[00:00:03]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** You were listening to tell me your story where we connect to HLS staff on a personal level.

[MUSIC] This is Edgar Kley Filho from Office of Equal Opportunity. My pronouns are he, him, his. And today, we are talking to Sarah Alkhambeshi from Faculty Support Services. Who tell us about her life, how long she is in this position at HLS, and the work she does. Thank you for joining us, Sarah, and please tell me your story.

[00:00:42]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Thank you so much for having me. I'm excited to be here.

[00:00:45]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** It's my pleasure. Let's start, what can we say from the beginning talking a little bit about you, your family history, if you have siblings and how was growing up.

[00:00:58]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** My dad is from Yemen and immigrated to America in the 80s. He actually immigrated with my mom who's also from Ethiopia. They actually met in Ethiopia. It's a crazy story actually that I recently discovered. My grandpa started in Yemen, traveled to Saudi for work, found himself in Somalia for work, and then continued on to Ethiopia for work, and then somehow met my grandmother in the middle of a village in Ethiopia, married an Ethiopian woman. That's how my dad was born and raised in Ethiopia, but yet of Yemeni background. We have a very blended family. It's really beautiful because we all share the Ethiopian culture. My dad speaks the language, but we also still have the Arab culture in our family. A lot of our extended family lives in Saudi Arabia, so it's a very blended family.

[00:01:45]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Wow, Sarah, that's a beautiful story. Your grandfather, right?

[00:01:49]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Yes.

[00:01:50]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** His whole family is from Yemen.

[00:01:52]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Yes.

[00:01:52]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Then he was working in Ethiopia for some reason during a period of time?

[00:01:57]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Yes.

[00:01:57]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** And met your grandmother there?

[00:01:59]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Correct. Yes.

[00:02:00]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Then they married and go back to Yemen?

[00:02:03]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** They did live sometime in Yemen, but they primarily stayed in Ethiopia where my grandmother's from. They raised their kids there. My dad and my uncles and aunts were born in that village in Ethiopia. It's called Adisu in the Tigray region of Ethiopia.

[00:02:19]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Do you know more or less, I know that you just found out a lot of this history, [LAUGHTER] but do you know how long your father lived in Ethiopia? Because you told me that he learned the language.

[00:02:28]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Yes, he was born and raised there. He was an entrepreneur from birth, essentially, because the whole family has a lot of entrepreneurship spirit. He's definitely continuing with me. But so my dad stayed there until around, 13, 14, is my understanding. Then he just went all across the East Africa region and the Middle East for work. He's like a hustler from day one. [LAUGHTER]

Amazing. How did that work? Because I'm asking this question because sometimes immigrants, I am one. Families of immigrants. Sometimes they try to teach their children their own native language. Not always happen if they are living in a country that is the primary language. The kids not always gad I can tell you because my father German descent. His father was German. My mom, both parents, Italian, none of them learn anything. You know if your grandfather was teaching the language from Yemen to them or they just learned later in life.

They actually grew up a multilingual household. They knew Arabic and the language of Tigrinya, which is one of the Ethiopian languages as well as the Ethiopian language of Amhara or Amharic. My dad now knows four languages because he also knows English.

[00:03:53]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Exactly.

[00:03:55]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** I can't imagine growing up that way. I'd be very confused. But I think they just naturally spoke it, and you know grasp it.

[00:04:03]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** But it takes some effort there from the parents from your grandparents in this case, to honor both language and learn a third one and then later English for your father in this case. I'm always fascinated by, when this multicultural aspect is kept and preserved. I think it's so important.

[00:04:27]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** It really is.

[00:04:28]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** For your father, makes a huge difference.

[00:04:30]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Absolutely.

[00:04:30]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** That's where the Alkhambeshi last name comes.

[00:04:34]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Yes. That is Yemeni family. In the Hadamut region of Yemen, which is Southern Yemen, they're very prideful about being from South Yemen, so have to make sure to say that. The way that a lot of Arabic last names work is Al is actually means the. It's the Khambeshi family. Wow. you'll see a lot of Arabic last names that might be like, Al Masri or Aldi or Alda, and that just means the x.

[00:05:02]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Then the proper name.

[00:05:05]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Exactly. That's actually a very huge family in Yemen. We have a lot of descendants we barely know.

[00:05:11]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** I have to ask. You are going through different direction. [LAUGHTER] Usually, I ask about you about your family and then go to school. I don't want to miss the chance and sometimes I forget. Also curious about food. For example, your grandfather from Yemen and your grandmother from Ethiopia. I don't remember if I had experience or had chance to eat food from Yemen. Although Brazil has a very strong Arabic backgrounds lot of immigration there.

[00:05:39]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** That's beautiful.

[00:05:41]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** But I had the opportunity to eat in Ethiopian restaurant here.

[00:05:47]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Nice. Okay.

[00:05:49]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** I think there is one here in Cambridge on Mass Ave, not too far from here. I think it was the same restaurant when I ate it was in downtown Boston. In that area and I loved food. I thought that was amazing, on the floor and take a piece of for me would be a bread or tortilla style, and then you take the food with your hand. I love that. It is such a different way for you to eat. The food tastes different.

[00:06:16]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** It does. It's the only way to eat food. It's the best way to eat food.

[00:06:20]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Then when I had the chance to go to this Etop restaurant and I had the bread there that I would pick up the food and eat it gives you a different feeling when you are talking to your friends than you are doing that.

[00:06:33]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Absolutely.

[00:06:35]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Did you have the experience or did you have a chance to experience the food from both sides?

[00:06:41]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Growing up, I will say that I identified and experienced more of the Ethiopian culture and a big part of that is because my mom's family are who exists here in the USA. My dad's extended family lives in Saudi Arabia and unfortunately, I didn't grow up with them. I mean, honestly, like, I feel like the revelation of even being from an Arab background and, the language, the culture, even the religion, all of that I honestly discovered in my adulthood. I knew my dad was this, Arab guy, and, he would speak this language once in a while throughout my life, and I'd be like, what is he saying? What is he talking about? It was foreign to me, and yet it was still part of my identity. I'm honestly, ashamed that I don't know the language or that I don't know the culture. I feel like maybe as a kid, I should have asked more questions because I think my dad was also being very respectful to my mom and my mom's family and also us. We were just these American kids just growing up in the US with Ethiopian culture because, they were there. I respect my dad for that, but I definitely have, an itch now to just know everything and anything about the culture. Exactly.

[00:07:54]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** That's what I felt, too. I think they were all very respectful of our freedom in terms of choices. But I just feel like, I could have learned Italian. But anyways, we talking about your grandparents, which was a beautiful story. Then how did your father met your mom? Is your mom also from Arabic word or she's American?

[00:08:18]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** No, so she's Ethiopian likely and they actually met in Ethiopia, and they came to America together. They first met when my mom was like 16, and he was around the same age too. They parted ways, and then somehow God brought them back together. They just met, like randomly in the middle of nowhere twice. In the city, but completely unexpected unplanned, and it just felt like fate. Destiny brought them together. I mean, unfortunately, they are divorced now, but we were meant to be here. We were born from that. [OVERLAPPING].

[00:08:52]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** There was a story.

[00:08:54]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** There was. It was beautiful and it brought the family here. I mean, we had an amazing childhood. They are amazing parents. I couldn't say more amazing things about them, honestly. I'm so grateful for them. I'm so grateful for our background. I will say, going back to the identity piece, one of the things, looking back on that I feel like maybe a lot of immigrants do is, they come here and instead of bringing their culture with them, we adopt American culture. I think the really weird thing looking back is that my parents gave me the greatest upbringing, but it was very American. I grew up in, Christian private schools from preschool through high school. There was no diversity. It was just me amongst other Americans so much so that I was like, I'm just an American, too. I completely did not realize we had this rich background. Because our parents did such a great job of just assimilating us and I think that's an immigrant's mentality of thinking this is what we have to do to be successful. We have to shed our skin and adopt what we come to in order to actually be successful in this place.

[00:10:02]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Very true.

[00:10:03]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** I think it's really beautiful now to, I think, not only realize for myself that I can be myself, own my culture, and be successful, but also show my parents, like, hey, we're proud of where you come from. We're proud of your background. We love where you come from. We want to embrace that, highlight that, and, show while we do that, we can all be successful. I think that's a really beautiful realization that I've come to in recent years that I hope my family and my parents really accept and believe too.

[00:10:31]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** That's a beautiful way to put because that you said that moved here?

[00:10:35]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Yes.

[00:10:36]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** You were born here? How was your life going kindergarten and then like a K 12? If you want to make a stretch in your experience, you was pleasant. Tell me how much you can in terms of growing up, going to school and have your experience in US.

[00:10:54]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** I mean, honestly, I had a very pleasant, childhood. I'm grateful. I went to the best schools. My dad, I don't even know how he did it. Now being an adult with bills. I don't know how he managed to pay for everything that he did. Especially private schools. If I had the opportunity, I probably would have just taken the free route. We had a pleasant experience. I definitely realized it was at the expense of my parents. They did a lot to put us through that. But it was a very normal American upbringing. It's actually, daring to look back and realize, I feel like I am nothing where I come from. Does that make sense? I'm more like where my parents came from. [LAUGHTER] But nothing like where I came from and I think the kindergarten through 12th grade experience, it gave me what I needed to succeed in America, and it was a very normal American upbringing. I think it gave me the right foundation. But I think in the process, I wasn't able to learn about who I really am deep down until I got out of that school system, if that makes sense, because I was just surrounded by a very traditional American school, Christian religion. There was not really any choice in the process, if that makes sense. Everything's just a [OVERLAPPING].

[00:12:13]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** That's what it was there.

[00:12:16]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** I think it was a really more eye opening experience after high school, where suddenly, the world is at my fingertips and I can explore, move to New York City, go to the school that I want to go to, learn about myself, learn about what actually matters to me and become who I think I've always been but just never been able to actually own, if that makes sense.

[00:12:39]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** I have to go back for two different reasons. One is, based on your family history and separating the fact that you were going to school and learning from a culture where you were born here in the US. But at home, it is a different story. There is a different upbringing. There is a family culture that's different from that when you go to. What do you think the word defining experience or values that shape who you are, based on your family influence rather than the school. We can talk about the school faster.

[00:13:18]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** I think definitely the importance of family because we a huge family. Both of my parents have double digits of siblings. I think like 10 or 11 each. I think we always gathered around each other every week. My grandparents were the center of that. We went to their house almost every day. I went to my grandma's house, I think, most days after school. The importance of family, I think is really the value that stuck with me, and I think that also later on in life became what continues to be valuable in terms of, like, understanding them, learning about them because they were such a central focus of my life. That even though, outside of my family, I had this very American life. The center of it all was still family. It always continued to be the center and, the thing that I kept going back to and I was like, wow, these are amazing people. They have such amazing backgrounds. I need to know what this is. I need to understand you. I need to understand where we come from. I think that they did a good job of balancing it. Honestly, I applaud them because I don't know how anyone can balance two completely different cultures and languages and still learn how to raise your kids in that environment. I think they really did an amazing. With everything.

[00:14:34]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** One question that I forgot about still your family because I think that is such a rich background and culture in two completely different areas, did you have a chance to connect with folks from Ethiopia or Yemen when they used to come to visit or did you have a chance to go visit them?

[00:14:53]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Yes, both. Luckily.

[00:14:55]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Have you been to the village where your grandparents your ven?

[00:14:58]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** No, I've been to Ethiopia and I've been to the capital city, which is Addis Ababa. But I haven't been to the village where my grandparents met, my dad was born and all of that. I want to.

[00:15:08]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** You are going to eventually.

[00:15:09]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** I hope so. Eventually. That's the plan. Me and my dad have already talked about it. I told him as soon as we can. Unfortunately, with a lot of these countries, there is still some conflict. It's not super safe in some areas. That's unfortunately a part of it. That influences our decisions. But as soon as everything is safe enough. That's the first destination I want to go to. [LAUGHTER]

[00:15:28]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Because when you tell this story, my first, my God, is she going back there to see? Because I am going there already. I don't even know your grandparents. [LAUGHTER] And your parents will say, I want to go to that village to see, they met here. It's like watching a movie, which is really cool thing. But I think talking about this cultural background, it is so important. I go back to mine too, with all the difference, always relate to the grandparents. My mom and my dad were the oldest in their respective families. Everybody around you, my mom's side mostly and even my dad when they used to come to visit was always based on my mom's as they grew older. Everything happened there. They were the point of attraction for the entire family to get together and drink and talk, and be loud and sing and all that and dance because depends on the celebration by after lunch or whatever they were eating, the furniture would be moved and then started dancing because they had to have something all thing [LAUGHTER]. This background that you're saying that shape your memory and it's going to last forever, it is something that's really strong. We talked about your experience going to school that felt like a very okay and average. By the way, I didn't even ask. What town you grew up?

[00:16:59]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** I grew up in Alexandria, Virginia. It's just a few minutes outside of DC, like 10, 15 minute drive probably from DC.

[00:17:11]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** You stayed there until high school?

[00:17:15]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Yeah, so I moved away around when I was 18, so college right for college. I moved to New York City for college.

[00:17:21]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** For college?

[00:17:22]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Yes.

[00:17:24]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** When leaving the town where you were leaving? Was it a small town? Was it a big town? more or less?

[00:17:30]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** I feel like it's a big city, for sure.

[00:17:33]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Big town.

[00:17:33]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Big town, yeah. But it felt like a small place.

[00:17:36]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Compared to New York when you were just jumping in.

[00:17:38]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Definitely. I felt like in New York City, I was moving around everywhere, like, completely incognito mode, as if you would never know anyone and no one would ever know me. But in Alexandria, like, everywhere you go, there's someone you know or someone that knows your parents or someone that knows your family. Half the time, I was just saying hi to people, and I was like, I have no idea who you are, but apparently you know my parents, so hi. [LAUGHTER]

[00:17:59]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Which is another thing that I always think is interesting, as well, because the reason I asked in terms of the size of the town because that makes a difference later. Depends on where you go to college or, for example, depends on where you lived. Going to a college or going to a community that's either more diverse or whatever it is, makes a difference because you are going to see people that you never saw in your life. But when you talk about going to New York City, then it's a completely different story. Like exactly like you said, I don't know anybody and I can do whatever I want because nobody's going to even bother about the way that they lived.

[00:18:40]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Exactly.

[00:18:40]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Going to NYC first, did you have already a path that you had in mind that you want to take, or you discovered everything on your way?

[00:18:52]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** I think it's a little bit of both. When I got there, to be honest, I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. I picked psychology as a major because I was like, I'm interested. I don't think I'm going to do anything with it, but let me just study anyways. I thought maybe medical school. It's like, the typical immigrant story, medicine, law, engineering, so I just picked one of the approved paths. But that's not what I stuck with at all. I think I knew deep down, I was still going through a phase of discovery. I honestly knew I needed to move in order to do that because, we're talking about being in a city where the community is so large. Everyone knows everyone. It also feels like you can't grow, you can't be who you want to be because so many people are watching or so many people are holding you accountable. Or maybe the family name is the thing that you're keeping in mind, the reputation, not of just me, but of my family. When I went to New York City, I had this moment of freedom where it wasn't necessarily freedom to just have fun, but it was just freedom to figure out who I wanted to be apart from my family. I think New York City to this day remains my favorite city because it was the place that I grew the most and I developed the most. I discovered that I don't think that I wanted to do medical school, and I still continued that path a little bit longer than I should have. I studied pre-med, graduated from St. John's University. I'm grateful for that and then realized that wasn't the path that I wanted to pursue. Definitely going in, it was clear but uncertain. Then afterwards, it was clear that that wasn't the path, and now I needed to figure out what the right path was. I think one of the reasons I focus on culture and identity so much is actually all the things that I want to pursue and that are very clear for me now connect to that. I'm pursuing a master's in international relations now. I have hopes of starting a nonprofit that focuses on providing a very specific service to immigrants and refugees. Then I'm also starting a business that is really centered around creating a device that will also most likely benefit more immigrants than most people. Hopefully it benefits a whole lot of people. [LAUGHTER]

[00:21:17]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** It'd be nice for much more people because then you would have a little bit more profit.

[00:21:22]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Exactly. But I know that the population maybe, especially in America. Hopefully, it's internationally beneficial. But I think a lot of what I'm pursuing now really is a connection back to my family, a connection back to culture, a connection back to identity, and me discovering who I am and anchoring myself in that has actually made my career path so much more clear.

[00:21:46]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** And different from where it used to be.

[00:21:48]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Exactly.

[00:21:48]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** I have so many questions and I don't I would be able to put them in place for what you just said, because there are different things in just the short few minutes that you just talked about is between high school, going to college, small town, going to New York. Have somehow an idea of what you like to do, changing everything. You touched that already. When you are in a small town, when you are involved with friends, family, and everything, the pressure or the unintentional in quotation of you should try this. You should be this. This is a good way to go. This is a good profession. Try this and try that. Of course, we tend to feel the pressure. We say sometimes, no, I'm dependent, I'm not going to do. But deep inside, you feel that pressure there. That's going to somehow influence your path for whatever you have to do. Before you get to the other part in New York, when you're already changing your perspective in terms of a path, what were good memories from this high school or elementary high school living in that smaller town? What were things that were memorable in a way that you care with you regardless of the change in path that you are going to do later?

[00:23:17]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Honestly, my grandparents. That's my first thought, because my time in Virginia, growing up, I feel like it had nothing to do with me because I felt like I was just like a puppet following the family, if that makes sense, 'cause I was also young.

[00:23:30]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Yes.

[00:23:31]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** But the thing that I associate Alexandria with my hometown is my grandparents because I remember I have videos on my phone that I still look back on now my grandpa. Every time we visit him, there was always music playing or dancing. Just like you mentioned with your family, and my grandma always forcing us to eat a lot of food. [LAUGHTER]

[00:23:52]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** You have to eat.

[00:23:53]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Exactly. It was always so fun. Even to this day, actually, my grandfather passed about a few weeks ago, actually. It's also fresh on my mind, too. But even now, going back to Virginia I guess when you ask the question of, like, what's the most memorable, it's them. Now when I go back, the most absent is them.

[00:24:15]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Yes.

[00:24:15]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Because they are my connection to the city and my memory of the city, that without them, it's almost like the city doesn't even exist. There's an emptiness that just [OVERLAPPING]

[00:24:25]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** It is almost the meaning,right? Is the reason.

[00:24:26]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Exactly.

[00:24:28]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** I totally understand what you're saying. There is a special place in south of Brazil. My dad passed away many years ago, but I had the chance to revisit the place with my mom. We took a long trip to go there because it's really far from where she lives now. My desire was to see the small house where we live. That was the most difficult part of my life with my parents because there was an economic crisis and everything else and was really hard coming back and restarting life in that place. But one of the best memories that I have how hard you fought and worked together to get out of that economical situation. But then when you got there, the house was not there anymore. They had demolished built something else. But I felt like it was my inner child that went there to see and was so disappointed what happened, a part of your history is not there anymore. I feel what you were saying. But then going to my other question, going to New York and starting college with the idea of medical or psychology all in that situation. You graduated in what was your major?

[00:25:42]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Psychology.

[00:25:43]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Psychology was your major.

[00:25:45]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Exactly.

[00:25:46]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** By the time when you graduate, you knew the path that you were going to follow that was not psychology?

[00:25:54]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** I think I knew it wasn't psychology, even when I picked the major. [LAUGHTER]

[00:25:57]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** At least you were certain that psychology was not what it was.

[00:26:00]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Exactly. Honestly, I feel like I was fulfilling a requirement, and that requirement was get my bachelor's degree. That was the mandatory minimum within family, within life. I pursued a post-baccalaureate pre-medical program at American University in Washington, DC. This is actually during COVID time. I was able to do it online, and that's when I finished all my pre-med classes. Even after I graduated, was still thinking, maybe I'll still do medical school, but I knew deep down inside that wasn't the path. I stopped my pre-med program. Actually, during this time, there was, like, a lot of other personal things, breast cancer related things that I was also navigating with my family and with myself. One of the reasons I pursued medicine to begin with, actually, is because my grandmother on my dad's side, so actually, the two that met in Ethiopia, she passed away from breast cancer, and then I also had two aunts that passed away from breast cancer on my dad's side. Then I also discovered that I have the breast cancer or genetic mutation, which means I have, I think the doctors estimated, like, 87% chance of developing breast cancer.

[00:27:11]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Very high.

[00:27:12]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Very high. I started screenings when I was like 16-years-old. At some point, they recommended that I have what's known as a double mastectomy, which is a surgery to remove the breast tissue and completely eliminate that risk essentially. I had that surgery actually while I was working doing my post-bachelor pre-med program. I moved back to DC to have that family support, do all of that in one year, finish the surgery. Then after all of that was done, that's when I moved to Boston. But once I finished that surgery and you could say eliminated my risk of breast cancer, I think I also eliminated my connection to medicine because I feel like I was only pursuing medical school in this study because I had such a deep connection with it. Then once I eliminated that risk, I wanted nothing to do with medicine. I think it was just almost a temporary connection because it was such a focal part of my life, since I was 16, I had screenings. I had all of these things. My whole life was centered around medicine, it felt like. It was just like, a natural progression of, I might as well study medicine because my whole life seems to be about it.

[00:28:24]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Was there a component of fear involved with that?

[00:28:28]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** To some extent, the relief component, yes, but I think the not necessarily fear compelling me to study. I think the fear made me feel like it was the greatest purpose I could serve in this world because it was the most meaningful thing to me in my life. I think the only question I ever asked myself in any career consideration is what can I do that's the most impactful? And the most impactful thing to me at that time was medicine. Even to this day, the things that I choose are based on what's the greatest purpose that I can serve?

[00:29:05]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** That is going to make a difference in your life.

[00:29:07]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Exactly. I think because my mind and my life was so tunnel visioned on medicine, it seemed like that was the only purpose that I could serve because if it was this important to my life and to my grandparents and my aunts, then it must be important in the world, and it is important in the world. I commend everyone that studies medicine, but it didn't necessarily need to define my life and my career trajectory moving forward. I'm grateful I was able to move on from there.

[00:29:33]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** That changed my question because my next question related to college and being in New York would be, do you think that New York because of how lifestyle is there, is what changed your perspective in path in life? But now based on what you're saying and everything that you went through and having this surgery, would that be the main focus or the main reason for a change of path? Was New York how you defined and decided to have the surgery that changed your path?

[00:30:06]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** I think the aftermath of the surgery was what changed my path. Because quite literally a weight was lifted off of my chest side, I felt like I can actually be done with this chapter of my life and move on. Like I don't need to dwell on this. I don't need to study this. Medicine is difficult. I really commend and respect anyone that chooses it, but it's emotionally straining. I worked as a medical assistant when I was in New York City, too, so I was able to witness firsthand what goes on. You're dealing with people that are also in the same position I once was in, which is, their life might be at risk or maybe they're afraid. You're really comforting, not just providing a medical service and treatment, but you're truly comforting people at their most challenging and fearful times, and that is a lot.

[00:31:05]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Go to a completely different direction, and that's the reason that you choose a master's in national relations. The influence now from are you still going to dig [LAUGHTER] into New York experience and whatever you lived there or more or it's a combination of what we experienced in New York with whoever you impacted your life there, plus your family as well?

[00:31:33]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** I think that this chapter of my life that I'm in, which I think is focused on international relations, immigrants, refugees, purpose driven. I think all of that, honestly, is based on my time in Boston and even here at Harvard.

[00:31:47]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Then when did you move to Boston?

[00:31:49]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** I moved to Boston pretty much immediately after the surgery and all of that happened, so around early 2022. The very start of 2022. Three years here and now. I think that's when I accepted my job at Harvard Law and simultaneously was also working full time at another executive coaching company. I was just working as the executive assistant in both role.

[00:32:13]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Is you in Boston? Yes. Prior to Boston, you didn't work anywhere else?

[00:32:17]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** I did.

[00:32:18]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** You did. [LAUGHTER] Because you're going to [inaudible 00:32:22]. After graduating in college and having your surgeries and everything else you were already working there or what places you were having?

[00:32:34]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** I've actually been working since I was 14-years-old, and I've never stopped. Even while I was in college, anything that I was doing, I was doing simultaneously while working, so that's why I say [OVERLAPPING]

[00:32:45]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** A full time worker.

[00:32:46]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Yeah. [LAUGHTER]

[00:32:47]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** That's very typical for anybody like me coming from Brazil. That's how you do. There is no other way. But here in the US, it's very rare to learn that people do that because that is a different way to deal with studies. You worked the entire time doing there.

[00:33:03]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** I did.

[00:33:03]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Significant works that you feel like made a difference in your life in your path.

[00:33:09]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** I would say definitely the medical assistant jobs that I had in New York City because I was able to see what the doctors do and what the day to day looks like. It made me realize I don't want to do that. Then, of course, when I got here, my executive assisting jobs were very helpful, I don't mind actually sharing this because I don't think it's that confidential, but the nonprofit that I want to work on is actually based on the experience that I've had the past few years. I've had a lot of administrative heavy jobs. I've been an executive assistant to a CEO. I'm currently one of the faculty assistants here at Harvard Law School. Then I also serve as an executive assistant at JP Morgan as well. I've always simultaneously had 1 million jobs. It's crazy. But it's been great. I'm so grateful, though, honestly. I'm so grateful. But I guess administration is something that I've kind of already known before I even had these jobs that a lot of immigrants kind of come from where they come from, and they're like, hey, can you help me get a job? Can you help me get an admin job, an administrative job or data entry job or anything. I've had family members reach out asking for this. I've had friends. I've always been that person that people just come to for this kind of help.

[00:34:24]

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

[00:34:25]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** What I hope to do in the future, actually, is start a nonprofit that focuses on job training specific to administration related work and job placement. I guess a job firm and an educational institute and also provide any miscellaneous courses like English, ESL classes, English as a second language, and really anything else that someone might need to equip themselves to then get an administrative related job.

[00:34:52]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Which is typical from that, have you had any experience before? Sometimes- Even for students here in US. That just left college and don't even know exactly, didn't even have time to have an experience. Rather. Then people come with that, what experience do you have? No, you're looking for someone who has a little bit more of a background and just give someone a chance and teach them what to do.

[00:35:15]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Exactly.

[00:35:15]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** I think what you are trying to do is going to be having a place that this question is going to be fulfilled.

[00:35:21]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Exactly.

[00:35:22]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** When they ask. Yes, we did. We learn this and this, non-profit organization.

[00:35:26]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Exactly, and I think so.

[00:35:27]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Which is fantastic.

[00:35:28]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Hopefully, God willing, that all works out.

[00:35:30]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** [LAUGHTER] You manifest that is going to happen. That's wonderful. Then where were you working until you got to Harvard?

[00:35:41]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** I was working for, so it's called Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, so they based in DC. This is the work that I was doing while I was pursuing my pre-med courses in American University in DC and then also navigating that whole surgery. I was also simultaneously working with them as an executive assistant. They focus on legal work that helps implement policies all around the world against tobacco use. I am probably oversimplifying, but just to give an example of smoking policies within certain buildings or within a certain distance or one thing that I remember them focusing on is advertisements for tobacco, being banned in certain countries. It's an organization that helped really focus on that. I'm definitely oversimplifying their work because I'm no expert, but they do a lot of amazing work. We're actually training attorneys. One of the things we had was a fellowship program. I was just assisting. I had no major hand in any of this, but they had a fellowship program where attorneys from all over the world were being trained by these attorneys based here in the US, and they provided them with the expertise to be able to implement these policies in their own countries. We actually had a graduation and the final seminars in South Africa. It was the first time I had a pretty massive business related travel internationally, and I was super excited.

[00:37:07]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** To go to South Africa.

[00:37:08]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** [LAUGHTER] I feel I was still this fresh college graduate, and they invite me to a South African.

[00:37:14]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** It really is a great opportunity and it feels important.

[00:37:20]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** I extended my time there, of course, made it a vacation for a little bit. It was really, really amazing. Amazing experience. I feel honestly, in the professional perspective career wise, I feel so lucky to have had the experiences that I've had. The people that I've worked with. The work that I've did is great, too, but at the end of the day, just like our community here in Harvard, the people that make the experience is so amazing. The things that make the experience is so amazing of all the people. That's the make or break in any job. I feel so fortunate that everyone, I've had the chance to work with has been amazing. Harvard is the cherry on top to all of that, this community, of course, is amazing.

[00:37:58]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** How does that happen? You were working somewhere else, how did you end up working at Harvard?

[00:38:04]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Honestly, it was just a very organic application.

[00:38:06]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** [LAUGHTER] But you had a plan for this, or you were just looking for another job and you say, I'm going too?

[00:38:14]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** I definitely wasn't. I think I had my site set on Harvard because I knew that I wanted to continue my education. Of course, why not aim for the best educational institute in the world? I definitely hoped that it would work out. But I will admit I was applying all over the country. I submitted hundreds and hundreds of applications, and I just promised myself that I would just pick whatever the best opportunity is and whatever felt right. Weirdly enough, years and years ago, I remember I even used to tell my aunts, I think I might be in Boston some day. I think I might live there. It's funny I always say these things. Even with New York, I'm like, I'm pretty sure I'm going to live in New York one day. I'm pretty sure I'm going to live in Boston one day. Then it all just ends up happening.

[00:38:59]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** That makes me so happy, because now I know that the non-profit organization that you are thinking, this is coming. If New York came by manifest, Boston came by manifest, there you go. Let's touch base in a couple of years to see how this is going to happens. You have there. That is something that's coming there, so that's good. You get into Harvard, you go straight to work because right now you're working in legal services?

[00:39:31]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Yes, correct.

[00:39:32]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Jamaica Plain.

[00:39:32]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Yes, correct.

[00:39:34]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** You go straight work that area or you worked here first?

[00:39:37]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** No, Jamaica Plain. I pretty much spent a majority of like,90% of my time in the Jamaica Plain office. The only times I've ever had to come here is when we have events or sometimes well, they have their seminars here every week, but sometimes I'm also here for that. But honestly, very rarely, I feel lucky.

[00:39:56]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** It is a beautiful job that they do there.

[00:39:57]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** It is. It is amazing work, honestly. I feel so fortunate. The team is incredible, honestly. I feel so lucky that I worked with them.

[00:40:06]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** I have to repeat here. I think I have said that before. Jamaica Plain, Legal Services hold a special place in my life. When I used to work, because I started in Harvard University Landscape and we have to go there once a week to pick up trash around to cut the grass. We'd whack everything around or go there to shovel snow and everything else.

[00:40:28]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** I was very familiar with the place.

[00:40:30]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Yes, I know that well. Everybody ever was in that front desk. Always so kind. I just would wave because it was locked out and they would allow us to go and use the facility. It's funny. It took me a while until I went back there to visit. But when you feel like, I'm back here again in a different situation. But the place feels nostalgia, it was always amazing.

[00:40:55]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** That's amazing. A good place. One question. The work that you do in legal services in Jamaica Plain you have a lot of interaction with students or it's mainly administrative and faculty? Actually, I feel like more so in the beginning of my time, I feel I've maybe been more remote than I should lately. [LAUGHTER] I haven't interacted with them as much but definitely, when I am there, and especially historically, I have interacted with the students a lot. I've actually made some friends from working there. I think the best part of the job has been able to connect with the students, honestly.

[00:41:31]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** That's what the question here, how does connection shape your work or what gives you great sense of a purpose in what you do there?

[00:41:39]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Definitely, I think being at Harvard, in general, it's a motivating environment and so for me connecting with even my faculty member that I assist. I sometimes I even pick his brain of how did you get here? Even the other instructors, I'm like, what was your career path? How did this even happen? Because being at Harvard and seeing these students, I'm always so inquisitive, like, what was your past life? I want them to tell me their story. I want to learn from them, because I feel this little tiny fish in this massive sea of successful people and so I think the greatest privilege of my job, and it's honestly an honor is to be able to meet the students and to be able to connect with faculty members and the instructors and just learn about them because some people come from completely unexpected backgrounds and to be where they are, that says a lot about who they are. I think that's been the greatest part of my job.

[00:42:42]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** It is. I have that same feeling working here for so many years. For years, you see them everywhere. You see them in the media. They became this. One is a mayor, one is attorney general. Our dean few years ago was our dean of law school now Supreme Justice. There are these vast amount of talent and not just here, even the ones that I met from the LLM the International Program. They go to their countries and I still have connection see how beautiful their lives and their careers go outside based the experience that they have here. It is very interesting to see. The clinical part of work that's done here for the clinic in Pro-bono office. Which is hands on going to court, learning cases and different sides of the legal work that they need to learn. I think it is just incredible. The clinical instructors that prepared be who they are and who they are going to become.

[00:43:42]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Exactly.

[00:43:43]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** I just keep thinking every year, they have a group, a different group every three years, a different group over that they're going to shape and mode and teach and have an influence and impact in their lives that is going to be. I think it's also fascinating. Let's talk about one thing that you put here for us, reflection and looking ahead. Looking back, what key lessons or values have stayed with you or what advice you would share with someone on their journey and what's next for you personally and professionally?

[00:44:20]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** I think the greatest advice and simultaneously, the greatest lesson for me is, I guess, a mistake that I made is I put the goal first, and I think it's very common and sensible to think I should work backwards. I should envision where I want to be and then work towards getting there. I feel that's a common piece of advice a lot of people get. But I actually don't agree with that anymore. I think maybe once upon a time, I did. But I actually think that in order to actually write your story and make sure it's a successful one, I think it's more beneficial to know who you are and define who you are, write the story of who you are before you actually write the story of what you want to do and who you want to become. Because I think the mistake that I made early on is not having the clarity on my own identity which led me down the path of the completely wrong career paths, meaningless things that maybe I wouldn't even consider today. But as soon as I learned who I am, my background, where I come from, that all comes with family, too. It's not just about me. It's about where I come from, what I identify with most. I think identity is a very big thing in our society now, too. I think it's really important to define the main character in the story before writing the story. It's a complete opposite of movies. Movies, you write the story first, and then you find the actor that could play it.

[00:45:47]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Exactly.

[00:45:47]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** But in real life really, we need to define who the main character is, and then the story writes itself. I think that's the greatest lesson that I've learned. Because as soon as I knew who I was, the rest of it was so clear.

[00:46:02]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** It's true. The path opens.

[00:46:03]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Exactly.

[00:46:07]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** It is a great advice what you're giving. I think we sometimes hold too much into specific targets that you want to accomplish. Not necessarily should be them. They should be malleable a little bit and try?

[00:46:23]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Exactly.

[00:46:23]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** I think that I learned that moving from one country to another, going through situations, being in a position in Brazil, privileged position and coming here and have to cut grass, shovel snow humbles you a lot until you have to restart over and figure out what you need to do. I think that's what you need to do with life to learn. One last question if you can answer me. You grew up or was raised in a way or your institutions surrounded by the Christian mentality, and today you are Muslim?

[00:47:04]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Yes. [LAUGHTER] Honestly, the most frightening journey, I will admit, because growing up in a Christian environment, literally a Christian community, it didn't matter that I had a Muslim dad. He just accepted whatever we chose and whatever my family chose, and to hear, I grew up hearing all of the Islamophobia and I'm not oblivious to that, I heard it my whole life. I knew how people viewed Islam. I also thankfully now understand all of that was just a misunderstanding and a fear of the unknown and also a fear based on whatever the media tries to sell you. My God, it's still the most frightening journey to be honest.

[00:47:53]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** I believe it is.

[00:47:53]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** I struggled so much, even wearing the hijab. Thank God that I'm wearing it now, but initially, when I first started my new job at JP Morgan Chase, for example, I couldn't even wear it in the beginning. I had to work towards wearing it because I was just so worried, based on all of that that I heard growing up that someone could think that about me. If I could hear that from even, some people that are really close to me, if I could hear that hatred and fear, who's to say that's not going to happen to me? I'm sure it will happen to me. God forbid it happens, but I guess I've learned now. It's not necessarily about fearing, what someone might say or what someone might think. It's about being a very positive representation of what it actually is. Because at the end of the day, the only way minds can be changed is just by owning the truth and being a positive representation of that. I have a little bit more confidence. I think now, thank God, that I can just be who I am and be proud of who I am and hopefully that alone changes the minds of others.

[00:48:57]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Yes. That's an important thing. I had great experience with some of our students here when I was, of course, in the Dean of Students Office that we had to deal with all the organizations and from different affinities there. The Muslim Law Students Association. You had some of the kids that work and you had a chance to chat and everything. I was able to ask questions that they were so wonderful to answer. Beautiful minds and telling me, things that I didn't know. Of course, nowadays, everything is Google it.

[00:49:31]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Right.

[00:49:32]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** But people are missing the chance to have an engagement with another human being and learn from the person if they are both willing to respect each other and have a beautiful conversation. I had that opportunity about what being a Muslim is, how the navigating the society that sometimes sometimes I'd be nice don't even understand and don't care to go a little bit deeper to understand what it is, and prefer to go for a very sad and ugly way to interpret and judge people. I applaud you for being strong and believe in yourself.

[00:50:12]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Thank you.

[00:50:12]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** And going for what makes you happy.

[00:50:14]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Thank you.

[00:50:14]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** What makes you a better human.

[00:50:16]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Thank you so much.

[00:50:18]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** We are getting to the end of our conversation. I can't thank you enough for reaching out.

[00:50:23]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Thank you.

[00:50:23]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** For participating in this project.

[00:50:26]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Thank you.

[00:50:26]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Means a lot to me. This just for our staff. But I'm happy that you saw that so meaning and decide to participate and reach out and being part of this.

[00:50:35]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Thank you for welcoming me, honestly. I'm so grateful this even exists, so I'm so grateful to be here.

[00:50:40]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Good luck with the non-profit that you already threw out there that's going to happen. Please let me know when you have everything.

[00:50:47]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Absolutely.

[00:50:48]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Sorted it out. I would love to hear about your success, and I know that's coming.

[00:50:53]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Thank you.

[00:50:54]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** Thank you again, Sarah very much.

[00:50:56]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** Thank you.

[00:50:57]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** You're welcome. For everybody out there until our next time. Bye, bye. That was awesome.

[00:51:08]

**Sarah Alkhambeshi:** That was so nice. Thank you. I appreciate it.

[00:51:11]

**Edgar Kley Filho:** [inaudible 00:51:11] Thanks so much.