

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**CORDEL FAULK:** Hi. I'm Cordel Faulk, assistant dean and chief admissions officer at the University of Virginia School of Law. In this episode of Law Schooled, we talked to third year law student Toccara Nelson. Toccara describes her Midwest roots and social activism. She is a member of UVA President Jim Ryan's community working group, seeking ways to strengthen the university's ties with our local community. Toccara gives us a sampling of what its ultimate report found. Admissions director Ashley Merritt joins us, too.

Welcome to this edition of Law Schooled. Thank you for joining us. We have Ms. Toccara M. Nelson here today.

**TOCCARA** Yes, the M stands for Michelle.

**NELSON:**

[LAUGHTER]

Toccara Michelle Nelson.

**CORDEL FAULK:** All right.

**TOCCARA** There's a story behind my middle name, but.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Well, Toccara, you are our first 3L.

**TOCCARA** Wow.

**NELSON:**

**ASHLEY** Oh, yeah. That's right.

**MERRITT:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Yes, you're our first 3L.

**ASHLEY** That's right.

**MERRITT:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** So let's start by talking about who was Toccara Nelson before she arrived here in

Charlottesville.

**TOCCARA** That's a question that I still try to answer to this day.

**NELSON:**

[LAUGHTER]

But no, so Toccara Nelson, I mean, it started December 26, 1990.

**CORDEL FAULK:** That's right, Capricorn.

**TOCCARA** Capricorn.

**NELSON:**

[LAUGHTER]

Capricorn squad, stand up.

**ASHLEY** I can't with the two of you.

**MERRITT:**

[LAUGHTER]

Turn it down.

**TOCCARA** You asked me to be on the squad. [INAUDIBLE] are you going to get. No, so I was born and

**NELSON:** raised-- and up until law school-- lived in the city of Detroit, Michigan.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Detroit Rock City.

**TOCCARA** Detroit Rock City, the only state shaped like a mitten.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** That's right.

**TOCCARA** Fresh water, homes, Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, and Superior. [LAUGHS]

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** What's it like?

**ASHLEY** We're going to get as serious as we can.

**MERRITT:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** I know, right? No, but this podcast is supposed to be [INAUDIBLE], so we can laugh.

**TOCCARA** Yeah. Laughing is allowed. TMN. So I was born and raised in [INAUDIBLE] Law School, lived  
**NELSON:** in the city of Detroit. Who was Toccara before then? That's a very vague question that can be answered so many different times.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Are you going to make me do some cold calling?

**TOCCARA** You're going to make me do some Socratic method.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** I know, right.

**TOCCARA** Let me get my stuff together before I get cold called on.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** All right. Because we have to start with high school.

**TOCCARA** I know, high school--

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Because you're always making me brag about your high school.

**TOCCARA** I don't make you brag about it.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Yes, because you won't talk about it.

**TOCCARA** Well, so I went to a high school-- Cass Technical High School. Cass Tech, number one,

**NELSON:** second to none.

**CORDEL FAULK:** No, and that's true. It seriously--

**TOCCARA** It's literally second to none. We were first in the best, alpha and omega of the city of Detroit

**NELSON:** Public Schools.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Correct.

**TOCCARA** Public school child.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** And it's a technical school.

**TOCCARA** And it's a technical school.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Science heavy.

**TOCCARA** Science heavy. I was in science and arts background pathway. I was valedictorian of Cass

**NELSON:** Tech. I think we had like six valedictorians.

**CORDEL FAULK:** I was about to say, don't make me say it. I was hoping you were going to say it. I know. No, she always makes me do it. She did it before I could do it.

**TOCCARA** Dang, making me taller than myself, dang. So my high school, Lily Tomlin, Diana Ross, Big

**NELSON:** Sean, amongst numerous others, [INAUDIBLE] previously attended the high school. I think one of Beyonce's dancers attended the high school, too. We have just a wide variety of legends that attended my high school, and I had a really good time. I grew up on the Eastside of Detroit always.

**CORDEL FAULK:** [INAUDIBLE] We need to emphasize valedictorian. Because I need people to understand you've got your academic chops, too. Everybody sees fun Toccara, but they don't realize she's got it. That's right, valedictorian. That's right.

**TOCCARA** Yeah, so I was valedictorian of science and arts pathways. It was kind of the advanced

**NELSON:** placement pathway. So I took a lot of AP classes. I took AP Calculus, AP English, AP History, all that type of stuff. I really like AP History, AP English. I loved my teachers. I think at Cass, it sparked my love for education in the sense of like-- it was an environment where the teachers were genuinely invested in your education. The teachers stay after class.

I was a teacher's aide for my AP English teacher senior year. And we would just have live conversations, let alone conversation about *Wuthering Heights*, or *King Lear*. But we would have life conversations, like what do you want to be after you graduate from high school, after you graduate from college? I had a teacher, my AP English teacher junior year-- one of our main assignments was we had to apply to-- our list of 100 scholarships, apply to at least like-- was it 25 or 50 of them?

**CORDEL FAULK:** Oh, wow.

**TOCCARA** I'm not s-- yeah. Because they had that [INAUDIBLE] investment in our education they knew  
**NELSON:** that we all had potential to be great. So I was really appreciative of that, and I knew that was the type of environment I wanted to be educated in. And I wanted to kind of thrive in because I thrive in that type of environment. Because I feel like I invest in other people, so I'm a big pay it forward type of person to see people who I kind of idolize as instructors be invested in my education. I really appreciated that, and I still do.

**CORDEL FAULK:** That's actually, that's really good background on how you've conducted yourself here. It helps me understand why you've been so involved with here.

**TOCCARA** Yeah, and I feel like that's kind of like a culture in Detroit. Detroit is 80-- is the second most  
**NELSON:** blackest city. I mean, it may have changed now with the onset of gentrification, unfortunately. But last time I checked, we were second to Gary, Indiana. And I talked about this last night. We had a perspective on black queerness panel, and I kind of talked about it a little bit more [INAUDIBLE] last night. But I think being in that setting, being in such a richly black setting, and my parents-- both of my parents, when I was little, they brought me an encyclopedia on black history. And I remember it was two or three summers where my task was to read a chapter from that encyclopedia every week and write a paragraph on it.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Wow.

**TOCCARA** Yeah, so reading that encyclopedia was important to me because it was I learned kind of the  
**NELSON:** rich history of blackness, of black people, black Americans, black people from African countries, from Caribbean countries like the Diaspora, and how important community was. And I think that's also something that I just take with me, whether it's my experience in high school, reading, history, seeing the importance of my parents investing in that, you're going to learn your black history.

I think what I got from it is the importance of community and sticking together. And just from the civil rights movement, how when Martin Luther King and all these different activists would go to different cities and have their organizing sessions, protests, et cetera, members of the local community, they would stay with them, and they would cook for them and provide food and transportation costs, so stuff like that, stuff [INAUDIBLE] the community. The Black Panthers they had their [INAUDIBLE] supports for local youth in Oakland, and how they ingratiated themselves in the community, that's something that's important to me. And I think

that's a legacy of blackness to me, and that's what blackness is about, is pulling everybody up.

And like I said, I got it in my educational experiences. Even in elementary school, there were teachers who invested in me. In middle school, there were teachers who invested in me. And I wanted to carry that and provide that to other people. So I think in thinking about it, I think that kind of like is one of the fires that kind of lies within the background of my soul, I guess, in terms of what I do and the work that I try to do.

**CORDEL FAULK:** You said in high school that your teachers wanted you to think about what you want to do after high school and after college, what did you want to be professionally at that point. Who did you think Toccara would become?

**TOCCARA** Toccara thought-- I thought that I was actually going to be a psychiatrist.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Really? OK.

**TOCCARA** So that stemmed from me experiencing kind of secondary or tertiary the tragedy that

**NELSON:** happened in New Orleans and Louisiana with Hurricane Katrina, and the aftermath of it. I thought that was one of our greatest tragedies in American history, how we left this group of peoples and failed this group of people as a nation, simply because of where they lived at and obviously because of the color of their skin. And I felt like that was something that just touched me as a teenager.

I saw this Spike Lee documentary when the levees broke, and I think that was something that was like-- I mean, it wasn't eye opening. I knew how things could happen in this country that is just mad racist. But it just was so tragic. Hearing the stories was just so tragic. And I've watched different shows about kind of the one year or two year anniversary. I think it was the one year anniversary, quote, unquote, of after Hurricane Katrina hit and how so many people had difficulties with mental health, and trauma, and PTSD, and et cetera, from not only people who stayed or just from seeing and living through the destruction. But so many people and families were separated post-Hurricane Katrina.

So initially, I think it was me watching an Oprah Winfrey show. I used to be addicted to Oprah.

**ASHLEY** Who wasn't?

**MERRITT:**

**TOCCARA** Who is Oprah?

**NELSON:**

[LAUGHTER]

Who was it?

**CORDEL FAULK:** It's been a while. She was off, I know, right.

**TOCCARA** It was like-- I think it was--

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Gail is now a thing.

**TOCCARA** Yeah.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Right. We could do another podcast of that.

**TOCCARA** I'm just saying.

**NELSON:**

[LAUGHTER]

Lord. Oh gosh. So with that, I wanted to be a psychiatrist to provide psychiatric supports for communities like people in New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and generally marginalized communities because I feel like we don't-- we still don't. This was back in '06, '07, late. We still don't as marginalized communities have the resources or kind of like we're not given the knowledge on how important having those mental health supports, therapists, et cetera, psychiatrist, et cetera, are to kind of staying healthy. Because this world can be wild. I mean, it's hard. It's difficult.

I mean, and I think it's very important to have-- I'm a huge proponent of therapy, just in my personal life. Because I've been through some very serious situations, serious mental health situations and sense of-- just going through anxiety and stuff. And I really am a proponent of therapy and good mental health. I take my mental health seriously. I take time. I try to take as much time as possible for me, meditation, mindfulness. So I think even still today, our communities don't have that resource. So that's what Toccara wanted to do.

**CORDEL FAULK:** How did you get from there to lawyer?

**TOCCARA** How did I get from there to lawyer? That's a good question. So I went to college. I went to the  
**NELSON:** University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Go Blue. Go Blue, forever go Blue. So I went there, and being pre-med-- if you are a psychiatrist, you have to be in pre-med pathway-- it's very difficult. And I found myself not taking as an enchantment with my science courses as I really wanted to. I always loved writing. In high school, I used to write poetry all the time to kind of get as a way of venting and getting my emotions out. Yeah. [LAUGHS]

**CORDEL FAULK:** We're learning some new stuff about Toccara today.

**TOCCARA** Yeah, so I used to write a lot. And so I went to college. And I was like, mm, I don't really have  
**NELSON:** any enjoyment doing science. But I still want to do something that helps the community and kind of leverages what I'm good at and my interest in helping the community. So I spoke to a pre-law advisor. And I found this is a good pathway for you to go if you're really interested in that. I also took-- which is really funny. I used to work for Michigan Telephone, which is a fundraising entity at the University of Michigan. I don't know if it's still there. And I spoke with someone who was an alum, who I think was an attorney. And she was like, if you really are interested in being a lawyer, you should take Roman Latin.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Was this somebody you were calling to ask for money?

**TOCCARA** Yeah.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** How did you get from--

**TOCCARA** I get advice from asking for money.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** That's so Toccara.

**TOCCARA** For real. I'm grateful and blessed for it. So I was already taking Latin as a language because  
**NELSON:** you have to take a language. And I actually was going to minor in Latin. So I took Greco Roman history, Greek history, Roman history. I took Latin. I really loved the language, and that also helped perfect and better my writing. So I really like the law. I really kind of liked the writing aspect of it, but I still didn't really know about it. I'm a first generation everything, first generation college student, currently first generation law student, first generation lawyer. So

there's still a lot of stuff that I don't know.

So after graduating from the University of Michigan, I took four years off to work. Two of those years, I worked for a very small kind of solo practitioner law firm in the city of Detroit. And I really enjoyed the experience because it was a corporate law firm, which was something different than what I planned to do with my career. But I really enjoyed the experience. I enjoyed interacting with clients. I enjoyed--

**CORDEL FAULK:** I think it's worth noting that you made a career transition in your head. You went to undergrad thinking you wanted to do psychiatry. You were transitioning towards the law by the end of college. And then you paused to see if that was the right thing, instead of just diving in. I think that's important.

**TOCCARA NELSON:** Yeah, I do think it's important. I'm a big proponent personally, and disclaimer, this is not the endorsement of UVA Law. This is an endorsement--

**CORDEL FAULK:** That will come later.

**TOCCARA NELSON:** Right. This is from Toccara Michelle Nelson. I'm a big proponent of gap years and taking time off. Because I feel like me, if I were to come and went into law school at 21, 22-- no, honey, no.

**CORDEL FAULK:** I think it's mature of you to have known that thing. Because a lot of people don't--

**TOCCARA NELSON:** Yeah, there's a lot of different reasons why I wasn't ready, just my own personal kind of stuff that I was going through, me dealing with kind of stuff and family stuff, my own personal stuff. Undergrad was not the easiest thing for me. It was kind of like a culture shock, and I feel like undergrad or in this place graduate school can be a culture shock to a lot of different people because it's your first time being on your own and being your own accountability person. With high school, my accountability person was my parents.

And honestly, my accountability person was meeting my motivation to try and better myself, see the world. You have teachers that are on your behind to do stuff. In colleges, it's different. College is like you have to make sure you get your butt up and go to class and do your homework and stuff like that. I mean, similar to law school, law school is even more accountability because it's like, you only have one exam pretty much, particularly your first year, one exam at the end. So you have to be on your butt to--

**CORDEL FAULK:** You are truly treated like an adult here. In college, it's a transition from childhood to adult. Here, it's all adult. And you are expected to be an adult.

**TOCCARA** Yes, so if I would have-- and I had--

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** But it's all professional.

**ASHLEY** Yeah, I was going to say, as it should be.

**MERRITT:**

**TOCCARA** Yeah, it's all professional. And in undergrad, I had difficulties, just with like-- I don't want to say

**NELSON:** maturity because I felt like I was--

**CORDEL FAULK:** Because I don't think that was the case. We're seeing that that wasn't the case.

**TOCCARA** Yeah, it wasn't maturity. It was just more so like I just had my own kind of personal difficulties,

**NELSON:** and I was like, I need to take some time.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Just kind of growing pains.

**TOCCARA** Growing pains, yes. So I needed to take the time off, but also figure out if law was really what I

**NELSON:** wanted to do because this is a great-- it's a big investment. It's a big financial investment, time investment. I mean, this is basically you're doing a professional finishing school for your career.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Correct.

**TOCCARA** So for me, I was like, I wanted to make sure this is what I wanted to do. And I love interacting

**NELSON:** with clients, to seeing the different ways that law could be used to do good, to do business or to make business. I really enjoyed that. So after working two years for the solo practitioner, I actually worked two years at Verizon Wireless because I could make a little bit more money. I could also take time and work part time and study for the LSAT. And when I say working for Verizon Wireless, I literally was at a Verizon Wireless corporate storefront selling phones, retail. And that honestly was one of my favorite jobs because it taught me how to be a better communicator, but also to communicate with integrity. I did not want to be that sole person-- and luckily I was in a store where honestly, the managers would not allow you to be that type of salesperson, in the sense of telling customers anything just to get a sale.

**ASHLEY** Yeah. Or up charging.

**MERRITT:**

**TOCCARA** Up charging, exactly. So we ran-- I mean, I was a solution specialist. I wasn't in management,

**NELSON:** but the store ran kind of a clean ship. But it also taught me--

**CORDEL FAULK:** That's a great title, solution specialist.

**TOCCARA** Yeah.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** That's nice.

**TOCCARA** Specializing in results. But--

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Some Olivia Pope.

**TOCCARA** Right.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Solution specialist, right.

**TOCCARA** Well, it reminds me of-- I don't know if anybody watched *Girlfriends*, but it was a show on UPN

**NELSON:** with Toni Childs, who was a lawyer from Fresno.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Back in the day, UPN.

**TOCCARA** And she was like Toni Childs, specializing in results. So--

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Right.

[LAUGHTER]

**ASHLEY** I forgot, oh my god.

**MERRITT:**

**TOCCARA** So but yeah. [LAUGHS] But for real, it taught me how to communicate with integrity because I

**NELSON:** also didn't want to be that type of salesperson. And it always makes me uncomfortable asking people for stuff, is like I need you to buy this for me, so my check will look nice. That's basically

what I felt like I was doing, but I really looked at it as like, we're discovering solutions. One of my assistant managers was like, we're just trying to discover the best solutions for these customers.

So I learned how to have fun with wherever I was doing while working at Verizon. I had fun with the customers, played music, demoed all this stuff, like generally try to find commonalities between myself and the people who were my customers. I mean, it's different because this is me still living in Eastside Detroit. But I worked in Sterling Heights, which is a suburb of metro Detroit. And this was kind of near the bigger mall, so I interacted with all types of different people with different backgrounds. Michigan is a very diverse state--

**CORDEL FAULK:** It is, yeah.

**TOCCARA** In terms of race, ethnicity, whatever.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Income levels, yeah.

**TOCCARA** Income levels, yes, but then also, just different type of communities. You get rural. You can be

**NELSON:** driving through farm country in some parts of Michigan.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Some parts of Michigan, you feel like you're in Georgia.

**TOCCARA** Correct. So--

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** I always thought that there's some parts of Michigan that are oddly southern.

**TOCCARA** Yeah, honestly. And I think I interacted with so many different people with different

**NELSON:** backgrounds, so it was like finding those commonalities and just having fun with it. Because I don't know. I can't really cuss on this podcast, but--

**CORDEL FAULK:** [LAUGHS] I know. We don't have an E.

**TOCCARA** But I will say this.

**NELSON:**

**ASHLEY** This is why I'm here. This is what this is.

**MERRITT:**

**TOCCARA** I will say I'll be darned if I don't have fun at the job that I do. And that's where I learned to  
**NELSON:** make every space my own, is when I worked for Verizon. So I think that was one of my most  
cherished experiences in jobs because like I really found a sense of success there. But it was  
more so stop and not a destination. And from there, I studied for the LSAT. I would study  
during the m-- because I would work kind of a swing shift. So on the days where I would close--  
- like I work part time, so I'll go in at 2:00, leave at 8:00. I would wake up early in the morning,  
study for the LSAT. So I would use Power Square Bible. Power Square books, their practice  
tests. My practice tests were--

**CORDEL FAULK:** I feel like we could put a TM, put a little trademark up there.

[LAUGHTER]

**ASHLEY** We're going to cut that part off here because we're not trying to get copyright infringement.

**MERRITT:**

**TOCCARA** But I used--

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** No, they love the advertisement.

**TOCCARA** OK. I mean, well, we all love to adverti--

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** They're seeing dollar signs.

**TOCCARA** If y'all love the advertisement, then sign your girl up to sponsor. I take a picture.

**NELSON:**

**ASHLEY** Toccara was studying for the LSAT while working at Verizon.

**MERRITT:**

**TOCCARA** And it was--

**NELSON:**

**ASHLEY** We're staying on track here.

**MERRITT:**

**TOCCARA** Yeah, staying on track-- so study for the LSAT. I didn't know I was going do well on the LSAT. I

**NELSON:** was really scared. I took the LSAT. And you know what's funny, is like when I took the LSAT, you know what album got me through taking the LSAT?

**CORDEL FAULK:** What?

**TOCCARA** It was Janet Jackson's new--

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Are you kidding?

**TOCCARA** Album.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Well, we have to get to that in a second. We'll get to that in a second.

**TOCCARA** So, Sia came back and I think I had--

**NELSON:**

**ASHLEY** Janet Jackson fan girls [INAUDIBLE].

**MERRITT:**

[LAUGHTER]

**TOCCARA** And honestly, Sia went on the tour. Did I see her before or after I took the LSAT? I don't know,

**NELSON:** but I went to go see her with my cousin, who's like my sister, in Grand Rapids. So she was getting me through.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Grand Rapids.

**TOCCARA** Yeah, Grand Rapids is nice. We stayed in a nice hotel, everything, yeah. So took the LSAT. I

**NELSON:** was like, I did all I could do. I can share this LSAT story. So I did not know-- I knew you took an extra portion of the LSAT for an experimental score. I thought the whole test was linear, and the last portion automatically drops off.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Oh, no, no.

**ASHLEY** No, Toccara.

**MERRITT:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Oh no.

**TOCCARA** So--

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Keep going. This is going to be good.

**TOCCARA** It ended up good.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** OK.

**TOCCARA** I did not know it was a random section that gets dropped off. So the last section, I was like

**NELSON:** mm, I'm just going to-- I didn't fill stuff in, but I was more relaxed. So I was like, mm, I'm just going to get this done, whatever. This is the last section. This is experimental.

**ASHLEY** Oh my gosh. Toccara.

**MERRITT:**

**TOCCARA** And then I end up learning after the fact that it was random. And so I was like, oh, snap. And I

**NELSON:** was like, I need to take it again. I was like, wha-- I'm going to have to take this joint again. I'm not going to get into any law schools. When that email sent of my LSAT, and at first, I looked. I was like, how? Secondly, I literally, I was home from work, check my email, looked at the score, LSAT, boop boop boop, percentile, boop boop. I would drop to the floor on my knees, and I was like, praise Jesus! I was like, what? How?

**ASHLEY** Oh my goodness.

**MERRITT:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Do you know, which one was the experimental one? Was it the last one?

**TOCCARA** I don't know.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Oh, OK.

**TOCCARA** I don't even want to know.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** I thought you were going to get at--

**ASHLEY** That's not to look at. It worked out. It all worked out, yeah.

**MERRITT:**

**TOCCARA** And actually being on the same way is like we're not going to look back. We're not going to  
**NELSON:** look back. We don't look back. A lot look back. [INAUDIBLE] looking back turned to a pillar of salt.

**CORDEL FAULK:** All right.

**ASHLEY** Oh my god.

**MERRITT:**

**TOCCARA** I'm not even religious, religious like that, but religion, the Bible, sometimes just pops up.

**NELSON:**

[LAUGHTER]

But yeah. Why are you snorting? So law school.

**CORDEL FAULK:** So you've taken the test.

**TOCCARA** LSAT.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** You applied to different schools.

**TOCCARA** Somehow we've made it to this point in this conversation.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Why did you choose Virginia? That's the core question of the podcast. So why did you choose--  
-

**TOCCARA** Why did I choose--

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Virginia?

**ASHLEY** 25 minutes.

**MERRITT:**

**TOCCARA** 25 minutes into the podcast.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** It's really entertaining.

**TOCCARA**            How long are these podcasts?

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** As long as they need to be.

**TOCCARA**            Oh, you-- [INAUDIBLE] time.

**NELSON:**

**ASHLEY**             Just speak your truth.

**MERRITT:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** I know. Yeah, we want you to speak your truth.

**TOCCARA**            My truth is hilarious. OK, so--

**NELSON:**

**ASHLEY**             Why Virginia?

**MERRITT:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Why did you choose Virginia?

**TOCCARA**            Picture it January 2016.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** I remember it.

**TOCCARA**            I got an email, little square email with picture, like you got a fee waiver from University of

**NELSON:**             Virginia.

**CORDEL FAULK:** That's right.

**TOCCARA**            And I'm like oh. So I was like, let me go ahead and apply. Because I looked at some of the

**NELSON:**            different resources, and I saw that UVA had a great placement in DC. And I knew I wanted to work in DC. DC was one of--

**CORDEL FAULK:** That's what we didn't know.

**TOCCARA** Yeah. So--

**NELSON:**

**ASHLEY** We'll get to that in a second.

**MERRITT:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** OK, OK.

**TOCCARA** Because I ended up learning, and I was like, what? So I knew UVA had a great placement in

**NELSON:** DC. I really wanted to work in DC because I knew DC was called Chocolate City. DC had a very--

**CORDEL FAULK:** I thought you were going to say a sophisticated legal word.

**TOCCARA** No. Seriously, DC is called Chocolate City.

**NELSON:**

[LAUGHTER]

Let me tell you. So Ashley here has her hood. It's a cute shirt. It has a turtleneck with a loose turtle neck, like infinity scarf style. And she, as I said Chocolate City-- which is not untrue, it's true.

**ASHLEY** It's not inaccurate.

**MERRITT:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** DC was called that. Yeah, DC was called that.

**TOCCARA** And so she put her infinity scarf portion of her shirt over her face in laughter. So Cordel is

**NELSON:** wearing--

**CORDEL FAULK:** I was just falling over.

**TOCCARA** Cordell is wearing a very-- what color? It's like a brown--

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Brown.

**TOCCARA** Brown sweater over a very nice--

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Maroon.

**TOCCARA** Maroon checkered shirt. Just the style is amazing in this podcast. All right, Toccara.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Wait, let's get back to Toccara.

**TOCCARA** I'm wearing a nice shirt.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** This shirt is amazing.

**TOCCARA** From Rosa Parks. If ya'll could just take the shirt and make it a cover picture of the podcast,

**NELSON:** wink, wink. Given to me, one, by me--

**CORDEL FAULK:** Rosa Parks.

**TOCCARA** Rosa Parks.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Detroit.

**TOCCARA** Oh, absolutely. There is a story behind Rosa Parks and how I got this shirt. But I'm not going

**NELSON:** to go into it, but long story short, me and my team of people, we won different shirts through BLSA, Black Law Students Association, trivia night.

**CORDEL FAULK:** We need to get back to how you chose Virginia.

**TOCCARA** We're going to get back to how I chose Virginia, but I just had to take that portion to note

**NELSON:** what's going on in the room. But anyway. So I applied. [LAUGHS] I applied [INAUDIBLE]. I applied and literally, I think it was a couple of days or a week later. It was very short turnaround from when I applied. I got--

**CORDEL FAULK:** You saw our very good placement rates.

**TOCCARA** Oh, very, very good placement rates in DC. I wanted to work in DC because it has a very

**NELSON:** thriving black population, black professional population.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Yeah, black professional class, right.

**TOCCARA** It is also subject to gentrification, don't get me wrong. But it's called Chocolate City for a  
**NELSON:** reason. And I'm not going to look at you as I say Chocolate City, but it was important to me, and me being from Detroit and who's predominately black, that also is important to me. I also wanted to see something different in Detroit because I was raised and lived in Detroit all my life. So I'm like, this is a perfect opportunity for me to kind of see somewhere else. So I knew I didn't want to go back to Detroit just yet. Initially, depending on what law schools I got into, I'm like, I will go local and stay in Detroit is fine. But I knew I wanted to kind of get out. The other places I was looking at is Atlanta, because I had family--

**CORDEL FAULK:** Again, it's a city with a very thriving black professional [INAUDIBLE].

**TOCCARA** Yeah, thriving black population. And I knew UVA also plays very well in the south. So did my  
**NELSON:** applications, applied to UVA. I saw UVA also had a great alumni pool, too. And I had noticed that, even when I was looking at law schools in undergrad that UVA had the best alumni participation, [INAUDIBLE] donation. That always stuck out to me. So I applied. A week or so later, I got an email from Mr. Cordel Faulk, dean of admissions at the University of Virginia School of Law. Like hi, we would like to interview you. I probably still have the email in my Gmail box. Like hi, we would like to interview you. Let us know when you have some time, blah blah blah. And at first, I was like, mm, I'll answer it. I'll tell you. I was going to answer it the next day because it was my off day, and I was like, it's my off day.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Right, it was your off day, right.

**TOCCARA** That was my off day.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** It was a snow day. It was a snow day, right?

**TOCCARA** Yes, it was a snow day for you. It was an off day for me. So I was, it's my my off day. I'm in  
**NELSON:** pajamas, I'm chilling. But I was like, something was like you know what? Let's knock this out.

[LAUGHTER]

So I emailed. I'm like yeah, [INAUDIBLE]

**ASHLEY** I was wondering how many people I emailed [INAUDIBLE]. Let's knock this out now. Let's get  
**MERRITT:** this done.

**TOCCARA** I was not good at the time with Skype interviews. I had--

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** I had no idea. You did a good job with the Skype interview.

**ASHLEY** What do you mean you were not good at the--

**MERRITT:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** You hadn't done many. Is that what you're saying?

**TOCCARA** Well, that was the first kind of live Skype interview. But it was another interview from a school

**NELSON:** which shall not be named, that it was one of those weird ones where it's like you have to talk and you record it. I did not understand it, and I felt so weird. So usually I will have to get my bearings, and this is when I wasn't as confident, I guess, as I am now.

**CORDEL FAULK:** I don't know when that was.

[LAUGHTER]

I haven't experience that, Toccara.

**TOCCARA** But that goes into the reason why I chose UVA, which I'll get to in a minute. So I was like OK,

**NELSON:** let's knock this out. So I emailed, like yeah, I'm available today. He was like great. And then so I'm like, OK, let me go and make sure I put my professional clothes on. Put my professional clothes on. I can't go into detail. [LAUGHS] Put my professional clothes on. And then I'm sitting there, and Cordell pops up on my Skype screen. And I think you were in like a t-shirt or something like that because it was a snow day.

**CORDEL FAULK:** I don't remember. It was probably a sweater with no shirt on or something.

**ASHLEY** I was going to say, I can't imagine Cordel in a t-shirt.

**MERRITT:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** I probably didn't have a collared shirt on. It was under the sweater.

**TOCCARA** Oh, that was a nice sweater.

**NELSON:**

[LAUGHTER]

It probably was like--

**ASHLEY** Cordel doesn't wear t-shirts. Cordel doesn't wear t-shirts. I was mistaken. Please cut that out.

**MERRITT:** Unless he's running a half marathon, Cordel's not in a t-shirt.

**TOCCARA** Yeah. How is that half marathon training going?

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Oh, I'm not doing one right now.

**TOCCARA** OK. He usually does some.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** I know, I'm just doing regular running right now.

**TOCCARA** Regular one. He does half marathons, full marathons, quarter marathons, all sorts. OK, let's--

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Back to Toccara.

**TOCCARA** Back to me. So we literally talked. It was such a great interview, and that's like why I felt

**NELSON:** comfortable was part of reason why I picked UVA. It's just like I'd never had like an interview, whether it be a phone interview, Skype interview with any other entity, where I felt so comfortable to be myself. And it wasn't like an informal type interview, but it was more so--

**CORDEL FAULK:** Wait. Just pause real quick. That's the only thing we want. We just want somebody to be--

**ASHLEY** Normal.

**MERRITT:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Normal. Be who you are.

**ASHLEY** Yeah, be yourself. Yeah, I shouldn't say normal. Be yourself, yeah.

**MERRITT:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** We genuinely don't like it.

**ASHLEY** You are normal. Be your normal.

**MERRITT:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** When we think somebody is putting on a front, that's the interview that doesn't work.

**TOCCARA** And you could tell when you're putting on a front. It's like ugh. But I mean, people get nervous  
**NELSON:** and stuff, but it's like still--

**CORDEL FAULK:** Right. There's a difference between nervous and putting on a front. And I think we've gotten to the point that we're pretty good at seeing that.

**TOCCARA** I agree, too. And I'll see though it, too. I'm like, oh, this person's nervous versus you're BSing  
**NELSON:** me. So it's just like.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Correct, right.

**TOCCARA** Anyway, so part of the reason why I just felt super comfortable. And it wasn't informal, it wasn't  
**NELSON:** unprofessional. I was very professional to talk about my experience and stuff, talk about UVA.  
But then we talked about Janet Jackson.

**CORDEL FAULK:** I don't remember how that came up.

**TOCCARA** I know! I think I was like, I went to the concert. I think I went to the concert.  
**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Oh, because I had the hottest of hot takes on Janet Jackson. And then you agreed with it.

**TOCCARA** Yeah, oh. That's why I was like, oh, I have somebody who will go down into Janet Jackson hill.  
**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** We need to give her our Janet Jackson hot take.

**TOCCARA** So Janet Jackson's better than Michael Jackson.  
**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Janet Jackson is better than Michael Jackson.

**TOCCARA** On top.  
**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** That is our hot take.

**TOCCARA** On top. [INAUDIBLE]  
**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Oh, I guess you're right.

**ASHLEY** I'm going to pause. I was going to say you're going to get a lot of followers [INAUDIBLE] after  
**MERRITT:** this.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Wait, we've been on this for a long time.

**TOCCARA** Oh, [INAUDIBLE] with that, yeah.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Yeah, we've been on this for a long time, but we are not new to this. People were telling us this was a hot take for a long time.

**TOCCARA** I know, but now y'all see the light.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** I know, right.

**TOCCARA** Now y'all see the light, huh.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** I know. Go pick up *Rhythm Nation*.

**TOCCARA** Right. Go pick up--

**NELSON:**

**ASHLEY** That's a great album.

**MERRITT:**

**TOCCARA** Go pick up *Velvet Rope*. Let's talk about it. Don't cut that out. Don't cut that part out.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** I know. That is the best Janet Jackson album.

**ASHLEY** Whoa, better than *Rhythm Nation*?

**MERRITT:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Yes. *Velvet Rope* was better.

**TOCCARA** Yeah, *Velvet Rope* was better. Yes. Oh, let me not.

**NELSON:**

[LAUGHTER]

So we bonded over that.

**CORDEL FAULK:** We bonded over the hottest of takes.

**ASHLEY** Janet Jackson stans.

**MERRITT:**

**TOCCARA** Can I talk about how the interview ended?

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** I don't remember.

**TOCCARA** You don't remember?

**NELSON:**

**ASHLEY** Give the offer?

**MERRITT:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Of course, yeah.

**ASHLEY** Of course. You can, we can't. I should point out. People that interview with me, it's not that I

**MERRITT:** don't love you. It's not that I don't.

**TOCCARA** So I interviewed, and he was like, oh, don't you want to ask me a question? And I was like--

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** You're giving away my tricks now.

[LAUGHTER]

**TOCCARA** OK, cut that out.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** No, I'm fine with it. Don't. That's fine.

**TOCCARA** And I was like, what you mean? Because I was like, I'm not going to ask timeline. I'm just like

**NELSON:** it's not my style. It's not my style. So I was like, what question should I ask or something like

that, like what you mean? What you talking about, Cordel? So at this point, I'm calling him Cordel. [LAUGHS] So Cordel was like, well, if you want to learn the timeline of when you're going to get admitted, I mean, I can tell you that now. I was like sure. And then he was like, well, congratulations.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Your timeline is right now.

**TOCCARA** Your timeline is right now. You're admitted to UVA Law. And I was like, ahh, yes!

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** I mean, after the Janet Jackson thing, you knew.

**TOCCARA** Yes. I was like, yes! Yes! And then, oh--

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Wait, wait, wait. We need to explain to people now, the Janet Jackson thing is over. You can't do that now.

**ASHLEY** Don't just bring up Janet Jackson.

**MERRITT:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** I know, don't bring up Janet Jackson anymore.

**TOCCARA** Unless you've really got some trivia.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** I know. You need some receipts.

**TOCCARA** You need some receipts.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** You need receipts. If you're going to bring up Janet, you need some receipts.

**TOCCARA** You're going to bring up Janet, that is field preemption. Field preemption, you'll learn about

**NELSON:** that in one of the classes.

**CORDEL FAULK:** You need some deep dive into *Velvet Rope*.

**TOCCARA** Honestly. And I'm going to save those nuggets for people who really are genuinely into *Velvet*

**NELSON:** *Rope*. But anyway, and then Cordel was like-- I was going to say--

[LAUGHTER]

**CORDEL FAULK:** You're going all the way.

**TOCCARA** Can I talk about it? I can't talk about it. I can talk about it?

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** I mean, it's up to you.

**TOCCARA** I mean, it will get cut out.

**NELSON:**

**ASHLEY** Speak your truth.

**MERRITT:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** No. Speak your truth, but people need to understand we do this differently now than we did back then.

**TOCCARA** That's good. So this is my experience.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Right.

**TOCCARA** So he's like, I have a surprise for you. And I was like, what is this surprise? What's going on?

**NELSON:** Like, we would like to offer you-- and luckily, I got a scholarship to come here. And I was like, what? I was like, ahh! So I ran after the interview ended.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Was your mom home?

**TOCCARA** My mom and my dad were home.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Oh, OK.

**TOCCARA** So I ran, told my mom, told my dad. And I was like, I got a scholar-- [INAUDIBLE], It's great,

**NELSON:** sweetie. So at that point, not to brag, but at that point--

**CORDEL FAULK:** They got used to it?

**TOCCARA** They got used to it. It was in my bag.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** That's right. Because you got that LSAT score. You were like, what? [LAUGHS]

**TOCCARA** Right. So it was in my bag a little bit. And then that same week-- and I get why you wanted to

**NELSON:** interview me. Because that same week, at the end of the week, we had a dinner. And I had to work on the day of the dinner. So I came from work. I came a little late because I was working, so I came from work, changed--

**CORDEL FAULK:** That was our first year of dinners, I think?

**TOCCARA** Yeah, because Scotty was there, and Hillary were there.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Yeah, Scotty and Hillary were there. Scotty [INAUDIBLE] are also from Detroit.

**TOCCARA** Yes, went to Oakland University.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Hillary Taylor.

**TOCCARA** Hillary Taylor's from Minnesota.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Minnesota.

**TOCCARA** Yeah, so--

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Repping the Twin Cities.

**TOCCARA** Oh, yeah, Midwest all day.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** That's right. That's right. That was a lot of Midwest.

**TOCCARA** It was a lot of Midwest. So went to the dinner, and I really liked the dinner. I loved having--

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** That was a fun dinner.

**TOCCARA** It was a fun dinner. Chris Knight, who is no longer--

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Chris is crazy. We love Chris.

**TOCCARA** Chris, I love him.

**NELSON:**

**ASHLEY** Also Detroit.

**MERRITT:**

**TOCCARA** Also from Detroit.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Also from Detroit, but now in Chicago.

**TOCCARA** Yes, now in Chicago.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** That's right, with Tamara Brown.

**TOCCARA** Yes, sir.

**NELSON:**

**ASHLEY** Also reps Detroit real hard.

**MERRITT:**

**TOCCARA** Well, I can't rep that because I rep someone else.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** No, he is. Chris--

**TOCCARA** He reps them. Let me be clear. He rep that. I don't rep that.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** That's all right.

**TOCCARA** I rep Chris because Chris is from [INAUDIBLE]. So it was a fun dinner.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** It was a fun dinner.

**TOCCARA** Such a fun dinner. And then I went to admitted students open house, which is coming up soon  
**NELSON:** for us.

**CORDEL FAULK:** That's right.

**TOCCARA** I don't know when this podcast is going to come out, but coming up--  
**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Next couple of weeks.

**TOCCARA** Next couple of weeks, so March 22nd-- 21st, 22nd?  
**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** 21st, 22nd, that's right.

**TOCCARA** So this may come out around that time. Yes, so I will be there if you want to meet me in  
**NELSON:** person. [INAUDIBLE] open house, turn it up, having fun, but also educating myself. But so I went to my respective admitted students open house as a 0L, and I loved it. One of my mock classes was with Dean Goluboff before--

**CORDEL FAULK:** She's so amazing.

**TOCCARA** It was before. It was like right when she was named--  
**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Wait. We need to represent common law, the podcast right now. She's killing it with [INAUDIBLE].

**TOCCARA** The podcast is in--  
**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Full bloom.

**TOCCARA** Play. Right.  
**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** That's right, full bloom at UVA.

**TOCCARA** Give me a podcast, shoot.

**NELSON:**

[LAUGHTER]

**ASHLEY** I don't know. I'm kidding.

**MERRITT:**

**TOCCARA** You too?

**NELSON:**

**ASHLEY** The many places your podcast would go.

**MERRITT:**

**TOCCARA** My podcast would be-- if you tell me--

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Would you need that ready?

**ASHLEY** It's a variety show.

**MERRITT:**

**TOCCARA** [INAUDIBLE] But all you got to do is tell me how wholesome I need to, and I can be very

**NELSON:** whole-- I'm wholesome right now.

**ASHLEY** You are.

**MERRITT:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** You are wholesome right now.

**ASHLEY** No, I just mean you wouldn't even-- like, it would just go in so many different directions.

**MERRITT:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** I know. But that would be amazing, right, yeah.

**ASHLEY** And that's the beauty of it.

**MERRITT:**

**TOCCARA** Shout out to common law. Shout out to-- I can't shout out to other podcasts, but one of my

**NELSON:** favorite podcasts is the Read. And it's led by two black LGBT individuals, and I love it. I actually want to go to see the Read live with one of my friends, who is one of my section's

mates partners. And she actually works for the university. Shout out to Kelly. So we went to DC to go see the Read live. So it's a live podcast. You know how they have Pods Save America?

**ASHLEY** Yeah, yeah.

**MERRITT:**

**TOCCARA** It was like that, and it was so fun.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** I kind of want to do a live podcast of the admitted students open house, but not this year.

**TOCCARA** We're doing ideas.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** I know, not this year. I don't want to [INAUDIBLE]

**ASHLEY** Copyright the idea that happened on this podcast.

**MERRITT:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** OK, so Dean Goluboff's class.

**TOCCARA** Dean Goluboff, and I really liked the class. Her first year as dean was me as a 1L. But this was

**NELSON:** right before her deanship officially started. So it was really dope. I really liked the class. I liked interacting with other people of my--

**CORDEL FAULK:** The Uni BLSA kids got together.

**TOCCARA** Us and the BLSA kids.

**NELSON:**

**ASHLEY** Black Law Students Association.

**MERRITT:**

**TOCCARA** Black Law Students Association. I met-- who did I meet there? I met [INAUDIBLE], Jeremy. I

**NELSON:** think I met Kiki there too.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Those are the stars of last year's video.

**TOCCARA** Yeah, so I met-- who did I meet there? I met Campbell there, and Campbell was in--

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Oh, is that right?

**TOCCARA** Yeah, at admitted students open house. I think we're at [INAUDIBLE]

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** The current editor in chief.

**TOCCARA** Of Law Review.

**NELSON:**

**ASHLEY** Oh, former.

**MERRITT:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Oh, that's right. Former, that's right. That's right. Recently former.

**ASHLEY** Recently.

**MERRITT:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Right.

**TOCCARA** So I had met him in admitted students. I met so many different people there, and it was just

**NELSON:** amazing. And honestly, I knew that I was going to UVA kind of after the dinner in Detroit. Because I just felt so comfortable. I felt so comfortable. I felt valued there. The fact that ya'll traveled to Detroit to like--

**CORDEL FAULK:** I mean, we normally do it every year. We didn't get a chance to do it this year, right.

**TOCCARA** Yeah, but still, the fact that no other school is trying to travel that's based below the Mason-

**NELSON:** Dixon line, try to travel to Michigan-- I know it wasn't just for me, but you do it every year.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Oh, no, no, no. I don't like to fly, so we drive--

**TOCCARA** You drive.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** To Detroit.

**TOCCARA** And then Kelly-- shout out to Kelly Conlan.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** My girl, Kelly. Kelly Conlan-- Kelly Conlan Carron now. She's from Detroit.

**TOCCARA** Because she's Michigan. She's from Detroit.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Yes, she's from Detroit.

**TOCCARA** Detroit proper.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** She's not from outside of. She's from Detroit. That's right.

**TOCCARA** She has become one of my mentors, too.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** So she did one of these podcasts, which was the most listened to podcast so far, so yeah. So they know Kelly.

**TOCCARA** So Kelly is one of my mentors, ever since that dinner. During the summer when I would work

**NELSON:** in DC, I would go over to her house.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Oh, wait, no, I need to explain to you. So we're driving from Charlottesville to Detroit. And then I'm like, Kelly, we need to come back with the car. [LAUGHS] I don't know what's going on at this dinner. But we're going up there. We need to come back with the car. And she was like OK.

**TOCCARA** I mean, y'all had me like--

**NELSON:**

**ASHLEY** At Janet Jackson. We had at Janet Jackson.

**MERRITT:**

**TOCCARA** After the interview, I was like-- because I already was in contact with other schools. But after that interview, I was just like OK, UVA just came and shook some stuff up. That is shaking up my decision. What am I going to do? And it's like, after the dinner, I was like, OK, I'm probably going to go. And then I went to admitted students open house, I'm like OK, I'm probably going to go. This is like hot tips for people, particularly for marginalized students or students who may be under resourced who are thinking about law school. It can be very hard, and luckily because I worked, I was able to have the money to travel to these places. UVA does give you

a partial stipend, depending on where you're traveling from, to visit UVA, including if you want to visit during admitted students open house.

But I recommend if you're listening to this and you're a year out from applying, go ahead and save your money now if you can. If you don't have the resources, hit up some of the schools. Hit up maybe law firms that are looking for diversifying stuff in terms of trying to get more underrepresented applicants into law school. Because that's where it starts in the pipeline. I mean, it starts earlier than that, but it's a pipeline issue in part. So it's very hard. If I didn't work, that's kind of another reason why I'm glad [INAUDIBLE]. If I didn't work, I wouldn't have had the money to kind of go visit these multiple schools or whatever. Because it can be very financially prohibitive.

So I mean, I was appreciate of UVA for giving a partial stipend to visit honestly. Because other schools weren't trying to do that. So I'm grateful for that. So I knew I was going, even kind of before ASOH, admitted students open house. And then it kind of sealed the deal. So after ASOH, I finished out my visits, because I had made commitments to visit other schools. But I finished out, and I knew that I was going to UVA. So paid my deposit, saved my money, and then, man, I'm at UVA.

**CORDEL FAULK:** OK, so we're getting towards the end. So I think we need to talk about some stuff that you're uniquely qualified to talk about. So President Ryan is very interested in the university's connection with the city and the county, basically the surrounding community. And so he appointed you to his working group to figure out how the university can interact best, most optimally, with our surrounding community. So do you want to talk some about that experience serving on that working group and some of the findings of the working group?

**TOCCARA**  
**NELSON:** Yeah, so for one, serving on the working group was such an amazing experience for me. I feel like I learned so much. There are so many different people and constituents from different backgrounds, whether it's in a nonprofit background, the university background, kind of community organizing background, et cetera. And I just learned so much from each and every individual in the working group. And I really cherish the experience I had helping to contribute to that report. I think we all came in good faith in love and with a focus on the community and wanting to change things and make things better. And we wanted to kind of change the culture of what's been happening or what stereotypically has been happening at UVA across grounds and the interactions with the community.

And I think we made the report focus on a community with an eye on the community, but also with an eye on how do we leverage the university resources to be a true anchor institution. And I think that was a theme that was throughout in the formation of the report. Basically, we had inner discussions within the group. We did some community engagement, which was just beautiful in my opinion. Some people in a group formulated a survey, and they did a really excellent job at creating the survey. And then they really did an excellent job around winter break time, January time, of actually doing community outreach, meeting with university workers, meeting with different community organizations and community staples, meeting with people face to face, talking about the survey, getting them to fill out the survey individually. Group breaking a survey in large discussion groups with the people of the surrounding community in Charlottesville in Albemarle County.

So a lot of our report is informed by those in-person conversations. A lot of our report is informed by the survey contributions that people filled out online. So with that report, we found that in terms of the university and community's relationship, the biggest kind of issue or the biggest priority of concern is jobs and wages, particularly the implementation of the living wage. And I mean, that's gotten so much kind of--

**CORDEL FAULK:** It's gotten a lot of publicity around here.

**TOCCARA**                    Publicity and attention. I mean, and rightfully so, because I mean--  
**NELSON:**

**ASHLEY**                    Yeah, for a long time.

**MERRITT:**

**TOCCARA**                    Yeah, rightfully so because I mean, it's been an issue, and not just for university workers and employees, but for contract workers. And I think that's something really important that a lot of people echo within a working group and outside the working group. I know Harvard, for example, recently implemented a living wage mandate for their employees. So that's kind of what we worked off-- part of where we worked off that knowledge, but mainly from the community, like affordable housing, youth and education, health care. Those were some other standpoints.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Health care's probably a really big one here because the UVA hospital is so important to health care.

**TOCCARA** Yeah, and then--

**NELSON:**

**ASHLEY** Child.

**MERRITT:**

**TOCCARA** Childcare, yes, and childcare is big. And then also, just overarching throughout our report was

**NELSON:** the theme of institutional accountability. And we drafted a report, institutional accountability, that kind of served as the guiding light. If you read the report-- the report is on our website.

**CORDEL FAULK:** What's the website?

**TOCCARA** Community working group, [INAUDIBLE]. That may not be the website. Google it. We'll Google

**NELSON:** it. It's a long website.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Google the UVA community working group. Right.

**TOCCARA** It's a long website. I'll get you pulled up.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** No, it's fine, it's fine.

**TOCCARA** So but it's on our website. But institutional accountability is something that we wanted to kind

**NELSON:** of have as a guiding light throughout the entire report. So that was something that's super important. And just to clarify, that is the website, [communityworkinggroup.virginia.edu](http://communityworkinggroup.virginia.edu).

**CORDEL FAULK:** OK. Don't doubt yourself.

**TOCCARA** So make sure y'all-- yeah. [LAUGHS] I know, imposter syndrome. Don't do it.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** No, seriously. Don't do it.

**TOCCARA** But [communityworkinggroup.virginia.edu](http://communityworkinggroup.virginia.edu). Check out the website. Read the report, read the

**NELSON:** survey findings, for real.

**CORDEL FAULK:** So what's been the response to the report?

**TOCCARA** We've gotten a very, very positive and warm response to the report. I think we kind of touched

**NELSON:** upon things that the community has been kind of clamoring for for years. I think the way we

did the outreach was amazing. And I think the community got really involved. I think we've really got a great response from it. And I'm looking forward to the aftermath of it and see what the university does.

**CORDEL FAULK:** President Ryan really cares about that, and I think that's to his credit.

**TOCCARA**  
**NELSON:** President Ryan is about that action. He's a man who is about that action. And I mean, similar to the group, the group is about that action. Like I said, I learned so much from being part of the group, but I also didn't feel like-- I didn't feel like a tag along just because I was a student. I felt like my opinion, and my perspective, and contributions was truly valued, but I also really do feel like I learned. Because I mean, I am a student. I don't have the point of knowledge as other people. And I feel like I truly learned from so many different people on the group.

So it was honestly such an amazing experience there. And I am just blessed to even gotten that opportunity to be part of that group. And I'm really excited for President Ryan's presidency and administration here with him being a law school alum. His background in education and his commitment to education and how important he views that-- I'm really excited about how his administration is going to be. And I learned UVA-- the surrounding community is important, but UVA means so much to so many different stakeholders and entities.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Around the state, not even just here, yeah.

**TOCCARA**  
**NELSON:** Around the whole state, exactly. The community is the state, and I think it's truly, truly super important. But it's also important to be like, OK, our community is a state, but we're right here in Charlotte.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Correct. Right.

**TOCCARA**  
**NELSON:** And Charlottesville has been a hotbed for a lot of different things. And I think the response to a lot of that, particularly from certain groups, I think has galvanized a lot of people within the law school. And I think with President Ryan's administration, I think he's going to build upon that galvanization to really create change.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Well, OK. So one last question.

**TOCCARA** Yes, sir.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** So you're a 3L now.

**TOCCARA** Yes, sir.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** So you've been through it basically. You've only got a few more weeks left.

**TOCCARA** What?

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** I know, right? It's true. You've only got a few weeks.

**ASHLEY** It goes by so fast.

**MERRITT:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** It goes by very quickly. So looking back, the people listening to this, most of them will be at the start of applying for or at the start of their law school career. What's one piece of advice you have for folks who are about to start this adventure that you're about to finish up and headed to a new adventure?

**TOCCARA** I'm probably going to give two pieces of advice. First piece of advice is more of a procedural  
**NELSON:** advice. Save your money.

**CORDEL FAULK:** That's so true. That's right.

**TOCCARA** Because--

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Wait, wait, wait. I have to give Mrs. [INAUDIBLE] a shout out. Because I know she got this from somebody else, but she said live like a lawyer in law school, live like a student after. You do not want to do that.

**TOCCARA** Exactly.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** You do not want to do that.

**TOCCARA** You want to live like a student until you pay off your student loans. And even then, I'm--

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Because if you do that, you can pay them off fairly quickly. But you have to be very disciplined.

**TOCCARA** You have to be very disciplined, but save your money prior to if you know you want to go to  
**NELSON:** law school and you know you want to kind of cast a wide net in application, save your money.  
It starts there because you have to file and register for the LSAC.

**ASHLEY** Applying is expensive.

**MERRITT:**

**TOCCARA** Applying is expensive. I was blessed enough to receive a lot of fee waivers, but if you don't get  
**NELSON:** those fee waivers, you're looking at your application. They're like \$65, \$70 a pop. You have--

**CORDEL FAULK:** I applied to law school 20 years ago, and it cost me \$1,200 to apply.

**TOCCARA** It cost me around--

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** 20-- and that's not including like test prep. That was 20 years ago.

**TOCCARA** It cost me about \$600, \$700 to apply just because of registration. And then each application,  
**NELSON:** even if you do get fee waivers, it's a 30 to 35-- and I mean--

**CORDEL FAULK:** It's \$45.

**TOCCARA** It's 45. Wow. So now it's a \$45 processing fee.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Even if you have a fee waiver.

**TOCCARA** Even if you have a fee waiver. So those things add up.

**NELSON:**

**ASHLEY** Visiting schools.

**MERRITT:**

**TOCCARA** Visiting schools, and I do recommend visiting a school.

**NELSON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** You should not put money down on a school until you walk through the front door.

**TOCCARA** Exactly. So you need to be cognizant, and you have to save money to visit schools because a

**NELSON:**

lot of it also runs on reimbursement. So if you don't have the money to initially put forth to buy your ticket to go, you won't be able to go or to pay for gas. So save your money now. And if you are underrepresented, under resourced, marginalized, try and apply for-- hit up different local lawyers or law firms in your area if you can and be like, hi, I am a student, first generation law student, first generation college student, whatever. I'm trying to fulfill my dream of going to law school. I need some help visiting these schools. I need some help applying for these applications. Can you please help? Because I mean, there are people who are out there and who are willing to help. And you just got to kind of find them and put yourself out there at times. And I feel like there's people, especially people who have made it who really want to help and give it back and pay it forward. So don't be afraid to do that.

And this kind of transitions to my second piece of more kind of substantive objective advice, is don't be afraid to be yourself and put yourself out there. You miss 100% of the shots you don't take. And in terms of being yourself, like you don't want to be a fake version of yourself. I've seen so many people sort of be in an internal impersonal hell trying to be someone that they're not. And that self will come out sooner or later. And you don't want their self to be tainted by resentment. You don't want that self to be tainted by stress over not finding the spaces to be your authentic self. And a lot times, authentic self can be very-- it can be used differently. You want to be your authentic self and find a place that values that. And it's hard because nowadays, we're in a space where people are promoting that now. And I think it's very important to be yourself, and find a place where your authentic self would be accepted.

There are spaces where your authentic self may not be supported. And that's OK. Everybody does not have to like you. That's something that I personally learned while in law school. Because my thing is like, I'll be darned if I cater myself or what I have to say just because I want to be liked. And I don't want to compromise myself. And because of that, I mean, I've had a lot of debates and disagreements with people, but people respect me. And that's something that I've always found [INAUDIBLE]. I mean, I've shaken some stuff up but people always respect me at the end of it because I stayed true to myself. And it's not easy. It is very hard to do so.

There are times where I'm like oh my gosh, shouldn't have said that. Or oh my god, what are people going to think of me? Because I can't really stand for this, that, and the third? But I feel like at the end of the day, people respect what I have to say. And I respect myself, and I'm happy with myself at the end of the day. I'll be less happy if I compromise myself on a situation

than if I had a backlash for something that I had to say or had to do. So don't change yourself. Be your authentic self. Find a law school that will accept your authentic self for who it is. Go in a space and own the space that you are in. Don't ever feel like you have to shrink yourself. And it will pay off in the long run.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Right. All right, Ms. Nelson. Thank you for joining us on Law Schooled.

**TOCCARA** Thank you for having me.

**NELSON:**

[MUSIC PLAYING]