

Narrator:

Interviewer: Madison Riley

Date: August 26, 2020

Transcriber: Madison Riley

Location: Old Town and Madrid via Zoom

Note: This is the transcriber's best effort to convert audio to text, the audio is the primary material.

[00:00:00.360]

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Hi

Madison Riley: Hi, can hear me?

Laila Sholtz-Ames: How are you?

Madison Riley: I'm good, how are you?

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Good. Hold on let me untwist this here.

Madison Riley: Take your time.

Laila Sholtz-Ames: There we go. Okay, you can hear me okay?.

Madison Riley: Yep.

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Okay perfect.

Madison Riley: Just letting you know I started recording. Um So

[00:00:25.080]

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Cool. Sounds good.

Madison Riley: Yeah, um I'm going to introduce myself um and then I want you to introduce yourself. So my name is Madison Riley. Um I use she her pronouns. Um the date is August Twenty-Six 2020. And I'm currently in Orono, Maine.

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Haha Great. Nice to meet you Madison. Um my name is Laila Sholtz-Ames and I also go by she her pronouns and I'm currently in Madrid in Spain and same date, but six hours later.

Madison Riley: How's Madrid today?

Laila Sholtz-Ames: It's good, it's actually uh summers in Madrid are a little bit hot, I have to say, so it's consistently about like ninety five degrees. So if I look like I'm sweating a little bit, it's because I was just outside.

Madison Riley: That is a hot summer

Laila Sholtz-Ames: So, yeah, it's a little toasty yep, but it's not bad. Not bad.

[00:01:30.000]

Madison Riley: So where are you from?

Laila Sholtz-Ames: So I actually grew up, I was born in Dallas, Texas, but I grew up in Maine because I was adopted when I was about five weeks old. And so I grew up in Bangor, Maine, and I pretty much lived there until I graduated from UMaine. Um So I was I lived there until I was twenty one. And then I moved to Boston because I wanted a city experience and I lived in Boston for a few years. I went to China for a year to teach English and then I came back to Boston and then I ended up moving to Spain for a

graduate program. Um I wanted to do a master's in teaching, so I came here. And ugh so now I kind of yeah, I consider like Madrid to sort of be my, my home. But I still, you know, I guess I'll always be a Mainer, you know, at heart.

[00:02:33.380]

Madison Riley: How old are you?

Laila Sholtz-Ames: I'm thirty one.

Madison Riley: Um and when did you attend the University of Maine?

Laila Sholtz-Ames: I was a student from 2006 to 2010, so I guess yeah I just had my well, I didn't attend, but the 10th anniversary, 10, 10 year reunion. And so, yeah, that's pretty crazy to think about it.

Madison Riley: I couldn't imagine. Um

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Yeah right time flies,

Madison Riley: Right. At least you are in Madrid. That's pretty awesome. Yeah Um.

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Yeah, it is nice. Yeah,

Madison Riley: so the purpose of this interview is to hear your perspective and experience of being like a UMaine student um who was a part of the Black Student Union on campus and to find out the culture in the time period. So basically, just like how things were back then and how you felt. Anything, there is nothing too small. So like, if you want to tell me one day you dropped your book like so you tell me.

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Awesome, go for it.

[00:03:46.000]

Madison Riley: Yeah. Um So. At any moment I can stop recording ugh if you want me, so like this is all for you. well all about you. This is all about you.

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Yeah.

Madison Riley: So I'm just going to lead it with questions, and you can just go on forever talking about it. Um So

[00:04:08.610]

Laila Sholtz-Ames: I love it. That's great.

Madison Riley: Yeah. I know that you've written a book and I've seen the book. It's awesome. So if you want to talk about your book, too,

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Oh thank you

Madison Riley: and how that University of Maine has impacted your book, anything like that? Um

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Yeah, absolutely.

[00:04:26.610]

Madison Riley: So what pulled you to come to University of Maine? Like what, How did that attract you? What made you come?

Laila Sholtz-Ames: So I actually a lot of my family actually attended the University of Maine, so, as I mentioned, I was adopted, my parents are white and ugh actually everybody in my family is white. And um so my sister, who five years older, she went to UMaine. My father, he did one of his degrees at

UMaine. And ugh so it was very much like this is you know, this is a good university growing up near Bangor I spent a lot of time on the campus. I went to different activities and camps on campus, and my mom was involved in some groups on campus. And I was really, really familiar with Maine and I have to be honest. So originally it was not my first choice. I really wanted to go to a city. I would I actually wanted to go to Columbia University because I thought New York would be a really, really exciting, diverse opportunity. But when I was 17, I realized that I didn't want to be in debt and I was really fortunate to get an academic scholarship to attend UMaine. And it was also close to home. And my parents, you know, they really wanted me to stay close to home. So at first I was sort of a little bit disappointed because as somebody growing up in Maine, I knew that it wasn't a super diverse state and I really wanted to be around other people of color. And so I was sort of like, oh, man, I don't know, you know, if I'm going to find a group. I don't know if I'm going to find myself at UMaine. But I actually in the end, I'm happy that I went because I think that it was actually a really, really good experience. I think that in hindsight, if I had gone to New York at 17, I don't know if I would have been really ready for like a big city. So it actually ended up being really, really good for me. And I'm glad I went after after all of that. Yeah. I'm glad I did it.

[00:06:47.200]

Madison Riley: Yeah, I, I, I get that,

Laila Sholtz-Ames: yes

Madison Riley: I get that um how long -- so when you came to campus, was there a Black Student Union already in place?

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Yes. So this is really interesting. When I first applied to UMaine, I did a campus tour, even though I already was really familiar with the campus. And when I was there, I met an admissions officer. I don't know if he still actually works at UMaine, but his name is Lateef O'Connor and he's African-American. And he was kind of talking to me a little bit about, you know, the fact that even though UMaine is not the most diverse school. He said that there are different groups like the Black Student Union, Latino Students, Asian Student Association. And he said, you know, you should really consider getting involved if you do end up coming here to UMaine. So when I started in 2006 there is something called the ALANA center, which I think they changed that to the multicultural center. And that was basically it was the Asian students, Black students, Latino students, international students. And that was right away. That was kind of like I became really involved in that because I thought, okay, like I might as well, you know, really, like, jump in and get involved and try to meet people and just have a group on campus. So that was something that at first the Black Student Union, I would say, of all of the groups, is the one that was sort of the least kept up in a sense, like there had been somebody that was in charge of it, but they had graduated the year that I was a freshman. And so it was sort of like in this weird transition where nobody was really like in charge of it and it was still in existence. But it was like sort of, you know, not happening. So my first year as a student, I was like, okay, well, I want to be involved. But I didn't want to take on a leadership position because I was still, you know, kind of finding myself. So for that first year, it was sort of different people were sort of like in charge of it. And then my second year, I kind of realized, like, okay, you know, this is something that I think is important. And I think it's really important for people of color to have a voice and have a presence on campus. And there's not really a lot of us. So I should probably step up if I wanted it to still be like in existence and I wanted to be an important part of the university, so that was sort of when I sort of jumped in and I don't want to say took control, but sort of that was when I jumped in and became a lot more active. And then eventually I became the official president of the BSU. So that really was, yeah, it was busy for sure, it was a lot. I really had a lot going on, it was also a lot of it was trying to

recruit people. I remember meeting with the football team and the basketball team because, you know, there were obviously a lot of athletes of color on campus. And I really wanted to attract as many people as I could. So I really was sort of trying to recruit everybody. And I remember even when I saw, like, people of color just walking by or like in the library, I'd sort of be like, hey, like I don't know if you know about the Black Student Union, but would you be interested in joining? So that was you know, it was a lot of. Yeah. Just me trying to get the message out and to actually some of my friends who were not African-American. They also ended up joining as well, which is really nice. So, yeah, to answer your original question. It was in existence, but it was sort of not super active when I started at UMaine.

[00:11:00.635]

Madison Riley: And when did you become president?

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Officially, I became president at the end of 2007, and then I was president in 2008 as well.

Madison Riley: Do you know how many like approximately like how many members you had throughout your time at UMaine for the Black Student Union?

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Yeah, you know, it was interesting because I definitely felt like a lot of organizations, you have the people like the core members, and then you sort of have the people that are like members and they kind of like turn up in events. So I would say we had probably about 10 core members and then different people that kind of consider themselves members, maybe upwards of like 20. So a lot of it was like, you know, the people that they're involved with but are not super hands on that type of stuff, but the core core members, I would say roughly around like 10 to 12. And a lot of them were, you know, my friends or like friends of friends or people I had met in the library or something like that, you know.

[00:12:09.970]

Madison Riley: Um so did BSU collaborate with any other groups on campus?

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Yeah, we did. So I was also, in addition to being in BSU, I was also in the Asian Student Association, and I'm not Asian, but I've always been really interested in Asian culture. And several of my friends were in that. So that was kind of why I joined. So we actually did a lot of stuff together because a lot of us were just you know good friends and we just felt like it would be really nice to have you know groups working together. And we're all kind of working to get visibility on campus and we might as well help each other out. So we were, we would do different things, like we'd have dinners, we would have, for example, Culture Fest. BSU always did something with the Asian Student Association. We would have a Dance Fest as well, like BSU and also the Latino Student Association. So that was something that I really, really value because I felt like there was actually a lot of support among these different groups, even though obviously the groups are different and we had sometimes different goals or we had, you know, different people and different ideas. I did feel like everybody was supporting each other. And I think that was that was really, really positive. And we had just a lot of good, I don't know, good members and just good, like positivity and good ideas. And everybody was always there. I know for me, for example, as president, in February, that was really busy, a black student union and so Black History Month. And so I had to, like, organize a lot of things I would reach out to, like the Asian Student Association president and be like, hey, like how did you go about asking for funds from student government or like, how did you do this? And like, you know, there's always like really good communication and collaboration. So that was something that I definitely, definitely valued a lot.

[00:14:14.150]

Madison Riley: Did you feel like there is any backlash from anybody, students, the university, the community or anything like that?

Laila Sholtz-Ames: That's a good question. Yeah, that's a really good question. You know, I feel like it wasn't so much a backlash. I would say the only negative thing is that sometimes there were students that didn't really understand why. Like why we needed to have this group. Why have a Black Student Union? I mean, I, I remember some students would be like, well, you know, maybe I should just start a white student union, like if you guys have your own group, that type of thing. So it wasn't so much, you know, direct, like, I don't know, oh you guys are doing that work, or oh this is stupid. But it was more sort of like I don't see the point in this. We're in 2008, why do we need to have these groups that's so divisive? Why don't we all just come together and get along and that type of thing. And so I think part of my job, I felt like we were sort of educate the public and also just kind of show like, yeah, I mean, the reason that we are doing this, the reason we have these groups is that we want to raise awareness and we want to showcase a lot of what we're doing and our culture and our history and also just being like proud to you know be a different ethnicity. So I think that it was sometimes a little bit, you know, especially for me, like having grown up in Maine and having dealt with a lot of not always racism, but just a lot of like microaggression. Sometimes it was sort of like, ugh why do I have to explain again why it's different to have a white student union than the Black Student. You know, that type of thing, uh sometimes it was a little bit draining. But I would say for the most people were really, really supportive. Like people would come, yeah, to a lot of our events. We had guest speakers, we had dinners. We were always, as I said, like Dance Fest and Culture Fest. And people like they knew BSU, like they knew the type of activities we did. So that was really exciting.

[00:16:33.640]

Madison Riley: How many people do you think attended your events overall? Was it a good amount or was it just like people would just float by and walk in?

Laila Sholtz-Ames: That I would say for the big events like February, for Black History Month, because that was basically BSU would try to do something every single week in February. So I remember I was part of a - we had a discussion like a panel, like a panel discussion that was in collaboration with the women's department. And that was actually like really well attended. People came to that. We had a um at the end of February, we had a big BSU dinner that we worked with the student government on, and that was like pretty well attended. So I think it depended on the event. I would say for some of the smaller things, like sometimes it was hard to get people, but for bigger events, like the BSU dinner, I mean, we always had several tables full of people. So those were yeah, those are definitely well attended. And also, I will say that I was a resident assistant for three years. So a lot of times I would like drag my residents to events and I would be like, come on, you have to go, right. You got to come and support me. So so. Yeah, that helped to get people see in the seats.

[00:18:00.000]

Madison Riley: Um how often would you say you had events? Was it like did you do events like weekly before February and like when February came like was there a different response to them? I guess you kind of already answered that, but what kind of events would you have held without not in February.

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Yeah, I would say outside of February, we wouldn't have something every week we'd probably have something like once a month or twice a month just because of everybody's schedules. And a lot of us were pretty involved in other activities on campus. So it really depended on just availability. But I mean, we would do, for example, like we did actually a couple different panels like panel discussions, because that was something like kind of fun and easy where you would be me and like some other members and people could come and ask us questions related to like race or just like, you know, how do you feel being a minority in Maine, just like different things like that were easy to plan. And some things that were maybe more complicated is like if we wanted to get a guest speaker, for example, we ended up getting, well we worked in conjunction with Amnesty International, which I was also a member of that group as well. And we got Paul Rusesabagina one year to come and speak. Who was -- He was the one that -- in Hotel Rwanda and so like that took a lot of time to plan and kind of get, you know, get everything together. So it really would vary. But yeah, I would say probably like one, yeah, once a month, sometimes twice a month. Sometimes we would have like bake sales or things like that just to like raise money. So yeah.

Madison Riley: So who did you see the guest speaker was. I'm sorry I missed the guest speaker.

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Oh we had Paul Rusesabagina. He was if you've ever seen the movie Hotel Rwanda, he was the one that was helping to save people during the genocide. So, yeah, we were able to come and speak to the University and Amnesty International as well. Yeah, we were able to get him to come. And he did a whole, like, really, really great speech about you know his work. And now he continues to travel around and talk to people about human rights and that type of thing. So, yeah, sometimes we had some really, really great speakers. We also would do, for example, for Martin Luther King Jr. Day, we would always have a brunch as well. And that was they actually attended and not just people from the University but the community as well. So, yeah, there is a lot of really, really good stuff that, you know, I was really proud of for others as just a student run group. But I think a lot of really good stuff happened.

[00:21:05.180]

Madison Riley: Speaking of Martin Luther King Jr, I'm pretty sure that in 2008, the MLK Plaza was added to campus. Um do you know what I'm talking about?

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Yeah.

Madison Riley: Yes, How was that?

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Yes, absolutely, yeah, yeah. Yeah, that was really, really cool because that I mean, it's funny to think about, yes, 2008 is now like 12 years ago because I remember when it wasn't there. And it's like then I remember when it was. And so that was really, really exciting to be part of just to see that going up, because I think there definitely was a need for that. I think there is, you know one thing that I-- one thing that I noticed in some of my classes and just being around campus is that there were still a lot of just like misunderstanding and just a lot of just you know ignorance, um I will say, because those people had never really-- a lot of students had never kind of been like outside of Maine and they hadn't really been around diverse groups. So, like, I remember some students sort of like, oh, Martin Luther King like what I mean is so great about him. Like, what do-- we like plaza, I don't know like what's the point of that? So I think things like that, I guess, you know, those are good opportunities that really have like a dialogue to really talk about it. And you know I think a lot of that stuff I definitely like there was a lot of these like what I call microaggression, you know, uh during my during my time at UMaine just like people literally, you know, they just don't really know. And so it's just like I don't see why we have this. I don't see

the point of this, you know, that type of thing. So, yeah, I think that, yes, I was happy to see to see that go up.

[00:23:07.210]

Madison Riley: Do you remember who donated it, the plaza?

Laila Sholtz-Ames: I don't know. I don't actually.

Madison Riley: I believe it was a fraternity.

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Really, I did not remember that. That's cool.

Madison Riley: Yeah um, so with all the events and everything like that that was going on, BSU and I believe it's ALANA, A-L-A-N-A... Which is the multicultural center.

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Yup

Madison Riley: Which is the multicultural center now.

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Yeah

Madison Riley: how do you feel the support was from the university, uh meaning like um, so for student government you had to receive funds um for events and stuff like that,

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Yeah

Madison Riley: Did you feel that in comparison to other organizations that it was just the same, like the support.

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Yeah, I felt like this report was pretty good. I have to say that, yeah, I really didn't find a lot of issues. Like we pretty much were able to get things that we needed, whether it was like space or funding or or whatnot. I think that we didn't maybe have as much visibility as some other organizations, but I felt like in general we were supported by a higher up in student government. And I have to say also that I felt, you know, a lot of times felt pretty supported as well. I had a problem actually my senior year when I was a resident assistant in Hart Hall, which was my favorite halls, Love Hart hall. So I actually had one night where I had to, of course, like, bust up a party because you know that's what RA's do. And we ruin the fun and whatnot. But anyway, the next day when I left my room, I had one of those white boards outside of my room and my residents would always write me little notes. So when I left my room, I saw that somebody had drawn a noose on my whiteboard and they wrote 'Happy Black History Month'. And so I actually went and I talked to Dean Dana about it, and he was like super, super supportive. And he said, like, you know, whatever you want. Like, I'm happy to help. If you want me to, I don't know, to do some type of diversity training, if you want me to like talk to [not audible or incomprehensible or audio dropped] or like different groups and see what we can do to be like a diversity event or whatever, like just whatever you need, let me know. And I'm happy to help. And so, you know, I felt like yeah, I definitely felt really, really supported in that instance. And then and I think, yeah, that is definitely something that that I would say was really good about. UMaine is like the amount of support. So, yeah, that was positive.

[00:26:10.370]

Madison Riley: Did anything come from that? Did you have a diversity training?

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Yeah, we ended up having it in just in our dorm alone, we ended up doing a diversity training and of course, we never figured out who, you know, put that on there. We don't know if it could have been, of course, somebody from a different dorm that was coming and you know hanging out with friends. So we don't know. But, yeah, we ended up having like a diversity event and we kind of talked about, you know, just sort of the importance of why we should -- we need to be respectful of why this type of thing is not okay, it's not appropriate. And, you know, I think it was good. I think yeah, I I feel like

some places are not-- wouldn't take that stuff seriously. So I always felt like, yeah, if something like that happened, I knew that I could go to somebody and I knew that I would be taken [not audible or incomprehensible or audio dropped] seriously. So I really appreciated that.

[00:27:16.090]

Madison Riley: Do you think the university could have done better in any ways? Um do you wish the university could have done something better?

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Yeah, yeah I mean, I think it is hard, I think that is a really, really hard thing um when you have [not audible or incomprehensible or audio dropped] you know at school, when you have a university that is, you know, not the most culturally diverse place, I think sometimes it is hard to really address issues that are really kind of, you know, deal with things or even have these conversations and dialogues. I feel like, you know, there's always more that people can do. I think, for example, I think it would have been exciting to have, you know, more things not just come from us like the Black Student Union. Like, it would have been nice to see, like, more diversity from groups outside of the BSU, to have you know different guest speakers come in from different cultures and to even have, for example, more professors, more staff members that are people of color, people of different religions, sexual orientations, you know, what have you. I think that would be really exciting, which I know, of course, sometimes that can be hard to do, like hire, you know, different people. But that's yeah, that's something that I would always, you know, I think would always be great to see. And in fact, I actually have a podcast that I do once a week and it is called Facing Race. And it's funny, the last episode that I did, I actually was talking about like diversity in the workplace and why I think it's important to have have diversity and how I think it's also important to have conversations of diversity, not just come from diverse people like not just be like black people talk about race like it's important for everybody to talk about it. So, yeah, I guess I would say that, like maybe UMaine could have done a better job of just having like more diverse people around and promoting, I don't know if promoting is the right word, but just having more diversity workshops, training, different things like that, but I mean, I think there's always, yeah, there's always room for improvement, you know?

Madison Riley: For sure, for sure. I'm here in 2020 and there's still room for improvement. So,

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Right, yeah,

Madison Riley: Yeah.

[00:29:51.280]

Madison Riley: Um in regards to the incident that happened on your whiteboard in your dorm room, was there any other circumstances like that that happened to you on campus? So like. How do you feel the University...

Laila Sholtz-Ames: **You know.** Yeah. Oh, no, I was just going to say, yeah, it's interesting, I was thinking about that, like different, yeah, different things ah that happened during my four years on campus, I think that was the most overtly racist thing that happened to me there. I think it was - I had certain interactions with like certain classmates and things like that over the course of my time at UMaine I'll give you some examples. So one thing was, you know, I had an academic scholarship to UMaine, but it was something that I didn't really like to talk about, because when I would - when it would come up in conversation and people would find like, oh, you know, you have a scholarship, they immediately would think it was some type of affirmative action thing or they'd be like, oh, you must play sports because they just thought the black people on campus were all athletes. And so it was kind of sometimes it would be like awkward

conversations where people would be like, oh, but what were your SAT's like I'm sure my SAT's were better than yours, but I didn't get a scholarship because they're just giving them out because they want more Black people. And just like conversations like that that I think just, you know, again, comes from people just having these ideas of like, oh, yeah, Black people or Native American people or whatever. They're just here, you know, if they get a scholarship, it's just because it's diversity. And it doesn't matter that I worked hard or that I had really good scores or anything like that. So I would have a lot of those conversations. I had an incident with I played rugby for two years, actually, my freshman and sophomore year, and I really liked it. My parents didn't like that I played but that's okay. And I had a really, really uncomfortable well actually a couple of uncomfortable encounters with the coach of the team. I don't think he's there anymore. I'd be really surprised if he was. But I'm going to name names anyway. Coach Chris and he was a former police officer in Compton in L.A. and he had moved to Maine, a couple, I don't know, a couple of years before he started coaching. And he would say a lot of things that were really sexist and racially offensive. What I considered racially offensive, like he would say, for example, I remember one time he said to me, like, 'I'm so much happier in Maine, like I spent my career chasing after these big Black dudes, like arresting Black people and I don't have to do that anymore in Maine'. And it's like stuff like that really made it an uncomfortable, you know awkward time for me on the team. And I remember he used to not want to put me in the starting lineup because he was like 'Nah I don't know. I think you know you'd probably be better off playing basketball or something'. I don't really play basketball, but you know he just had this idea that I don't know. I guess black people don't play rugby. I'm not really sure. But so I think if stuff like that was, you know, not the best feeling, I also would have people I remember we had one black professor uh say his name was Marwin Spiller and he was great. And I remember like a couple of students were talking about him and they were like, oh, I don't know I'm not sure if I should take his class because I think that he speaks Ebonics. And I don't know if we're going to understand him. And, you know, just stuff like that, like certain comments and things like that that sometimes made me sort of be like, why am I here? Like, why did I sign up for four years here? I could have left Maine, that type of thing. But I think that, you know, looking back on it again, I think a lot of it stems from just like ignorance and and these microaggressions that really come from people not knowing what they're saying is offensive. And maybe I'm giving people the benefit of the doubt. I don't know. Maybe people know what they're saying is offensive. But and so I think that you know for me, like looking back on it, even though it was hard, I also would like to think that hopefully I left some positive impact and hopefully I was able to help educate some people or at least change a few minds, hopefully, you know, so that's kind of how I see it at this point.

[00:34:52.920]

Madison Riley: Did you have any interactions with campus police at all that were negative or positive?

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Yeah, I had interactions, my interactions with campus police ah were mainly because I was a resident assistant, so we [not audible or incomprehensible or audio dropped] required to call them any time we had to bust up a party. And it was something that, yeah, honestly, I'm not going to lie at first when I first became an RA, I was sort of I don't know if I want to do this, I have actually gotten stopped one time as a freshman right outside of campus, Right, I don't know what it's called now, but the bar 'Ushuaia' is like right off - I think it was the 'Ultra Lounge' after it was called 'Ushuaia' anyways there's a bar like right off of campus. And I remember I was pulled over one time when I was a freshman and I was like really nervous and I was an Orono police officer and I was like freaking out. And he basically told me that my headlight was out and that I needed to get it checked. And then the next day when I went to get it checked, they were like, no, no, no, your headlights fine. Like, I don't know why the officer pulled you

over. Anyway so I was nervous. It was something like when I became a RA, it was sort of like do I really have to call campus security every time there's a problem. You know, I have to be honest and say that my experiences with campus security was always very positive in fact Deb Mitchell was somebody that really was great. I was a really, really good interaction with her and she was always super helpful whenever I called her, she was like, come right over. So, yeah, I mean, that was yeah. I have to like, give credit. My interactions were always really, really good with everybody on the campus police. Yeah.

[00:36:50.670]

Madison Riley: So did you say Deb Mitchell?

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Yes.

Madison Riley: Who was that?

Laila Sholtz-Ames: She actually, I think is she retiring? I'm still Facebook friends with her, I actually don't know, but I think that she's going to be retiring but she was one of the I don't know if she was like a chief, but she actually worked. Yeah, she worked in campus security. And she was really, really like super friendly, really nice. Like, really helpful. Um So, yes, good interactions.

[00:37:27.640]

Madison Riley: That's good. I, what, I found you just through just searching your name and

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Oh, nice.

Madison Riley: I yeah, I found your Facebook and I also found your UMaine Facebook. You know what I'm talking about?

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Oh, yeah, yeah,

Madison Riley: Yeah, Throwback, right?

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Yep

[00:37:53.630]

Madison Riley: You had a blog, you were posting, posting blogs on like interactive. It's not there anymore. UMaine doesn't use that anymore, do you know- Yeah- Do you know if you posted anything in Relationship to Black Lives Matter or BSU or anything like that on it?

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Yeah, I did post a lot of stuff on BSU, so at the time Black Lives Matter wasn't really, really a thing because I think it started in 2012. But I did- I remember I did post a lot of things about BSU. The reason I started that is because, yeah, I was working, I worked part time, I also worked for the MainCampus newspaper, but I was working part time for the public relations department. And so they had basically I don't know if they still do this, but they hire like a bunch of us students, bunch of us, for journalism and communication majors. And they said, like, you know, we just want you to talk about your life and the university and, you know, like pay you for blog posts. And for like, if you go to events take pictures, stuff like that. So, yeah, I did that, it was really fun. And I yeah, I did, I would do a lot of like the cultural stuff. I always made sure to promote that like Culture Fest. I always, you know, wrote about that and took pictures and things like that. But yeah, I mean I wonder if I have any like copies of that because I don't know if I saved anything that I did, because at the time I was just like I'll write this and publish it and I never thought to keep anything but I should look back and see if I have anything saved.

[00:39:32.580]

Madison Riley: You should. I know in our emails you said that if you have anything, it would be at your parents house in Bangor.

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Yeah.

Madison Riley: Is there any way, maybe they could scan it or I could, I live in Old Town, I could pick it up if they left it off on the porch because of COVID.

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Okay.

Madison Riley: But if you - we'll take anything, I just started this collection so we have like nothing. But yeah, that would be awesome.

Laila Sholtz-Ames: I bet it's hard. Yeah, I would talk to them. I really appreciate you doing this. I think this is really, really great. Um Yeah, they I think I'm trying to think if they have anything, it would be it would be with them. I can also check in my files online and see if I have any stuff that I saved. Yeah, I can look through my computer and I can always like email you if I find anything, because I think yeah, I really think this is great, I think this is really important.

[00:40:32.00]

Madison Riley: Yeah, me too. Um I'm trying to think if there's anything else I wanted to add, oh, so you were talking in 2008, I know it's throwing it back, but 2008 you talked about there was you worked with Women in Curriculum, which was the group, and you had a 2008 lunch series. And one of the events that you talked about, you brought up. It's funny that you did because I've been trying to find out more information on it. I'm actually emailing- do you remember Karina Fernandez?

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Yes, I do, actually, yeah, I think I'm still Facebook friends with her, but I haven't talked to her in a long time.

Madison Riley: Well, I'm actually doing an interview with her as well. She's teaching in New Hampshire.

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Nice.

Madison Riley: Yeah, but she was part of it and the event was called 'Women of Color: The UMaine Experience'. Do you remember anything from that talking with or anything specific from that?

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Yeah, what I remember about that is uh I remember being- because it was one of those things that, um you know, I I felt like we didn't at least when I when I was a freshman, when I first came to UMaine, I felt like there weren't a ton of like things that were focused on women of color. Like I felt like we had, of course, like there's a women's group and different things. And then we had the Black Student Union and we had different things. But I didn't feel like there's a lot of like focus on women of color. So, yeah, that's actually one of those events that I was really, really excited about because I felt like we were going to get like a voice in a way, like a platform, albeit for a short time, but still like a platform um to talk about. And I mean, I can't remember specifically what I talked about, but I think one of the things that I don't have, like always talked about whenever I talk about race and being in Maine and of course, you mentioned to that you found my book and a lot of my book was yeah me talking about my experience as a black person in Maine, especially as a black woman in Maine a lot of times people get really caught up in these these stereotypes. And so I know for me, like one thing that I do remember talking about is like dating like trying to date is like a black woman at UMaine and how like I felt like a lot of people were sort of like, ah I don't know, like your kind of pretty for like a black girl. But Like, you're not really like somebody that I would date like you're not someone I could take home to my parents, that type of thing, so that I do remember something about that. And I remember like a couple of my friends attended the panel. And like, I remember people being like, really like interested in joining me like they wanted to hear what we had to say so. Yeah, I like doing those things.

[00:43:33.440]

Madison Riley: Um That's good. Um Yeah. I found the event and I'm just looking up more information, but I have an interview with Karina and I'm excited for it. .

Laila Sholtz-Ames: That's cool

Madison Riley: Um Yeah, is there anything you wanted to add that you think would be important for this, for this interview? Or do you know, if any, do you know of anyone else that I could interview or?

Laila Sholtz-Ames: I would say you should if you haven't already talked to him, I would talk -----

Madison Riley: What is it?

Laila Sholtz-Ames: because he I don't know if he's-- his name is Gimbala Sankare. He's originally from Ghana, but he went to UMaine the same time that I did. Well, I think he actually graduated a year after I did. I think he did five years. But he was a friend of mine at the time. And he yeah, he was originally from Ghana, but he grew up in New York City and he came yeah, He came to UMaine and he was very involved. He was kind of like me, like we wanted to kind of be in everything and do everything. So he was very involved with the Black Student Union, student government and he was very active around campus. So, yeah, I would speak to him. If you get a chance to connect, actually still lives in Maine. He married, actually someone that also went to UMaine the same years that that I did and they have a kid and I think he lives in Freeport I believe. Yeah, he would be a good resource and then you could also talk to maybe-- have you spoken with Judith Martin?

Madison Riley: I haven't.

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Okay, She was really good, so she I guess that maybe she doesn't work at UMaine anymore, but she was one of the coordinators, people at the ALANA center the years that I was there. I think she started my sophomore year and she was really, really good. She's originally from the Caribbean, but she spent a lot of time in Maine. And, yeah, she was kind of like our, I don't know, our diversity coordinator. I forget her official title, but she was very, very involved. So, yeah, I can even, like, send you because I'm still Facebook friends with her so I can always send you a contact information if you need.

Madison Riley: Yeah, I would, I would appreciate that

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Yeah, absolutely, yeah, so I would say those yeah, those would be good resources to touch base with, but no, I mean I think I feel like yeah you have some really good questions. I feel like yeah, we covered some good stuff. I'm just like, yes, super excited to be part of it because I think it's a great project. And of course I always - even you know, even with the stuff I told you about some of the challenges and hardships and stuff, I mean, I really ultimately had a great experience, I had a really good four years, so I always enjoy talking about UMaine, and it's nice like, you know, it's a nice little walk down memory lane.

[00:46:55.580]

Laila Sholtz-Ames: I remember when I was a student, like in addition to like the being an RA and like working for the public relations department. I also worked for a time with the alumni association until they had to, like, lay all the student workers off because they didn't have the funding. But basically we used to call up alumni and be like, you know, talk to them and then ask for money. And I just remember thinking like, oh, my gosh, like, that's never going to be me.

Like, I'll never be like a graduate, and like you know, and know I am, know I'm like damn like, I graduated ten years ago, uh but yeah.

Madison Riley: Here we are, and you'll to be there forever in the archives.

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Exactly. I love it. That's very exciting. Yes.

[00:47:41.720]

Madison Riley: Well, thank you so much for doing this. It's amazing. I'm pretty excited about it.

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Oh, absolutely. And let me know if you have any, like, additional questions or things that you think of, feel free to contact me and I'm happy to yeah help you out. And I'll check in with my parents and see if I have anything else as well.

Madison Riley: Awesome. And is there anything you want to add before we finish up?

Laila Sholtz-Ames: No, I guess I just want to also plug my podcast again, if any one is interested in listening. Yeah, it's called Facing Race. And yeah, I do an episode each week and I talk about different issues related to race. So it could be anything from like protests to like people of color in the military to the diversity of the workplace. Yeah, if people are interested in listening and taking a look at it, that's about it.

Madison Riley: Do you want to plug your book title?

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Oh, yeah, yeah, I might as well while I'm at it, my book is called 'Knee Deep in a Sea Breeze'. It's available on Amazon. And yeah, it's about my experiences growing up as a person of color and as an adopted person in Maine and just kind of some of my experiences and trials, tribulations, success, etc..

Madison Riley: Awesome. Well, thank you so much.

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Thanks, Madison, I appreciate it.

Madison Riley: Have a good night in Madrid.

Laila Sholtz-Ames: Thanks have a good one, bye.

Madison Riley: Bye.