



THE ALEXANDRIA ORAL HISTORY CENTER
OFFICE OF HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA
CITY OF ALEXANDRIA



Oral History Interview

with

Jaron Chailer

Interviewer: *Francesco De Salvatore*

Narrator: *Jaron Chailer*

Location of Interview:

Lloyd House, 220 N Washington St, Alexandria, VA 22314

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Transcriber: *Bridget Nakamura*

Summary:

Jaron Chailer is an American with a global upbringing. He first moved back to the USA as an elementary schooler in 2009 and soon moved to Alexandria. Jaron recounts his unique feelings of reverse culture shock growing up in cities like Bangkok and Hong Kong as a U.S. citizen before attending American public school. Jaron continued living outside the USA after the 7th grade and eventually decided to return to the USA as an adult to start a career in international relations.

Notes:

The narrator mistakenly describes the location of his childhood home in Alexandria as “Four Mile Run.” The area is actually named “Holmes Run.” The narrator also describes an electrical engineer as being from Afghanistan. They are Pakistani.

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INTRODUCTION

Jaron Chailer [00:00:06] My name is Jaron Chailer. I'm 23 years old. Today is September 29th, 2022, and I'm at the Lloyd House in Alexandria.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:00:17] Cool. I'm Francesco De Salvatore. I'm 30, and we're at Lloyd House. And it's September 29th, 2022, so. All right, let's jump in. Let's start from the beginning here. So, when, and where were you born?

Jaron Chailer [00:00:37] I was born in 1998 in Winnipeg, Canada, which is a very, very isolated from many places on the plains.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:00:47] Great. What are some of your earliest memories in Winnipeg?

GROWING UP IN WINNIPEG

Jaron Chailer [00:00:55] Some of my earliest memories. I can't remember too much from that time. And it's honestly kind of a blessing because my family decided to leave Winnipeg because it's a very like cold, rough kind of place to live. And it's very far from all other major cities. It's just north of North Dakota if I'm not wrong. And so, part of the reason why my family eventually moved to Alexandria is because of that. My cousins, too, when my mom was growing up with like my aunts and my uncles, they also decided to leave Winnipeg. And so, I also have cousins in this area, too, now.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:01:30] Okay. So, when did you leave Winnipeg?

Jaron Chailer [00:01:34] I can't remember the specific year I left Winnipeg, but it was probably just like, uh, maybe two or three years after I was born. So, by about 2000-2001.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:01:45] Okay. And then you moved to Alexandria. Correct?

Jaron Chailer [00:01:48] And then I moved. I started living internationally where I moved to Bangkok for elementary school and Hong Kong. And those were the places I lived before moving to Alexandria.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:02:00] Right. So, yeah, let's. Yeah, maybe let's walk us through that kind of time period. So, you moved to Bangkok. What are some of your memories as a kid in Bangkok?

RECALLS GROWING UP IN BANGKOK AND HONG KONG

Jaron Chailer [00:02:11] It was definitely extremely fun and interesting because I think areas like that, you know, Hong Kong is a super global international city. So many, many foreigners live there, but not too many foreigners were children there. Not too many people were kids living in a place like that. And so, for me, I think a whole lot of people have been interested in how I picked up languages, especially, many people have asked me about that. And when I was young, I was having conversations all the time and in a mix of like English and Thai and Cantonese and Mandarin. And it was this whole kind of interesting mix where I was kind of influenced as an American living in Southeast and East Asia. And some honestly, some of my best memories from that time had to be like the national, like the cultural holidays in Thailand. They have what's called Songkran there and what's supposed to be like the hottest day or time of the year every year. It's a festival where everyone can just like you throw water on each other, you bring water guns in the streets, and you

splash each other, and people bring water balloons and buckets. And some people try to keep their clothes dry, so they wear big old ponchos and raincoats. But then other people, they just wear regular clothes and it's like a whole day of just the entire probably country. But I was only in Bangkok, but definitely the whole city was just out, out of work, having fun, splashing water everywhere, cooling down. It was so fun. Many places in the world don't have something as fun as that. It's awesome.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:03:49] That's cool. That's great. Are there any other memories from Bangkok that you remember?

Jaron Chailer [00:03:56] I can't remember. Maybe anything else? Well, I'm sure I can, but those are definitely, like the most fun ones I remember from school especially. I remember my mom kept on trying to put me in like higher, higher level English classes so that I would be like at the proper level of an English speaker. But then in Bangkok, in my grade, there was only two other foreigners. One was Chinese, one was Dutch, and then there was myself. All the rest were Thai. So, I did end up speaking English with a Thai accent and Thai slang, which was it was kind of funny at one point. But then my mom said it also kind of annoyed her too, because she wanted me to be able to, like, speak our mother tongue properly and fluently. But then I kept on instead of saying like, 'Oh, don't, don't touch that or don't do that', I would say 'Cannot'. I don't know. It was all these little things and like slide became slide [Thai accent] and spaghetti became spaghetti [Thai accent]. And like all of these things that I was saying as just a little kid, because I was communicating how other people did. And I was always like the only kid in like an advanced English class that my mom tried to put me in to make me sure that I would keep up the level and not lose it or anything or not get behind for other kids my age who never left the States.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:05:21] So, what ages did you live in Bangkok?

Jaron Chailer [00:05:25] This was kindergarten before elementary school and then first and second grade. So, I was maybe about 7 between 6 to 8ish when I was living in Bangkok.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:05:42] So, you were pretty young.

Jaron Chailer [00:05:43] Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. My formative years. That's where I was. And it was super, super fun.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:05:48] Yeah. Yeah. You keep using the word fun. Can you say more about that? Like, so I know you talked about like that day-

Jaron Chailer [00:06:00] Oh Songkran yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:06:01] Yeah. Well, yeah, like why like looking back, like, why is fun the word that you think of when you think about that period?

Jaron Chailer [00:06:09] Mm. Fun is the word that I would use to describe it because I just only ever have, I only really have fond memories from there. Everyone was very, very welcoming and all the activities were just genuinely, really fun. Like you imagine there isn't really a Songkran in the States unless you were going to join a Thai cultural festival with the Diaspora community, or maybe the embassy. But, just like imagine being a little kid who would like to run around at school and play, you know, flag football or dodgeball, except you're playing a cool water sports spray park game with the entire city. Millions of people. It is wild. Same thing with Loy Krathong. That's another festival where you have to make like out of some leaves and you put something in the middle. You have to form it together so that it can float on water, and you put candles in it

sometimes. And there was like a song that we learned. And so like, I got to build like a little what felt to me, like a kind of ship, like a little boat. And then you had to put it down sometimes, you know, just the swimming pool, but I think traditionally supposed to be down a river. And so, like there were all of these activities, all these fun things I did, all these cool places I went, and it was just a great way to grow up, to be honest.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:07:30] Yeah. And so, when you moved to Hong Kong, do you think you still have fond memories of living in Hong Kong?

Jaron Chailier [00:07:38] For me, honestly, Hong Kong was a mixed bag because the school system is really strict there. The same way you'll probably hear when Chinese students come to the states, their math level is always way higher than Americans. That's because the schooling system is just way more strict and tough and advanced and fast. And so, I remember having just kind of like I was occasionally burnt out at school with learning Chinese characters and um, picking up that advanced level of math. I did have a lot of time to have fun, but I just remember, like, school was very heavy. You became the cool, popular kid at school if you got the best grades, right? And that was a cultural difference when I moved back to Alexandria because in Hong Kong, I was used to the people who had straight A's and A + and the teacher liked them being the cool, popular kids. And that's how you would like to get. I don't know. What would you call it? Street cred or like popularity at school when you were young. But then coming to the States, when I was used to that, it became more of like if you were good at sports, if you could crack the best jokes. And I remember when I first moved back to the States for the fourth grade at Randolph Elementary School, which is in Arlington, and then I went to, uh, Francis Hammond in Alexandria. I was always just trying to talk about school all the time, and people thought it was just lame and boring. And I tried to make a joke about like it was just a, your mama joke when, when we were really young, you know. And so, I learned in school that a collapsed star is like a blue star and it's like the densest, heaviest things in the universe. And so, I tried to make it your mama joke about like, your mom is so fat, she's like a blue star. Ha ha ha. And then everyone at the lunch table at cafeteria did not laugh. They were like, Huh? And it was just kind of awkward, like crickets in the background. But then if people were like, you know, insulting their teacher and making jokes about each other or, you know, making all kinds of jokes like that, or, um, being the best at flag football, being the fastest runner, leading all the games at recess and everything. They were always the coolest there. And it was like a weird adjustment period where I became like the classic nerd in all the movies you watch growing up.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:10:06] Interesting. What else did you bring with you to America? So, you brought this nerdiness, quirkiness, I guess. But what else did you bring with you from, from your time international?

Jaron Chailier [00:10:21] Off the top of my head, I, I'm trying to think of maybe other things I brought. Maybe I just knew some things that other people wouldn't about like the world around us maybe and using different languages. I know in the States when people move here for a long time, they end up, uh, forgetting their languages. Like if they come from immigrant families. I know a lot of people who stay for a long time end up knowing only or primarily English. And so being able to know, being able to like to hold a conversation in a couple of different languages was nice. And but then after staying in the States for a couple of years, my Thai and my Chinese also did drop off. So now I barely remember any Thai actually. I still have the accent. Thai people have told me I still have the accent, but I cannot hold any conversation in Thai anymore and I can't read or write anymore. But when I first moved back to the States, it was cool to be multilingual, I guess.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:11:27] And so your first move back to the states was Alexandria, right?

Jaron Chailier [00:11:32] Yeah, it was to the Alexandria area and Arlington.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:11:36] Right. Yeah. Um. Yeah. So, let's get into that period. So, you were how old when you moved?

Jaron Chailier [00:11:44] It was around fourth grade. So, I mean, I was about ten years old.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:11:48] 10 years old. Okay. So, you're so you're 10 years old, and you, uh, you first moved to Arlington?

DETAILS HIS MOVE TO THE ALEXANDRIA AREA

Jaron Chailier [00:11:55] I can't remember exactly, but I remember middle school was Hammond in Alexandria and elementary school was Randolph, which I think is Arlington. So, whichever happened to be closest from where we lived. But, uh, the place that we lived was by Four-Mile Run. So, um, that's Alexandria. But for a short time, we were in the Barcroft area before we found a place to, uh, like a more permanent place to live, which I think might have been Arlington then.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:12:25] Uh, so what was it like? Like, if you look back now, what was it like moving to this area as a kid?

Jaron Chailier [00:12:39] I guess a lot of things were going through my mind when I moved back here or. That's the thing, too, is like using the word back or not because it's not like-

Francesco De Salvatore [00:12:49] Not back. But yeah.

RECALLS BEING IN AN ESL CLASS

Jaron Chailier [00:12:50] I mean, yeah, kind of technically back to the States, but not like back to Alexandria per se. Um, besides those kinds of cultural differences, I remember getting like, I remember getting on or off the wrong place on the school bus because they said, you know, 'what's your address?' You know, so that they knew which bus to put me on. And I was like, 'I don't know'. And they were like, 'why don't you know?' Every kid knows. And also like, I don't know, like I've moved too many times, I can't memorize all those addresses and they got annoyed, and they had to call my mom. And I got on, I got off on the wrong stop once with my sister. And there were all those challenges. And I remember I was also one of the only like American U.S. citizen kids in ESL when I moved back to the States, which was an interesting memory and it was kind of rare like I was, everyone else was, you know, doing the classic five paragraph essay, the classic thing that everyone learns at school for, for essay writing in English. But I could barely, you know, string together some paragraph zero cursive and I couldn't spell people. That was one word I remember struggling with was people because I didn't know why there was an O in there. And [laughs] that was basically an adjustment period for me, all of those different things.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:14:10] What did it feel like?

TALKS ABOUT BEING CRITICIZED FOR NOT BEING CATHOLIC

Jaron Chailier [00:14:17] I guess I felt equal parts happy because like it felt comfy. Like it was like my cousins lived in the area and my mom was here. You know, a lot of things clicked in that sense. But then it was kind of conflicting because living for so many years outside of the states, growing up to a lot of it was unfamiliar. And you know, those things, everyone faces them when you move

to new places, trying to fit in, trying to understand new norms, trying to understand new rules. At my school in Hong Kong, before I went there, there was a very strict uniform dress code, head to toe, shirt, pants, bow tie, black shoes, black dress shoes and socks. Very strict dress code. But then in the States, it was just casual, whatever you wanted. Um, and that was an adjustment, too. There were all of these things about school lunch for home lunch that I didn't understand, and I didn't have my number, student number to get the school lunch at one point and the cafeteria and my classmates asked me, 'Why don't you know your number?' And I was like, 'I don't know. Where did I get the number?' I don't know. And also, I remember one thing that I didn't expect. I was a couple of years ago, actually, I was going through the first email I created. It was a Yahoo! Like I called myself Jerodude, that was my nickname for myself. And that was my first email on Yahoo! and I was going through that to make sure I had everything that I thought I needed before I would close it. Because now I have, you know, like a new email that I use on Gmail. It's more compatible with stuff. I ended up finding an email I sent to myself with a draft of one of my first five paragraph essays. And it surprised me because the topic that I chose was about like, uh, religious discrimination. I didn't have that term in my head at the time, but I remember being, like, criticized and questioned because a couple of my classmates were Catholic, but I'm not. I'm agnostic. That's the background I come from. And so, they kept on saying, apparently, I was I was getting heat for people saying, you know, 'why aren't you Christian?' 'Why don't you go to the Catholic Church and everything?' And I was and I just I wrote this little mini essay that I was trying to string together about, you know, why do people have to criticize me for that? You know, why not just be kind and open? And it kind of made me a little sad because I didn't remember that part of the adjustment period. The only reason I had my memory jogged is because I read that draft of the essay that I sent to myself, so I wouldn't like lose it on the school computer. And I pulled it up and I was like, wow, I didn't even realize that that was something that I that was weighing on me at the time. Little, little ten-year-old or so Jaron, you know?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:17:23] What were some of the things that you wrote in an essay that you remember now?

Jaron Chailier [00:17:28] That I remember from that essay? I was saying that I wish people wouldn't be mean, you know, and to like, you know, don't bully me kind of thing, that classic nerd, I guess. But then I was also kind of asking questions in the essay. I was asking questions. I don't know if it was targeted at like the teacher who would have graded it or if it was just me thinking on paper. But I was asking questions, you know, like, why would they care? Why would it be a problem? Questions like that. And of course, it's not like the administration and the teachers were down with that. It was just a couple of classmates. But then apparently it still did weigh on me at the time, and it got me thinking. So, me personally, I don't hate on anyone for their spiritual beliefs. And probably that's part of the reason why.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:18:16] Great. Hmm. What are some of your other memories about Alexandria when you moved here?

RECALLS PLACES IN ALEXANDRIA THAT HE VISITED

Jaron Chailier [00:18:24] I would say a whole lot of regular things. A whole lot of things became like standard in my family when we moved to Alexandria. Going to like Charles E. Beatley library all the time. My mom is a librarian by trade. She has a master's degree and a second master's degree to be a teacher. So, all education, international schools. That's why I moved everywhere also. And so, I was in a family where my mom wanted to emphasize that we wouldn't get addicted to TV or to smartphones or to an iPad. And so, my family would do really, really regular trips to Charles E. Beatley library, get some books. We would borrow so much that we didn't read all of them. I really ended up loving Rangers Apprentice. There's like, I think a 10-book series called Rangers

Apprentice about an archer who gets mentored by. Excuse me. An older archer. And then he'll just go on, like, adventures in everything. Like a kind of fantasy book that's set in, like, the medieval times, but it's all fiction, and there's some magic stuff that happens and reading comic books. And then we'd also do lots of like activities in the area nearby, around Four Mile Run every, every spring season, the geese would have, you know, they would lay eggs and they would have their chicks. And we know I think I learned that I technically wasn't supposed to, you know, feed the ducks, feed the geese, because they had signs every once in a while. But occasionally I think we did actually feed the geese and it was very fun. And we could watch like the geese grow up from babies, uh, by the river, which is really fun. I was put into soccer after school, which is a regular thing for years, but then I realized I actually hated soccer. I didn't want to play it because every progressing year you get older, people get more and more competitive. All the people who want to be a professional soccer player like Ronaldo, or Messi when they grow up. But I just wasn't into that. I was more into swimming. That's my sport. And so, I ended up just leaving it. But for many years, like when I was in Alexandria, it was always like soccer practice or soccer at school or going with my friends to play soccer and everything. And there was all those fun memories.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:20:43] That's cool. Do you have any memories of friends that you created here? Like could you maybe you described some of them?

Jaron Chailier [00:20:52] Some of my closest friends at the time. Um, one of them was. He lived just two blocks down from me in the same area around the Four-Mile Run. And he comes from a Syrian family. The two of us both played soccer, the two of us both were in the same school. So, we both since we were just one or two blocks down from each other, we rode the same bus home and I remember what we ended up having a lot of fun over was in general like cracking random jokes. Both of us were into those kinds of goofy things. Like there was an old show from I think it was made before I was born, *Beavis and Butthead*, shows like that. And we would also play hockey as well because he, we, um, like part of my family is Canadian and I was born in Canada. We would go like roller blading together at Thomas, I think Thomas Jefferson in Arlington. They had, uh, normally in the winter they would use the indoor rink, not the rink, the indoor track to do rollerblading some evenings on the weekends. And we would go to that and roller blade or sometimes we'd play hockey in the hallway of his building and people would come out and get annoyed at these kids who were like slamming the ball around and hitting the walls with the ball playing hockey, we would watch a whole bunch of movies. We eat nonstop with each other, which. I ended up having to spend a lot of time at the gym burning off when I got older. Big, big, big foodies. And also, we ended up becoming family friends with this one group, this one family in our building. There was like a really big snowstorm when we moved like proper to Alexandria to the Four-Mile Run area. And I remember there were things that we had to do, like shovel the car out because of so much snow. And there were snow days. So, people were just kind of trying to find things to do around the immediate walkable area. And we ended up running into them because I think myself and my mom and them, they're both like, we're all really, really big extroverts, so we just talk to anyone all the time. And I think we also clicked because we both have kind of like a global background. They're dual Brazilian U.S. citizens. Of course, I don't speak any Portuguese, but, um, and they didn't speak any French. But then we would just have so many fun, random adventures around the area. We tried to build an ice slide that winter because the snow plows. They pushed all of the snow to the fence, to the back of the parking lot.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:23:39] What was the parking lot?

Jaron Chailier [00:23:40] The around pavilion on the park. And so, when they pushed all the snow back, it ended up getting like packed and condensed. And so, the very bottom of it was ice, but then the top was snow. And so, what we did was we got our shovels together and little hand shovels, we put our gloves on and then we tried to like dig out a hole through it. And it's as tall as like two

middle schoolers. The snow pile up was very, very tall. And so, then we ended up burrowing a hole through it like an actual hole, hole through the middle. And it was like a 2 second slide. But still, we built that through it and it was it was really, really, really fun. I remember that like the snow days that I had zipping through that like ice slide in the middle of the winter. Of course, one time when we were building it, I think I got stuck for a while because like my foot was deep in the snow, but then there were all of those cool things that we did. And those, those were my closest friends, Daniel, and Nicole and. Yeah. Those two were with the family that way. Were in the exact same building, close to the same floor. And doing all of those fun things. And we're still friends still today as well.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:24:48] That's cool. I have a question about the area you grew up in Four Mile Run, right? So, for those who have no clue what it is, what it looks like, can you maybe describe this area? What does it look like? What is it? What it feels like? Yeah. Like, can you maybe paint us a picture of it through words?

DESCRIBES FOUR MILE RUN

Jaron Chailer [00:25:10] The area I lived in was very, very peaceful, I would say. For some reason, one half of the stream of the river was like stand-alone houses with a yard all around it. And then the other side of the river were or the stream where I lived on was like apartment complexes. So, the cool thing that we got was the view we lived up on the ninth floor, which I was super used to, because in Hong Kong they have like 40 plus story tall buildings, and we were on like 35 and so we would look out from the balcony and pavilion on the park. The building itself is curved like a, like a U. And so, we would look out from the balcony, and you could see the other apartment complexes in front of you. You could see a hotel down the street that starts to connect to Van Dorn Street, if I'm remembering correctly. And then on the right, there was like a communal garden that people set up with different square plots. People grew their own fruits and vegetables in part of the area, which was really cool. And then there's the stream. So, people went for walks and picnics and runs. And then there was the townhouses far on the right side you could look out on and the fireworks that Alexandria puts on for like 4th of July and everything. If you like, try to turn your head around like you kind of lean over the balcony. You could see them every year. So, you didn't have to go anywhere or watch on the TV. Thankfully, no one ever set off fireworks in the parking lot. But anyways. And then in the area within walking distance, there was a couple restaurants and a bowling alley and a McDonald's. And down the street from us. If you go the opposite direction where our balcony face, that's where Charles E. Beatley library is. That was the neighborhood where we lived in.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:27:05] That's great. Did you play a lot near the stream, near the water?

Jaron Chailer [00:27:11] Oh, yeah. I didn't play any games there because we didn't want the ball to go in and we had to go get it. Yeah. But then we would play a whole bunch of different games around there. And the first time I got one of those remote-control cars for Christmas, we would try to zip it around the parking lot. And we found out after testing it that if you go up to the ninth floor, you can still remote control the car in the parking lot from there. So, we confused a lot of people who were parking their cars and driving around. They didn't see anyone. But then, you know, we were kind of like peeking up from the balcony on the ninth floor, making our cars zip around and like go around people's feet and go around under the cars. And that was that was really, really cool and we did that, too.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:27:52] That's cool. Okay. I want to go back to Hammond, your middle school. So, I'm kind of going backwards in time cause I feel like we didn't hear a whole lot in the

sense about, like, about your experience? But I'm curious, are there any teachers? That stick out in your mind from that period?

Jaron Chailier [00:28:12] Yes, actually.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:28:13] Yeah, maybe can you describe them?

RECALLS TEACHERS FROM HIS MIDDLE SCHOOL

Jaron Chailier [00:28:17] One. The teacher who stands out to me the most from when I was at Hammond was definitely Mrs. Kochis. I would actually be really happy if I could reach out to her now, actually, that would be really fun to see how, you know, her students grew up in everything. But Mrs. Coaches was my science teacher in middle school. And the reason why I remember her so well is because she was the most positive, encouraging teacher ever, even though I you know, maybe she hoped that I would have. But the reason why I originally wanted to go into mechanical engineering and the science is because partially because of her. But then I realized my real interest lies in like international relations and foreign policy and everything in languages. But then at the time, I just I loved her classes so, so, so much. I remember there was, you know, we did the science fair that I kind of failed at because I made a very crap project about nails and nails and stuff rusting in soda, trying to figure out how corrosive it is, you know. But then in class, there was also a presentation I did on the stages of cell division, mitosis. I can't remember all the stages, and that's also a shame on me too. But I especially remember when I when myself and one other girl made really, really good presentations and she, you know, she told us that and we felt like we accomplished something. We were proud of ourselves, we're learning, we're smart. You know, we ended up getting to go to I think it was the Alexandria like education. I'm not sure what it's called, like the council, the part of Alexandria City that deals with education. We got to present it to them. And so was like all the board members sitting on the side and all the teachers over their and. Um. A super nervous little. Sixth or seventh graders were presenting. And we showed our video up on the screen. And then we had to describe, you know, the little science thing that we made the video on. And that's cool because most people only do that when they're presenting something like for a masters. But then, you know, it was just so fun and engaging because us as middle schoolers, we got to have that experience. We dressed ourselves up. Um, I can't remember the girl's name, unfortunately, but I still remember her. She had really curly hair and we got to present that in front of them. And I remember my face turning beet red, but it was still so cool to push myself in that way and to feel like even though it was like a little video that I made on I-Movie, um, that I got to present that, just that sense of accomplishment and pride that you give little kids like that, like the way that I felt it was so, so happy and so I can't remember if I can't remember any other teachers names but hers, you know. Maybe Mrs. Noetzli from English class.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:31:19] That's okay. That's great. I mean, you've kind of said it, but. So, I assume, maybe tell us like, where did you go after high school? What did you end up pursuing?

DESCRIBES HIS EXPERIENCE IN COLLEGE

Jaron Chailier [00:31:30] After high school, I ended up going into a degree in international relations. That's how I explain it in general. But specifically, the name that my program gave to it was a bachelor's in global and international studies. And the degree just matched my interest and my passion so much. And they call it global and international because of the, you know, the distinction and or the overlap of when things are between individual states or when they're mixed between the globe. There's a lot of things that overlap, but there's still a lot of divisions. And so that was kind of how it was framed in a lot of ways, and I just fit in so well. And, you know, we had the

international language requirement which I was overjoyed, counted for full credit for the degree. And that's when I realized I was sitting in Alexandria at the time applying to my bachelor's in Canada because it's so much cheaper. And I remember sitting there with my mom, you know, looking through my acceptances and rejections, and I got rejected from one university. At the earliest possible day that they can reject you like it was as an obvious no because I was applying to engineering and sciences and like I just didn't have the grades, I didn't have the passion or the interest in the essays I wrote. And I actually wrote an essay on this that made it into a book where I decided literally that day that I wanted to completely redo all of my applications last minute in December, and the deadlines were either December or January. And so, I completely redid all of my applications, all of my essays. Um, I made new accounts to apply to different universities on different websites, and that's when I did all of my applications for different international relations programs. And I'm happy I listen to myself because I don't regret it one bit. That last minute decision has impacted the last like six years of my life and they've been awesome. And after graduating, ended up coming back here for work.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:33:52] Yeah. Where did you go to college?

Jaron Chailier [00:33:54] Carleton University. It's in Canada's capital city. So, they call it the capital. Uh, what do they call it? The Capital University. Canada's Capital University. That's where I went.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:34:06] And why did you come back here then? Why? What brought you back to the area?

EXPLAINS WHY HE CAME BACK TO ALEXANDRIA

Jaron Chailier [00:34:11] Part of it was the COVID 19 pandemic. It just really wasn't easy to live all by myself with no family closer than a flight away. And, you know, it's because I have family in this area. It was just better to have-

Francesco De Salvatore [00:34:31] Like your parents?

Jaron Chailier [00:34:32] Yeah, my mom is here, my cousins are here. Like they were my closest cousins by flight, like an hour-long flight away. And my other cousins who were in Canada were all the way in Alberta, which is like a six-hour flight away. And so besides my friends circle, I just didn't have that kind of support network that you'd have if you're close to family. And in general, I say I'm okay with that because, you know, if you want to work in international relations, you have to keep moving. That's part of the job. But then, you know, with the isolation from the COVID 19 pandemic and, um, not being able to have like that bubble of people that you're super close to and, you know, the way that you're close to friends isn't the same as family. So, if I ever, you know, needed to go to the hospital for any reason, I'm not sure all of my classmates would come and help me out or drive me anywhere because we were too young to own cars. And so, like, after all of that decision making and D.C. is a bigger city, I was more familiar with it. I thought the job opportunities would be better. There was a bigger support system. I was familiar with it. Um, and all of those decisions came together, and I just decided like, this is once I graduated, no before I graduated, actually, I had one or two semesters left to go. I came back and I did the rest of my degree remote from this area.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:36:00] Got it. Yeah. So, you bring up the pandemic. And so, I'm just curious. Um, maybe. Yeah. Can you share your, like, what, what was your experience with the pandemic? Everyone had their own experiences. What was yours?

REFLECTS ON HIS EXPERIENCE WITH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Jaron Chailier [00:36:13] Oh, man. I mentioned earlier that I'm an extrovert, and this term was I feel kind of a nonchalant thing before the pandemic. But then it became a nonstop conversation topic in the pandemic because introverts fared better, you know, holing ourselves up to avoid the, uh, coronavirus spreading. But then for extroverts like myself, like the, the, the stress was so, so strong and powerful. That's part of the reason why I left because I had to be close to family, like in the same house, you know, so I could be with around other people. Because at the time I was renting an apartment, I was renting a room in the area with, um, and in the building, you know, there were other people shared, um, shared laundry room and everything. But then we really weren't close to each other. We weren't like best friends who moved in. We were strangers who happened to find the same room online. Um, and so then my experience with COVID 19, to be honest, was just a whole lot of, a whole lot of just sitting at my desk going between the desk and the bed, trying to do some work, trying to finish my assignments. And just I was something about being an extrovert means like. I learned that it's not just how talkative or not you are, but that for introverts you need to like go away from a social situation to recharge. They get exhausted, even if it's good company and good food and everything, and they're enjoying themselves. But then extroverts the opposite. If I am alone, like in my room or in some kind of nonsocial thing, like writing an essay for too long. I need to get out. I need to see other people. I need to talk to people. I need to like be with other people. I need to be a part of something or else like my stress levels mount. So, it's like the opposite of them is like I recharge by being with people, which was a really cool thing that I realized a lot of people ended up agreeing with and understanding as I talked about it, to people, to see what other people felt in COVID 19 isolation. And that was just basically the majority of it is trying to with people who were in my bubble, we would try to just go on walks and talk or we would try to do video calls, which was the closest thing to social interaction. But then as soon as you look left or right, the phone screen isn't there anymore. You know, it's not the same as being with a person. And I just I tried to find so many different ways to keep socially engaged in some way, you know, full masking. I even got one of those plastic visors, you know, I was one of those people because I had to eventually take a one-way trip home. When I came back to this area from Canada, I had the mask and I had the plastic visor on the flight, and no one else did. And I did a virtual exchange for my international relations degree where I was, quote unquote, studying in Beijing. But I never actually got to go. So, I was studying with a 12-hour time difference, which was wicked. I had to do all my classes in the middle of the night and sleep during the day when everyone else was awake for a whole semester. That was another really, really interesting experience trying to get my Chinese level up and keep on understanding different ideas around the world. And then eventually, once everyone got the vaccines, then things started opening up again. And I actually felt like I could enjoy things again. And I did a whole lot of beach volleyball in Old Town, right by the Potomac. There's a place on the edge of Old Town. I forget the name of the park, but there's a park where there's a public beach volleyball court. And I went there like weekly so that it was at least open there. So, there was less chance for transmission. And then, you know, you could see the sunset, you could see the river and the bridge and play beach volleyball for hours. And those were all the things that I was doing for. Yeah. What's now the past two years.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:40:58] You moved here two years ago?

Jaron Chailier [00:41:04] The start of COVID was two years ago. I've been back here for maybe like a year or a year and a half.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:41:12] Right?

Jaron Chailier [00:41:13] Well, yeah. It took me a little while before I decided to leave from my apartment in Canada to coming back to this area.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:41:25] So we're about to close out. Is there anything you want to mention before we close out? Is there anything?

EXPLAINS WHY HE LOVES ALEXANDRIA

Jaron Chailer [00:41:32] I feel like one thing that really makes me love this area, which is why when people ask me if I do want to settle down in one country or area with this degree and these languages I speak, I would say specifically Old Town in Alexandria, because I just think Alexandria is so comfy to live in for someone like me because not only are there so many people with different backgrounds, different languages, there's a huge like there's Ethiopian communities, there's the El Salvadorian community. When I was in middle school in Hammond, my crush, like my huge crush was this woman, this girl from Honduras. We were both in middle school. You know, were young. And that was like my super big crush at the time. And even just the neighbors on my specific floor in my building, one of them was like a like, um, electrical engineer from Afghanistan. There was a man who moved here with his family from the D.R. Congo, became a full citizen because he had a really, really high up job in his career when he was younger. Then, when the regime changed to the Kabila family, he had to leave. I don't know the specifics, but then, like, there's all this like global history and connection in the D.C. area. All the embassies are nearby in D.C. proper, like just all of these connections. It just feels it feels so nice. It feels so open and connected. And that's yeah. Again, that why I decided to come back here, even though I've had many opportunities to leave. That sounds kind of negative, but you know, I have, you know, I can, I can, I can find a, uh, a cool international relations job in many places. I was thinking about working for the U.N. Um, I want to get a master's degree soon. Who knows where that will be? And these are all of the things that have been making me just happy to be in the area. I relate easier to people.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:43:37] That's great. Thank you for sharing everything all this.

Jaron Chailer [00:43:42] No problem. I'm happy to share. Thanks. Give my \$0.02.