

Interviewee: Lila Milukas
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Abstract: Lila Milukas was born in Ashley Falls, Massachusetts, in 1988. She was raised by her mother and father, both of whom were successful in their careers. She attended a small private high school, which emphasized the equality of women and men. From there, Lila went on to attend Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. She graduated in 2011 with a bachelor's degree in geography. During her time in school, in addition to work on her studies, Lila volunteered at an African Community Education, as well as at AmeriCorps, a nonprofit organization focused on "helping others and meeting critical needs in the community." She currently works at Worcester Community Action Council as a youth employment coordinator. In this interview, Lila spoke about her life journey from childhood to adulthood, her educational background, her job experiences, and her family life. Lila and her fiancé share responsibilities in their household. Both contribute to the couple's finances, home care, and care of their child. For those just starting their adult lives, Lila stressed the importance of learning to manage money, stating, "So when I started living on my own and with my family now, having to realize how much we need to make to get by was a learning experience, definitely."

TB: So, the first question is, what is your full name, including both married name and maiden name if applicable?

LM: My name is Lila Milukas.

TB: And when were you born?

LM: I was born [] 1988.

TB: Have you ever been married?

LM: Not yet.

TB: Do you have any children?

LM: Yes

TB: What are their ages?

LM: I have one child and she is one years old.

TB: Oh, ok. What cultures or ethnicities do you identify yourself with?

LM: I identify as White, American, and European.

TB: Oh ok, so that is like your family background?

LM: Yes.

TB: So, if you had to, could you tell me a little about your parents?

LM: Sure. My parents. I have a really close relationship with my parents.

TB: Ok

LM: They've been really good to me and gotten me through so much, so they were very close with me as a child and made sure I had every opportunity I could have. They were both teachers, but they are retired now, but they were teachers so they were constantly in my life. I went to the school that they both taught at so they were just always there. But I have a really good relationship with them still and I'm very honored to have them as parents.

TB: So next question, where have you lived during your life.

LM: So I grew up in Western Massachusetts. It was a small town called Ashley Falls. I lived there for most of my life. Until I moved here when I was 18. And then I actually spent a year traveling so I went to Europe for three weeks and then I was in Brazil for a year. And then I moved to Worcester to go to college and I've lived in Worcester since.

TB: And that college was?

LM: The college was Clark University.

TB: Oh ok. What was your major?

LM: So my major was geography.

TB: What neighborhood are you from in Worcester?

LM: So I live in the Main South neighborhood.

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TB: What is that neighborhood like generally?

LM: So for me, the neighborhood is very comfortable. I have lived there since I came to Worcester. I lived on campus for four years and then when I started working I moved off campus right near the school. It's been really comfortable. I think some would say that it's not the best neighborhood in Worcester, but I have had a really good experience and it's been great to raise my daughter so far. There's a playground right around the corner. Just great places to kind of walk around. So I like the neighborhood.

TB: So this, that's the only neighborhood you have lived at?

LM: Yes it's the only one I have lived at in Worcester.

TB: Do you have any family members here?

LM: I have in-laws. I am about to get married and my fiancé's family lives in the city. And I actually have a second cousin that went to school here too. So I have family coming in and out.

TB: If you had to say that there were challenges in the city, do you think people still face them?

LM: So the first thing that came to mind when you asked is sort of like access to resources or access to like wealth in Worcester. There's a lot in Worcester, but it seems a lot of residents might not know it's there or how to get to it. My work kind of exposed me to that. Right now I'm working with Worcester Community Action Project and they do something like, one resource they give is fuel assistance. And I'm not sure how many people know about that or feel like they could use that resource. So things like that. I would say a barrier of having access to what's going on in Worcester, but I do feel like there is change happening and more and more people getting connected.

TB: And if you could go into more detail about that change, is it a specific thing or multiple things you have seen?

LM: Well, that's a weird question. Well, there's a lot of development going on in Worcester. So they are engaged and connect with a lot more residents to live and work. I saw some research recently that young people under the age of 29, a lot of them live in the city but then work outside of Worcester. So I think to build up the community a little I think they would try to find jobs in Worcester so people could work here as well. Also, on the other hand, there is a lot of people living outside of Worcester that come to Worcester to work so it's kind of an interesting dynamic. But just in term of connection to resources, also I guess just more discussion around it. Just making sure connecting to people that may not know what's going on. Giving them more access to it and making Worcester seem more comfortable.

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TB: So what is distinct about Worcester? Is there anything distinct to you?

LM: Yeah, I like Worcester. Most things for me are kind of the geography of it. I guess my geography side has to do with that. But it is a city, but it sprawls out, so it kind of expands out. A lot of greenery but it's also pretty dense so it's nice having that variety. Like I said I grew up in a small area where there is a lot more than land people so Worcester is like a good size city for me. I wanted to be where something is going on, but not somewhere where I couldn't have access to nature.

TB: What do you think women's experiences in Worcester have been in general? What is your thought on that?

LM: I haven't thought about Worcester's experiences for women very much.

TB: So, like, what is an experience for you?

LM: That's a good idea. I guess I mean it's a very positive, I have been able to reach a lot of women mentors with my career and life and with women in Worcester. So I see that as a positive. They did, I would be fortunate to be part of this conference about girls and women, mostly in Worcester in like what they're going through and how resources or community organizations can approach those things and be more I guess suitable for girls. So I think Worcester is talking about what it means to be a girl and a women and how we can best support those experiences. I guess another specific thing that I was involved in was a program that's called Girl's Circle I don't think it exists anymore, but it was a space for girls, middle school girls, to come together and learn from each other. So I really benefit from the situations and I think it's a really positive experience for a young woman in Worcester to know what's going on in Worcester and share those experiences.

TB: So I know we already spoke a little about your education and that you went to Clark University, what was your major again?

LM: Yeah, so I went to Clark University and majored in geography.

TB: What made you want to go into that field?

LM: So when I was a first year at Clark, we had to do first year seminars, which were just random. So you looked at the topic and picked what interested you. I saw the geography one and was interested so I signed up for it and I got very interested in geography classes and sociology and geography classes. So then I stuck with it.

TB: Ok and what years were that you went to Clark?

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LM: I went to Clark from 2007-2011.

TB: Ok and if you had to name any challenges you faced during Clark, if you feel comfortable, can you go into depth about that?

LM: Sure. I was really excited about Clark when I first attended. Get out of a small town and move to a big city. I also liked that it was a small campus, even though I was in a bigger city, I had a home. My experience was mostly positive at Clark. I felt that at Clark, it's really important at Clark to challenge convention. Which I think helps people to think outside their normal thought box or what they perceive as normal. And realize there is a lot of perspectives, in all situations so I really benefitted from that. Although I did feel like Clark was a little hypocritical that they wanted things to be so changed and different that it was still a private school that was a business. So at the administrative level it was very business-like. It made me very nervous about my experience. What if I lose money? So I felt that I wish the academia and the administrative world were kind of melded more, but since graduating I've reflected on Clark, and I also like that I am an alumni of Clark and the experience left me being able to work through things and be able to look at problems and realize there's more than one way to solve something So I am glad that I went to Clark.

TB: You say you have a daughter, I know there is something that if you stay in this neighborhood that you can get into Clark for free. Do you see that being an option for your daughter?

LM: Yes, I have thought about that actually. If you live within a mile of a Clark campus you can get into Clark for free, but I also want to be able to make sure it is something she is interested in. I think it's great to have that resource that is available for this community.

TB: Alright, this goes more into former education. What did you see as your options?

LM: I felt kind of unprepared when I graduated, as I was not sure what I wanted my options to be. Not that Clark did not prepare me as much as I did not think about it. I wanted to minor in management because I found that to be very interesting, but I just had to study abroad and was not able to fit it all in. I went from Clark and did AmeriCorps which I did not plan or think that would be where I went, but that was a good experience. From there I stayed working in the community and things like that so I didn't plan it, it just kind of happened.

TB: What important networks or mentoring have been important to you?

LM: Can you say that again?

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TB: Yes. What networks or mentoring have been important to you?

LM: Actually, doing AmeriCorps was a good experience for me, I got a lot of experience in nonprofit and training and through that experience, I met women that have been mentors. So Hilda Ramirez who has been a pretty prominent mentor in that community and connects a lot of people together and she is a good mentor of mine. Then a lot of just close friends that also went to Clark with me even a couple years ahead or we worked together. I am constantly sort of branching out to meet new people in Worcester and kind of learn from them and their experiences so it's been pretty good.

TB: Through college, did you work at all?

LM: I worked a little before a college. A lot of babysitting in my area and I worked as like a stock person at our local convenience store. I know its good work, like a good starting experience.

TB: Did you work at all during college, were you able to?

LM: So I did work study on campus with the community engagement center which was cool so I got to like go out to different organizations that Clark students would volunteer at to help match students to sites. I had my own site and I volunteered at African Community Education.

TB: Do you want to go more in depth about the African Community?

LM: Yeah so I was able to volunteer there and built a bond there. A lot of them are Clark students that volunteer there, some are older than me and got close to them. So stayed doing that experience for a while and after college ended up sticking with that organization. So I brought up previously that I did this thing AmeriCorps, which is like a National Peace Corps, so you go out of the country to help develop other countries. But in AmeriCorps you work in a local community that needs help here. There is AmeriCorps which is out of Boston as an ambassador of Mentoring so my first year doing it I was at the Worcester Youth Center which was a great experience right out of college to know the youth of Worcester a little bit and kind of get my feet wet with nonprofit work. And I worked closely with Hilda Ramirez there and Janette Roach who works for the city now, and Laura Ceroviac. They are all women who were close to me that I worked with and a lot of people that I got really close to. Then my second year at AmeriCorps I went back to African Community Education where I had volunteered and worked part time. That organization was, once I was done with my AmeriCorps year, that was where I developed my mentoring program for them. I then did three years' full time for them. Full time for three and part time for one so it was a great experience with African Community Education. We are an organization that works with African refugees to kind of build the gap between their educations. So a lot of them did not go to a formal school. They are placed by age when they get to the U.S.

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so they are grouped by age and not education level. So they have to play catch up so the after-school programs and Saturday programs help to get them more comfortable with their education with tutoring support and mentoring because they didn't have the same support that a lot of American students have. They do not have a parent who speaks English so they need that extra support. So that was a lot of the work I did for a lot of years out of college. And now, I have switched over, I switched over in June to the Worcester Community Action Council as a youth employment coordinator. So it all kind of connects. I have had a good experience with my work so it's been good.

TB: So have you, what does this work mean to you?

LM: Very good question. I feel good about this work. I feel I am supporting young people in Worcester and being able to kind of see Worcester in a different light than through school, but also get to know themselves so they can go down a successful path. This new position that I am doing, which is youth employment coordinator, has been a great experience to connect with youth from ages 16 to 24 and just supporting them in the time they are out of school or in school and thinking what is their next steps, and what the career is going to look like, or what jobs do they want to get to reach that career. So it kind of is what I just went through so it's so prevalent in my mind so I'm thinking about how getting them to know themselves to be successful and it's been a really good experience so far.

TB: So you already said that you have a fiancée and that you guys actually have daughter. She is one years old you said?

LM: Yes.

TB: How is the responsibility shared between you two?

LM: Right now we are sharing the responsibility ourselves. We take care of her; we haven't done any day care yet. We are fortunate that I work during the day so my fiancée Jeremy stays with my daughter Maya at home while I'm working. He goes to work in the afternoon while I put her to bed and all that stuff. So he takes the first shift while I do the second shift, and we have been able to split child care that way.

TB: So that works for you guys?

LM: It works and it's not always ideal but for me I value being at home with her so I like it.

TB: So what about housework is that like the same responsibility?

LM: Yeah we split it pretty well. Sometimes I give my fiancée a hard time because I feel like I

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do a lot of it, but it gets tiring when you're home by yourself with a child all day and trying to figure out how to balance everything. Most of what we do is split, he has his weekly tasks and I have my weekly tasks so we do pretty well.

TB: So let's say for instance, you guys came into a lot of money and only one of you had to work, and you could stay home with your daughter, would you do that? Would you stay home with her?

LM: If I could, I would stay home with my daughter or he loves to stay home, but we have found out he's kind of an extrovert while I'm more of an introvert so I'm more comfortable at home. I can find things to do where as he kind of prefers to be around people and he gets energy off of other people. I, in some ways, would love to switch and I love seeing her develop and see her learn and influencing her so I would gain a lot of excitement and energy off of that.

TB: You said you guys might do daycare, is that a possibility or?

LM: We thought about doing daycare maybe when she starts to talk more. That way she can talk more about her day when we're not with her. So we are starting to think about it more. It's good to socialize before school so she'll have to do that anyway. And she likes being around people so eventually we'll get there. Right now it's tough financially to think do you have to go back to work pay for child care or do you stay home and work less. So it's kind of a question to figure out what works best for you.

TB: Is it just you two who have responsibility or do you get help from family at all?

LM: Every once and awhile we get help from family but most of the time we are doing it ourselves.

TB: Thank you. Has it changed over time, you say you guys might do the day care, is that the biggest change?

LM: That stemmed from when I changed jobs. So when I first went back to work I was still at African Community Education and I was working part-time. So I was with Maya more so I didn't work as much. In June she turned one and then I went back to work full time. So that was a bit of a transition for us. It was a little bit challenging for me because I didn't know how the balancing of working and being a mother would be. So it was kind of a transition for me.

TB: You have different priorities, obviously your daughter is the main one, and like the different roles, you have to work and stuff. How do you balance all of it?

LM: Still figuring that out. Like being able to do it all is definitely kind of a lot. Like right now I'm planning a wedding which is kind of a crazy idea to do while starting a new job and having

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your first child, but it also has to work out so you hope for the best. Things that I appreciate that I have so being lower income is nice so you hear input from other people about how your daughter is doing. I try to have friends come over to keep my energy up and expose Maya to different things so it's been pretty good but it's definitely a learning experience.

TB: This part is a little more personal so just say what you want to say. What do you think are the pros and cons of the path you have chosen?

LM: I realized that financial security is really important to me. Growing up my parents were very good at saving and providing for me, so I didn't realize how hard it was. So when I started living on my own and with my family know, and realizing how much we need to make to get by and that was a learning experience definitely. And knowing what resources I could use to be able to feel comfortable. And it's definitely a personal preference. I was used to a certain level of security and now figuring out what I need now. I really like learning and I'm a flexible and adaptable person, or I try to be anyway. Everything that I'm doing now has been to benefit me in a way that now I have figured that I needed fuel assistance or get discounts on fuel, I take the steps to do so. So I'm pretty able to do that for myself so that has been one the thing that's a challenge with the path I took. With a college education you feel like you're supposed to make so much money once you're done so that doesn't always happen or there are jobs you really want to do but realize there is not a lot of money there. I am not the first person to go through this and probably won't be the last so just learn what you want to do. It's good to know yourself and other people and as you get older you get more set in your ways so things are supposed to be a certain way and it's not always like that. I'm just trying to live the best I can and kind of enjoy the moment and not get caught up in what I'm doing or what I could be doing.

TB: You said you enjoy the moment so you are confident in the choice you made, are there any sort of regret in the choices you made though?

LM: I always would love to travel more. I love traveling a lot especially traveling out of the United States. So I guess I would have wanted to travel a little more before I settled in Worcester. But I feel we live stable lives now so I can travel later in life as well.

TB: So basically work, set yourself, and then travel?

LM: Yes, possibly.

TB: Do you consider yourself active politically?

LM: I don't consider myself very active, no. I think my work kind of leads me toward that, but I don't think I'm as active as I should be or want to be.

TB: If I had to ask you, what role do you think religion has played in your life?

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LM: So religion is my foundation. My mom brought me to church every Sunday when I was a baby to 18. So I got a lot of my roots from church. It was supportive and the church was very supportive, but now I don't practice religion. It just mostly that religion made me a judgmental person. Just because it gives you a set of guidelines to live by, but it changed how I perceived the world. So I had to take a step back from religion for now and kind of experiencing life without that practice.

TB: This is going more into health now. Have you ever had any health issues that have impacted your life or anyone in your family? Like any major ones?

LM: We haven't had any health issues. I have been fortunate enough to not have any surgeries or anything like that.

TB: Anyone close to you?

LM: My mother has, it's interesting, my mother has breast cancer, she recently got diagnosed, so it's been a little hard. It's interesting, the year I was a junior in high school my parents were celebrating their 30th wedding anniversary and my mom got breast cancer and my dad got heart surgery. So it's this really strange thing that it happened all in one year. At that time, I was kind of old enough to understand what was going on, but my parents were good at kind of taking care of themselves. They were pushing me to do my own thing and I don't really remember it as much. I just figured they were going to get better and that was going to happen. This time around when my mom got cancer, it's been a little bit harder especially with having my own family. Wanting her to be in the life of my daughter so I'm just being cautious and trying to figure it all out.

TB: You experienced healthcare, so do you take any initiative in getting good healthcare for you and your daughter?

LM: Right now what I have been doing is what's affordable. I get healthcare through the health connector and my fiancée and daughter are on Mass Health which is good to help us with cost. I did realize that though, I had this experience where I have to get better dental insurance because I have dental issues right now. So that's a process that I'm learning and of course you pay more for insurance you get more coverage so it's been an interesting learning experience in that way.

TB: The only person you are really responsible for besides yourself is your daughter?

LM: Yeah right now

TB: When it comes to healthcare?

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LM: Yes

TB: So if you don't mind right now, I'd like to ask you some more personal things about yourself. When were you allowed to date?

LM: I like technically don't really remember them saying you cannot date, but they said kind of wait until I was teenager. But like I said before I'm pretty close with my parents and they were always at my school so it was mostly where I interacted with people. So it was really, I didn't date that much because my parents would know and it was a little awkward. They knew everyone I went to school with so I didn't really date until I was in college.

TB: In college, were there main places you went on dates? Like the café or anything like that, that you can remember?

LM: Not really. I didn't really date that much in college either. It's kind of funny, so the person I'm marrying right now I met in college but he didn't go to Clark, he was just there at a party. We met at a party and started dating after. Our first date was literally walking around Clark's campus which is very, very small. It was just walking around and it was really cold. We've been together for eight years now so I never really got into dating.

TB: What is or was your favorite musical group, song dance or club? Anything like that.

LM: Maroon 5 was something I really liked in high school. And then I kind of still listen to the same stuff because I don't use the time to really explore music.

TB: So going back to school and stuff, if you could remember, how were girls treated in your school?

LM: Overall, pretty well. High school I had a very competitive and small class. So I graduated with 47 people in my class and it was a public school so it was really small. I felt like girls were treated well. They always encouraged us to speak out and not feel like we were overshadowed. At Clark there were always feminist groups. Some of the classes I took were in women's studies and we talked a lot about gender issues and stuff like that so I've always had a good experience.

TB: Still going on school, what were your most significant extra-curricular involvements?

LM: So in high school I was very involved. I played multiple sports. Like I said, my school was very small so there was not much competition on being on a team since there were so few of us. So I played soccer for most of my life and it was cool when I was a junior and senior in high school we went to the state semifinals which was awesome for such a small school. Like some schools had 22 kids on their team and we had like 13 so you didn't have a lot of people to trade in and out. When I went to college, I wasn't as involved in campus stuff. I got more involved in

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volunteering in the community. That kind of slowed down on my involvement in other things. In high school actually, another big involvement for me which was exciting for me was music. I like to sing and now I realize that I miss that and I'm trying to get back into arts. Hopefully, like either with taking a dance class or just singing somehow.

TB: Were there any challenges you faced in the transition from childhood to adulthood?

LM: I sort of mentioned it earlier with the realization of how much things cost. I think I was spoiled but I don't think I was that spoiled. I was provided for and my parents valued me a lot so like when I had to start paying for things myself it was like, "Oh wow!", I don't make as much money as I thought I did. I've learned how to live on less so it was a good experience, but still sort of like a wakeup call. Actually just to go back to extra-curricular, I just thought of something that was cool to have an influence on my life. I was part of a Young Women in Science club when I was in high school. It kind of stuck with me and had been a good experience. It was interesting to sort of go back to the Women's Oral History Project.

TB: What memories do you have of historical events while you were growing up, if you had any at all?

LM: The first one that comes to mind is 9/11. That idea of terror and the terrorist attack. I remember being at middle school when it happened and how weird it was to see it happening on TV and not really understanding what was going on. It was interesting, like five years later I've said I traveled to Brazil and actually Brazilians brought it up and asked me about it and things like that. So, that's kind of something that has been in my life.

TB: This is more focused on your free time. When you were not at home, how did you usually spend your time?

LM: I usually, so my town was really small, so it was really spread out, so I spent time at people's houses. I spent a lot of time at my grandparents' house which was just down the street from me. I actually had two cousins who were females and were a little older than me who lived at that house. I had another really good friend who lived pretty close to me so we would hangout a lot.

TB: I know you said you were short on time with your responsibilities, but do you ever have time to do any of those hobbies still?

LM: I play video games, not a lot. But recently I've been playing a little bit more which is nice to kind of feel like you're—I play strategic games, so it's nice to feel like you're solving a problem, but it's not something you have to deal with all the time.

TB: A system or computer?

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LM: We have a PlayStation 4, so right now I'm playing Ex Con 2 which is like a cool strategy game. I got into it because of my fiancé. It's more like you have to get through the map and kill the enemies and make sure that your kind of defeating these aliens you could call them. You have to make sure you make good decisions so the world isn't conquered by these people before the end.

TB: So now we just have a few more questions before we end. The first one is, how do you get through tough times, what thoughts keep you going?

LM: I kind of mentioned that I'm kind of going through a tough time right now with my mom being sick, and trying to plan a lot of things at once. So what's getting me through it now is just trying to stay in the moment. I keep trying to tell myself that things are fun. So we just talked about video games. Sometimes you look at your apartment or where you live and realize that it's a mess, and that you should clean up. But I also think, what mental health thing do I need right now. I might just be sitting down and playing a video game and taking time for yourself. So I try to balance those things because I always involve myself with, I have to do this and I have to do this, but I'm learning to sort of balance those things. One thing I'm trying to start doing now is writing my thoughts down now. A lot of times I think with technology it's easier to text someone else or try to get acknowledgment from someone else that things are ok, but I'm trying to teach myself now that if I write it down, I'm encouraging myself that things are ok. It's a learning process and I'm trying new techniques.

TB: Do like a compare thing, when you were younger how did you define success in your life compared to how you define success now? Is it the same or did it change?

LM: My first thought is that it changed a little bit. When I was younger I defined success through education. Feeling like I did well on a paper or things like that. My parents seemed very successful to me. They lived minimally, but also I was very provided for as a child. It changed a little in just that, getting through every day is a success. There are some things that happen in my life that I necessarily did not plan. My parents I feel planned out a lot. I'm not planning now as much as them, but things are still happening and its going well and those kinds of things that I haven't planned I see as successes, in that I'm able to just enjoy what I'm doing instead of thinking about how I'm not doing everything I expected. It's just realizing that success changes for a lot of people and success looks different for a lot of people. That's how its changed for me is just seeing that success has all different forms and shapes and sizes.

TB: This will probably be our last question, because I know you have to get going. Based on your life experience, what advice would you give to yourself or future generations like mine or your daughter?

LM: I think what advice I would give is to try to enjoy as much as you can. Don't get too

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worried about what tomorrow looks like or what you should do, but really take time at the end of the day to reflect and think, “What did I do today? What felt good? What was successful about the day?” So that you can really build up your experience in thinking about what is going well versus being too hard on yourself for what isn’t going well. I have that kind of experience because I often am very hard on myself. For my daughter and future generations, just being open to all new things. I think with technology it shows how quickly the world can change now. You have to be adaptable and be ready for whatever is going to come at you and travel. Travel. Meet lots of people and cultures.

TB: Alright thank you for your time.

LM: Thanks.