

The Hum Podcast

Episode 15: “I Tried My Best As A Kid To Blend In”

{Theme music begins}

{Simona’s voice begins to come in over top of music}

Simona: To be honest, I am the darkest-faced in that room. I’m walking into a light space being the darkest person on the roster.

{Music increases in volume}

Male voice: You’re listening to The Hum.

{Music decreases in volume}

Gilad: Now before we kick things off, I’d like to take a few seconds to talk about Boxcar Social. It’s one quarter bar, one quarter cafe, and one quarter amazing. In fact, it’s so amazing that I’ve decided to get married there later this year, so I guess that also makes it one quarter amazing event space. They’ve got four locations all around Toronto, including one right by the lake. If whiskey, wine, or beer by the water isn’t your thing, then I’m sure coffee, tea, and a rotating menu by the water must be you. Boxcar Social, where curiosity, innovation, and excellence meet. Be sure to check them out in person or online at boxcarsocial.ca.

{Music fades out}

Gilad: So Simona, it's been great doing a couple of episodes with you here on season two of The Hum.

Simona: Oh my gosh.

Gilad: I mean we've been friends outside of this podcast for a couple years.

Simona: Yeah I think it's like been four years now.

Gilad: Every time you've tried to explain to me what you do for a living, I never get it, like I look at you and I nod and I regurgitate I think what you've said. I think even once I've actually written down in a journal so I can remember what it is you do.

Simona: Dear god, it's me [indistinct].

Gilad: And I still don't get it. So what is it that you do?

Simona: So I work in digital literacy policy, so I'm working with an independent think tank housed at a local university, where our main focus is doing programming or doing research that will influence the government policy, so essentially like creating change at high-level places.

Gilad: Basically in the tech sector.

Simona: More so like tech-focused education, so working around the ideas of like what is digital literacy, who will be able to benefit from the new innovation economy that we're seeing around, so like - it's more than just startups, but there's a lot of money to really ensure that Canada is a competitor in the world markets. But my work mainly focuses on how do we work with communities who are racialized young women, those with mobility incapacabilities, how do we actually provide them a pathway to get them into this work or get them to a place where they can actually then pursue these careers when they're ready to. So you won't - the tech sector won't just be CHADs, which are Caucasian, higher-educated, affluent dudes.

Gilad: You call them CHADs?

Simona: They're CHADs, but you'll see more Gebrons and more Lisas and more Sinittas and more like ...

Gilad: You walk into work right and I'm imagining you're not walking into a place where there are women and people of color all around you.

Simona: No, I'm walking into a room predominantly made up of white people, really great people. Some - a large majority of women, but to be honest, I am the darkest-faced in that room. We have a temp now but I don't count her as like a full-time person, but it definitely is - I'm walking into a light space being the darkest person on the roster.

Gilad: Do you ever feel like you're ever having to prove yourself and I ask this because for the first few years of JAYU doing this, I felt like an imposter for so long. I actually didn't even figure out the term "imposter syndrome" until somebody told me after and I was like, that's actually a perfect way of describing what it is I feel everyday. Do you ever feel like you carry that around with you in your work?

Simona: Every day. You're right, it's an everyday thing to the point that you're surprised when you do good work, like you are surprised like oh shit, I actually know what I'm talking about, like I have skills, I have like knowledge that is useful to this work. And it is true, it is an imposter feeling, especially that I've worked in tech and tech education for the last six years and I don't have a technical background.

Gilad: So tell me more, tell me more about this feeling at work.

Simona: You walk in and I feel like everyone knows that narrative around the tech sector. You hear the horror stories. It's not new information that women are not treated that well in certain spaces in tech. Yes, you know, with every example of like a Sandy - a Sandra Sandberg at Facebook who is like their CEO, CFO, there are women who are continuously victimized, who are forced out of this industry just for the sake of being women, or working on all-male teams and facing a slew of misogyny and microaggressions every day until it becomes too much and the stories are: there was just one day I couldn't get out of bed, so I quit, and then that created this huge financial difficulty for me. It changed income for me, but it was like the best decision I could make.

Gilad: Could you walk me through, though, a common microaggression that you might feel in a workplace, and microaggressions are sly little things because they happen to you and I feel, you know, it's a microaggression. So as it's happening you're like, was that aggression?

Simona: It's kind of like the eyelash on your cheek, like you feel something but you're not - it's not so apparent that you can actually - you think it's something bigger until you realize how annoying it gets right?

Gilad: Right, that's a good way to put it.

Simona: I think one of the - there's like a moment that I remember and it's been, you know, I've remembered it for the last four or five years. It was - I was doing an event at an organization I was at before my current place, and I was doing a youth event with predominantly racialized young people. It was at the end of the day 5:30, so people are leaving. I like was intentional about scheduling it at the end of the day because I would, you know, people would be leaving the space, I could - young people could be a bit louder and it was about 5:45 and the young, like the youth were just like in the space, taking off their jackets, like playing music and just having a really great time. They actually had been on a bus for an hour, just coming from like the west side of the city, so getting them into this space was great, just like them opening up was so beautiful. And an email was sent out by one man to - that could have been an individual email to me directly, but it was like an all-office email and it was like, this is a place of business period, this is not a place to entertain children period, this is a place of business, this should be the last time that we experience something like this. It was just very curt, very direct, and it was - it like hit, it stung a little bit. But I went on with my day, like did my event and then next day there was

another email saying that we should essentially have no youth events anymore. I was the only one doing youth events at that organization. It was my work, it was my portfolio, so he was truly just saying, none of her work is valuable to our mission, to our organization. So what could have happened in that microaggression that I could have just paused period and like went on and still did my events, I went up to him directly and told him if you have an issue with my events, please come to me directly period.

Gilad: Oooh, the period wow. Wow, how does someone react in that situation? What happened?

Simona: I didn't get another email and that was it right. But I think about - that's just my experience, that's my privilege, but like thinking about women who would face the same microaggressions every day, questioning their code, you know, does this code really work or questioning the way they write things or how they present themselves every day. It's a shitty win because it doesn't really change anything other than the fact that he just won't engage with me, but you don't know what he's telling other people on his team about me, you don't know what he's spreading in the office around me, and I've just become a targeted person or a toxic person. I think you - that may kind of relate to you being a Jewish, white-passing male who leads a human rights film festival, so I can only imagine the microaggressions that are thrown your way just by the space that you occupy.

Gilad: So many walking contradictions in that sentence, which I feel though often in the work I do. It's interesting running a human rights organization but also being Israeli at the same time and walking around with a lot of the assumptions that people have of you, which is you are the

politics of your country. It's sort of the same thing when like, when George Bush was president like I hate Americans, when actually most Americans probably hate George Bush right, so it's interesting walking that line of being an advocate for human rights, but then just by the sound of your name or where you're from throws people off right away, that's one thing. And the other thing that I've learned more as I've been growing up and come to terms with is the fact that I'm yes white, which if I walk into a room, let's be real, the lights turn on, the doors open, nice breezes come in, like I understand the privilege that comes along with that, especially as I've gotten older, I've been able to appreciate and recognize that privilege more. But at the same time, there's also - I come from a different history and although I do present white, my history is not quite the same as the predominant white narrative, that being grandparents who - family members who were slaughtered in the Holocaust, some have thankfully survived but, you know, we grew up in a household where mom every day would tell us growing up, you know, you're different and people don't like you, and you're going to have to work twice as hard and I've never really understood what she was talking about, you know. I never really fully got it because I tried my best as a kid to blend in. You know, my name ghee-LAHD as it's supposed to be pronounced, going to school I was trying to say gi-LAHD, so it's more phonetically pleasing to the like Caucasian ear, you know. So even from the get-go, I wasn't even acknowledging myself in the way that I was born to be acknowledged. You know, they say the first gift you get after life is your name and I never really honored that. And so anti-semitism is real, I can't pretend that I don't experience it, I do. A couple years ago, I remember being - working somewhere in the arts here, in the media, in a space where you feel is more open, more left-leaning.

Simona: More fluid.

Gilad: More fluid, you know, and my manager at the time who later actually - I'll get to that, my manager at the time pulls me aside and says, why did your parents name you Gilad when you were born, did they hate you? And that was really interesting for me because first of all, I was shocked, I was like you have no idea how incredibly racist and anti-semitic that is, but secondly I think you did that because you feel like you have permission to do it because we look the same, even though we're not. So I took that to HR, I complained about it. Months later, he was promoted from manager to director of the department, so whether or not something was done I don't know. And it happens all the time, people making fun of my name, people asking, you know, I can get into a cab and cab driver will ask me all these questions, and we're getting along and then finally the question comes, well Gilad where are you from? And I can tell because sometimes, it might be like a Muslim cab driver or someone from like an Arabic country for example, and he'll say where is that from because it sounds semitic, is it Lebanese and, you know, there's a part of me that hesitates to say where it's from because I know every time I do, the rest of that cab ride is going to be a silent one. And I've been in that situation over and over again, and the tough part I find, as someone who sort of walks between both these worlds, the world of undoubtable privilege but then also the world of undoubtable racism and hatred, is that sometimes I don't know where I fit. I don't know where I fit and finding allies sometimes is tough because yes, the other half is - I have it pretty good right, so it's been tough, it's been tough. I want to ask you growing up, did you ever experience that growing up at home, like were mum and dad ever like you're different, you're ...

Simona: Definitely and I think - and it wasn't just you're different, you are brown period, and you will have to work twice as hard to get half as much. But also one of the benefits was I grew up in Scarborough, so I went to a school that was predominantly people of color. We had similar

narratives growing up, our parents came from the same places in the world, so to be honest I had the privilege of not really having to deal with that stuff. I didn't really have to deal with my difference. I got to deal with the regular stuff that middle school or elementary school kids deal with: bullying, or my boobs didn't come in yet, or my period is still like -

Gilad: On its way.

Simona: On its way, even though your mum just says don't worry, but I think that is also a privilege that people don't understand is that it's not until you're placed in the space where you are, you know, the other that you realize like all that kind of back-end narrative that you grew up with makes sense.

Gilad: Did you ever deny yourself of your color though, like would you ever - because when I was fifteen or sixteen, people would - I would put like blond and red streaks in my hair, it was terrible.

Simona: Oh my god.

Gilad: But I would do these things, I would try to change the color of my hair, I would try to change the way my name sounds so I could try to be something else. Did you ever -

Simona: Blond highlights, blue contacts, and I went - what's that club in Vaughan, Polato?

Gilad: Nice.

Simona: I used to go to Polato all the time and pretend like that my name was Sim and I would go with like my white girl friends, so I think that's like something you realize that should be like a rite of passage for any like children - child of an immigrant. It's like how white can you look, which is like blond hair, blue eyes I feel for many.

Gilad: Yeah, how Aryan can I look.

Simona: How Aryan can I look, even though my beautiful melon brown skin will give it away like ...

Gilad: Do you think our parents were just like, oh they're going through their white thing?

Simona: I feel like - I think so and I think it's interesting like you think back, like do you think your mum went through a white thing growing up in Israel?

Gilad: No I don't think so, because she grew up in a very homogenous country and I feel like she was going through, I think she's going through her Jewish thing actually being in Israel - sorry being in Canada, because where she grew up, religion was very much embedded in the culture, so when Passover came, everything was closed. Same with Hanukkah, Rosh Hashanah, whatever the holiday was, and so you didn't have to be very religious to be close to your culture because they were sort of tied in, whereas here no one is celebrating - no one even knows what Passover is on Passover, unless you watch *Curb Your Enthusiasm* or you know a

Jewish person or you're Jewish. So for her now, she's kind of, she's overcompensating and mum, I don't think she listens to the podcast, I love you, but she is. It's not easy.

Simona: It's definitely not easy and I also think it - I also, that's a really great point that you raise that, you know, as a parent witnessing this kind of transformation of your teenage child. I guess that's where all that Our Lady Peace came from, and like Audioslave came from, it's like she's just like listening as you're blasting it in your room, she's like when will it end?

Gilad: When will it end.

Simona: When will he just take on his Hebrew roots.

Gilad: So we're talking about it not being easy every day and I'm curious to know how you define victory at work, and I ask that because in my work, sometimes our victories are so minor. You know, it's not like we're ever going to abolish say human rights abuses, but there could be a minor victory say, one of the youth who's in our program is now more respectful or is - seen the value in themselves. I'm curious how do you define - and I'm asking this on an ethical level. As a person of color in a predominantly white, hetero, male work environment, what does a minor victory or victory look like to you?

Simona: I think for me, it's language. Like the language that's used to describe a community or to describe a project or even an individual person, because it's so easy to say like, oh this black person was really great in this meeting, or Celia from Jamaica was amazing and she gave us all this really great insight, like you know it's that kind of tweak in language. And like I have to be

honest, in my current space, you know, there are predominantly more women than men and there are, you know, but again in terms of like racial diversity we're seeing - there's not a lot, but I think when you hear like someone who has used language that is just not kosher or not that -

Gilad: I like that.

Simona: Right like - not that I'm trying to go to your like Israeli, Hebrew roots, but more so like when you hear someone use a specific - a specific set of language to describe just anybody of a community right, and then there's that one moment that your ears perk up and that you realize like oh he didn't say chick, or he didn't say blacks, or he didn't say you know this.

Gilad: Indians.

Simona: Indians or anything like that, like they used the proper terminology. I can't say that's a win that was precipitated by me but that's a win that affects me right, because now this person is starting to realize that it's not just an individual, but there's humanity behind that individual.

Gilad: How do you balance all this in your day to day - self-care is like the buzzword. I feel like empathy was a buzzword of - I feel like Syrian refugee was a buzzword of 2015, we then moved into 2016 being empathy, but I feel like self-care is something that, especially in the not-for-profit world, I don't know in the for-profit sector, but self-care is something that is very talked about. A. how do you take care of yourself, and B. how do you balance all of that?

Simona: Marijuana is a really big part of my lifestyle in the sense that -

Gilad: So jealous by the way.

Simona: Yeah I know, I really wish that one day we can find something for you to just like make you chill and not -

Gilad: It's grant writing.

Simona: Marijuana is actually a really big part of my self-care, of my self-care practice, and not to be just like oh I'm a stoner, but I actually have real issues with sleep, and I've haven't had quality sleep since university I think and that affects you on a micro level that you actually start to internalize things that don't exist. You start to lash out because you are just so essentially tired, and I didn't smoke weed in high school or university. I started smoking weed to medicate an issue, which was my insomnia and my lack of sleep or just my quality of sleep, and I have started - once you start doing research on marijuana and realizing like this has been part of so many different cultures that there is real science and history behind it, and that the narrative around marijuana has been a very racialized narrative, where it's like what black people do, don't you want to be better than that, don't do that, and that's kind of what I grew up with. And then realizing that it's bullshit and that this is something that is actually really helping people and it has helped me immensely. Okay yeah, so sometimes I smoke weed and I listen to 90s music videos and eat half a pie, but that's my business, but I've also been able to sleep and improve my quality of life, which I think is the ultimate goal of self-care, is to have a real outcome that changes your life, your perspective, and your relationships, so I want to throw it to you because I know -

Gilad: I wish, I wish I could just say marijuana. Honestly, I feel like identifying as an artist and working in the arts sector and the sort of work I do, I feel like - I had this conversation with Anita, our producer, had this conversation with her a couple weeks ago where I was like man, I wish weed and I got along better. I feel like, you know, I envision this life where I grow old and there's weed sitting on the front porch with me, they bring out my warm tea, we're reading the newspaper together.

Simona: Wearing your Costco sweatpants.

Gilad: At night we go to bed, me and my weed, but it's not like that.

Simona: No.

Gilad: Like if I smoke weed, I become a paranoid, anxious, disgusting mess.

Simona: The person that will ruin your weed buzz, like the person that you will just like, fuck damn it, never again.

Gilad: I actually do feel like I do lose my mind when I smoke weed. I actually do feel like I - I feel like I hear a million thoughts a second and I can't make it go away and it sounds terrifying, but every time I tell myself if I wake up like this tomorrow and I still feel like this, I can't go on living. It feels that bad. But nice segue into how I actually take care of myself. It's interesting on your side, because self-care is a journey for me. It's something that I've had to learn very late in life. I

don't think I had very good self-care techniques even up until three years ago. Work, about three years ago, was really stressful. We lost a sponsor very last minute, we had a festival to put on, just huge expectations, and especially like when you're the founder of a charity, there's a lot of pride and ego that goes along with the success of the organization. If it fails, you feel like you're failing. So I had a nervous breakdown in late November 2015 and ever since then my brain, I feel like has had to be - has become rewired. And so the last I'd say three years has been me trying to understand who I am as a person, because I'm not the same person sometimes every day. There'll be times when I could be leaving a staff meeting say, I'm pumped and I'm in it, and then there could be other weeks where I go walk into a staff meeting an anxious mess, feeling like I can't do it. So for me self-care is understanding that it's a journey and it's understanding that I need to be sometimes, A. open with the people around me, talk about that this is what I'm feeling, destigmatize the language around anxiety or - I don't have depression but that's another one. But in terms of what I actually do, I find photography helps me a lot. Photography is definitely a tool that helps me when I'm feeling anxious. I almost look at it as a form of meditation when I'm shooting. I'm focusing very much on the light around me, the composition of things, where things are in the moment, I'm being very present, and I'm not worrying about that grant we didn't get, or this thing that's coming up tomorrow, or this impending wedding. So it's a journey, it's a journey and I feel like there's a lot of positivity around self-help and self-care and all that, but there's not enough acknowledgement of why we need self-care, and that's because all of us experience anxiety at some point. I really do feel that and a lot of us do experience self-doubt and a lot of us aren't so sure of ourselves all the time, and we don't talk enough about that and creating an environment where people can feel more comfortable talking about those things, because if we did, that would be half the work

done already. It's feeling like we feel welcomed in any room we walk into no matter how we feel.

Does it make sense?

Simona: I think it does and I think what that means is like real and quality self-care practices allow you to walk into a room without you having the feeling that it needs to be a welcoming space, that you are able to engage, exist, participate in a space and that it doesn't negatively impact you, right? Like I think that it's not just about resiliency-building, I think that's a bit different, but I think it's a bit more so you are strong enough, or you believe so wholeheartedly in your practice that you don't need the other things to be in place and that you know how to deal with the things that are not there or not in place.

Gilad: I love that you bring that up. I think you summed it up really well. I wanted to ask you something because we talked about this before we started recording, but the idea of have you ever experienced an ally, or someone who appears like they should be an ally, actually not being one and setting you back, or even feeling like setting like all of you back? Like you shouldn't have said that, you fucked that up for all of us? You ever experienced that in your work or in your life?

Simona: I think it's more so in the friendships, realizing that one, our friendships have to evolve, but like we are in a very volatile time in our lives, I wouldn't say in history but in our lives, that we have seen so much and we have seen the need for, you know, women to unite but then realizing that we need to also take an intersectional lens and that we're not all the same type of women, and that some women have immense privilege and power that intrinsically the work that they do sets racialized women back. And I think one of the best examples was when I was at

the Women's March and this is like the huge, you know, city by city march that just got women of every shape and color out, but that was like in the moment where I realized that you cannot - we're not all the same right, because you realize you look at the numbers, there are 54 - like 52 or 54 percent of white women voted for Trump, who would then go on to try to impose travel ban after travel ban, rescind DACA, which all affect racialized people, not just women. So you're then sitting in this crowd of white women, saying like truly we're not the problem, like our bodies are not the problem. Your bodies are. You have this power to create these decisions, yet you are only thinking that we're all the same women and we're not. And I use this analogy that if I were to walk into a room and on one side was people of color, men, women, non-binary, and the other side was just women of all shapes and sizes and all colors, I would go to the side of the room where those people of color, because even though I've experienced misogyny at the hands of men of color, they still understand the oppression and the practices that have impacted me, whereas on that side of the room, there are women who are the perpetrators of my - of the oppression of the people that look like me and the people that I trust and love, and I think that was one of the things that you had to start to look at: your own friendships and your own relationships and I was like wow, oh this is problematic right, because where are all these women at the Black Lives Matter marches, or the Idle No More marches, or the marches at, the protests at Toronto Police Services, like where are your bodies? You only want my body when it makes sense for you, but when it comes to making decisions of my body, you give it to other people and you enhance that oppression, so I think that was - I think friends, my friendships with white women have evolved and changed. I have become incredibly vocal about these things and there are so many moments, tense moments where you - you start to feel like hmm, I need to hold back or say it, because that's how people learn is when you say it, right. So I think that, going back to your question, that it's not about - I think we're in a time where you can't just count

on one aspect of your identity and then relate to all those that look like you or who represent that, that true allyship is not performative. It is real shit. It is real things. It's not me trying to change the opinions of other people, it's those people trying to change the opinions of people that look like them, you know, so I feel like part of the - one of the aspects of Me Too, the Me Too movement is that it's not a woman's responsibility to change men. It is a man's responsibility to change other men and call out this bullshit behavior and call these people out, which I think is the same thing with other issues too, like you cannot - it is not the role of the oppressed to change the values and the opinions of the oppressor. It is the other oppressors that should change each other's values.

Gilad: There's something I wanted to say that, which escaped me.

Simona: Well let me throw a question back to you. Have you - have you faced that, like have you experienced an ally who you thought yeah, this is like we're on the same page, and then has said something that has been like oh no, like you just ruined it for all of us, like you have just ruined it for all of us, we all have to leave the party now?

Gilad: I have never publicly shared this story before and I'm going to toe the line. I'm going to be very careful with my choice of words, so as to not give anything away, but years ago - actually not even years ago. Last year, right around this time, we - there's this really rich person with quite a bit of money, who is known to fund other organizations that are similar to mine in the city, mostly through let's say film. I approached this rich funder or person directly, and so not to give too much away about who this person is, but we agreed to a phone call and in the phone

call, they asked me - let me paraphrase the actual call because I think that will be more powerful. So I pick up the phone and I go "hello".

Simona: So this is a month later from your initial outreach?

Gilad: Yes, yeah, I reach out in say January or February and the phone call's in March. So I'm at work and there are three people on the line, but only one voice speaking the whole time, and so "hello", I say. And this voice goes "hello, this is so and so speaking", and I go "great, how are you today", and they go you know "every day is busy, every minute, every second, every hour, every millisecond, every week, every hour." And so I was like oh.

Simona: Is it like one of the old - like grumpy old men from the movie?

Gilad: Kind of like that, and so I'm - I say you know "thank you for taking time out of that busy schedule to speak with me today. In fact, quite a lot has happened since we last spoke. We just got our charitable status", and this voice says "how did you lose your charitable status", and I go "no, no, no, we just got our charitable status." You know, I'm trying to break the ice here a little bit, because it's feeling like this is not really going anywhere, so I say "you know, when you're working with the government, they're kind of slow, they tend to move a bit slower, so we just got our charitable status", and this voice goes "well if you're a fucking charity working in this fucking country, you better watch out because the government has their ears perked up, especially if you're working with kids named Muhammad fucking this or Ahmad fucking that. As far as I'm concerned, it's all terrorism. And, you know, you have police running around right now and they're arresting black people and they're calling it racial profiling, and as far as I'm concerned,

it's not racial profiling, it's justified, lock em all up", something like that. And I'm in shock. I don't know if you've ever had a moment in your life where information is going in your ear, but it hasn't quite caught up to your brain, so you're sort of starting to figure out like, is he joking, was he responding to my "the government is slow" comment, like what is happening. And so all I could muster up the energy as I could feel like the blood rushing out of my body was to say "who am I speaking to?" And the person on the phone identified themselves as who they were, the rich giver of money, and I said "well I don't think you're going to be happy with where this call is going." So for contacts, we were asking for support to fund our iAM program at JAYU, which in the previous year helped support 25 newcomer youth, all refugees from the Middle East, kids from Syria and Iraq, and we even sent this person a video where you can clearly see kids walking around with hijabs on, so they knew what was going on. And so I said "I don't think you're going to be happy with where this phone call is going", and the voice on the other end said "well, you know, we got a whole bunch of fucking requests like this from charities just like yours, what makes you so different?" And I said something like you know "I don't know what makes us different, but what makes us impactful is that we provide an important space for some of the youth that you're speaking out against, including Muslim youth and people of color", and the voice said you know "thank you, but we're going to take a pass, goodbye." And so I walked out of the phone room and I broke down in tears. I was destroyed. It's interesting because two things were going on. One, I was acknowledging that I'm a white person who doesn't experience this day to day and there are people out there, people of color who experience this all the time, and for me to just get a tiny taste of what that might be like terrified me and it broke me. But the other thing that happened was that person was a Jewish person, and in a space where I thought that this would be an ally to me, they were setting everything back so far and because this person has so much money, they feel like they can just say whatever they want,

and in this case it actually sadly - they're kind of right. It's like the Harvey Weinstein situation.

The reason I can't identify who this is is because this person would destroy me and destroy our charity. We just wouldn't be able to deal with it and so I leave it to the public to sort of put the pieces together and try to figure out who this is, but power comes in all shapes and sizes. They can come in money, it can come in the color of your skin, it could come -

Simona: In your presence.

Gilad: In your presence, it could come just by being a straight, white, able-bodied male, whatever it is. But when you come face to face with that power and you know you're powerless in that moment, there is nothing that can suck the humanity out of you quicker than something like that and it was - it was terrifying.

Simona: And the fact that it was so brazen and so fluid for him to say that is also very interesting to me, like there was no filter, there was no hiding it, there was no - there wasn't any background or backroom racism.

Gilad: He though, he - what I think happened though, I think he tried to school me. He knows, I mean, my name is a giveaway. I might as well stamp a Jewish star to my forehead, like Gilad Cohen, it's like an Israeli Jew. I think that he was trying to say like how dare you, how dare you Jew work, you know, with this population. How dare you. I think that that's what that was because there would be no reason for this person to ever be on that phone call at such an entry level sponsorship level, but here's the thing, that is the reason I do the work I do. I came face to face with hatred in its purest form I think in my life, and that is the work I do. The work that I do

is try to reverse that, to try to stop - to try to really stop more people from being that way, especially in a world like we're in right now with 2016 he'll not win, he'll not win. We're heading down that road again slowly and we need more - more people doing this human rights awareness work more than ever before.

Simona: And having and shaping those conversations. I think that's amazing that you are - you can remember that moment, move on from that moment, and take the power away from that moment, because you're still doing your shit, like you're still doing your work, which I think is so counter to his MO. I think that's a great way to kind of wrap up on, you know, why we will continue doing and supporting things that we support, is that in the world where there's so much bullshit and so much out there that will just make you not want to get out of bed, every time you do to do this kind of work is a victory against that whole narrative.

{Theme music fades in}

Gilad: My name's Gilad Cohen.

Simona: And I'm Simona Ramkisson.

Gilad: This podcast was edited by Brandon Fragomeni and Alex Castellani.

Simona: The Hum is an initiative of JAYU, a charity that shares human rights stories through the arts.

{Theme music fades out}

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