Hear My Story - Zahava Rendler transcript

**Lisa MacVittie** 00:00

I'm the last survivor of the Holocaust in our family.

**Jackie Congedo** 00:04

Behind the words pictures and artifacts in the museum are people whose stories of survival and hope come alive to inspire new generations of upstanders, one by one, these stories stir the soul.

**Al Miller** 00:18

Can there really be hope for us?

**Bella Ouziel** 00:20

See, mine is 40018, my sister was 40017,

**Jackie Congedo** 00:28

Holocaust survivors, their descendants, liberators, champions of justice and courageous upstanders ask only this, hear my story so that the lessons they teach will echo for generations, I will never meet someone else like my father, but there are many of us who, if we come together, can keep his voice alive. These stories will change you. They will move you to action, inspiring the best of humanity, every day. I'm Jackie Congedo, and in this episode, we share an incredible story of survival. Zahava Rendler was born Golda Feuerberg In Stryi, Poland in 1941. When she was just a baby, her parents decided the threat to Jews was so great, they needed to go into hiding. The family sought refuge in an underground bunker. Zahava was given sleeping pills so that she wouldn't cry and give away their hiding place. She was later hidden with a Catholic Polish woman and then sent to live in a convent. She and her family managed to evade detection by the Nazis and were reunited after the war, they made their way to Israel, and she later immigrated to the United States, settling in Cincinnati. Her story is one of faith, hope and resilience.

**Jackie Congedo** 01:43

It's so wonderful to be here in the museum with you, Zahava, one of our treasures at the center, who really was part of the original group that came together to build the organization that became the Holocaust Humanity Center, many years ago, right? It was more than 20 years ago now that that this, you and many others came together to say, to do this.

**Zahava Rendler** 02:14

Thank you

**Jackie Congedo** 02:15

Absolutely. And you know, I'm so grateful that you're here to share about your story, about your life and your journey, which has been full of moments of great trial and adversity and also moments of great joy and beauty. I want to start with with your earliest memories. What is your earliest What is your earliest memory?

**Zahava Rendler** 02:47

My earliest memories were strange. I remember the Nazis. I did not know Nazis. I was about nine months old when they marched in to Stryi, Poland, the city that I was born. And I saw many, many people walking, and many people are standing on the side. And one thing that I really remember, my grandmother was holding me in her arms, and I was looking at her, and she was crying. I was a baby. I didn't understand it, but it's very, very strange, even at that age, I think if I will see many, many people, she was not old at that time. I don't remember how old was she, I would recognize her. The face is still just like real to me.

**Jackie Congedo** 03:17

Wow.

**Zahava Rendler** 04:05

I think that this is the first memory. Then another thing I remember my mother crying and giving me away to a man. I did not know who was that man. Later on alone, I learned that was Stachek, our caregiver, that saved our life. And then I remember very well, I must have been about two and a half. The nuns in the convent, a lot, a lot of very nice women with long brown coat, like a coat or a dress, always smiling and always petting our hair and saying something in Polish.

**Jackie Congedo** 05:17

Wow.

**Zahava Rendler** 05:18

I think it is just like, like later on, I learned because when I was almost told the end, they almost used to say "ladna dziewczyna," which meant "pretty girl," or something like that. And I remember them with love, that's what I can say. And today, as an adult, I am very, very grateful that these women, Catholic women, that sacrificed their life many times in order to save me and other Jewish children, and there were many children in the convent.

**Jackie Congedo** 06:01

So before we get to the convent, you know the Nazis come to power. They invade Poland, you have this early memory of your grandmother crying, watching what was happening, holding you as a baby, and at some point, your family recognizes that the only way to possibly survive right, to stay safe was to hide, was to go into hiding. Talk about your family's you know what your what your parents later told you about their decision to do that. Bring us through that part of your story.

**Zahava Rendler** 06:43

Stachek was a friend of my father. My father and his siblings had a factory, a leather goods factory, and Stachek worked for him. One day, Stachek came to my father and he told him, "Mendel, the Nazis are approaching our city and everything, what you have will be taken away. And you probably know, family will be sent away too. I have a hiding place that can host 32 people. And you must come. I'm offering that place to you." It didn't take long, and we entered the bunker. My mother, my sister, my father and me, I had underground, underground, a cellar. It's like today, I would say a basement, but it was dark, no windows. Everybody was quiet. It was very cold and probably very filthy. People spoke in whisper, and my parents gave me sleeping pills and sleeping shots. I was about a little over nine months old, and most of the time I was sleeping.

**Jackie Congedo** 09:02

Otherwise, if you cried, the Nazis would hear

**Zahava Rendler** 09:05

If I cried, or I was hungry or I was not comfortable, there was a chance that I will reveal all the people in the cellar, because the Nazis were, the Germans, were walking up stairs on the streets, and they will hear that somebody is crying, A child is going so they will know that some people are hiding there. After several months, Stachek came to my parents, and he said that he has a very close friend. Later on, I also learned she was working with the underground, and she was Polish, a Polish Catholic, and she had agreed to take me into her home. Few days later, he came with false identification papers. My name was changed to Olga Pachulchak. That was a very common Polish name, and my parents started right away to talk to me Polish. My parents were Orthodox people, so before even entering the cellar, they would talk to me only in Yiddish. They didn't understand what they were talking, but they tried to prepare me to my new destination, maybe my destiny. So I was taken out of the bunker in the middle of the night,

**Jackie Congedo** 11:22

and this is the memory you describe of your mother right handing you

**Zahava Rendler** 11:28

And was given to that Polish woman.

**Zahava Rendler** 11:40

It was very, very late at night, and when I came, she hugged me, and she asked me, "chcesz mleka," "do you want milk?" I did not understand what she said. So she came with milk. I did not know what it is, even and she asked me to drink, drink, and she put me the milk next to my mouth. I drank, and it was very tasty, but I was very, very, very tired. So she put me to bed in the morning, when I woke up, I saw some children around my bed, and it was very strange. They spoke to me in Polish. I did not understand even one word. The woman was very nice. I remember her combing my hair, singing to me and really very nice. Only experience in her home was very good, very good.

**Jackie Congedo** 13:05

These were her other children who were there

**Zahava Rendler** 13:07

probably were other children, and I don't think that I knew had her men even ever the children were older than me. One day, there was a rumor that the Germans are coming to the village where I was in her possession, and they are searching every single home. And if somebody is hiding a Jew, their fate will be exactly the same as the Jewish fate. That means they will be taken away wherever. She got very, very scared, and not far from her home was the convent. So she took me and she brought me to the convent. I remember a very, a very big house, and I saw many, many people. And I saw also many children running around, playing, and I got very, very scared. I didn't know anybody, and it was very strange, she placed me in that convent, hugged me, said something in Polish, probably "be well" or something, be safe, and went away. I never saw her again, and nor did I see her children.

**Jackie Congedo** 15:10

Did you know? Have you ever had the...Do you know who she was?

**Zahava Rendler** 15:14

I didn't know anything? I did not know anything was going on on the outside world, and I just knew that I have to be always quiet and speak in whispers. It's like a joke among my friends that I'm the only one that talks very quiet. Probably this was some kind of something in me that I'm not supposed to talk so loud.

**Jackie Congedo** 15:48

Yeah, yeah.

**Zahava Rendler** 15:51

So life in the convent, a lot of children around me... strange. Most of them spoke different languages, and I did not understand them.

**Jackie Congedo** 16:14

Were they Jewish children? You think,

**Zahava Rendler** 16:16

yes, yeah, these were children that I learned later on we had many times visitors. Who were the visitors? Germans that came in to look for Jewish children. And the nuns said, "There is nobody Jewish here." And they looked at her with very serious faces and asked her, "So who are these children? from where?" And she said that "We saw, after every bomb, we saw children on the street crying, no parents. So we collected all these children to to the convent, and we are taking care of them till maybe one day, their parents will come to pick them up. We don't know who their parents are, but they are definitely not Jewish." and the Germans left believed them. Listen, nuns were holy people, and you did not mess around... but we had few visitors.

**Zahava Rendler** 17:41

Another part that I remember every morning, when we got up, we had to cross ourselves, and, but it was a song. And for me, crossing... it's a game with our hands. That what I took it is after that some words were said. I did not know. I did not understand. Only years later I was there a few years I started also to say the word same words. In the morning when we got up after the prayers, we ate breakfast. The breakfast was a piece of dark bread out some water that was supposedly tea and and that was it,

**Jackie Congedo** 18:47

because this was in Stryi in Poland, right same

**Zahava Rendler** 18:51

Stryi...it's the the convent was probably not in Stryi. It was in one of the villages, not exactly in the city. I don't remember from the city at all. I was just, I just remember I was born in Stryi, Poland, and it was called Galicia. But I don't remember anything from this city, and honestly, my parents never talked even about the city anymore.

**Jackie Congedo** 19:30

What life was like before, because it was

**Zahava Rendler** 19:33

Well it was a life, life must have been very good before. They were, I would say, I don't know if they were wealthy or they were upper class. I remember the preparation that they used to talk about, Shabbos is coming. Shabbos is coming. So what is Shabbos? So my father explain me that six days of the week we work, and we are so grateful that God gave us a day of rest, and it is called Shabbat. So I felt growing up that everything was around Shabbat, just living for the Shabbat. So Shabbat was a very lovely day. The family was together. We always were dressed in our best clothes. My mother was a great cook. I loved her gefilte fish. I loved her chicken soup and all the trims around so I wish I would have that life before, but that was talked always.

**Jackie Congedo** 21:08

You were born into, right into

**Zahava Rendler** 21:12

great things. Yeah, really great things.

**Jackie Congedo** 21:19

So I didn't mean to get you off track. You were talking about life in the convent, and so

**Zahava Rendler** 21:24

life in a convent, there were no nothing was special. We were, on nice days, we were playing outside. Our toys were from rags. Our doors were from rags. And

**Jackie Congedo** 21:47

because this was wartime in Poland,

**Zahava Rendler** 21:48

wartime in Poland, yeah. In the winter, we hardly went out because of the snow. I remember the convent always hunger, fear and cold. These were my three memories that I always felt in the comfort except the warmth and the niceness of the nuns and the kids, the kids were nice. They, you know, everybody was whatever you could be to do the best in it together, yeah, and together, I remember a lot of bombs falling, and it was very scary, and everybody started to cry. I'm sure I was among them too, crying, being very, very scared, and there was nobody to hug me, to calm me down. And every time that a bomb fell, it was hours and hours later till I became myself again, and you want to hide, but you don't have where to hide. You can hide under your bunk beds.

**Jackie Congedo** 23:20

What did the nuns say when, when the bombs were dropping? What did they say about it?

**Zahava Rendler** 23:24

"Cichy, cichy." "Quiet, quiet." You know that we would not cry. How can you? Somebody can tell you, don't cry. You're so scared, you are crying. But I remember the world, and that was our daily routine, daily work.

**Jackie Congedo** 23:44

How many years were you in the convent?

**Zahava Rendler** 23:49

About close to three years.

**Jackie Congedo** 23:54

So you were not

**Zahava Rendler** 23:55

the end of the war. That was 1945, I was born in 1941. I was nine months old when I was, when we entered the bunker. I was in the bunker close to a year, and then when I was given to the Polish woman, I was about close to two, close to two, yeah, and another year, probably, or less, or what, in her house, and then I don't remember, or I don't remember, that's what my parents told me, and they were so secretive about it, I don't think that they really were ready to tell me. Yeah, maybe for later on, I forgot to say something. When we entered the bunker, I had another sister that was two years older than me. She contracted pneumonia about two weeks before, and she was in the hospital. So the day, a day before we entered the bunker, my father went to retrieve her from the hospital, because he knew that we are going already into hiding, and when he came, they said that she must have some more medication. If he will come in the morning, he will be able to take her, because she's much, much better. So the first thing in the morning, very early in the morning, when he came to retrieve her. She wasn't there anymore, so he went to the room, to another room, to another room. He thought maybe they switched her to a room, and nobody knew what, where she was, what happened. So finally, he met the head nurse, and asked her, "Where is my daughter?" So she said, "Oh, I'm so sorry, but she died. She passed away the night before." He stood there, devastated, and he did not know what to do, but he asked to see her, and they said that they right away a person that dies, they take it away to another place. So he had no child, no choice. He stood there, and he said, "If he will go and miss a...look for her, there was a chance that his fate will be exactly like hers." He almost later on, after the war, my mother said, years years later, when I knew already about her, that he was so devastated that he had to go back to his family because he was afraid. He only thought maybe, maybe a childless nurse adopted her. Maybe a doctor in the in the wildest thoughts. He never thought that they killed her. But who knows.

**Jackie Congedo** 27:52

We, you don't still to this day, you don't know?

**Zahava Rendler** 27:53

Still to this day, I learned about her when I was about a month or little less before I got married, wow, they told me that after school they have to talk to me. It was towards the end I was married, June 18, and graduation was about a week before, and I came home from school, we were sitting in the kitchen, and they told me the story that I had a sister and I knew something is wrong, because every year, my mother used to light a little yahrzeit candle. And I asked her, "What is it?" And she only said, "Oh, this candle is for all the people that perished in the Holocaust," and I was not naive, but I did not want to know. I just did not want to bring up all my mother's feelings, devastation, of course, so I didn't say anything.

**Jackie Congedo** 29:19

So you this was the sister you never knew and never heard from again,

**Zahava Rendler** 29:26

And where I kept on asking, "Why? Why didn't you tell me?" And she said, because I was a very curious child. And every time that I will see somebody that is two years older, that looks like me or my mother or father. I... I will sing, this is my sister.

**Jackie Congedo** 29:54

And you have another sister who was in hiding with you?

**Zahava Rendler** 29:56

I have another sister. She passed away. In Israel already. She always lived in Israel, and she was with us in hiding.

**Zahava Rendler** 30:11

She was seven years older. She never talked about the Holocaust. She never talked about any war, anything she never wanted to say. And when I asked her, "And how about our grandmother?" And she looked at me, "I will tell you another time when that was it," but never in her life. Only one day I was in Israel, visiting her, and she comes and she gives me a book. And I said, "What is it?" This is a book from Stryi, from the people from Stryi. But it was already after the book was after the war. And as she didn't tell me that my father and my brother are in there - a picture of them. And as I was turning the pages, suddenly I saw my father. So I said to her, spoke to her only Hebrew, "Here is father, and here is my brother." And she said, "Oh, good for you that you found them." She closed the book, and she told me that I can have the book. So my suitcase was packed. It weighed a ton, and here she comes to give me a book look almost as heavy as me, but I said, I'm taking it, even if I have to take to give away the suitcase.

**Jackie Congedo** 30:11

She was older.

**Jackie Congedo** 32:08

So it was you and three siblings. Your brother was how old?

**Zahava Rendler** 32:14

My brother was two, about two and a half. But he was born after the war,

**Jackie Congedo** 32:18

After the war. Okay, so, so I can imagine that your parents, when they made what must have been the hardest decision of their lives to give you to this woman who was going to hopefully, they thought, care for you. They never. They probably feared they would never see you again. But that's actually not how the story miraculously turned out.

**Zahava Rendler** 32:53

Yes, but you must understand, they were Orthodox, speaking their faith, their belief in God, was so so strong that they were sure he will not take away another child from them, and they did not have a choice. They have a choice that for sure, they knew I will not survive in the cellar, the bunker, and they gave me away. So I'm always thinking how devastated it was, and many times I was just thinking after the war, growing up, my sister was much older. We don't look alike at all. She had blonde hair, blue eyes. I was dark, like the dark sheep of the family, and she constantly she was, in a way, when every little conflict or something with her, she always said, "You go back to the Catholics. You don't belong to us." But I was a replica of my mother, so I did belong to the family, and I was called Zahava Feuerberg. Her exactly... her last name. Why did she tell me? But is a child even so that I was already a teenager. It constantly, constantly bother me. And then I said, "Okay, fine, so I don't belong." I do belong. I'm a very proud Jewish woman, yes, and as a child, I always wanted to learn to soak in everything that belongs to me, and I will never let it go.

**Jackie Congedo** 35:08

So your father, the war ends, your father comes, your parents and your sister survive in the bunker. They come out and they're able to find you. How did your father find you? Did he know you were at the convent?

**Zahava Rendler** 35:27

Stachek- all this year or year that they were in the bunker, none of them, but I wouldn't say none of them, somebody always managed to scavenger for food and come back, but Stachek told them there would be a time that he will not come back, because life is dangerous than the outside world. He brought them also the news from the outside world, and one day he will not be able to come. He has a feeling that somebody is following him. They have to start to get stronger. Very easy to say, how can you get stronger in that place and to go out of the bunker. What was there in the outside world? Nothing, if they will be outside, maybe they will have something, but at that time, if you will give somebody, if somebody will see you, yeah, you know, he will deport you to the Nazis, to the Germans, even for a sack of potatoes or sugar. Life was nothing, especially for the Jews.

**Jackie Congedo** 37:06

yeah, yeah.

**Zahava Rendler** 37:07

So they didn't they remained in the bunker, only when the war ended. They didn't hear any bombs. It was quiet. They went out. My father, right away went to the Jewish the... to the Polish woman. He had her address from Stachek and asked for me, and she started to cry, and she said she's so sorry, but she had to give me in a nearby, to the nearby convent. Also, when Stachek brought me to her house, my mother gave her all her jewelry. Like to pay for the woman, and right away, she ran to the drawer and she wanted to give him back the jewelry. And he said, No, no, you did a great job, and you sacrificed your life in order that my child will live. And he didn't. She told him that nearby was the convent, and there I am. So he ran to the convent. He knocked on the door. A nun opened him, and he asked, he asked her, "Is Olga Pachulchak, that was my Polish name, in your midst?" and she said, "No, we don't have anybody by that name." So he did not know what to do. He stood there thinking, thinking, and he went back to my mother and sister. My mother that time, we didn't have any more at home. We didn't have anything. So she joined the partisans in the forest with my sister. So he ran there and told her, and he said, "No, I have a feeling that she is in this place." And he kept on coming. And every day, nothing they denied that I am in their midst. And one day, even today, we don't know from where he came with a Polish kielbasa. It's some kind of a sausage. He bribed one of the nuns and she showed him where I am. I was at that time playing in the yard, and she did not, you know, go with him. She just pointed at me. He ran, took me, threw me over the fence, jumped after and started running. He was afraid she will call the authorities and tell them that somebody kidnapped a child. I'm thinking at that time a man comes, grabs you, throws you over the fence, jumps after you, picks you up and runs. But somehow even today, I have the shivers, even today I'm thinking about it. When he hugged me and ran with me, somehow I had some kind of a feeling this is somebody that likes me, that wants me, therefore he runs away with me. He ran to the forest, met my mother and sister, and few days they were in the forest, my mother saw me. She hugged me and kissed me, and it's she never let me go. And I would say, all growing up, she never let me go. I was already a married woman with a child, but were ever, always, always looking what I'm doing after and and everything was just everything for me.

**Jackie Congedo** 42:10

I can't as a mother myself. I just can't imagine that feeling.

**Zahava Rendler** 42:15

I can't, you know, I had a sister that was older. I had a brother that was younger. I was a sandwich child, you know? And everybody said, Oh, my God, you have a little brother. You have an older sister. So who are you? And I said, I am me. My mother is my mother, and she loves me very much. But you know you always have doubts. You always think and are...But I'm always thinking my mother giving me up. How could she give away her baby? And there were many, many years I could not understand it. I could not even forgive her. I did not talk about it till I came to the United States. I befriended a man that was a psychiatrist, also an Israeli, and I told him about this story, and he said, What do you think knowing your mother? And he knew, my mother, is she the person that would give you away, never in a million years, but her belief was so strong in God that she will see you again? That's what happened.

**Jackie Congedo** 43:40

Wow.

**Zahava Rendler** 43:42

So it was a great reunion. Life in Israel.

**Jackie Congedo** 43:47

You went right away - Your family went right away to Israel?

**Zahava Rendler** 43:50

My family was in, I don't know, I don't remember even that part from Poland, somehow they came to Marseille, how? What in France? France? They stayed there for several months, and then they joined a group. It was almost 1946, and they joined a group of also survivors that went illegally to Palestine at that time, it was 46 Israel was established only at 1948.

**Jackie Congedo** 44:50

Not a modern state yet, but many Jews living, not

**Zahava Rendler** 44:53

really a modern state yet. Yes, it was governed. By the British and Arabs. And the British collaborated with the Arabs, so no Jew was allowed even to come into the land. So on their way, they were called in Cyprus,

**Jackie Congedo** 45:20

the ship from France, from France, Cyprus,

**Zahava Rendler** 45:24

Cyprus. They were caught in Cyprus, and they were caught I don't remember exactly how long we were there, but it was probably several months. We were in a DP camp in Cyprus. In Cyprus, that's the first time that I heard English. I must say, life was very good in Cyprus. We were behind barbed wires, but we had clothes, we had food, and we could shower. We could take a bath every day. So it was wonderful. And then one night, we were dressed in with different clothes. I remember wearing shorts and T shirts and a... This was like a little hat that you were wearing, this rainy hat, and put into little boats and went to Israel on the shores, almost of Haifa, we were caught again and again. Put it was like a deacon in attic, but that was already in Palestine near Haifa. We were there a few months. I remember a lot from it. I know that we lived in tents, and all night long, we heard like babies were crying, and I did not know, Only later, growing up and one of the history stories in school, I learned that wolves at night, they cry exactly like babies. This is their bark, or the way that they talk.

**Jackie Congedo** 47:57

So you were in another displaced persons camp in Haifa.

**Zahava Rendler** 48:01

Yes, it was next to Haifa. It was called Atlit

**Zahava Rendler** 48:06

Atlit

**Zahava Rendler** 48:07

Atlit. Even today when you are driving to Haifa, there is a beautiful museum with Holocaust commerce and tents and everything. And tells this story.

**Jackie Congedo** 48:24

This was 1946

**Zahava Rendler** 48:30

then the Arabs were still the British were still

**Jackie Congedo** 48:34

all you'd been through when you were five years old at this point. Yeah,

**Zahava Rendler** 48:39

six and I did not have any shot. I didn't have any childhood till the age of five. Yeah. So must have been nice to be a child and mischievous and do whatever and spoiled and then free and see the sun every day and everything would have been a blessing, but I don't know about it because my life somehow was different, but it completely changed In 1948 when Israel was born. Look at this. It's my homeland. It's my home. I can, I can say only positive things growing up. Yes, there was a war of independence, it was not so pleasant. Ben Gurion, at that time, spoke and

**Jackie Congedo** 49:54

On the loudspeaker

**Zahava Rendler** 49:56

on a loudspeaker, offered the Arabs, please do not leave your homes. We will, together build a new home for the Jews and for the Arabs. Stay in your home. We will build a beautiful country your kids will have exactly the same education as the Israeli kids. You may live wherever you want. This country will be yours too. It will be called Medinat Yisrael, the State of Israel. Everybody was dancing on the street. It was wonderful. All night long, and early in the morning, the Arabs had different plans, and the War of Independence started, most of the Arabs ran away, and even to that's where they are today, suffering in their places, calling themselves Palestine, Palestinian. And look in 75 years, what a beautiful country we have in spite of seven Arab countries that survive us, our kids are educated. We are known for our health, for electronics, for sports, for everything, a beautiful country, and this is the wonderful life that I had in this country till coming to the United States, many times I'm asked, Why are you doing it?

**Jackie Congedo** 52:23

Coming to the United States, United in the 70s, right? Yes,

**Zahava Rendler** 52:27

I came just for five years to study. These five years became close to 60 years. I love the country.

**Jackie Congedo** 52:39

You came to Cincinnati.

**Zahava Rendler** 52:40

I came straight to Cincinnati, and I came with a train from New York straight to this train station in this building.

**Jackie Congedo** 52:55

Wow.

**Zahava Rendler** 52:56

What an excellent experience. I must say the United States was very good to my husband and me. Both obtained a further education. We were very happy. We came with a child that was three years old,

**Jackie Congedo** 53:21

your son,

**Zahava Rendler** 53:22

my son, Nathan, and later on, we had a daughter only, I must say I gave my kids also a wonderful education, and even my grandkids, a wonderful education. So I love this country, and I just yearn for one thing, for peace, peace in Israel, peace in the United States and peace in the world. I think we all yearn for peace, and years ago, I joined I learned that there is a chance that the Holocaust center will open, so I tried to join it. I was successful, and I was one of the founders, and somebody asked me, "Why, why are you doing it?" And I said, "Why? First of all, I'm so happy that there would be a place that will take... tell my story and other stories of survivors that we were here. We once had a wonderful life, and unfortunately it changed, and if these people that are not here today cannot speak. I became their voice. I will talk for them. I will fight anti semitism and prejudism and also I hope that my children's and grandchildren's future will never be my best." And as I said, I'm grateful for everything. But I always say I'm Israel high the people of Israel live and I'm grateful that we have such a great ally the United States. And I'm so grateful for this beautiful center, and we are so lucky to have Jackie Congedo leading us. I'm very proud of you. Thank you for all the hard work that you do

**Jackie Congedo** 56:19

Well, it means the world to me to hear that from you, because of what you have given this organization, because of what you've given the city, all the people you've you've shared your story with probably 1000s at this point, throughout the years, and and you, you know, you became a teacher. I mean, you have

**Zahava Rendler** 56:41

right, and I'm, you know what? One thing I don't know, if it's not too late to edit. I became a teacher a week after I came to the United States. I was lucky that I am a teacher. I taught for 50 years at Yavne. Today it is called Rockwern Academy. I educated 1000s of students. I was a member in the Judaic Studies department and just teaching so many children. I taught, also in the cities, Jewish High School, afternoon schools, that basically I was all over the place, but I don't regret it. I can say that I educated many, many students, and even today, I am invited to their children's Bar or Bat Mitzvah and sometimes weddings part of their family. So it is a part of a beautiful, beautiful family. And I think this is what Cincinnati is, especially the Jewish community, very close, very close family.

**Jackie Congedo** 58:22

I have two other

**Zahava Rendler** 58:22

and thank you.

**Jackie Congedo** 58:24

Well, you can't get off that easy. I have two other questions for you before we stop. The first is, you talk, you know, I was watching your whole posture change when you talked about Israel, and I would love for you to share the story when you were in Israel and you were watching the Eichmann trial. So because what's so beautiful, one of the things I think, Zahava, that's so beautiful about your story is that you know this miracle of your survival, your family's survival, and what comes of that, right? What comes of that is, is this beautiful teaching of Jewish tradition and Jewish life that you get to do for 50 years, a family that you have, and this moment when you are in Israel, watching on the television the trial of Eichmann, right? One of the perpetrators, one of the leaders, one of the Nazi leaders. What were you doing when that was happening, when you were watching this on the television, and how were you feeling about this?

**Zahava Rendler** 59:32

Well, we were all very excited that Eichmann was caught. A butcher, a murderer for so many 6 million Jews, and here I just had my baby. I. We just finished the Brit

**Jackie Congedo** 1:00:06

the bris,

**Zahava Rendler** 1:00:06

Milah, yeah, yeah, and it was so beautiful. And every single day we listened to the radio, and I was holding my baby in my arms, and I was so grateful. And what a coincidence. We gave him a name, Natan. Natan means gave, and what was the quotation? Natan Hashem, God gave my reward. Here I have a baby. I am a baby. Was a baby that was not even supposed to live. And here I gave birth to a baby in my beloved country and listening to the terrible, terrible monster that is on trial, God, for sure, gave me my reward,

**Jackie Congedo** 1:01:19

the justice of that right,

**Zahava Rendler** 1:01:21

also the justice the miracle of death. I am holding my baby in my hand, a dead monster will never make it. He will be tried for justice.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:01:41

Incredible. And so what a full circle. God

**Zahava Rendler** 1:01:45

yes, works in mysterious ways. And I'm so happy to be here today and tell my story. As a matter of fact, my son was here recently. He was already few times here, and every time he goes to see his picture and the quotation here in the museum. And he said, Mom, you never told me. And I said, Well, I knew that you will come one day and see it is a miracle. It is my son, incredible. His own family. He lives in San Diego. He has five kids. Unfortunately, my daughter know best away, but my children carry the Jewish tradition, and they also have the love for the State of Israel,

**Jackie Congedo** 1:02:56

and they will carry on your story, your family's story, this miracle of

**Zahava Rendler** 1:03:02

always

**Jackie Congedo** 1:03:02

Survival

**Zahava Rendler** 1:03:02

They are very, very involved with all these things here, but in San Diego.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:03:12

The last question I have for you. We're living during a time of so much turmoil rise and antisemitism. You know, your son was the one of the first people in San Diego on scene after the shooting at the synagogue the Chabad in San Diego, Poway, in the midst of what feels like a really challenging, dark time in so many ways, you manage to find the hope and the light. And you're always telling me, "Jackie, it's going to be okay, it's going to be okay." How do you maintain that spirit of hope and positivity in the midst of challenging times that we're living in?

**Zahava Rendler** 1:04:02

So I will look back to the Bible, to our high history. In every generation, somebody comes to kill us, to destroy us, and God saves us from their hands. It is a quotation from the Haggadah every single year we read it in the Haggadah, which is the Passover story and Jewish survival from the hands of Pharaoh in Egypt. So in every generation, if you will, count and look, somebody came to destroy us. Antisemitism is a terrible. A virus, virus exactly and not only that, prejudism is exactly the same hatred. Hatred does not have room in our society. Hatred can bring only killing of innocent people. So how can we get rid of it? By being together, by sticking together by having places like that,

**Jackie Congedo** 1:05:47

learning about each other, learning

**Zahava Rendler** 1:05:49

each other, respecting other people, respecting other religions. And not only that, today we have wonderful schools, and I think it's our obligation to educate each faculty member. What does it mean to be hateful? I think it comes only from ignorance. And the United States has such great teachers, if they will only come and learn about us, learn about other people, they can prevent all the hatreds. The United States is one of the richest country countries, and they can buy all the supplies, all the books and everything that is necessary to give out to students, to family members, just to learn what happened and educate others only, then it will not happen again. It's not just the Jewish religion, each religion we have to respect each other and always be together.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:07:25

Well, you certainly are doing your part, educating for your whole life, and all the work that you do at the center the fact that your story is here, touching 1000s and 1000s of people in this museum and in all of the work that we do, and we're so grateful to you for a lifetime of teaching and educating and sharing what is a incredibly challenging, painful story in so many ways for you. So thank you for your courage, for your stamina, for your hope, because it certainly fills me up, and I know that. I know that everyone who's watching, I'm sure feels the same way. So thank you for spending time with us today.

**Zahava Rendler** 1:08:11

Thank you. But I must say, this place is my hope, because I can go sleep quietly, because I know somebody is carrying my torch, and somebody will be always for the Jewish people here and all people in the world,

**Jackie Congedo** 1:08:39

the lessons, the lessons that we can use for humanity, right?

**Zahava Rendler** 1:08:42

Thank you. That's really the lessons that we can use for humanity.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:08:49

This knows we thank you. Thank you. To make sure you don't miss an episode, subscribe to our channel on YouTube. Let us know your thoughts on this episode. Our email is in the show notes. You can also connect with us on Instagram and Tiktok @holocaustandhumanity and X and Facebook @CincyHHC. Hear My Story is a production of the Nancy & David Wolf Holocaust & Humanity Center. The Center's mission is to ensure that the lessons of the Holocaust inspire action today. This series is part of the Cynthia & Harold Gutman Family Center for Storytelling, and is generously supported by Margaret and Michael Valentine. Visit us in person at historic union terminal in Cincinnati, Ohio, or online at Holocaustandhumanity.org. Managing producer is Anne Thompson. Consulting producer is Joyce Kamen. Technical Producer is Robert Mills. Technical Director is Josh Emerson. Select music is by Kick Lee. This is recorded at the Nancy & David Wolf Holocaust & Humanity Center in Cincinnati, Ohio.