UCL Remarkable Stories

Episode 1 – Shahid and his education journey

Transcript

**Mitesh Vagadia**

We are UCL and these are our remarkable stories.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Hi, I'm Mitesh Vagadia, I work in the UCL Student Support and Wellbeing team. In each episode, I'll be in conversation with a UCL guest as they share with us their remarkable stories, experiences and life lessons.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

In this episode, we hear from UCL alumnus Shahid Janatmir, who is currently completing his Master's at Cambridge University and is due to begin a role at BlackRock Management in September. Shahid shares his experiences growing up near the Afghanistan and Pakistan border, the challenges he faced adapting to life in the UK, and how his ever changing path continues to bring unexpected opportunities.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Tell me, where does your story begin?

**Shahid Janatmir**

So for me, it began quite early on in 2007-2008, and I was supposed to go to school, but I had friends and they, I don't think they were so keen on school, neither was I, so we used to skip school and go out exploring.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

And where was this?

**Shahid Janatmir**

This is Afghanistan-Pakistan border, North East.. And it's a valley, so there is a river that flows by and on each side of the river, there's mountains and hills.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Okay.

**Shahid Janatmir**

So we used to hide from the school and go towards the river, whether that was swimming or just skipping stones or picking berries, which you don't find over here and those are quite sweet berries.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Okay.

**Shahid Janatmir**

That was the Summer sport.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Okay.

**Shahid Janatmir**

And in Winter, we used to hunt because, in Winter we used to get geese and ducks and other birds that used to come and take sips and migrate towards other regions southwards, or northwards, depending on the season.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

And how would you hunt these geese?

**Shahid Janatmir**

So we had rifles at home. I think it's a tradition over there in the valleys. Everybody has some sort of hunting machines, rifles or miniatures. Yeah, and sometimes slingshots as well.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Oh really?

**Shahid Janatmir**

Which we had as kids, but then when we grew up slightly, slightly old, so 10-12 we had the strength to hold a rifle.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Yeah.

**Shahid Janatmir**

And uh, and you're able to hold the recoil of the, of the rifle, which is quite strong.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

What was school like in Afghanistan?

**Shahid Janatmir**

I mean, the schools are very different over there. It's formatted in a certain way. You'll read a full book and the teacher reads a full book and, and I think that's why I didn't really like it over there because you don't really get to understand why you observe certain things, and in nature or in people, in literature or in anything really, you memorise it and you'll recall it whenever you get tested on it. So I think that's the big difference between schooling over there and over here. Here, you get to ask questions and, and everything's explained how it should be. And I think that's what instilled that passion in me when I came over here from Afghanistan, and settled over here.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Just before we talk about you coming over here, the place that you were living in Afghanistan, was it safe? What was it like in terms of the Taliban or in terms of safety?

**Shahid Janatmir**

I don't think it was safe then because that was the peak of insurgency. You had many groups operating without anybody knowing where the command came from. It could have been the neighbours, it could have been anyone really, and it was quite complicated for anyone to understand, but I think the situation has improved, compared to then and certain groups have dissolved over time because they didn't see that same motivation as they did back then.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

So how did you come about moving to the UK then?

**Shahid Janatmir**

So this was in 2008.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

How old were you then?

**Shahid Janatmir**

I was 12.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Okay.

**Shahid Janatmir**

Yes and my father came over here in about 2000.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Okay.

**Shahid Janatmir**

He took the harder route, which was through ships, through um, through the regular migrant route that many take today as well from other countries as well.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

And then so you were living at home without your father, who's living here?

**Shahid Janatmir**

Yes.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Then you were living with, who were you living with?

**Shahid Janatmir**

My uncles and extended family. So, over there, families tend to be really extended and they stretch out from the grandfather up until grandchildren.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Okay.

**Shahid Janatmir**

And they all live together, they don't separate until all the brothers in that family, they become grandfathers and it's too big for the family to coexist.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Yeah, yeah, yeah. So was it always your dad's plan to go ahead, go to the UK, and then eventually you would come along afterwards?

**Shahid Janatmir**

Uh, I don't think that was the plan. So my father studied in University of Peshawar in Pakistan and he dropped out after completing two years of his university, and the reason was, because he had to, there were quite a lot of financial issues in our family, and he was the only source of income at that point. And there was a good opportunity for him to join a group of migrants that were going to come over to Europe, that was the plan, but then when he came to Europe, he decided that actually, if I can cross the channel, there might be more opportunities.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

And then so you came to the UK in two thousand and?

**Shahid Janatmir**

Eight.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Okay.

**Shahid Janatmir**

For me it was easier because it was just a plane from, from there to here. For my father, it was another story.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

And you were, how old were you? Twelve you said?

**Shahid Janatmir**

Yes, twelve.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

And then so you came here. What were you expecting, did you speak the language? What were you thinking London was going to be like?

**Shahid Janatmir**

So I settled in Derby, which is a small town in central England and I think that kind of helped me in a sense because I had that space and time to myself. If I had, if I was thrown into a big city like London, I think I would have been a bit scared because I lived in a small village back home.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Okay.

**Shahid Janatmir**

And moving to a big city and a global city, one of the best cities in the world, I think that would have been a bit too much for me.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Yeah.

**Shahid Janatmir**

So I think Derby was the best place for me to pick up words and statements and little things here and there and then compile them together.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

So your dad was working in Derby?

**Shahid Janatmir**

In Darby, yes, yeah. He worked in a factory, so he had been working for a lot of time and because of that, he became a supervisor and a manager after then.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Is he still working there?

**Shahid Janatmir**

He's not actually. The company that was there before went through some bad financial conditions and he was laid off at one point, so he had to find something else after that.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Okay. So tell me what it was like for you to come here and go to school for the first time.

**Shahid Janatmir**

I think it was scary is one way I would put it. I mean, I was quite intrigued by it, but then when you don't have the tools to bring out the best of your intrigueness, then it is quite scary because everybody understands what's going on in the class and you're there just staring at the walls, not knowing what the hell is going on. Why everybody's, um I mean, what we used to do in year seven and eight was simple exercises, so cut and stick, and it was just matching different things. So one statement might say, the rock and you had to define what a rock is, or volcano or something like that. And everybody knew it was in the class and I didn't, so I used to just pretend that I knew and just stick things on, on there, on the posters on the piece of papers.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

So you didn't read, you couldn't read English, you couldn't write English and you couldn't speak it?

**Shahid Janatmir**

I could read English.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Okay.

**Shahid Janatmir**

Yes. But I couldn't speak it and I couldn't understand it, of course.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

How did you learn to read it?

**Shahid Janatmir**

So English is taught, but it's more like parrot English. You, you learn to read it, you learn to assemble things together, but you don't really know what you're doing, or why you're saying certain things in a certain way. That, in a sense helped me because I didn't have to learn how to read, but then speaking is another issue altogether.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

And how did that come about?

**Shahid Janatmir**

I think because I was young, I was a bit lucky. So, had it been a year or two later, I think things would have been a bit more different. So, when I came over here, this was in year, end of year seven, so year eight starting, things were a bit easier, and the words were slightly easier to understand. I think that kind of helped me in some senses, but I had to spend a lot, a lot of time after school, go to after school clubs in that school and pick up the odd words and the odd ways of putting things together. And when I, when I made friends, I think that helped quite a lot because I could finally communicate with them in English and I think that was the biggest jump for me. And that happened in year nine, actually, so for that whole year, I didn't really have friends to call friends.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Right, that was gonna be my next question is, how was, apart from the education side, what was it like settling in and making friends and, you said for that year, you didn't have anyone?

**Shahid Janatmir**

Yeah, so in school, I didn't really have anyone in year eight and because of that, as you know, in schools, what happens, there's the issue of bullying and, and I think I was a big subject of that because I didn't have any friends and at a young age people tend to group together and form alliances, something I didn't quite, I mean, I understood it, and that made me quite mature as a person, because I looked at things in a very different way to my peers. It was quite challenging and it got me into quite a lot of trouble. So if I describe it, so I spent, I would say half of year eight getting into troubles.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Is that because of the bullying?

**Shahid Janatmir**

Yeah, because if you, when somebody bullys you, you want to respond in one way or another, right, it could be verbally or in other ways. And I couldn't, verbally, right. Um, the kind of bullying was things like, just chucking a pencil at you or saying bad things to you, which you kind of picked up over time

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Hmm.

**Shahid Janatmir**

But I couldn't respond to it in a positive light, because I didn't have the tools to, so that used to get me in troubles quite often, but when I did make friends in year nine, I think that's when people backed off and realised that I can no longer be that subject.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Hmm. And I guess you feel a lot more settled and like you said, just picking up things a little bit more.

**Shahid Janatmir**

Yeah.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

People are getting more familiar with you.

**Shahid Janatmir**

Yeah. And they understand your behaviour or how you approach things or how you think as well.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Yeah.

**Shahid Janatmir**

I think that changed quite a lot.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

And then so, how was it all the way up until GCSEs? How did that, how was it for you?

**Shahid Janatmir**

So GCSEs was um, the funny bit because I passed everything just on the brink. So had it been a few marks here and there, I would have failed. So I just hit the benchmarks to get into A-Levels.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

So what did you get?

**Shahid Janatmir**

I just got, it was B's and C's. In English I got, I think it was exactly the pass mark. So I think it was my lucky year.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Okay.

**Shahid Janatmir**

If I had to retake GCSE English, I think I would have, I think I would have given up or maybe something else would have popped up and in the surface, right, and things would have changed, things would have been different.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Yeah. And then so you got your GCSEs. And then what did you, what happened next?

**Shahid Janatmir**

So I then went on to study A-Levels at a much better school. So the school I went to for secondary school was, in fact, even today, it's one of the worst schools in the country in terms of grades. It's, I think, top or, top 20 in terms of the worst schools in the country.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Still?

**Shahid Janatmir**

Yes, today as well, this is 12 years..

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Later.

**Shahid Janatmir**

Later, and it still is at that rate. And then when I went to the high school for sixth form, I think things changed quite a lot and that was a much better school and I had the opportunity to go beyond the kind of, the norm. The norm was to study four A-Levels. I started with six.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Six?

**Shahid Janatmir**

Because I had to push myself and that was the only opportunity for me to do that. I think the school was quite helpful and supportive in that manner. They didn't say no, you can't study six because of my prior grades. I think they looked at my potential as time went along, so initially I enrolled in four A-Levels and then they saw that I could actually cope with the work and I was producing good results as well in the, in the tests and um, in the mock tests and exams.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Yeah.

**Shahid Janatmir**

And they, and they allowed me to do the other two as well.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

What was the jump like from GCSEs to A-Level?

**Shahid Janatmir**

Massive, massive, yeah. I think GCSEs, you take everything on belief and faith.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

What do you mean?

**Shahid Janatmir**

So you take things, it's, it's based on faith as in somebody says, "Oh, this is true, a cell is that big, or this is what it does" and you memorise it, you recall it in the exam and you get good grades, right? This is the way I would describe GCSE. But I think A-Levels, you've got to fundamentally understand the phenomena in hand, whatever that is. So, it could be the physics of moving objects, or it could be just cells and how they function. Mathematics, how calculus works. You've got to fundamentally understand it because the, the exam questions tests for the fundamentals and the understanding of it, rather than the recalling of it. I think that was the biggest difference in A-Levels and GCSEs.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

So not just the answer, but actually the background and how you got there and deep, obviously deeper into the answer.

**Shahid Janatmir**

Yeah, you've got to understand it I think with A-Levels. I think that was the biggest jump, which I think was good for me. It gave me the opportunity to learn everything from a more fundamental and basic level, which is what I wanted to do in GCSEs, but I didn't have that opportunity, because everything was just bullet points. This is what happens in the cell, this is what happens there, this is what happens there.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Hmm.

**Shahid Janatmir**

But why it happens, right? Or how things would be different if it happened in another way. You couldn't really ask those kind of questions, because you didn't have the, the time and space to do that.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

So what are the four you did in the end, four A-Levels?

**Shahid Janatmir**

So I did the Sciences, Mathematics, Geography and I did Urdu as well.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Okay.

**Shahid Janatmir**

Yeah.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

And then how did you get on?

**Shahid Janatmir**

I did well, yeah. I think I did well, so I decided that I would study Chemistry for my undergraduate course, without any reasoning for why. I think the biggest reason there was that I loved Chemistry as a subject out of all the A-Levels I studied.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Yeah.

**Shahid Janatmir**

But I didn't really think it beyond that, so the requirement for that was three A's for A-Levels, and I did much better than that. And when I started Chemistry as a course, I realised that it's interesting.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Hmm.

**Shahid Janatmir**

But I don't think it's developing me as a person the way I want to be.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Hmm.

**Shahid Janatmir**

Or the way I, the place I want to be at, I don't think with that degree, I would develop the skills I, I need. And I think that varies for different people, so if you want to go into academia or if you want to work on research and development, or the development of different chemical products or systems, then I think Chemistry is definitely for you.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Hmm.

**Shahid Janatmir**

But I think I wanted something different.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Could you, could you, could you've done something differently yourself to find out what this subject entails a bit more before you said, I want to go ahead and do it?

**Shahid Janatmir**

Yes, so I actually did participate in two Summer schools, and those were chemistry based. So perhaps what I could have done was not just focus on one subject, but keep an open mind and explore everything.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Hmm.

**Shahid Janatmir**

So, I had quite a few different options on the table. I could have studied Medicine, I could have studied Mathematics, Engineering, Computer Science, Economics, in fact, anything with the options I had. But I think I had a closed mind at that point. I said, because I enjoy Chemistry, therefore, I'm going to study Chemistry. I don't think I thought about it beyond that. And I think another thing that would have helped was maybe I should have spoken to people that had done different subjects and got their perspectives on how they, how useful they had been in their careers or what kind of skills they developed because of it and then compare it to where I wanted to be. I think that probably would have been the best approach, but when I was doing Chemistry, I could change and UCL was quite supportive in that change.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

What universities did you apply for then, you applied for UCL?

**Shahid Janatmir**

Yes, so UCL was one of them. Cambridge.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Okay.

**Shahid Janatmir**

Which is where I am at. In fact, it's the same College that I applied for as well, Churchill College. Um, Warrick, York was there, I think Nottingham. Yeah, Nottingham, yeah.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

And what was it like when you found out you got into UCL?

**Shahid Janatmir**

I, so I got into all my universities except Cambridge and I was a bit devastated with Cambridge because I expected at least an interview, right, where I could explain my reasoning for the subject I wanted to study at Cambridge, but I didn't get the opportunity. But, when I realised that UCL Chemistry Department was one of the best in the country and in the world, in fact, I think I was a bit more relieved after that. And there were quite a lot of opportunities as well that were given to me when I got the offers. I was given a scholarship for UCL.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

What schoalrship did you get?

**Shahid Janatmir**

So this was Dr. John Eliot.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

It was, what did you, what did you get for that?

**Shahid Janatmir**

A big sum of money. 25,000 it was.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

For the duration of your course?

**Shahid Janatmir**

Yeah for the duration of the course, which was quite helpful because what that meant was, I didn't have to get a double loan. I got a loan, or a maintenance loan for my maintenance and then the fees I could pay off using the scholarship. So that was quite relieving.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

I bet, I bet. What was your family or your your dad's reaction to you coming to, getting A-Levels, coming to UCL?

**Shahid Janatmir**

I think he was ecstatic when I've passed my GCSEs. I think that was the biggest achievement that I've ever had. I mean, I can name quite a few other things.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Hmm.

**Shahid Janatmir**

But I think everything changed then, right.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Okay.

**Shahid Janatmir**

Had it been another scenario, I think God knows what I would be doing today. I think that changed everything for me, so he was really happy then, but then he knew I had the potential and so he supported me in that transition from GCSEs to A-Levels and he knew I could do it. So when I told him I'm doing six A-Levels, he said, son, you can do it, so he was quite happy with it.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

That's interesting. You said most probably in your education career, your GCSEs were almost probably the easiest sort of exams that you sat, but they're the most important ones at the same time.

**Shahid Janatmir**

Exactly. I think it's the circumstances, right? Because when you become more mature, I think you have a lot more control over what happens in your life.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Hmm.

**Shahid Janatmir**

So it becomes easy in that sense, but when you're very young, you have so many strings attached to you. It's so hard to make the decisions that you should be making in that circumstance.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Mm hmm.

**Shahid Janatmir**

I think that was the most difficult thing for me. Or that's what at least I found to be difficult.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

And what was your time like at UCL? How was it here for you?

**Shahid Janatmir**

I think it was fun. So I spent four years here in UCL. I made a lot of friends,

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Did you live on site?

**Shahid Janatmir**

So that's one of the mistakes I made in UCL. I didn't live on site and there was a reason for that. I think that was because I found a good friend.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Yeah.

**Shahid Janatmir**

He was living close by and he had a flat with an empty room and he said, "This is what I'm gonna charge you, it's much cheaper than what you have to pay at UCL. Do you want it or do you wanna stay in UCL?" I was like, should I take it or not? And then in the end, because it was a beautiful sight from the apartment as well, of the city.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Where was this?

**Shahid Janatmir**

This was in Elephant and Castle.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Okay.

**Shahid Janatmir**

And it's not far from here as well, so I thought actually, it takes me about 20 minutes to get to UCL. Let's live here for a year, let's try it and then maybe I could change things a bit later, but then I liked it so much so I stayed there for two years.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Yeah.

**Shahid Janatmir**

And then I moved around different places.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

So why do you regret not staying in student accommodation?

**Shahid Janatmir**

I think it's a good experience to live with students that think like you. So at the moment, in Cambridge, this is the first time I'm actually experiencing living in student accommodation. I think it's a whole different vibe altogether.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Hmm.

**Shahid Janatmir**

And I've heard a lot of stories about the accommodation at UCL as well. Got stories as well.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

What stories?

**Shahid Janatmir**

So things like my friends used to go out and party or like, like studied together, things like that, or they would travel in groups to different parts of UK.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Hmm.

**Shahid Janatmir**

And it's something that I missed out on, but I'm making up for that in Cambridge, so.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

So it gives you that, it's like an opportunity to have a sense of community.

**Shahid Janatmir**

Yep.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Which, if you were living in a separate accommodation, private accommodation, you might not get that as much.

**Shahid Janatmir**

Yep, I think that is exactly it. You know that there are people around you who are going through similar circumstances or they're in this exactly same phase of life, making similar decisions. So you get to see how they go about it and you learn from them as well.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

In terms of the transition to UCL from your sixth form, what was the most difficult thing, would you say?

**Shahid Janatmir**

I would say socially, that was quite difficult because Derby is a small town and I moved to London, which is, which was a big city obviously, is a big city and seeing so many people around and seeing, hearing the buzz, buses going around, lots of cars and taxis and cycles, I think that was quite a big change for me. It took me, I think at least a month to get used to it. In fact, the first month I couldn't even sleep properly because there was so much noise around, whereas in Derby it's quiet, you don't really hear anything except the odd breeze here and there.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

When you say social, was it, was it even harder to make friends than then when you were in Derby?

**Shahid Janatmir**

No, no, no. You can never I think, struggle to make friends here in London. There are so many people around you wherever you go, but you've got to want to make friends. I think that's the first step. You've got to want to go out and socialise with people in whatever way that's comfortable for you, right?

**Shahid Janatmir**

It could be going to an event, an academic event right and meeting people there, or it could be a bit hardcore, so get into your party, right? There's a whole variety on display in London.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Hmm.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Hmm. What was the, the thing you enjoyed most about coming here?

**Shahid Janatmir**

I would say there were quite a lot of opportunities in UCL. You can pretty much do anything you want, like from sports to setting up societies. So I did set up a society for a year, which was UCL Afghan society.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Okay.

**Shahid Janatmir**

And there weren't that many of us but we managed to run a few events. And in fact, they've set up the society again this year and they've had, I think, two events so far. So I think that was quite interesting and enjoy, enjoyable as well.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Just to get this right, you did Chemistry here?

**Shahid Janatmir**

Yes.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

But that's not what you graduated in?

**Shahid Janatmir**

No, it's not.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

So what happened?

**Shahid Janatmir**

I changed my degree to Chemical Engineering and I began fresh here in UCL, just in a different department. And I then graduated with a, with a Bachelor's.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

So you did the first, you did one year in Chemistry?

**Shahid Janatmir**

Yes.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

And then you decided this course is not something you want to continue on doing?

**Shahid Janatmir**

Yes, I did do well in it, though. I did my exams.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Yeah.

**Shahid Janatmir**

And I got really good results. So I did enjoy it as a subject of study, but maybe the skills I wanted to gain, if I was to continue for the three years, maybe they would then, have been very different to the skills I actually gained from studying Chemical Engineering.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

But did you know that at the time when you were changing course?

**Shahid Janatmir**

Yes and that's why I made that change, because..

**Mitesh Vagadia**

How do you know that?

**Shahid Janatmir**

I did some research and I met quite a few Chemical Engineers, and what kind of problems they worked on. So there was one Chemical Engineering student in one of the courses I was doing, Arabic as a language. And he talked about using programming controls to solve various problems. For me, I thought that was quite useful and I find it interesting. So I had began programming in MATLAB back then and I wanted more of that, but Chemistry didn't really provide that opportunity.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Hmm.

**Shahid Janatmir**

But Engineering did. So any problem that you do solve in Engineering, you have to use some kind of programming language to be able to solve it because they get so complicated that simple use of Excel sheets or by hand calculations simply aren't enough.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Is it, was it quite easy to do, going from one course to another at UCL?

**Shahid Janatmir**

I think they were quite supportive, yes. So there is the portal that is designed for that purpose. So if you do want to change your programme, then you can go through the portal. And I think this is on Portico. And it's literally two or three buttons and you submit the application, and you get the support from the tutors and you get your decision very soon as well. So I think the decision was, for me, it was pretty quick. I think it was a few weeks for me, so that helped quite a lot.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

And now you're at Cambridge, doing a Master's? What's that like? You actually got to go to Cambridge?

**Shahid Janatmir**

Yes. Finally. I am studying at the very College I applied to for my undergraduate. It's quite special, Churchill College. It's quite spacious and it's a bit on the outskirts of Cambridge, so there is not a lot of buzz around, and I kind of like that, because it's the final year of my studies and then I'll be moving to London, so I think I do want that space where I can collect myself together and build a plan for the future.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

You said you were moving to London. Why, why are you moving to London?

**Shahid Janatmir**

So this will be to join BlackRock as an Analyst, and this will happen in August.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

For those who don't know BlackRock, what's BlackRock?

**Shahid Janatmir**

So, BlackRock is one of the largest investment management companies, and they provide asset management services to clients all over the world.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

It's interesting that you studied Chemistry then went to do Chemical Engineering, studying a Master's in Engineering, but you're going to study, sorry you're going to work at an investment company.

**Shahid Janatmir**

Yes. And for those of, for those people who do want to pursue another career, or they want to divert from their conventional studies and pursue something else, that is an option. And here in the UK, and in other developed countries, you can do that. You don't have to have studied the exact subject for the field you want to enter. Unless it's like, some kind of practice like Engineering or Medicine, where you have to have studied that subject. But in, in, in London, and in big cities, you have these massive financial institutions and companies that provide services, and to be able to provide those services you need certain a skill set, and that you can develop studying anything really. So I mean, going back, I could have joined BlackRock from studying Chemistry, but that's not something I knew back then.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Hmm.

**Shahid Janatmir**

And I know people who have gone into banking and particularly investment banking, from having studied Chemistry. So, if I had known, I probably, probably would have stuck around.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

So it's not just the degree, it's actually the transferable skills that you'll carry and taking with you, is what they're looking for.

**Shahid Janatmir**

Yes, it's the transferable skills. And I think it's important as well, that alongside your studies, you partake in other things. And things like societies or sports clubs, because that's where you gain other skills that you might not gain from the books that you read.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

So how was it, what was it like with you to go for an interview at BlackRock, knowing you studied a totally different course?

**Shahid Janatmir**

It was, so it's funny because I actually applied for an internship with BlackRock in compliance division.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Okay.

**Shahid Janatmir**

And at that point, I had an offer for an internship with ExxonMobil, which is one of the largest oil and gas companies, and I had a bit of a decision to make, who should I go with? Should I go with someone where I will apply the exact skills that I've learned in my degree, which is ExxonMobil. Or should I join BlackRock? And I think at that point I was quite keen on pursuing a career in, in the chemical industry, just because I had enjoyed Chemical Engineering so much. But I would, when I went, I did enjoy it, but I thought the career pathway would have been very different had I joined, so I decided to go with ExxonMobil for the internship. When I completed the internship, I had other feelings that maybe what I do want to achieve out of my career, I don't think I could have done so in ExxonMobil.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Mm hmm.

**Shahid Janatmir**

And that's when I decided that it's time to prepare my applications to where I can develop those skills. And it was investment management. So I applied again for the Analyst role and I managed to go through the interview successfully.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Brilliant. Is there anything you would have done differently?

**Shahid Janatmir**

If, if I look at it, I don't think I can say I can do anything differently. I've taken things on face value. Like I studied one thing, but pursued something else, then did something else, then did something else, so it's, it's been a curved path for me. And if I look back on it, I don't think I can say I would have done anything differently. I think whatever you do, you do it because of how you pursue the different options that you have at that point in time. So whatever decisions I've made, I think I've made it because that was the best knowledge or understanding I had at that point. So I don't have any regrets.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

If you could go back at any point in your life and talk to the younger Shahid, is there any words of wisdom you would want to give to him?

**Shahid Janatmir**

Yes, I think that would be keep an open mind. Life doesn't have a simple one option strategy. Keep your options open, career wise, life wise, and think about exactly what you can achieve through each option. And then how well that aligns with your, with your dreams or ambitions. Whatever aligns best, I think that's the path you should pursue. And I think it's also important to get an idea of what you can do after pursuing that option, so what is the next step and then the next step because if you don't have a clear plan or clear idea of what can potentially happen, I say can, because you never know what happens, but I think you can get a good idea of the potential pathways that you might take with the option that you're pursuing. And whatever takes you to your aligned goals and ambitions, I think that's probably the best path. And that's something I would have said to my younger me.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Is there anything you would like to say to anyone who's starting off their career, maybe at GCSEs, or A-Levels, or coming to UCL or even at UCL, is there anything you would like to share or tell them that you you wish someone told you?

**Shahid Janatmir**

I would say discover your options. There are so many things you can do, there are so many opportunities you can get involved in. In fact, for those who are currently sitting GCSEs or A-Levels, Sutton Trust runs a lot of Summer school programmes and a lot of companies, especially banks offer work experience programmes and I think that's the best opportunity for them to see what they enjoy and what they don't and begin their journey way earlier than me. So I began slightly later on through internships, but if you can get an idea of what you really enjoy as a subject and as a career, I think that would be a head start.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

You've come a long way from skipping school with your friends by the lake to getting on a plane to come here, to Derby, go to school, learn English, do your GCSEs, your biggest achievement still today.

**Shahid Janatmir**

Yes, I think so.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

Going to do A-Levels, getting really good grades, applying to some of the best universities in the country, come to UCL, do a course that you really enjoyed, but wasn't the right one for you, so you looked to change, and you moved to another course, which was the right one for you. And you finally got to go to your first choice, which is Cambridge to do a Master's which is where you are now and you got to live in the accommodation.

**Shahid Janatmir**

Yes.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

That's right. Another tick.

**Shahid Janatmir**

Yep. Big tick.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

And you've got a position now at BlackRock. That's a remarkable story for me.

**Shahid Janatmir**

If you say so.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

If you have been affected by any of the topics raised in this episode, please do visit the UCL Student Support and Wellbeing website, where you'll find a number of helpful resources.

**Mitesh Vagadia**

We hope you enjoyed the first series of Remarkable Stories and learned something from our inspiring speakers. Stay tuned and join us for more interviews in the second series scheduled for release later this year.