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**Edgar Kley Filho:** 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 the Equal Opportunity Office. My pronouns are, he/him/his and today, we are talking to Caitie Parmelee from the Graduate Program, who you tell us about her life, how long she is in this position at HLS and the work she does. Thanks for joining us, Caitie. Please tell me your story.

[00:00:41]

**Caitie Parmelee:** Thank you for having me, Edgar.

[00:00:43]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** That's my pleasure. Let's start from the beginning. We always do this. We always ask everyone to tell us a little bit about their origins, if they are from New England, if they are from somewhere else, just so you have a sense how you end up here in the end, but it's for our start side. Where are you from?

[00:01:07]

**Caitie Parmelee:** I grew up in Connecticut. I was born in Pennsylvania, but we moved when I was 4-years-old. It's a part of my life that's so far away. I barely counts. But, I grew up in Connecticut, in the same town where the University of Connecticut is.

[00:01:28]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Oh, wow.

[00:01:32]

**Caitie Parmelee:** Up until I moved to Boston, that was where I was my whole life.

[00:01:37]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Tell me about your childhood. How was the town where you lived? How was first years going through school? How was the whole situation?

[00:01:47]

**Caitie Parmelee:** I grew up in a really nice town, very nice for families. Definitely not somewhere where you stay after you graduate from college. But it was small on the smaller side, but not small town. I guess you would call it suburban, but I've, seen true suburbs, and it's more rural than that. It was always like a weird ambiguous place.

[00:02:21]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** But sounds lovely. But like for a child to grow up and go to school, feel safe.

[00:02:27]

**Caitie Parmelee:** Yes, always felt very safe. I was so comfortable my entire childhood walking around anywhere by myself probably gave me a false sense of security for the rest of my life. Because still I still don't feel unsafe walking around places by myself with earbuds in. Maybe that's naive of me, but.

[00:02:50]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** No, I don't think it's naive, actually. I keep thinking about the difference, for example, culturally, that's one of the first thing that someone coming from outside. I'm talking about where I came from and the experience that I had until up to the time when I came here. I'm here for 20 years, things might have changed. But one thing that really I felt like it was a huge difference for me. I came here when I was on my 35-years-old. I was not a kid anymore, was the sense of security. As a child going somewhere. I always talk here about my childhood to playing around, going playing with friends, neighbors, going to creeks or adventuring and have that feeling like, everything is okay. Did you have that same experience you had many, for example, siblings and cousins around or many friends from the neighborhood? How was it for you?

[00:03:53]

**Caitie Parmelee:** I have two older siblings. Obviously, especially when my brother, who is the oldest was still at home, we would spend a lot of time together, and we would, go off places by ourselves. There were woods nearby where he would take us for hikes. A few friends around the neighborhood. There weren't too many kids in my specific neighborhood. But no, there were a few there, and it was the same with my friends, too, from school. We never really had, I don't mean this in a bad way, but, adult supervision. If we needed a ride somewhere, our parents would drive us there. But then we were left to our own devices. It always felt fine, and it felt normal.

[00:04:51]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** That's exactly the same experience that I had. I would come back from school. First thing, I had to do my homework. If I didn't I wouldn't go play at all. Then she would say, go and be here before sundown. That was always the rules. It was such a cool time. But tell me about going to school. Did you go to school in your neighborhood or you have to take a bus, or go somewhere else? How was it? First years.

[00:05:23]

**Caitie Parmelee:** I went to school in my hometown. I went to actually four different schools. The town that I lived in was big enough to have three elementary schools.

[00:05:36]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Nice.

[00:05:39]

**Caitie Parmelee:** Two years in or so, I got switched to another one. Of those three schools. Then there was our middle school that I went to for fifth through eighth grade, and then high school. My high school was less than a mile from where I lived. I never took the bus there. My dad would drop me off in the morning, and then I would walk home in the afternoon.

[00:06:06]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** The experience were always good? No, the typical high school as well? Like, nothing they do?

[00:06:13]

**Caitie Parmelee:** I'd say fairly typical. I didn't have a bad time at high school or anything. I'm not super nostalgic for it.

[00:06:26]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** That's a good way to put it.

[00:06:27]

**Caitie Parmelee:** [LAUGHTER] Because it's still, that awkward time in your life it's like, I can see how some people would love to go back to that time. But for me, I was like I'm happy to [OVERLAPPING] keep that in the past.

[00:06:43]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Exactly. I can see that. It's interesting. Some people have different experience. Some have a great experience in high school, hate college. Some have hate high school, and then have a great experience in college. I think, like you said, is a moment in life. It depends on how the experience was and how you felt in that situation is going to strike something. Was that special? I don't know. Then when time to go to college?

[00:07:13]

**Caitie Parmelee:** College was an interesting experience for me. I went to the University of Connecticut. A big reason why I went there, is because my dad works there, and one of the benefits that faculty and staff at UConn have is their children. If they get in, they can attend tuition free.

[00:07:35]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Nice.

[00:07:38]

**Caitie Parmelee:** For that, I am extremely grateful, so grateful. I would do it again for that exact reason. I was not thrilled to be going to UConn. I was pretty anxious to get out of my hometown and to see more of the world, and I felt very trapped. No not being able to leave. There is a part of me that I wish if I could go back, I would take a gap year because I feel like I went in not really knowing what it was that I wanted to do. I didn't I didn't know enough about myself. I didn't know enough about the world to really be making the kinds of maybe not permanent decisions that they expect you to be making in college, but they expect you to know by the end of it, what it is that you're going to be doing. Because they just throw you out into the world, and it's like, go find a job now.

[00:08:41]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Exactly.

[00:08:43]

**Caitie Parmelee:** I do wish that I had had a little bit of a break to consider that.

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**Edgar Kley Filho:** When you say a break, you mean between high school and going to college?

[00:08:54]

**Caitie Parmelee:** Yeah.

[00:08:55]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** That's a good point, Caitie, because two things that I like to mention because I think I understood, let me know if I'm wrong about this. When you say I was not really thrilled to go to UConn has nothing to do with institution was just for example, your desire to maybe explore the wood a little bit. I don't know, go to California or go to Florida or going whatever it was, but far from the town, far from where you grew up, just to really have a different experience. Is that what your feelings were at that time?

[00:09:29]

**Caitie Parmelee:** Yes, that's exactly. But then at same time, going into an institution like UConn and have the chance to have that tuition free in a way, it's hard to pass. You really need to consider. Then you are in between what I would like to do, but what rationally, you have to think about what's the right thing to do and that's what has to be done, I think. Did you have a good experience there? In your time already, of course, when you think about UConn always about the basketball teams that they have because it's ridiculous. What did the programs that they have there and so successful like they were? Did you have a chance to enjoy that, experience that or chill a little bit like a focus?

**Caitie Parmelee:** College, especially the first couple of years, it was a bit of a struggle for me. I was struggling a lot with my mental health at the time. As I think is not uncommon with kids at that age, not fully recognizing that that's what I was struggling with. It got to a point where when I finally was able to name what was happening and seek out help for that.

[00:10:53]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Nice.

[00:10:54]

**Caitie Parmelee:** That it became a little bit of a turning point for me. I will say, though, the greatest experience that I had during college was not at UConn. It was my study abroad semester. I went to England the second semester in my junior year of college, and I spent six months there. Six months?

[00:11:18]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Yes. I was in a program that is actually not dissimilar to the LLM program in its diversity. I met and made friends from all around the world. It was just such an enriching experience. Those were, like, the best friends that I made my entire time in college. I fell out of touch with most of them over the years, as you do. I was 20-years-old. But, I recently reconnected with one and visited him and his partner in Toronto. He came and visited me in Boston.

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Wow, that's nice.

[00:12:01]

**Caitie Parmelee:** It's like that deep friendship that you form under those circumstances. It's truly lasting. We met back up, and it was like, no time, has it?

[00:12:10]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Nothing has changed. That's a beautiful part of this. Question for you, what do you attribute the difference or the the joy that you had going to restart abroad was because you had already looked for help in terms of what you were going through and that gave you an opening to feel more secure, more confident about what you plan to do or was really because the situation there, the diversity, international environment was different than the one that you were used to. How you consider both?

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**Caitie Parmelee:** I think it's probably a combination of both. I think I was in a really good place when I started that experience with my mental health, and that is definitely a contributing factor because anybody who has ever struggled with depression or anxiety can attest to just how big of an impact it has on not just how you're living your life, but how you view the world around you. It was like that lens was removed. By the time I started this experience. I'm very grateful for that. But it was also, I was in a new place where nobody knew who I was. I didn't automatically change the person I was because of that. But it was, like, weirdly freeing. Nobody had any expectations, of who I was and how I would talk or act. I was just able to be myself in a new way. Because you are in a very diverse environment where people are coming from all over the world. They all have different views on life, and this is a bit of a cliche, but people who put themselves in those positions are usually very open minded in terms of new experiences, meeting new people, learning about them new ideas, new world views. It was just a really great time and place for me to be where I could learn about other people. I could travel with them and they were just as excited about it as I was.

[00:14:44]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** It is so interesting what you were describing. I'm so glad that you had that experience. Sounds lovely. Now, on the other side, because you have this experience and I should wait until we talk more about when you start working at Harvard, but I don't want to miss the chance and miss that continue conversation based on your experience. We both work here. I was in the DOS for a while you are in Graduate Program, and you deal with students. You know how much you make efforts to try to help students and what ways you can figure out to help them. Going through what you have been through at that time, do you really think that administration can figure out how to help our students if they are not ready or another way, would you wish that there was someone that could have noticed that and called you for a conversation? How you see both situation working here and trying to help and being there and needing help?

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**Caitie Parmelee:** So, I will say, when I was in college, this was not a conversation. There were no sessions or flyers or people talking openly about how to recognize when you're struggling with something. There were some resources. Honestly, I think this is probably still true to a certain extent. They were very hard to access because it requires the individual to be proactive. For me personally, I was not in a place where I was even willing to admit that there was something I needed to be proactive about in seeking help. It was someone who brought it to my attention. It wasn't I one day was like, you know what? I need to get help. It was it was not anybody at my university. It was my sister. My sister called me one day after she had seen me over the holiday. She said, I think you're depressed, and if you don't call a doctor, I'm going to. I'm very lucky to have had somebody in my life, who was able to recognize that I was struggling and was willing to push me to do something about it. Today, especially here at HLS, I do see the efforts that we're making the administration is making to really, do more mental health awareness and programming and identify people who are in need of help, even if they're not coming to us, the ones who will never [OVERLAPPING] They look fine and they act fine, but they're not. That's something that I don't know the answer to this. I don't know how you do it, how you figure out who those people are. But I think having open conversations about it is definitely a good place to start and making it clear to students, to staff, and to faculty that there's no judgment here. There's nothing wrong in saying you need help. This is the first time that I'm openly talking about my own mental health. I think most people who know me know that it's something that I'm a huge proponent of, mental health awareness and support for students, but they don't know why. That's, I do feel a certain responsibility if I'm going to tell students, You need to be open with us, then I would like to be open as well, and I would like to do it and think that it's not going to affect how people look at me or treat me or think I'm able to do my job better or worse because of it.

[00:19:42]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Exactly. I know you for many. Let's be honest here in terms of when I say many years, because you work together here and I'm trying to age in anybody, but I know you for a while, you work with us, and I know how phenomenal you are in the work that you do. We have worked together, you in your Graduate Program, me when I was in the DOS, and how many events you have to prepare and work together because the two offices are connected somehow, dealing with the students, international level, and the JDs that we have. You are phenomenal if that was something, and I totally understand what you're saying. It's perfect right, what you know, the suspicions, stigma that is all around our society and cultures in general regarding this topic. I'm glad that slowly, I can see the program since I started work here, how much has been put through to make a difference, to make this more available, the resources that the university has that is phenomenal and all the other departments that are also available in case anybody needs and each department doing their part in terms of a mental health week and what you put as options for someone that needs or seek help. I'm very grateful that you are opening up and talking about this, being vulnerable. I'm grateful that you are opening up and we are talking about this. Thank you. Going back, I want to know after you have this great experience six month in England, how was going back to UConn?

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**Caitie Parmelee:** Oh, it was very hard. I went home. The university I was at in England, I had my own room with its own bathroom.

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**Edgar Kley Filho:** Oh, wow.

[00:21:43]

**Caitie Parmelee:** Then I came home. That was financially never going to be an option at UConn because housing at American universities is insanely expensive. I was like, Okay, I'm not going back to live in a dorm. I'll go live at home because I was very close. My parents house was just a couple of miles from the university. I went home, and I was living at home for the last year. I was just like, I need to get through this last year, and then I can go back out into the world again. It was very tough coming home. But I will say, my last year of college was a really good year for me in terms of setting me up for the next stage of my life because I had done really well to complete the credits that I needed to graduate, and by the time I got to my final semester, I switched to I was able to switch to being a part time student, so I could work 35 hours a week and really save up. I could move somewhere without immediately needing to have a job while I was there.

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**Edgar Kley Filho:** How long do you stay there? Three or four in UConn?

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**Caitie Parmelee:** UConn was four years.

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**Edgar Kley Filho:** Four years.

[00:23:08]

**Caitie Parmelee:** Yeah.

[00:23:09]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** So you come back, you graduate, and then what's your next step? How you go?

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**Caitie Parmelee:** I didn't know what I was doing when I graduated college. I graduated without a job. I had my university job that they were very nice and allowed me to stay on full-time for a few months after I graduated. Well, I figured out my next steps. My sister was living up in Boston. She was about to move to a new apartment, and she said, Do you want to come and live with me?

[00:23:46]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** You have a nice sister. I like her.

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**Caitie Parmelee:** Yeah, no. She was great. She helped me out. My first year. I took on a little bit more than half of the rent so that I could take my time to find a job.

[00:24:03]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Because she was already established here, right? She had her job and everything.

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**Caitie Parmelee:** Yeah, exactly. I moved up here to live with her, moved up without a job. I knew at the time, or at least I thought I knew at the time, that I wanted to work in the nonprofit field. But I found it very hard to break into without knowing anybody in the field up here. There's a lot of networking that goes into that. If you don't know anybody, it's going to be really tough to get hired. I didn't know what I was doing in looking for a job.

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**Edgar Kley Filho:** Start things out.

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**Caitie Parmelee:** Yeah. I took on some temporary work. I went to a couple of different temp agencies. Actually, the second one that I went to brought me to Harvard.

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**Edgar Kley Filho:** Really?

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**Caitie Parmelee:** Yeah, the second assignment that they had for me was a job in the Graduate Program office, reading financial aid applications.

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**Edgar Kley Filho:** So that was the first one?

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**Caitie Parmelee:** Yeah.

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**Edgar Kley Filho:** That's where you were since then?

[00:25:14]

**Caitie Parmelee:** Yeah.

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**Edgar Kley Filho:** Wow.

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**Caitie Parmelee:** Yeah, I came in as a temp, but I never left.

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**Edgar Kley Filho:** Interesting, Caitie, we were not the first person that talked about the job agencies that we have around Boston. They seem to do a fantastic job. It's a good thing for people looking for a job and they don't know how to start. You're talking about networking again. We're going to talk more about this, hopefully, as you talk about your job. But how important it is. But if you don't have that at the moment, these agencies can be a very good resource for people to try to figure out some people are success, some people are not. I think goes well with just say your own personality, your own, work ethic, the way that you see and trying to do what you do. Because when did you start at the graduate program with the Agency?

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**Caitie Parmelee:** With the agency February 2015.

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**Edgar Kley Filho:** 2015?

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**Caitie Parmelee:** Yeah. I was officially hired by HLS in mid-May 2015. I transitioned to an HLS employee at that time. Yeah. Yeah, I mean, I will say there was a certain amount of luck involved. The Graduate Program happened to have this open position that fit well with the little professional background that I did have and also with the international element, it was a good fit. Also, as a temp, I got, a little test run. They got to see me. How I worked. Which I think most people are not lucky enough to have that in a job search. So yeah, no, a temp agency is an amazing thing. For me, it was a lifesaver. If nothing else, I was like, Well, I can have some income coming in while I'm figuring out what I'm doing. I got the best case scenario where it led to a permanent job.

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**Edgar Kley Filho:** When you were working there, when you started working at Graduate Program, was Naomi already there?

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**Caitie Parmelee:** She was.

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**Edgar Kley Filho:** She was your direct contact, or you had?

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**Caitie Parmelee:** I was technically working for the Admissions and Financial Aid side as a temp. My contact was Melissa.

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**Edgar Kley Filho:** Melissa. Interesting. When you started work, you stay with the admissions or you were straight for front desk?

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**Caitie Parmelee:** I went straight to the front desk.

[00:27:56]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Front desk. Which is also a good experience, isn't it?

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**Caitie Parmelee:** Yeah.

[00:28:00]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** It is a good experience. Do you think the whole process work in a Graduate Program and have the learning curve there?

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**Caitie Parmelee:** Yeah, honestly, it's been an amazing experience. It's weird to say it's been an amazing first job because I've been here for almost 10 years.

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**Edgar Kley Filho:** First job, and I'm here for 10 years.

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**Caitie Parmelee:** Yeah, so I learned so much about how to be a professional in this job and working with people, working with students. Working with international students in particular, there's a certain element there that requires you a different empathy than you need working with a student who grew up in the US and is used to a US school because they're being thrown into an environment that's not just educationally different but culturally different on so many levels. I think that it's an amazing experience, and I think that anybody would be lucky to be working in that office.

[00:29:24]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** I love your group of people that work there that I know for so long. They're all amazing folks working together and to put the program and keep the program running. Your job, for example, that's completely different than in a way during commencement. Your own orientation, completely different than the regular orientation that DOS and JD programs offer. It is fantastic to see the job that you do. When you talk about your experience with International, did you stop there or have you how how your search for the word keeps going since you are working at Harvard. The girl who went to Connecticut but wish had gone somewhere else stopped searching or still investigating traveling, figuring out things.

[00:30:22]

**Caitie Parmelee:** Traveling is probably my favorite thing. In the world. That was probably the thing about the pandemic that was the hardest for me was having to stop that. But, I make an effort to travel somewhere new as often as I can. I try to take at least one new trip every year. I went to two new countries this year. One was very recent, a couple of weeks ago, I went to Costa Rica.

[00:31:01]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Costa Rica.

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**Caitie Parmelee:** Yeah.

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**Edgar Kley Filho:** I heard that's amazing.

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**Caitie Parmelee:** It was beautiful. It was my first time going there. I just went for a quick vacation decompress from the 100th anniversary celebration.

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**Edgar Kley Filho:** Yes. That's a lot of work.

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**Caitie Parmelee:** Yeah. Then the other new country that I went to was Uganda, and I'm planning to head back there in December.

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**Edgar Kley Filho:** What is in Uganda? Why Uganda?

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**Caitie Parmelee:** I went to Uganda with an organization called TAASA Health. It's a nonprofit organization that works to bring healthcare to rural communities. Right now, specifically in Uganda, eventually, we'd like to expand, but right now our focus is Uganda, and we have a clinic in Kalongo that opened, I think a little over a year ago now. That it serves more than 17 villages and more than 20,000 people. I got connected with the organization through my brother-in-law. So there's the networking again. Like you need to know someone. But I got connected with them, and they invited me to go out to the clinic with them in May this year. I went not knowing what I was going to be doing. They were just like, we just need hands. We just need people who can be there to help out with whatever. I went not knowing what I was going to be doing, and I was so busy the entire time I was there. It's a very young clinic with very limited resources. We have a clinician there and also someone who runs the pharmacy. She's also like a nurse, maybe a nurse in training. They do the healthcare for anybody within 30 kilometers who they come and with whatever ailments they have, and they're treated by these two people.

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**Edgar Kley Filho:** The group that you participated, how many were?

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**Caitie Parmelee:** We weren't all there at the same time. There was some overlap between the trips, but six total went out.

[00:34:02]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Six for?

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**Caitie Parmelee:** For this trip, yeah.

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**Edgar Kley Filho:** Then the main focus is medical assistance.

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**Caitie Parmelee:** Yeah.

[00:34:11]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** What kind of job you did while you were there? When you say that you had not much clue, but they needed help. What would you be doing yourself?

[00:34:20]

**Caitie Parmelee:** There were a lot of different types of things that I was able to help with. The first being, we brought over with us tons of supplies and clothes for donation. The first day we were there, we were just sorting through all of that and organizing it and figuring out what we were going to distribute, where, and then we would walk around the clinic and the property and just look at the condition that everything was in. One of the reasons why they were excited to have me there, along with two other people who this was their first time going over was we were fresh eyes. We were kind of going and looking at things and asking questions and saying things like, why don't we have a cabinet in this room? Things that seem so small and insignificant. So Richard doesn't have to run back and forth between the pharmacy to get a pair of gloves every time he needs to put an IV in. We would look at the systems that they had and how they were running. One of the other people who went over with me, Rohan, he has a finance background, and his big project was he did an inventory or he took the inventory that they had for medicine and all of their records, and he put it into a spreadsheet. Did an analysis to figure out what we needed to do to be able to reduce the number of trips that Richard, our clinician, was making to the city to buy medicine because he was driving out every weekend on a motorcycle, what they call a Boda Boda, which is a very dangerous trip to be making every weekend, because he would just go every time they ran out of something. He compiled all of that data and was like, based on what you've done over the last year, here's how much you could do in one trip that should cover you for the next four months. That was the type of thing that they were looking for and the types of projects we were doing. We did a lot of community outreach. We would just walk into the villages. We would hand out clothes to people on the street. They would see us coming and they would come up to us, and they knew that we would have something for them. We went into schools. We talked with the teachers there. We talked with the kids, the importance of education and health, and we went into churches, and we were basically just like, we're here you can come in for anything you need. It doesn't matter if you can't name it. If something's not feeling right, you can come in.

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**Edgar Kley Filho:** Wow.

[00:37:38]

**Caitie Parmelee:** Because a lot of people still didn't know that the clinic was there. We saw while we were there, people would come in the next day and say, I saw you in church. I've had this thing going on with my foot for a while. Can you help me? So that was amazing.

[00:37:54]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Why did you say that was dangerous? What's the was too far, what the risks would be for him to be driving far?

[00:38:07]

**Caitie Parmelee:** It was very far. It is a very far distance. But it's not just that. The roads are all unpaved.

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**Edgar Kley Filho:** Exactly.

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**Caitie Parmelee:** There are so many things that can go wrong when you're driving on a boda on those roads, if it's the rainy season the roads might just be impassable. There may be a lot of people driving at the same time and people drive dangerously. It might be like, incredibly dusty. We luckily, I did get to ride on a boda a couple of times, yes. It was actually really fun. I enjoyed the experience.

[00:38:59]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** But when you are in a safe area.

[00:39:01]

**Caitie Parmelee:** But on a hot dry day, you would not believe the dust that gets kicked up. We took a car ride out to the nearest city one day, Masaka. We were in a car. We were fine. But we had to keep bringing the windows up. Anytime somebody passed us because so much dirt would come up. It would just come into the car. Can you imagine being exposed on a motorcycle? Then the difficulty in seeing.

[00:39:39]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Sometimes rocks being thrown because, what vehicles are going or passing by. There's a lot of things to consider there. I can see what you're describing. The distance to go from one place to another, calculate, I need to leave here at this time, to be able to come back while it's still sunlight because otherwise, that's another fact that can be a problem too. When you say that you are going back again, how long do you stay in that place?

[00:40:09]

**Caitie Parmelee:** My plan is to go for two weeks.

[00:40:11]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Two weeks? But they stay there longer, they go for stay on?

[00:40:19]

**Caitie Parmelee:** Richard, our clinician, he lives on site.

[00:40:23]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** He lives there?

[00:40:24]

**Caitie Parmelee:** Yes. As does, he lives there with his wife and his daughter. We have a groundskeeper who lives there with his family. For lack of a better word, I'm going to call her nurse. Praise. She also lives on site. We have a small compound of apartments that were built sometime in the last year. That's where I stayed as a volunteer.

[00:40:57]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** When the volunteers go they have a place to stay. Nice.

[00:41:01]

**Caitie Parmelee:** They all live there year round, and then the people I traveled over with were the US staff, the board members, and then just volunteers, you don't have to like, as I can attest to, you don't have to have any kind of experience or specialty to go over. That's the thing that I'm not sure I ever fully understood, because it's something that I've always wanted to do. I wanted to travel and to go and volunteer and do something like this. But I didn't know if I could. It was like, what do I have to offer? The fact is you have yourself to offer. If you're there and you're willing to work. If the opportunity ever arises for anyone, I would say, go for it. Just go and do it. I'm really happy that I did because I've been saying for so long, this is eventually the type of work I want to transition into doing. I would like to be able to go and live in one of these communities for a year. Just work there. It's one thing to say it and another thing to do it. It's where I went, there was a lot of poverty, and it can be tough to see, and it can be tough to live in. I was there for two weeks. I was unfazed at having to use a latrine. It's two weeks of my life. I don't know that I would feel the same way after a year. But, it's a hard way of living that I think can become romanticized. People say, well, they're poor, but look how happy they are with what they have.

[00:43:11]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** What other option?

[00:43:12]

**Caitie Parmelee:** Right, I know. I was like, well, what are they going to do? Sure, they don't necessarily need more things. Just because they don't have iPads, doesn't mean, but I feel like that is not a good measure of whether somebody is living the way that they deserve to live.

[00:43:39]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Sometimes not having the basics. Did you have a chance have other questions because you said that you went to the church, you went to schools, you talked to the villagers, you definitely have someone a translator, interpreter to go through all the conversations, what were things that you noticed that not even need the translation? Your connection with folks, how was it? Did you have a chance to experience that to being with them?

[00:44:13]

**Caitie Parmelee:** To a certain extent, yes, we got to connect with people in the community. They were so welcoming and just so lovely on every level, so happy to have us there, not as you're coming in and you're giving us things, happy to have visitors, to have people who wanted to come into their church and to sing with them and to dance with them. It was really really beautiful experience getting to be with them and to spend some time. They're definitely like the language barrier was an issue in terms of you don't get deep conversations. But, you get enough to, you just go and you clasp hands with someone, and that says a lot. Right there.

[00:45:18]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** There is a human connection. There is an energy that you sense in that exchange that's different from the regular good morning. Hey, how are you doing that you see here? It is this exchange in terms of a human connection that I can offer something here that you can benefit from. Like, healthcare is so important for many of these communities. Anywhere you go around the and can be expensive or non existence, depends on the place where you go. I think it's a beautiful job when you can offer that. I think that I'm glad that you had a chance to experience. Did you ever felt unsafe?

[00:45:57]

**Caitie Parmelee:** No.

[00:45:58]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** No. Always good. The organization that you go with, the group that you go with is very well structured also offer to have access to the work that you do.

[00:46:11]

**Caitie Parmelee:** I would say the reason why we can do what we do and feel safe and secure in doing it is because of Richard and his team on the ground in Uganda, who is they are really the heart of TAASA. They're the ones doing the day to day work and going out and building the connections with the community that are necessary to even be there operating.

[00:46:49]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** That's nice.

[00:46:49]

**Caitie Parmelee:** As a clinic. Richard, in particular, has an enormous amount of respect in the community. Because we have that connection to him, it extends to us. It's not even just that. It's anywhere you go, you need to be smart in traveling. I would say it's no different there. You don't go and wander off by yourself.

[00:47:21]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Exactly.

[00:47:22]

**Caitie Parmelee:** You'll be fine. It's a rural area. It's quiet.

[00:47:32]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** It sounds beautiful, too. Sounds like a, how was your day to day work? You had for example, stupid question 9-5 that you were supposed to be volunteer or is something that you wake up and there are something to be done, and you are immersed in that universe, the way that can be done.

[00:47:52]

**Caitie Parmelee:** We would wake up every morning and we would all have breakfast together. Then once we were done eating, we would go off and do whatever tasks we had planned for that day. I would spend a fair amount of time in the clinic actually, seeing patients with Richard, obviously not giving any medical care.

[00:48:17]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** But it would be like a triage. To figure out where they are or basic information to be able to pass along.

[00:48:24]

**Caitie Parmelee:** Something I could do was, I could take blood pressure, just to get that moving along. The patients a lot of time would like having us in the room, just standing there. I think some of them did think that we were all doctors, but as long as we weren't, trying to give medical care where we weren't supposed to, it was fine. But, they liked having us stand there. Sometimes I would just be in the room. There were a couple of times where there would be a patient who was in pain, and I struggle with that a lot. I struggle to see somebody in pain. There was this older woman who was having some trouble with her knee and she needed some injections. It was incredibly painful for her. I could see just how upset she was. I just sat next to her on the bed and just held her hand while while that was happening. That was the type of thing where I was like, I didn't like, materially offer anything here? There was nothing that I did that allowed her to be treated. But just being able to be there and to be a comforting presence. I was very grateful to be able to do that.

[00:49:57]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** It is a great experience, isn't it, Caitie? Should be, I don't know, that makes my mind goes in terms of who you are, questioning who we are and how you can be good humans to other humans that we meet in our lives, do you know? There is a language barrier, but you understood what was going on. I was not necessary much. I'm pretty sure that you understood that you were kind enough to be with her in that moment. There was a pain there and you were trying to offer some. I truly believe that energy makes a huge difference when you are in this kind of a moment. Just offering that, there is a message. We call anything, love, kindness. But for me, it's always a really strong energy that when you are connected, makes a huge difference in someone's life. That's really beautiful. When you are going back again?

[00:50:54]

**Caitie Parmelee:** December.

[00:50:55]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** December?

[00:50:55]

**Caitie Parmelee:** That's the plan.

[00:50:57]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** This time, you're also going to stay there for two weeks?

[00:51:00]

**Caitie Parmelee:** Yes.

[00:51:01]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Nice. I want to learn more about that. We are going to be talking more. If someone is interested in that one, they would be a good resource? They can connect with you and find out more. Nice. I'm so happy with our conversation, everything that you told me about that, for your acceptance to participate in this project, is just a way that our staff can tell their stories, tell their experience, and the others can relate to that or the new ones can see if they're interesting to listen to. To leave a mark here, a way for us to tell our stories and what you did and how you got here and what the meaning of our work here. I really thank you very much for coming and talking to us. Good luck with your work with Uganda, with this organization that sounds so beautiful and the work that you do. When I thought that you went to Uganda, I thought that you were on a tour. Just Safari or something like that.

[00:52:06]

**Caitie Parmelee:** I've done that, too. [LAUGHTER]

[00:52:10]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** But this one. I'm glad that you told me this story because, going there, nothing wrong with that. But this is really meaningful. There is one way that you go there to enjoy yourself and visit and see the beauty in that continent. But this one that's a different kind of relationship. It's beautiful.

[00:52:32]

**Caitie Parmelee:** It's Uganda is, I think, the fifth African country I've been to. I will say it was the first time that I really felt like I was in an African country, really seeing the country for what it was and not just the the amazing beauty. I mean honestly, it's really phenomenal if anybody ever gets the chance to go on a Safari. I highly recommend it. It's not the same, though, as being in the community and being immersed in the culture. It was just really it was the most amazing experience for me. I'm so grateful that I had the chance to go and that I have the opportunity to continue working with them.

[00:53:20]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** I think that is a different meaning. Anyways, thank you again. Thank you for being wonderful co-worker. I admire you. I loved the work with you when you were in the US and Graduate Program. Our work around Hauser to put these students to graduation. All the work that you do there has been always so much fun. We are always stressed running around, but that is fun in everything. Our orientations, trying to get them in line, to go to the food trucks when you have that's another one that you have to be doing. But you have always been wonderful to me. I never had a chance to tell you directly that, but I always appreciate everything that being with you, chatting, laughing, being stressed and whatever it was that you had to do in our work, that means a lot for us. Thank you very much.

[00:54:17]

**Caitie Parmelee:** Thank you so much Edgar.

[00:54:19]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Thank you for accepting to participate. For everybody out there, we'll see you around. Bye bye.

[00:54:26]

**Caitie Parmelee:** Bye. [LAUGHTER] [MUSIC]