

The Hum Podcast

Episode 31: "Everything I Did Was For The Future"

[Theme music fades in]

Hamza: But then the first person I met, he told me, I can't remember who exactly, but it was just something like, "Thank God you're safe now and everything is okay now." But no, we are displaced. There is no chance in the near future and maybe in the long term that we might be able to get back to our city. Assad is in control. People are still in prison. He's still targeting people and killing people and so, no, we're not okay.

[Music increases in volume]

Speaker 1: You're listening to the Hum.

[Music decreases in volume]

Gilad: This episode is brought to you by UNHCR, the UN refugee agency. Since its creation in 1950, UNHCR has been dedicated to protecting the rights and safety of millions forced to flee violence, persecution, war or disaster at home. UNHCR has staff on the ground in more than 130 countries around the world. UNHCR works to provide lifesaving assistance to refugees, asylum seekers, stateless people, and those displaced within their own countries, many of whom have nowhere else to turn. And the organization works tirelessly to ensure that everyone everywhere has a right to seek asylum and find safe refuge. To learn how you can help, UNHCR and its work to build better futures for those forced from their homes, please visit www.unhcr.ca.

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Gilad: Since 2012, the uprising and crisis in Syria has taken the lives of an estimated 300 to 600,000 people, or approximately two to 3% of Syria's pre-war population. In addition to that, according to the UN, 13.5 million Syrians require humanitarian assistance of which more than 6 million are internally displaced within Syria and around 5 million are refugees outside of Syria. Aleppo, one of the cities hit hardest in the crisis, and once known as the commercial heart of Syria has gone from a buzzing city of more than 2 million people, roughly the size of Toronto to a devastated and broken shadow of its former self.

Gilad: Waad al-Kateab, a Syrian journalist and filmmaker spent several years of her life documenting the uprising in war in Aleppo and along with Edward Watts, they directed a film titled *For Sama*, which just had its international premiere at Hot

Docs here in Toronto. We are honored to be joined here today by Edward Watts, Waad al-Kateab, and her husband Hamza, a medical doctor also from Aleppo and also a subject of the film. And we have a special guest here today, a special guest host. Simona, you've gone MIA. Where are you? I have no idea. We're joined here today by Andrea Rodriguez from JAYU. Thanks for coming back.

Andrea : I'm happy to be here.

Gilad: So before we even jump into the current condition in Syria, we're just curious Hamza, you're a doctor in Aleppo and Waad, you're a journalist and a documentary filmmaker covering the war. How did you two meet? Was it during the conflict? Before the conflict? Tell us a little bit more about how you guys came to know one another.

Waad : Actually, we were both a student at Aleppo University and we shared the same protests usually, so we were part of the same coordinating group, which called Aleppo University Revolution, or how we could say.

Hamza: Revolution University or Aleppo University of Revolution, because a lot of students were protesting that time. So we had some small groups to organize the protest, when to start, where to end, when to end and the locations. So we usually ... There are several, many faces that you meet in each protest every day, so you become friends even without knowing each other like, "Oh this is the pretty girl that always protest with us and this is the handsome guy that you always protest."

Gilad: I love the honesty, I love it.

Waad : We were also like in the same Facebook group, which we were together but we didn't knew that, when we met at the protest, that this is Hamza the same on the Facebook group and that's Facebook group was called Ark, it's like ark ship or something like this.

Edward: Noah's Ark, yeah.

Hamza: After the part of Aleppo was called liberated by the FSA, like was out of the regime control, I moved there and worked in several first aid points and then started a hospital there. And Waad also joined and her ... You can speak about your part when you joined.

Waad : I came actually with a friend too, kind of the frontlines in 2012 like October, and then we went to the medical center when I met Hamza again, and we knew each other before though. It was kind of friendship.

Hamza: Yeah. And then 2014, I will say we, but I'll speak for myself, I realized that we should join path and complete our, this journey together. So I proposed to Waad and we got married.

Andrea : Yeah, just to continue that conversation, so much of what I loved about the film was that despite the chaos everywhere, despite the war and people dying, there was always this underlying sense of creation. Whether you're planting seeds in the garden, giving birth to your child, or even just coming together as a couple, it gave hope to the chaos. My question to both of you is what was it like to form a new relationship in the midst of all that chaos?

Waad : Actually our life, the previous life was changed after we left to the liberated area in Aleppo, East Aleppo. Not just our situation or our relationship together but also with the whole community. Which a lot of people who living there shared the same experience, shared the same difficult and risky things, which it shaped a lot of new relationship, new families. Which we were the hospital's family, we were the activist family, we were the journalist family and in this chaos, you realize that the only things you could make you feel okay or better to join and share your fears with the other people. And Hamza as individual one, for me was very comfortable space to share my fears with. Also, the people in the hospital, the other people who I worked with in the media and you just realize that, "Okay this is our new life with our new families."

Gilad: I wanted to touch a little bit about, before this interview started, we talked a little bit about how we don't want to call this a conflict. It's a crisis really, there's so much happening. And besides it being very tragic, the situation in Syria, it's also very confusing depending on who you're listening to. You're getting a different version of history. Of course there's ISIS and Bashar al-Assad and all these different rebel groups, and the US and the Russian interest. I'm curious to know for two people who actually come from Syria, and for those who don't know much about the history or the conflict that's happening right now in Syria, the crisis, can you tell us a little bit more about how Syria ended up? I know it's a huge question, but for people who don't know, can you guide us through how Syria came to be in this situation that it's in right now?

Hamza: Actually, it's a difficult question to just lump sum, everything that happened through the total eight years. I guess there are still several study centers and research centers didn't figure this out in the right way, despite all the research and study groups that they have make. The beginning was as several Arab countries in the Middle East, a lot of ... Syria was under the dictatorship of al-Assad's family since 1917, so at 15 years of or 40 years of being under the mercy of that family. A lot of corruption, injustice, you're just ruled by the security intelligence family. And that started all after the first protest in Tunis, Tunisia and

the spark hit Syria and it started in March 2011, where people start to challenge the fear and protest against the regime.

Waad : And through these years, as much as the dictatorship, Bashar al-Assad was trying to make our voices silent, people while were trying just to speak out, and all the violence was increased day by day. We have small reactions from the oppositions. Like in 2012, we could say that the revolution, the peaceful revolution changed to be an armed group who were trying to defend themselves, defend the people and with the violence and with the very big plan that the regime has to destroy all the protests or the hope that people has. He tried to, for one example, 2012 when he was arrested a huge amount of protestors and at the same time he was release, a very big leaders of jihadist group who were in his prisons. So he was trying to play the cards, card by card. So he knows that ISIS will be just established a while ago after he will release these people, and so he was trying to tell the world and point that this is not a revolution, this is Islamic groups, this is ISIS, this is whatever it was. Anything could be just bad.

Hamza: Just to make it easier for anyone who's not familiar with Syria or what's happening, when it started in 2011, there was no ISIS, there was no jihadists, there was no Islamists at all, and al-Assad make all the world focus on those. It's major problem, but it's a resulting problem to what happened. So people now, if you say Syria, they will not say dictatorship or Bashar al-Assad, they will say, "Oh ISIS, refugee crisis, civil war, people are killing each other." While in 2011 when all started, peaceful protesters were protesting against a dictatorship regime and what make us more sad as Syrians that people now, a lot of people and journalist reports are saying that the war in Syria has ended, that nobody is bombing, there is no bombing, there is no danger anymore, and there is no danger anymore because al-Assad is not bombing the cities anymore because he re-control all the area. So it took us back to the first thing that happened in 2011, where al-Assad were controlling the area and nothing has changed.

Waad : And I really would add something because you know how the audience, the Western audience think about this.

Edward: That was something that we have talked about a lot. I followed the Syrian crisis since it began and I think what these guys are saying is exactly on the money. Essentially this confusion that you're talking about and this puzzlement in people's minds about what happened in Syria, is exactly what the Assad regime wanted. They wanted to make things confused and murky. And what I say to anyone who asks the question you asked is, it's very simple. What happened was a majority of the people, middle class, secular, educated people like Waad and Hamza, stood up to protest for rights that we all take for granted in the West, for

dignity, for democracy, for the freedom to choose your own path in life and not to be beholden to corruption.

Edward: And the Assad regime, and this was actually a quote from a guy who worked in the state department on Syria, he said to me that very early when this began, some in the regime, at the highest level, they took a decision that they would stop at nothing. There was no low and no level of violence that they wouldn't reach for in order to crush this. Whether it be chemical weapons, imprisoning people, raping people, I mean, and as these guys are talking about encouraging and trying to twist the opposition into, to make it look like terrorism.

Gilad: I wanted to also go back to you and just ask, this isn't your first human rights film. We call them human rights films here at JAYU, because we do a human rights film festival. It's not your first human rights film. We know you've done work in Nigeria and Rwanda. I'm curious to know, how has this experience in Syria been any different for you as a filmmaker?

Edward: Well, I've never been to Syria myself, though I feel like I have, through the footage and through knowing these guys and working together. But I think Syria is unlike any other crisis that I've ever covered, I think partly because of the reasons we were just talking about. You have never seen violence and such, what's the word, not even premeditated, but such conscious violence, such a conscious decision to slaughter to ... The refugee crisis. We talk about the refugee crisis. That was a deliberate policy by the Assad government to basically bombard areas, and as these guys say, it's happening today, to bombard areas to put people to flight and to essentially empty the country, empty the areas, the guys that are opposed. And you know, I've covered these terrible wars as you say, but I've never seen such carefully planned malice and violence.

Gilad: I think we can call it cerebral maybe, just very well thought out.

Edward: It was a decision. Yeah, I mean it was ... And this is it. These guys, they use chemical weapons. They've used chemical weapons in a way that we haven't seen since Saddam Hussein, I think, in Halabja if I'm getting my history right and to use it time and time again. I mean these guys, if you hear their stories, cue your stories. Yeah.

Andrea : Yeah, and that's why I think this film is so important because it provides that perspective from the ground, from the ordinary Syrian civilians that live through this political overarching conflict. And those stories from the regular civilian people are being suppressed by those in power. So I think that's why your film is so powerful in that sense. And it's very evident that you began documenting this whole conflict from the very beginning. We see footage of the peaceful student protests from 2012. And so I want to ask why and when did you decide to start

documenting your life in Aleppo? And did your reason to film change throughout the years? And for Edward, how did you get connected to this project?

Waad : Actually like I always dreamed to be a journalist, but in Syria, as we all knew are Syrians, it's very difficult to be a journalist as you want, which will be like a hand for the regime or the voice of the regime. Anything else you wanted to say you can't. My parents were refused me to be a journalist, and they like very clearly told me that, "Okay, go now, study anything and when you're finished you can go out of Syria and do whatever you want. But here you can't." And for that thought, I just went to Aleppo University to study marketing, economics and in 2011, me as like called the Syrians, our life changed when the revolution started. And I joined the protests from the early beginning and I actually, the first thing, let me feel that maybe this rule, which I should do in this things was, because we were protesting every day and we've tried just to speak out and said, "Well look, we are here. We are Syrians. We want our life to be changed." And all the formal channels, which the regime has, they were denies everything was happening. So we were in the protest during the day and at night we watch like, "This is fake things. This is coming from outside, this is not in Syria. These people are not Syrians," and that's it.

Waad : So I felt just like no, we need something to be just an evidence that this is what is happening. And me, as many Syrians and activists try just to document this moments through our cell phones, through our any camera that we have. That's why actually, when 2012 I was just ... From 2011 also I have footage but what we used in the film was started in 2012. And during the time gradually, I taught myself how to use the camera and in any opportunity to have something more experienced as camera or these skills I was trying to improve myself. Then in 2015, end of 2015, I was contacting with Channel 4 News in UK, and I've sent them stories to broadcast that in their daily program. And after we left Aleppo in December 2016, I went to London for a work and then there I met Ed.

Edward: Yeah.

Waad : First time actually was maybe January or February 2017.

Edward: Yeah, yeah, a couple of years back. And I mean basically I'd been wanting to. The reason why I was fortunate enough to be connected with Waad and Hamza was because I've been talking about Syria since it began. And as we were just discussing really saying that I felt that the media and you know, people just getting this wrong, they'd be reading it wrong and that we needed to make a film that was going to tell the truth. And I'd been talking about this for years. And finally, so when Waad came out of Syria and as she said, she'd done these incredible news reports, but no one really, I don't think had an idea of this incredible archive that she had, all these home movies basically. So when they

realized that she had this vast collection of incredible footage, then they said, "Right, who's a good person to work with her? Maybe Ed will shut up about Syria if we just like put them together." And so that was, yeah, we had the chance to meet.

Andrea : And throughout the years and with the birth of your daughter, did the reason to film change at all? Because the title of your film is *For Sama*. So how did the narrative change in what you wanted to show or did it change?

Waad : Actually, the main things that make me just record everything was happening, before also Sama was born, it was when, we went in the hospital and we lost one of our very close friends. And before he have been killed, I was having my camera and filming some important stuff, and some silly stuff as sitting together or joke or something like this. And they were always said to me, "Stop filming, stop filming, stop filming." Then I really didn't thought that that footage is something important, and when he was killed, I was just looking at this footage that I have, and I thought that I lost this man who is totally in this footage.

Waad : So I just felt that the death is very close to us, all of us. There's no one could be safe in Aleppo, and that's the thing that I thought, "No, I should try to record everything, whatever it was." Even with sometimes bad sounds or bad lighting or whatever it was, I felt just like this is the only life that I will live here, and I don't know when it will be end. So I just will finish, will document everything. And gradually, with each difficult period which we come to, I was thinking that no, maybe this is the most important. And with the next one it was, yeah, this is the most important.

Waad : And after we met with Ed, I had some stuff which is personal. I was trying before to make something about how to bring a child for this crazy life, but in a different way of what we did *For Sama*. So I got some footage for myself through, when I was pregnant and then when I give birth to Sama. Then when we met and we were discussing the line which we will do the film for. When we watch every everything and we write script many times, then we find out that the point of everything I did was for the future, for better future for Syria. And it was like as a sample of Sama, being Sama in my life, being Sama in the hospital, being any new opportunity or a new chance to live better, it was kind of just to bring a new child to this life, and live for the better, for the future. And that's when we felt that, yeah, Sama could be the -

Edward: Evolved. Yeah, exactly. I mean it was all in the footage and I feel like you were filming it for Sama anyway, and then it was just ... Because there were so many different elements as you can imagine in all these hundreds of hours of footage. There were so many stories to tell. It was almost like we had to rediscover that story within all of that footage, when we went back to the beginning and as

Waad said, she had everything from herself preparing a meal, like very detailed footage of preparing a meal and peeling aubergines, to all this extraordinary stuff in the hospital. So yeah, it was kind of an organic way in which we found that.

Gilad: I wanted to talk more about, because you were talking about the fact that there just wasn't enough clear media, truthful media being put out there. And so that was part of the reason why you had to stay, was to share the truth of what was happening. I know for you Hamza, you're a medical doctor, so so much of what was driving you was this need to help in that way. I also understand that you opened up your own hospital to treat people. I'm curious with hospitals in Syria, it's usually understood, right, that hospitals are sort of no fly zones. You don't attack a hospital in the midst of war. Was that the situation in Syria? What was the case there with hospitals and working in them? And what's the daily reality of being in a hospital in a place like Aleppo?

Hamza: Yeah, unfortunately in Syria and dealing with the Syrian regime and the Russian, so the hospital wasn't the safest place at all, and actually it was maybe the most targeted place. I really had patients several times that I need to hospitalize in the hospital for like three days, and they said, "Doctor please, just give me the medications and I will take them home. I can't stay here three days because who knows that when the hospital might be targeted. Just discharge me please."

Hamza: And one person once told me, I met a Syrian doctor who lived in the UK for long time, I met him in Syria in early 2012. Well a lot of medical doctors were coming, Syrian medical doctors were coming from America or the UK to help. He told me that he knew that the hospitals will be the main target for the regime, because they are using the same tactics that the Russian usually use during wars, where the golden rule for the Russian in any war or especially in the Second World War was to like kill a German doctor is worth more than killing 10 soldiers. So because it will make the soldiers desperate, it will make them helpless that they can't, there are nobody to support them. So he told me, be careful because that will happen in Syria.

Hamza: And I remember the first attack that the regime has on a hospital called Dar al-Shifa in Eastern Aleppo where several people were killed and then we knew that this is the situation. Actually yesterday, five primary healthcare centers were attacked in Syria. This is the strategy. If you targeted the bakeries, the schools, the hospitals, then people will not be able to live there anymore and they will retreat to another area or displaced to another area, move, just flee to another area and the regime will take this area easily. This is what happened in all the areas on the districts of Syria, in Homs, Al Ghouta, now it's happening in Idlib, as I mentioned yesterday, Aleppo, Daraa, everywhere. The White Helmets, the civil defense areas, maybe four days ago, also there was an airstrike over a White

Helmets center. This is like, there was no nobody to provide help for the civilians and the people there, then the regime can control the area easily.

Edward: And just to say, that goes back to what I was saying, this is that decision that they made that they were going to unleash this kind of violence, through this deliberate targeting of hospitals. It's kind of, where do you end? That's the end point, isn't it? When you're targeting hospitals, you're killing sick people, you're killing doctors and essentially you're going absolutely to the soul. You're going to the soul of a people like we say in the film, right? I'm not going to quote the subtitle.

Waad : No.

Edward: But you know, it does like ... Well I'm going to quote the subtitle, because it's a good one, but it breaks people's spirit, and that's what Hamza's talking about in relation to the conflict and the Second World War. And it's, you're destroying the soul of a people and forcing them to fly. And as he says, the UN, I read it this morning, the UN is saying 300,000 people have been displaced over the last whatever it is, three months from these areas in Idlib. It's happening today as people are listening to this now.

Waad : And actually, it's a strategy of the regime since the revolution started, and they were always very curious to arrested journalists or people who were like filming, arrested people or doctors who were helping the protesters when they were injured in the protest. This is same strategy from the beginning. While he wasn't arrested people who were protesting, but going to the hospital to see who's people who help these people or who was filming. They were very curious about who film this more than about who were protest itself. So actually this is their protest, just to make everything silent and hidden and don't let people speak or stay alive or anyone who will be against them.

Andrea : And after enduring so much in 2016, you both decided to leave Aleppo and at what point, what was the point that led you to make that decision to leave?

Hamza: Actually it was not a decision or a choice because that was after six months of besiegement, the regime has sieged Aleppo for six months and they manage with the help, by coverage from the Russian aircraft to re-control the areas. And in the last, in the beginning of December 2016, all of the people were just surrounded in an area -

Waad : Two kilometer square.

Hamza: Around two kilometers square. Then when there was no other choice, the Russian has just communicated with the armed group that was in the area, in the

opposition area, saying that you have no other choice. There was only one hospital left in this area because the regime has targeted and destroyed all the other hospitals, and they said that we know that you don't have enough food. There are a lot of civilians that in medical care and everything and we are surrounding you everywhere. So the only choice was whoever wants to leave the city, we will prepare that. They call evacuation, but it was displacement. The agreement happened on the 15th of December 2016. They gave two days for the people to just pack or to prepare to be displaced and then it happened, the displacement happened through around a week, where we were evacuated or displaced out of Aleppo to another opposition area which is Idlib.

Waad : In 22nd of December in 2016, the regime and the Russian take over the city, East Aleppo where we were, and then the announcement, the victory that, "Okay now, the regime take over the whole city." And all the terrorist as we, like Hamza and me and Sama, my daughter and a lot of other civilians were just displacement of out of the city.

Gilad: And you guys were both very involved in spreading awareness of what was happening in Syria. Like Hamza, there's lots of footage of you speaking to the news, and of course all the work you're doing, Waad, with the film and all the media that you're putting out. How has that changed for both of you? How are you now spreading awareness since you've left Aleppo or now that you're out of Syria? And also to Edward, I'm curious, you're not Syrian, Andrea and myself are not Syrian, to all of our listeners who aren't Syrian, what can we as non-Syrians do as allies to spread the story?

Waad : Actually there is very big responsibility on my shoulders first, on any Syrian who left to feel that we left, everything happened, and it's still happening until now. And as Hamza mentioned and Edward mentioned, it's still happening until now and they speak now about massive attack by the Russian and the regime to places in Idlib and the North countryside of Hama city. And I don't know how until now, no one could imagine that he could live his life normally, while you know, what your experience is. It's still happening until now.

Waad : For me, my first decision was to make this film, which I felt that maybe that's will make some awareness to the people, that people could see how our life were there and what our thinking, why we stayed, why we left and why we took this decision from the beginning that we want to join this part of the conflict. And everything we will do, it will make really very small effect maybe but still, this is what we could do and this is what we really want to do, and to stay stand with our people, with our community, with everything happened, we shouldn't till this pass. We should in everyday just still saying that, this regime killed people and is still killing people and we should let people not to forget and not to forgive also.

Hamza: For me, at the beginning when I moved to the East part of Aleppo and started working there, I would just focusing on, I'll be just a medical doctor or provide health care to the people in need and that's it. But then I realized, because I was one of the few people who know how to speak a little English, I hope, and I have an extra responsibility to tell all the world what's happening in Aleppo. And that's when I started to communicate with several media channels, journalist. In my contact list, I have more than 200 journalist numbers from all over the world. So just communicating with them, taking interviews, just telling what's happening in Aleppo at the moment, how the situation is. Unfortunately that didn't help, I thought that it might get a chance or to change the end, that they might stop the bombardment, they might end the siege, they might have a decision at least to let us live in our city.

Hamza: So after we were displaced out of Aleppo, I thought that I will have break, I will just have a rest with my family, will not speaking about Syria and we are out of Syria at the moment. But then the first person I met, he told me, I can't remember who exactly, but it was something like, "Thanks God you are safe now and everything is okay now." But no, we are displaced. There is no chance in the near future, and maybe in the long term that we might be able to get back to our city. Assad is in control. People still in prison, he's still targeting people, killing people. And so, no, we're not okay. So that's when I realized that we need now change what we were doing and making this awareness about what happened in Syria and what's still happening for people, because still a lot of people saying that the war is over and that's it. But no, no, this is the beginning of a real nightmare for all the Syrian all over again.

Edward: Yeah. And I'm really grateful to the question actually, because this is one of my big lines that I often say is, in my mind, we are all Syrians because these guys were fighting for the principles that we value the most, as I talked about, democracy and dignity and just the right to live in freedom basically. And we've seen Syrians be demonized as terrorists and refugees, and we need to understand that these guys were fighting the battles that matter to us before we even knew we were in the struggle. And you can make these connections, the same guys who are bombing Hamza's hospital, who are bombarding the people in Aleppo are the Russian government who are responsible for poisoning people in a sleepy English town or who are disrupting our democratic processes.

Edward: And I think we need to get into this mindset that, it's not like they're over there, the Syrians, god, the Syrians suffering over there. We have a stake in their fate and we need to, and you sort of say, well what can we do? We need to just think about everything that we can do, whether it's supporting refugees or looking at refugees in a different way, whether it's raising awareness about what's happening today in Idlib, whether it's the fight for justice. The justice of all these

people who have been unlawfully arrested, detained, all the people had been put to flight.

Edward: One of the things that people don't fully understand is that so many of the issues that we see in our world today, whether it be the rise of ISIS, which scares a lot of people on the street, whether it be the rise of the far right, the extreme right in our political systems, whether it be the refugee crisis or even just a fracturing of our international order, that for imperfectly has managed to maintain world peace for 70 plus years or so. The fracturing of that, and so many of these issues, come from what's happened in Syria and actually our failure to stand with people like Waad and Hamza who are asking for their rights. And so there's a lot we can do and we all need to get up and get on it basically, because our future's at stake.

Andrea : Well as you mentioned Edward, the Syrian people, a lot of the times are demonized and seen as the other, and a lot of people find it hard for themselves to relate to the Syrian people, because of the whole nightmare of the crisis and the war that's going on. So I was hoping Hamza and Waad, if you can provide some sort of insight into what Syria was like, what the Syrian people were like before this whole crisis started, so that maybe for some people who have it a bit difficult to imagine, that there can be some sort of connection.

Gilad: It's a hard question, but what is the Syria that we're fighting for? What is the Syria that we're fighting for?

Waad : It's just what come up to my mind -

Hamza: Actually there are several stories about how Syria was under al-Assad control and why we want to change that. For a simple example, anyone in the police or in the intelligence has the right to stop you, ask you for your ID, beat you, slap you on the face, and the one action that you can do is just keep silent and hopefully that you will not be arrested and walk, even before the protest and before anything. This might be unreasonable for any Western people, but this is really what was happening. And the thing that we were fighting for is very simple, just to end the corruption in the system, to have our own freedom to choose our president, to have our own freedom to choose what party I want to join, or just the simple things. We were not asking for many parties, just to have two parties will shut us up, and we're fine with that. But that was too much to ask from a dictator who his father run Syria for 30 years, and he was running Syria for 10 years, he was, what those people are talking about, and you know what happened.

Edward: Can I throw something in on the demonization point, which is, and this isn't like just a shameless plug for the film though, it is sort of -

Gilad: Plug please. Please plug.

Edward: I think when you see the film, what is so incredible about what Waad captured and the life that these guys lived is the fact that when you look at it, you know these people, you recognize them, you know Waad and Hamza, they're your mates, you know, Salem and Afra, who are their great friends because they're your neighbors, their humanity and especially their humor. I mean these guys have an incredible sense of humor, Syrians in general, as well as courage as well as you know, intelligence. And I think that is the fundamental thing that is so important in the film. And it's something I've tried to do in all my work, is trying to get beyond this idea that we're all from different planets. There is a core humanity that underpins us all, and when you see the film and when you meet these guys, either through the film or in person, if you're lucky enough to do that, you realize these are my friends, these are my people, you know?

Gilad: I can't think of a better way to end. You mentioned lucky, Andrea and I are so lucky to have met you today, and we only had you in studio for about 40 minutes, but thank you for your courage. Thank you for the film. *For Sama* is the name of the film, please, if you have an opportunity, catch.

Edward: Yeah, we've got one screening left as part of Hot Docs on Sunday, right?

Waad : Yeah. Sunday.

Edward: One screening, on Sunday.

Waad : 12:45.

Gilad: And you know, we do human rights work here in Toronto, so maybe there'll be an opportunity to bring the film back.

Waad : Hope so, yeah.

Edward: I really hope so, yeah.

Gilad: We'll talk, we'll talk. Thank you so much for joining us.

[Theme music fades in]

Waad : Thank you a lot. Thanks.

Gilad: I'm Gilad Cohen.

Andrea : And I'm Andrea Rodriguez. Our producers are Brandon Fragomeni and Alex Castellani. Our associate producer is Ron Ma.

Gilad: The Hum is an initiative of JAYU, a charity committed to sharing human rights stories through the arts.

[Music fades out]

Andrea : To support The Hum and our other important initiatives, consider making a tax receiptable donation at jayu.ca/donate.