



SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES

A conversation with Kevi Begolli

By: Robyn Ross & Kevi Begolli

Kevi Begolli joined Burgundy Asset Management in 2017 as an Investment Analyst with a focus on high-yield fixed income. She came to Burgundy after gaining valuable credit analysis experience at two other industry firms.

Kevi earned a Bachelor of Commerce degree

(Finance and Economics) at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management. She is a Chartered Financial Analyst Level 3 candidate. She is actively involved in Burgundy's outreach initiative to inspire young women to consider finance as a career option.

Robyn Ross: You made the bold decision to leave your home country of Albania and immigrate to Canada by yourself. What motivated your decision?

Kevi Begolli: I was 16 and interested in pursuing a business degree. I was evaluating universities in Europe and closer to home when family friends recommended that I look into the business program at the University of Toronto. I was impressed with its reputation for high-quality education and believed studying there would pave the way for great future opportunities. Setting my fears aside, I moved to Canada one year early to get acquainted with the curriculum and the university application process.

RR: What are some of the main challenges you encountered and observations

industry may not be female-friendly. I had none of these stereotypes blocking my career view when I started my Bachelor of Commerce degree.

RR: Many business school students choose strategy consulting or investment banking, but you chose a different path. Why did you decide to focus on finance, and on fixed income in particular?

KB: I was at the Rotman School of Management during the period immediately following the Great Financial Crisis, so naturally there was a lot of emphasis on the role and consequences of debt in the economy. It wasn't until my final year at Rotman that I took my first Fixed Income Securities course. I found it fascinating. The professor had spent most of her career in

An important part of my job is to understand the robustness of a business and evaluate the downside risks. I need to understand what can go wrong and analyze the worst-case scenarios. I try to avoid complacency in my thinking by seeking out opposite arguments and views. I look for companies that possess a safety margin to survive future adverse events as well as a strong ability to pay their current and future debt obligations. To do this, I am constantly challenged to understand businesses and industry shifts.

RR: What is your advice for young women interested in Finance?

KB: I advise young women to open their minds to many opportunities, and to explore and discover for themselves what career path might be right for them. The opportunities

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you made in your early days in Canada?

KB: The first day of high school in Canada was very exciting, but I was also anxious about failing or not fitting in. I felt I was behind in every subject. I asked myself, “What's the worst that can happen?” In the worst-case scenario, I could return home and evaluate new study and career options. I knew that defeat was always a possibility, that there were no guarantees and that all I could do was try my best. I'm grateful for this experience as I've learned that, despite challenges, if you have the right attitude, you will emerge stronger and smarter. Coming from outside of North America, I also had an open mind about business opportunities. When I talk to young women here, I find them often opting out of Finance because they grew up with a perception that the

corporate bond origination and had worked with many businesses to help them borrow money in the Canadian market. She brought debt documents issued by various companies for us to analyze in class and taught us how to understand a company's motives for raising debt. This sparked my interest in learning more about credit analysis.

Though I didn't know where this would lead in terms of long-term career prospects, I thought it would provide me with a unique skillset that I could leverage throughout my career.

RR: What does a Credit Analyst do?

KB: Businesses constantly borrow money from investors to fund their operations. From the point of view of those investors, credit analysis is crucial to understanding and assessing the risk/return proposition.

in capital markets are broad, and gaining experience through co-ops and internships will help them better understand the choices available. Variety of experience is valuable. Even a few months spent on a different side of the street will give you insights that will help make you a better investor.

I always learn the most when I step outside of my comfort zone. In general, my journey has been unconventional relative to family and social norms, but I was able to find my way. You don't need to know exactly what the end game is; it's important to have a positive attitude, enjoy the learning process, research your choices and be open to opportunities. You are more in control than you think.

RR: How do you define success?

KB: Success for me means working to

reach my full potential. I believe that you need to be internally motivated to improve and to achieve success. I am fortunate to be in a job that is intellectually stimulating and ever-changing, and where I am always learning. I work with people who inspire me every day and push me forward. I need to be creative and resourceful in collecting and interpreting information and forming conclusions in my role as a credit analyst. This draws on both left-brain and right-brain thinking and allows for continuous self-improvement.

RR: *What have been the constant influences in your life that have shaped you into the person you are today?*

KB: My family has been the most important force in my life. They instilled in me discipline and passion for continuous learning and improvement. They worked hard for me to be able to receive a good education and taught me to have a positive attitude towards life. Their own journeys, their teachings and their trust in me are my biggest motivators.

I was independent from an early age and as I matured I discovered that overcoming the fear of uncertainty has helped me grow. I remind myself constantly to stop thinking about how to prevent failure and to remain open to opportunities. I try to surround myself with role models and mentors that hold me accountable,

believe in me and push me outside of my comfort zone. Long-term thinking, patience and perseverance are approaches I use to help me overcome the fear of failing.

RR: *What has been your biggest life lesson?*

KB: My biggest life lesson has been to follow my own path. Everyone has a unique way of engaging with the world. Trying to simply follow someone else's path or comparing myself to others' success has been counterproductive. Setting my own priorities and my own direction has helped me learn and improve. It helped me stay focused and discover a career that is fulfilling for me.

RR: *What does the future of women working in Finance look like to you?*

KB: I am very optimistic about the future of women in Finance, particularly in investing. Women are very under-represented in wealth management, but I believe that the industry understands that there is a problem and is taking steps in the right direction. Education and role models are crucial to attracting and retaining women in the industry. It's up to the asset management industry as a whole to act with this long-term mindset, to break down unconscious bias, and to educate and develop women. As the industry's environment and attitude changes, I am confident that more young women will be drawn to careers in investing. **M**

