yale, and went straight to Harvard Law school?

[00:09:28]

No. I had two years working in DC.

[00:09:30]

That's what you said that you have the period of time that perfect. Then you come to law school. How was the orientation? How how did you feel? You knew already had you been here in Boston to visit? How was it?

[00:09:44]

I had come to Boston for an MUN Model United Nations high school trip and I was here for a very flurry snow, not real snow.

[00:09:55]

My God.

[00:09:55]

It was my first snow, and we stayed at the Marriott in Central Square, if you know where I'm talking about. Vivid memories. I think it was like host out of Harvard MIT. I was an MUN program. I was like, wow, this is a real city. Coming from Miami, which is just a sprawl.

[00:10:12]

Wide and large, everything.

[00:10:14]

I was like, wow. I was Cambridge and I was like, we're in a real city, but we did go to Boston too a little bit. I recall. [LAUGHTER]. That was my only experience coming here before.

[00:10:27]

I was prepared for having gone Seale. I was prepared for winter, but I wasn't prepared for breaking the historical snow record, 2014, 2015.

[00:10:36]

Great time being here. [LAUGHTER]

[00:10:37]

A little traumatized? I don't know if I can do this a lot.

[00:10:42]

Like the year of everything in February.

[00:10:46]

What was that one?

[00:10:47]

When the snow was piled up? You had tunnels that went through the side walk?

[00:10:51]

one hundred and seven inches in one month?

[00:10:54]

It was the most we've ever had.

[00:10:55]

Every weekend, that February was a huge blizzard. Then was just like when you were walking here to go to North Hall. Really large amount of snow. Did you feel how was your impact or how did you feel starting working here or starting here at HLS? Did you connect quick, was a little bit it was too big, was a lot going on? How would you adapt to the situation?

[00:11:29]

I think there were a couple of things I think helped. One was I had very little legal exposure outside of the things that I knew I cared about so I didn't have parents who were judges or attorneys or anything. I wasn't trying to follow anyone's path, which I think is freeing and liberating in some ways. I didn't know what a clerkship was. I wasn't trying to become a Supreme Court Justice. I wasn't going for some things that maybe other my peers were and I have already been in a very challenging environment with folks who were from private schools, from different economic backgrounds than mine at Yale. Coming here, that was all replicated, but it wasn't the first time that I was going through it. I think I felt a lot more comfortable. I could already code-switch prey well. It wasn't new to me and it wasn't something I had to learn to navigate. I think a lot of friends I ended up making, it was the first time they were in an environment like Harvard. That was challenging and I obviously still experiencing impostor syndrome. But I was more aware of it and I was more aware of things like that, it wasn't the first time that I was encountering. I think that helped too. I could see some of my who ended up being my friends just struggling a lot more with trying to prove their worth that they did deserve to be here, that they did merit being in the same classroom as other folks. I think one I was hard [LAUGHTER].

[00:13:02]

Do you think that the expectation whether it is because it's Harvard or it is a family pressure? Do you think this affect the way that students start here because it is a heavy load first year, that everybody knows? It is extremely academic focused. Then second third year, you start exploring more the clinics and, where you're going to practice what you are choosing in terms of a career? But do you think that a lot of this pressure comes from whether is your own perspective, what law school should be in our family pressure in terms of it is?

[00:13:41]

I think in terms of that, too. For my parents I already achieved great. I was a Harvard Law School. This is great. Whatever I did was fine, and I'm so grateful for that. I think a lot of it is family pressure pressure that you put on yourself? If you're a minority there's just there's a lot also there. Feel like you have to represent or you have to do well. I think we're doing better, maybe, hopefully. Younger and younger generations are still struggling with a lot of the same, but hopefully, we're talking about it more.

[00:14:15]

When did you find out that Dianna Parish was coming to Law School?

[00:14:20]

Maybe I don't remember how we found that out. She was a year ahead of me here. Turns out she also really wanted to do negotiation work, and she had done the same clinic that I ended up doing where I now teach. We had a lot in common. It was really beautiful.

[00:14:34]

Isn’t that interesting. From the time that you separate and you go for different places, did you have a chance to visit your other or you never?

[00:14:44]

No. We only saw each other once in DC when I was working in DC to get coffee to see who we were as adults. It was a nice coffee, and that was it, and then we ended up reconnecting again here.

[00:14:56]

Is such a beautiful story when you both end up she was one year ahead, which can be helpful as well. She went through a lot of struggle that you would be facing or other students would. Did you get involved with organizations here?

[00:15:13]

The only reason that I think we had met before because I was always ordering lunch for who knows what organization. It's like Felipe pizza [LAUGHTER].

[00:15:23]

I tried to explain to the new generation of a DOS folks working there until there was a division of finance. All the students would go to DOS because of the cards. You need to put your orders for anything. Whether it was strips, events, or ordering food, whatever it was, was always that front desk, and whoever was sitting at the front desk would be managing the Pcards and going after students. Don't forget the receipt. My God, how many mails I sent to your students. You were late with your receipt and that thing. I think was a much more vibrant. I really enjoyed the front desk at DOS. I had such a great contact with so many students in different conversations, whatever their frustrations were in class that they could, or sometimes, students would come to the front desk for the chocolate or whatever it is. Were so immersed still in their conversation in class. They would come. It's like I was not even there. They would grab the chocolate and keep talking and eating chocolate and really debating about what the professor said, and one was in favor. The other one was against and whatever it is and finish that and go. Sometimes getting to the door and say “oh, hi, Garzai, we're rushing now”. I always admire that environment, and I didn't interfere unless was something that I want to tease them about. But it was a great time. I think I really had a great experience. My connection with them was easy. I always felt like a if you can talk for people who work with higher education and sometimes can feel like issues can be difficult, I can count in my hands the moments that I had with issues that I had unpleasant connection or situation. But overall, and you have close to 2,000 students, was just fantastic. It was such a great experience.

[00:17:27]

Many folks know you because of DOS.

[00:17:30]

Yes. The front desk there because the places that I have been, that was the biggest exposure to everything. You went through and then you had your path. You chose what you want to do in terms of negotiation.

[00:17:47]

Yes, I did end up, and that was the first time in life that I really think, I was like, I really wanted to do that thing, and I did that thing because everything else I had been like, I guess I'll apply to these colleges and, I guess I'll do. Like, no, I really want to do those negotiation work and Harvard Law School seems to have the program to this. I have to go there. It was the first time that I really aimed for something and did it, and was able to do it, and I ended up tying and I took a bunch of negotiation classes, and it's still very work that I would love to continue to do into some capacity in life. A lot of my peers, like my classmates from my year, are now also clinical instructors there. I pretty much know everybody in that office, and it's pretty small. It's a small world to be friends with these other folks that were also my classmates.

[00:18:33]

You were very probably very much in touch with the PON Program on Negotiation Mediation Clinic.

[00:18:39]

Yes. The Dispute Design clinic I ended up doing two semesters. Design Clinic. My other semester was at the Clinic I currently teach at, actually. I did three semesters of clinical practice, which I do not always recommend to students to do [LAUGHTER]. I also got certified as a mediator while at Harvard, which, my last semester through the Mediation Student program as well. The SPO. I over overdid it, but I loved it every little bit.

[00:19:13]

You had something in mind.

[00:19:14]

Just doing what I wanted to do.

[00:19:15]

Exactly. That's what counts. Did you have a chance to study, take class with Professor David Hoffman?

[00:19:22]

Yes.

[00:19:23]

Sheila Heen.

[00:19:24]

Sheila wasn't around, I think teaching when I was here, but I did with Professor Hoffman. He actually was the professional responsibility course. He was the one who taught that one? He had this different bend to it. We were talking about a collaborative law, which I didn't know, but that's not a thing I wanted to do. I remember actually when my sectional leader was contract Professor Rakoff, and I went to his I never went to professor office hours, but I liked him, and so I went to him and I was like, really like contracts, but I want people to work together more, and I'm not sure what that looks like. He's like, well, there are some people who do this, usually, like divorces. Like, I don't want to be a divorce attorney. Then I get to three hour, and I'm in collaborative law with Professor Hoffman. He's talking about how it's done in the business setting. It's done often in family, also scenarios, and divorces. But it's about getting people to collaborate. There's a lot more to it but as you go through resolving this dispute and getting to a better place, and I was like, This is what it's all about, contracts, too [LAUGHTER]. This is what Professor Rakoff probably was hinting at. Now here in three hour I saw that full circle, and how to bring it all together. I was very fortunate to have Professor Hoffman as a professor, too.

[00:20:45]

Do you know that he has a phenomenal event happening tomorrow?

[00:20:50]

I'm trying to go, too.

[00:20:51]

I want to go there.

[00:20:51]

I keep sending reminder emails, and I was like, he might have been my professor. [LAUGHTER].

[00:20:56]

I really want to be there. I really like this.

[00:20:58]

I really want to be there.

[00:20:58]

I was watching some of his videos and things that he did, and how he changed his career from litigation to negotiation and mediation. I think that just such a beautiful story in the way that he presents his case. He's really nice.

[00:21:12]

His class was the first time, I think I really was exposed here to the idea that you can pave your own way in this profession because the field that he practices in was developed by someone who had an idea. To me, it was like, there were all these ingrained ways of practicing law, but actually, you can figure out a way of doing things differently, you don't have to always follow the same model, and that was the first time that I sort of got that little bit of freedom to say, you can be an attorney and you can be an attorney in many ways.

[00:21:40]

In many different ways.

[00:21:41]

That was very liberating, too, as a three hour.

[00:21:45]

Then you graduate here in 2017? Did you work somewhere else for a while?

[00:21:50]

I did. I was at a big law firm in New York City for a little over three years.

[00:21:55]

How was that experience? Challenging?

[00:21:57]

It was challenging.

[00:21:59]

Grueling. Can I do it? Of course, I can do it. Do I want to do it? Not really. Made a lot of good friends, too. I was very lucky. A lot of the junior mid-year associates were very nice, lovely people. I still have a very good friendship so stay. It just was not the practice I wanted to do. It was the first time that I was like, How did I telling you all that I told you about? I was now working on gas and aircraft financing deals.

[00:22:24]

Wow.

[00:22:24]

How did I get here? That's not where I was planning to go at all, but law school debt being a big factor, had to pay that down, had to get some savings. It was tough. Also to build a transaction I knew I didn't want to litigate. I wasn't sure how to do any of the negotiation work yet in a way that would pay me enough to live. Support my family, so then I had to just go to a big law firm and also get some skills to be able to practice laws a transactional journey, and that's very hard to do in the public interest realm right after law school. I didn't have the flexibility of can take a 50 K salary after law school. That wasn't something I was going to be able.

[00:23:08]

Tried to figure it out. And then when law school work comes back. What did that happen?

[00:23:15]

Yeah, during the pandemic, actually, was someone who went to the clinic to the community enterprise project of the Transactional Law clinics with me, and they heard of an opportunity. They actually were a fellow in another organization, heard of an opportunity there, told me about it, applied to not get heard about this other organization that they were linked to, and I applied, and I did get that job. Thanks to that student, that was my classmate at the clinic, that I ended up getting my first job out of Jump ship from the law firm to very small nonprofit, and I had a team of one other person and a half and a half. We were very small split and she's fantastic and I learned so much from her, and we're good friends, and so we ended up working for a year and a half together and had a lot more community work, going from the big law firm to more community-centered economic development work, Brian Price, who was a director.

[00:24:12]

Brian Price.

[00:24:13]

Transactional Law clinic.

[00:24:13]

Yes,.

[00:24:14]

My professor. I had a TA, at the clinic too.

[00:24:17]

Remember, Brian. Since I was in Facilities.

[00:24:21]

My clinical instructor was Amanda Kool. She was also extremely, just gave me a lot of guidance and modeled a lot of, like, how I would want to practice law and the kind of person I would want to be. And so I had TA for her so Brian, I think saw he's really good about Linton, and I think he saw my career shift, and there was an opening. He's like, Hey, do you want to apply? I actually because I was at a moment where I needed to think about what was next, then I had the chance to come back here.

[00:24:49]

Are you happy?

[00:24:50]

Yes.

[00:24:51]

Is that a work that finally feels like here is something that in my path that I always?

[00:24:58]

Nothing I ever thought about. I was afraid of teaching because when I was younger because I thought that I didn't have anything to teach, on my mom's side, both my grandparents were teachers, actually, it's in my blood, and it's been really lovely when I TA the negotiation workshop as a three all the winter negotiation workshop was the first time I taught, and I loved it. I was like, Wait, maybe It's not about how much of an expert I have to be, but it's about me helping facilitate the for other people. Maybe I can do that. That I can do. I don't know if I can be an expert, but I can definitely do that and I love doing that.

[00:25:38]

Your parents must be very proud of the entire journey. What's their name?

[00:25:46]

Aixa. My mom was named. The Moshe pronunciation Arabic pronunciation will be Aixa, which may be more familiar to folks, but Aixa, that was the name of the Last Moorish Queen of Spain. My grandmother was. The right head cause she was a strong woman. So I read a book about the Last Moors in Spain, and the name of the Queen was Aixa Aixa, that is my mom's name, and then my dad's name is Pedro.

[00:26:13]

Pedro, I really believe that they are very proud and very happy with what you have achieved since you left Cuba. 8-years-old.

[00:26:24]

They are, and, it's thanks to them and thanks, too, right? It would have been possible if not extremists for me.

[00:26:30]

To their sacrifice, to bravery, to try something completely new in a place not speaking the language.

[00:26:41]

Not speaking the language, not having anybody. I went through a lot of challenges as a kid. You realized I wasn't communicating with as much with family back home. You do it to self-protect emotions? They had to do all of that, in their 30s, not speaking the language, not knowing how things work, having to figure it all out from scratch without any family support. Well, they had my mom had some family and extended family here, but it's not the same. They had to do a lot and sacrifice a lot. I used to feel guilty about it a little bit because I thought it was all about me. They told me, it was about you, but it was also about us. We also needed a new life. That gave me a little bit of less pressure to say, Oh, okay, like, this was all for us, but it wasn't just about me, and that's actually great because I felt a little less pressure, and so very grateful because I can easily see what my life would have been like otherwise. Of course, I worked hard and I did something to get me, there was a lot of luck. There was a lot of good people that stepped into the right times. Even from getting into elementary school, I had my mom's cousin who came and advocated for me to let me into the school because my dad had rented a place nearby that was very expensive for him to be doing that. Back then, he would go to Barney’s and Nobles and look through school records, and he was like, that's the best elementary school. I want my daughter to go there. He ended up paying really high rent to thinking, you go to the school that's close to you. That's usually how it works. It was a magnet program, and they said, No, we have a wait list from when kids are born, even back in the 90s, my mom's cousin went and helped to advocate. She would have been a good litigation attorney. She went with my grades, and she advocated for me and they ended up allowing me to come and join. Fantastic.

[00:28:38]

I had really good grades I spoke good Spanish, and I was very charismatic little kid, they ended up letting me start at that elementary school, that elementary school got me into a good middle school and got me into a good high school. It was pre the lottery system that now exist in schools Miami. And so I ended up going to. All these little things that you see you look back in life, you're like all these little moments helped get me to where I am.

[00:29:05]

You can see both ways too, how much you have to fight to get into the system. How much the systematic situation can deprive others? Exactly. You have the opportunity. If your father didn't have a mindset to try so maybe I have to be close and even rent something that is more than I could afford in his way, and then your aunt or cousin?

[00:29:26]

Yeah, my mom's cousin.

[00:29:27]

Your mom's cousin would come and advocate for you to give you a chance. How much was put in effort there thinking of you? Your mom can say that she was nothing Well, she didn't. I know that for them was deliberating, was something that they could conquer other things at that young age as well, but was you and them and in a family together, which is amazing. That's beautiful. That's a beautiful story. We talked a little bit. We getting to the closing of our conversation here, Patricia. Thank you very much. Everything for accepting to participate, for being a phenomenal person, I don't want to get emotional here. For being a wonderful student that I remember when you used to go there and chat with me. I was a front desk person only. You were a law of students. We look at you all in a different level. You're always kind. I'm so glad that you have a chance to reconnect for you to come and participate and now as a Clinical Instructor at HLS. It's wonderful to see trajectory from a Latina person who came from a strong mother, Aixa, your grandma was right. Thank you very much for your participation.

[00:30:50]

Thank you for being there for us when we were students and still being there for us now.

[00:30:55]

Thank you.

[00:30:56]

It means a lot, so thank you.

[00:30:58]

Thank you and for everybody out there, I'll see you soon. Bye bye.

[00:31:05]

Here are some sound bites from the beginning of our recording.

[00:31:09]

Then you can say, okay, Patricia. So you ready for today?

[00:31:13]

Yes.

[00:31:14]

Awesome. You can do it, and my voice is a little bit louder than yours. I should do.

[00:31:19]

Yeah. I can try to project more. That helps. No. Hello.