

*Mohamed Geshesh.*

[Music Playing]

JANET WEBER: This is *Journeys of Learning*, where we talk to students that have taken unconventional pathways to reach their educational goals. I'm Janet Weber, and I'm your host. I'm a counselor at De Anza College, and I created this podcast so that students will feel less alone on their own journeys of learning.

We are here with Mohamed Geshesh, and he used to be a student of mine at Foothill College, and we first met when he came to see me for counseling, and we quickly became friends and spent many hours in my office talking about his future, educational goals, and just chatting over lap days. Does that sum it up?

MOHAMED GESHESH: Absolutely. And thank you for having me. Such an honor.

JANET WEBER: So let's start with you just telling us a little bit about your background.

MOHAMED GESHESH: My name is Mohamed. I am a 27 years old. I come from a little bit of a mixed background. Grew up mostly in Libya, North Africa, which has a heavily Italian influence. My grandparents are mixed and my father kind of grew up in that environment. I have two siblings. I have two sisters, and I have a little cat. Moved to the states around 2012, and it's been a roller coaster of a ride but I'm very thankful and grateful to be where I am today, and I'm extremely lucky that I got to meet Janet.

JANET WEBER: The feeling's mutual.

Tell us about your educational journey.

*Mohamed Geshesh.*

MOHAMED GESHESH: I sum it up in one word. I think my educational journey has been far from perfect, if anything. The kind of obstacles and ability to maneuver and change really helped me get a greater, actually, educational experience rather than taking the streamlined way of going to a four-year institute and not having the greater exposure and opportunities which I might have missed out. So I started my educational journey first at a community college when I went to Foothill and I got the pleasure of meet Janet and all -- everybody else at Foothill had been a great contribution to my journey there.

And then after going the community college rout it allowed me to explore different fields, especially for somebody who's international and comes from elsewhere, a lot of the majors that are available here in this state are not necessarily available at other universities across the world. Like, the focuses, for example, on mental health and all of these niche fields are not really embraced at all in other country. The majority of those countries, or especially where I come from, you either have to be a doctor and a lawyer, and every other major is not really accounted for.

Going to the community college and being at Foothill, it really opened my eye to different experiences to see what's really out there and what really kind of fulfills my curiosity. And after going through that rout of two and a half years at Foothill I got an A.A. degree in economics, and then I was able to transfer out to pursue a degree in business administration, mainly focusing in marketing because I love content creating and kind of producing new things into the market.

And then from there I went to San Francisco State for one semester. Loved

*Mohamed Geshesh.*

the school. It was just a little bit too crowded and I'm the person who likes to learn where there's, like, a one-on-one interaction with the professor and in a smaller intimate group rather than a larger crowd.

At one semester at San Francisco State, I was recruited to join Menlo College in Menlo Park. I got a full ride scholarship to go there, and I had a chance to go there and join the rowing team as well. I was at Menlo for about two years, a beautiful small community that gives us access to a lot of kind of opportunities that larger school could possibly give, but you would have a harder time navigating resources. And I was able to graduate in 2018 in a degree in -- bachelor's degree in marketing.

JANET WEBER: And now what are you doing?

MOHAMED GESHESH: Post-graduation has been a journey. I got to explore a lot of different kind of areas and a lot of different fields. Currently I work at Compass Real Estate, and I'm trying to pursue and try the idea of becoming a real estate agent and working that market since I've been in and out from the real estate work for quite some time. But prior to this I was working at DoorDash as a product management helping them launch their ghost kitchen concept across states.

And prior to that experience I was working at another brokerage in downtown Palo Alto. It's a little bit more of a high-end luxury brokerage where we work with clients who kind of look for investment properties or rental properties as well.

JANET WEBER: One reason I wanted to interview you is because I

*Mohamed Geshesh.*

remember sitting in my office and talking about you becoming a lawyer, potentially immigration lawyer. And I was definitely stuck on that. I totally saw you as a lawyer. I still can see that in you. But then you started working at a real estate agency and then started really liking that and finding that you were really good at it. And then you started steering your career that way and now I can see how that just fits your personality so much because first of all, everybody loves you --

MOHAMED GESHESH: Thank you.

JANET WEBER: -- you have a great personality. And you have a really good style, and you're a good entrepreneur. And so I -- I think you're going to be very successful.

MOHAMED GESHESH: Thank you.

JANET WEBER: And can enjoy what you're doing.

MOHAMED GESHESH: Absolutely. I feel also it brings a lot of human interaction to it. Post-graduation you will see especially in the Silicon Valley area a lot of the jobs can be mainly focused on tech. And as somebody who comes from elsewhere to here, you're trying to build your own family and your community within the job field and the people you get to meet. So some careers despite the fact that they could pay so well and in an amazing career but you might find it more isolating.

JANET WEBER: Mm hmm.

MOHAMED GESHESH: Choosing a field such as real estate or working in such a business there's so much human interactions. You get to work with your

*Mohamed Geshesh.*

clients, your peer, your individual, and you want this kind of family around your business that kind of allows you to flourish even more. And it's something I thrive in so --

JANET WEBER: Mm hmm. And the other reason I wanted to interview you is because I think you're such an inspiration that you came to this country not knowing any English, not having much money; is that true?

MOHAMED GESHESH: Mm hmm.

JANET WEBER: And I remember that you had a family that was hosting you, and you started at a language school, and then you lived in an apartment with many other people, and then you started going to community college, and working, and getting the lay of the land, and then having, you know, maybe your own room in an apartment. And then sort of slowly moving upwards and onwards until now you're in a really nice place in San Francisco, starting your career, and I've been able to watch you do that.

And I guess my question is: What qualities -- what has helped you do that?

MOHAMED GESHESH: It definitely has been a journey from landing literally in San Francisco Airport and generally not knowing nothing but yes, and no, and reading the peoples' face reactions to kind of carry on the conversation.

JANET WEBER: Mm hmm.

MOHAMED GESHESH: I wouldn't really sugar coat it and say the journey was easy; it was a lot of emotional kind of experiences that you go through. Especially when you first transition and try and assemble and try to get to know your areas and try to get to explore that field. And not only that, it adds in -- it's

*Mohamed Geshesh.*

another layer if you happen to be a gay man. It's kind of create these all kind of mixed experiences. You're not alone introducing yourself to a new area, and you're kind of finding yourself and your sexuality, and then trying to be comfortable with that.

JANET WEBER: On top of everything else.

MOHAMED GESHESH: On top of everything else. And it make it is journey -- as I look back now, it made it a lot more beautiful because it allows it to kind of ease into each other that knowing that you have that kind of clean start where you can assemble yourself into society and create the group that will accept you for who you are --

JANET WEBER: Mm hmm.

MOHAMED GESHESH: -- rather than trying to build them something that wasn't really flourishing or giving you the space to exist.

I think the qualities -- to go back to the original question that you asked, is to have -- to get such a level work hard and do this and do that. I think one of the really biggest factors for me was the belief. Knowing that you started from somewhere. You will get somewhere; it's a matter of consistency and believing in yourself, and really, really, really connecting yourself with people who genuinely care for you.

JANET WEBER: Mm hmm.

MOHAMED GESHESH: It's not only when you find people who genuinely care for you that people can support you financially or [indiscernible]. People who they generally care for the betterment of you, who care for, like, guiding you,

*Mohamed Geshesh.*

providing you advice, or even lending you an ear when you have something that you want to kind of bounce back and forth and them.

Having those foundations it gives you a lot more stability to move forward.

And then the other thing that I really found and that I recently kind of come to terms with is vulnerability. Being vulnerable with who you are and allowing the rest of the work to connect with you in that regard rather than always want to create this facade of oh, I'm strong, I got this. But then behind closed doors you know that you're going through so much. Allowing that vulnerability to come out and share that with people that create a greater bonding.

And when you share your vulnerability of where you come from or the experiences you've been through you're not necessarily looking for someone to feel bad for you, or looking for sympathy or anything. It's rather voicing that out. It kind of gives it less power and give that power back to you that I've been through that but yet I want to make something out of myself. Rather than I've been through that and it sucks, and why me, and this [indiscernible] language.

JANET WEBER: Mm hmm.

MOHAMED GESHESH: It's rather than strip away the power from that experience and yet embrace it elsewhere.

JANET WEBER: Interesting.

And so being brave enough to be vulnerable with others which makes you connect with people and gives you that community that supports you in the growth.

MOHAMED GESHESH: Absolutely.

*Mohamed Geshesh.*

JANET WEBER: Okay. That brings me to one of the other questions which was: Was it easy for you to ask for help? How did you do that? And where did you find the help?

MOHAMED GESHESH: I wouldn't say it was easy because to an extent it wasn't impossible, but yet it wasn't easy because in the concept or in the idea as a human sometimes we feel when we ask for help it puts us in a position we are weaker than the person we're asking the help from. But more is versus having for help you really finding resources and creating a kind of supporting environment for you.

JANET WEBER: Hmm.

MOHAMED GESHESH: When you go for somebody asking for help or what is best to do, they might not necessarily be helping you directly, but they might basically direct you in the right direction by saying do X, Y, Z, or there's this program that offers this. When I was in a place where I really financially was unable to compensate for school or pay for the school or vice versa, or continue educations or struggle with rent -- especially as a college student -- it was so much easier knowing what resources were available to you. Like, hey, there is X, Y, Z program exists that support -- there's this program, that can provide you with this. Knowing these resources can already give you a lot more than what you anticipated. Before even you can take a step further of asking people directly for their support, knowing the resources and what's available in your local community is going to really create a greater blanket of help.

JANET WEBER: Mm. That makes a lot of sense because even when I was



*Mohamed Geshesh.*

asking that question I was thinking well, Mohamed didn't really need to ask for help because everyone just wanted to help you anyways.

[Both Laughing]

JANET WEBER: Because going back to the other question, you were vulnerable, and curious, and you really were a part -- so for example, at Foothill, you were really a part of the community. People in Admissions and Records knew you, people at Counseling, we knew you, and --

MOHAMED GESHESH: The bookstore.

JANET WEBER: The bookstore. You worked at bookstore. You talked with your professors, and you connected with other students and you were a part of different activities. So being just being a part of that community you were able to tap into resources and help.

And like you said, being resourceful. Looking around for the different resources that were around.

From what I remember it was little bits and pieces that helped you, like, get from the next, to the next, to the next.

MOHAMED GESHESH: Mm hmm. It literally was the buzz word that we -- as we moved forward we trying to connect the dots and where we going next.

JANET WEBER: That's interesting. I was thinking of, like, a little toy train track. Just putting each track down as you went along.

My next question is: If you were to go back, how would you do things differently? What would you do differently?

*Mohamed Geshesh.*

MOHAMED GESHESH: In terms of my educational path, or in terms of my experience overall?

JANET WEBER: Educational/career path.

MOHAMED GESHESH: I would say most definitely invested in more resources than I did. Like, I think the amount of unclaimed scholarships that is available out there and the amount of money that is available out there that people don't know even exists or don't bother to apply for just with the assumption that I won't qualify. Plenty of people will apply. X, Y, Z will get it. And having that not necessarily positive attitude makes you miss out in so much. There's trillions of dollars in literally scholarship opportunity that it's free money that's literally up for grab and yet students having hard time acting upon that. So I think if I were to go back in time one of the things that I would heavily focus on. At least to create, like, a résumé, you create a scholarship applications where you just submit on the go and see how much it eliminates from either your student loans or taken a little bit of a break off your parents' funds or however way that you have utilized to pay for your school. Really there is so much that is available out there. It's just a matter of looking out for it.

Especially for minority groups. Like, minority groups --

JANET WEBER: Yes!

MOHAMED GESHESH: -- like, as somebody who is a minority, there was so much scholarship that it's available and resources that people want to support and kind of give out to first-generation students and yet we didn't really act upon those.

*Mohamed Geshesh.*

JANET WEBER: And you did go to college for pretty much free; right?

MOHAMED GESHESH: Yes, actually. At my community college I kind of navigated it in my own and eyeball it and it worked pretty well for me. I was able to kind of get into a community college. And once I transferred, luckily I was able to join the rowing team and that kind of gave me a pretty solid scholarship that covered most of my essentials.

JANET WEBER: Mm.

See, I -- that's a good example of something that you wouldn't know about.

MOHAMED GESHESH: And moving from North Africa to here, never rowed in your life, not even knowing what rowing was --

JANET WEBER: [laughing]

MOHAMED GESHESH: -- and yet when I went for that tryout, I had the kind of body strength for it.

JANET WEBER: Uh-huh. Because Mohamed goes to the gym all the time.

So how did you find that scholarship?

MOHAMED GESHESH: The scholarship first initially started where I was really looking for options because I was a little bit frustrated at San Francisco State and the number of students per classroom and I wasn't really learning anything. And I was like, I'm paying so much money for this, and yet I'm working on top of going to school to afford school and yet I don't feel that I'm learning anything but I'm not getting any special treatment at school because I can't even see the professor that's providing the lecture. So I looked at my

*Mohamed Geshesh.*

resources which goes back, again, to what's your options? And what was available out there when I was in touch with the recruiter from Menlo and what's there availabilities were like. First they had a [indiscernible] scholarship available for a specified group of minorities or people with, like, specific majors, or came from different parts of the world as part of their international student program, and then once I attended there I tried out for their rowing team and then that also boosted my scholarship to cover the full term.

JANET WEBER: I was thinking that part of your success was always being open to opportunities, and looking for the opportunities, and being flexible.

MOHAMED GESHESH: Yes. I think flexibility plays a bigger role of getting kind of an idea of, like, you can view life as everybody has their own journey and everybody has their own experience of what they perceive, and a lot of the times opportunities come across us as we navigate through our own life. Sometimes we are so quick to act and shut the door that we don't really know what those opportunities might open up.

I think having the mindset of always entertaining whatever opportunities come your way and then from there once you have all of the informations decide if it's a good fit or not for you, you will be surprised what really comes your way. But if you shut things down at an earlier stages without allowing them to flourish, you might miss out on greater opportunities than what you have now. So flexibility is definitely a key.

JANET WEBER: What advice would you give other students that are going through their educational journey now?

*Mohamed Geshesh.*

MOHAMED GESHESH: So one of the things I say is have fun. You cannot claim that time back.

JANET WEBER: Mm.

MOHAMED GESHESH: Enjoy your college experience, and be as curious as possible.

JANET WEBER: Yes. Thank you.

MOHAMED GESHESH: Do not get caught up in the idea of getting straight A's, and you have to have the highest GPA and go to the best school because ultimately life will roll on. Study hard, focus, and do everything; but also enjoy the journey. Enjoy connections with those other students you meet. Be curious about different subjects, and don't presume that certain subjects are hard or boring rather than go with an open mind see what do you learn about yourself and what you learn about the subject. Because your free will is space and every individual they meet whether it's a student or a professor throughout your schooling journey, they really have the greater effect in your life later on. As you would like some people will touch your life later on as you would like. Some people will touch you in a ways that you didn't even really think would come in that perspective. Taking History classes, or during astrology classes and all of these things that you thought would never be related to your major, but it could give you perspective in things that you never would have learned without.

JANET WEBER: Mm.

MOHAMED GESHESH: So be open and absolutely enjoy the journey.

JANET WEBER: I know from talking to you that you spent time talking to

*Mohamed Geshesh.*

professors that you enjoyed their classes, and went to their office hours and spoke with them, and they had effects on your life that were beyond the educational realm.

MOHAMED GESHESH: Some of the professors that I made a connection with quite some time ago yeah we still have those connections. Until today we still check on each other via email or we still run into each other at times and just stop in places [indiscernible] within the same area. And it's always beautiful moments when you see people that you met during your college journey and they get to run into you now and they see how far you have come and where you are at now, and kind of you connect a bond with them.

Because ultimately as professors -- and the majority of professors I've worked with, they want the best for you. They wanted to provide you with as much resources at their hand to help, like, pour into your bucket so that when you go out there in the real world you can have these opportunities and these resources.

And ultimately you don't know how they come back to your life and play a role. Sometimes you only think they're a professor, but then you go on, and you graduate, and finish elsewhere, and then you realize you worked with their son or with their niece or with their nephew or with their relative. You're like, oh, your father was a professor of mine. There was always things that go around that always keep a positive effect on the individuals you meet. Especially your professors can really give you a positive outlook in the long run.

JANET WEBER: Anything else you want to tell me or other students?

*Mohamed Geshesh.*

MOHAMED GESHESH: One thing I would highly recommend and I think students don't take advantage often enough is the study abroad program. If you ever come across opportunities to study abroad around the world, especially if you pick a country that does not pick the language that you speak, take it with eyes closed. If it's three months, six months, time will go by and you will come back. But the life learning that you will learn from being exposed to a different culture and seeing different people -- people who function and behave and exist at an entirely different way really gives you a greater perspective in life, and it kind of general experience that life exists all over the world. Every community and every group of people experience it differently, and also it removes our own biases and kind of assumptions about other communities and other groups. Because when we live with them and when we interact with them we realize they are not what they portrayed in the media rather than there are other ways in which we can benefit from each other and we can bond at a kind of a greater level rather than what society and structures have given us over and over. Go on a journey outside of the states.

JANET WEBER: I definitely second that. Traveling is such a good education.

MOHAMED GESHESH: It's just so fun, first of all; and then second it's just it gives you -- allow you to realize how small you are at a greater scale, at a global scale --

JANET WEBER: Mm hmm.

MOHAMED GESHESH: -- you really think sometimes we get caught up as

*Mohamed Geshesh.*

life exists fully here, but when you really look at a global perspective there is everywhere. Life is going on everywhere else.

JANET WEBER: Yes. To travel in very different countries and cultures you see that people live so differently, but also that human beings are the same everywhere. There's a saying in Sumatra that's translated as same, same but different.

MOHAMED GESHESH: Right?

JANET WEBER: Thank you, Mohamed.

MOHAMED GESHESH: Thank you, thank you, thank you so much.

JANET WEBER: I really enjoyed talking to you about your journey and hearing the advice you have for other students.

MOHAMED GESHESH: Thank you so much for putting this amazing work together in a way for your students to hear it and hopefully become participants in their future. And Janet is your resource if you ever go to Foothill or De Anza College.

JANET WEBER: Yes. Visit your counselor.

MOHAMED GESHESH: Yes. Thank you.