Hear My Story Beth Silvers and Sarah Stewart Holland 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** 00:21

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,

**Elisha Wiesel** 00:41

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.

**Jackie Congedo** 00:48

These stories will change you. They will move you to action, inspiring the best of humanity every day.

**Jackie Congedo** 01:01

I'm Jackie Congedo. In this episode, I'm joined by two Kentucky women who were honored at the Cohen family 2024 upstander awards, Beth Silvers and Sarah Stewart Holland, are the Co-hosts of the Pantsuit Politics podcast and winners of the Irwin Hurley award for perspective, for the way that they bring diverse perspectives into a conversation across differences with one another. Irwin Hurley was a US Army captain from Northern Kentucky who was assigned to lead a unit of Black enlisted men as World War II played out in Europe. Hurley felt great empathy for the men in his unit as they faced intense discrimination at home. Beth and Sarah sat down with me to talk about receiving this award, what it means to them, and how the character strength of perspective and the virtue of wisdom show up in their daily lives and work.

**Jackie Congedo** 01:49

So amazing to be here with these two incredible women who are joining us in our museum to talk about their work that they're doing, which, again, is really hard work, sometimes deeply unpopular work, but important work, and who were recognized for that work at our upstander awards this year, Beth Silvers and Sarah Stewart Holland of the Pantsuit Politics podcast. So we have a lot to talk about. This is going to be an action packed episode, because we have three talkers up here. But before we get into, you know, the podcast and the work that you all are doing, I want to start with how our stories converged. And that was June 2 at the upstander awards. And sort of leading up to that, after you all found out that you were nominated and then selected as finalists, tell me a little bit well, actually, maybe first we should share with folks who are listening and watching a little bit about what the award that you won was. So this was the Irwin Hurley award for perspective, and for those who don't know a lot about our upstander awards. Every year, we recognize amazing upstanders doing great things for our world and our communities with awards that are named after our survivors, liberators and other upstanders, and they're always named sort of through the connection of a character strength, one of our 24 character strengths, the via, via character strengths. And so this award was an award for perspective in honor of Irwin Hurley and his life and work. And I wonder if you all would want to just share a little bit about what you've learned about Irwin or sort of, yeah, what you took away from from the history as it relates to this award?

**Beth Silvers** 03:33

Well, I'll say that when you say amazing people doing amazing things. I came to the breakfast where I met the other finalists and was blown away by the room of people, and thought this was really lovely for us to be included, but there is no way we will be, you know, awarded something among this group of people, I was just so impressed with with the quality of work being done and the spirit with which it was happening.

**Beth Silvers** 03:58

When we received the award. I was so privileged to meet Irwin's family, and when I came up on stage, they said, can we find you after? Where's your table? And they came over and they gave me a letter that Irwin had written to his wife while he was serving overseas, and in that letter, he shared just what he was seeing on the ground and his concern, maybe frustration, that there was any denial of how brutal the Holocaust was and the war was coming to an end, but there was such a pain that came through in this letter, and such a commitment to expressing that pain and helping other people grab on to the tentacles of this experience. And what I can't stop thinking about from the letter is how he expressed his his empathy for German youth, yeah, who had only known Hitler and had only known this worldview and this perspective and his his worry about what the future would look like, given that kids had grown up that way, but there was... a there was a care for them in the process, too. And so that connection to perspective made a lot of sense to me, and it it really increased the honor and humility that we feel receiving that award.

**Jackie Congedo** 05:19

Yeah, yeah. And perspective is such an appropriate award, if I do say so myself, for you two, because of the ethos of what pantsuit politics is all about the work that you're doing together. And again, we're going to talk about that. So So, yeah, just to pick up Beth on sort of, you know, Irwin story. So Irwin Hurley was a liberator. He was a, you know, Catholic guy from Northern Kentucky who was drafted in 1942 into the into the army, and he was commissioned as a second lieutenant. And he, he, you know, this, his story of service abroad is actually only part of the story, right? The other part of the story is what was happening at home in this country at that time, in the 1940s and, you know, throughout the war, related to the segregation, and you know, the really horrific treatment in many cases of people of color in this country. And he was really close to that, because the army was segregated at the time, and he was in charge of a unit of all Black men, and so he was in this dynamic of sort of leading a group of people who had a very different lived experience day to day than he had, and he was proximate to the struggle and to the to the humanity of people who were treated very differently doing the same work, had the same humanity, but were treated really differently, and so much so that actually one of the men in his battalion was murdered while he was on leave from the army because he refused to sit in the back of a bus, and a white bus driver was angry about that, and and he was and he killed him.

**Jackie Congedo** 07:11

So here's Irwin watching this, digesting it, and then tasked with having to be on the front lines of a liberation effort that was about justice, that was about freedom for people who had been so horrifically treated and oppressed in, you know, in Europe. And so he held these perspectives with him, and as you so beautifully said that, you know, the letter that he wrote his his wife after liberation, he was one of the liberators at Dachau, at the concentration camp, that after seeing this cruelty, the first thing that maybe it wasn't the first thing, but the thing that he thought to write about was, of of course, how brutal and horrific this was, and how the world must remember and how are we, how are we distinguishing ourselves from the people we hate? How are we not becoming them? How do we think about what's our responsibility to the youth, as you said, of Germany, to make sure that we're we're caring for them in a way that brings them along, in a human way, in a way that can elevate everybody's empathy and humanity. And that is a really beautiful trait, and it's something I think that the both of you have because of the work that you're doing. So I wonder if now I've talked a lot, Sarah, if you want to share a little bit more about before we leave the you know the conversation about the award, what your thoughts were when you heard about this award? Had you heard of this organization before? Did you know, like, give me a little bit of your

**Sarah Stewart Holland** 08:54

No, I'm not from the Cincinnati area. I'm from far western Kentucky in Paducah. And so when we found out about this, because we had been talking so much recently about international conflicts and violence, and were really trying to, you know, walk that careful line when there are a lot of really, really intense perspectives surrounding an issue and high stakes and high stakes, and high stakes, and it had been really difficult, and I've been really emotional. So I was just, you know, deeply honored to feel, I tear up easy, don't become alarmed. Everyone to feel seen in the work that we had done. That's what people you know. That's what everybody wants. They want someone to say, I see what you're doing, you know. And so I was just so honored. And the more I learned about the organization and the awards, I think it's so special to link these values to individuals and their stories, because the further away we get from the events of World War Two, I. Think the easier it is for the event itself, in that whole era of history, to become this two dimensional story, and the more you can put some texture, put these individual stories around it. So I think it's so ingenious to link them to values and to individuals, and to to push those stories and perspectives and investments we all have in humanity forward in this way.

**Sarah Stewart Holland** 10:33

You know, I was just on a trip to Japan with my family, and we went to Hiroshima, and that's another aspect of the war that just becomes so big, it's hard to take in and just and to do, to see the individual faces and the individual stories, and to understand what Irwin did, which is you have to hold it all. There's a beautiful part of her at Hiroshima where they they were trying to memorialize something, and people were angry, like they felt like it wasn't putting enough blame in the right places. And the memorializers were like, the blame, or whatever you want to call it, what we must hold is for all of humanity to hold this, not just one country, just not just one person, but all of humanity must hold what happened, both good and bad during this time. And it strikes me and definitely why I'm so deeply honored to get this award that Irwin saw that, to see that so soon, as a testament, it takes a lot of time when you're memorializing something over decades to get to that point, but to be there as a liberator and see immediately. Now we there's a lot of complexity that we have to hold. We have our own monstrous things that we have to recognize and and keep in perspective this entire time. That's that's super human, in a way, that's a really hard place to get so soon.

**Jackie Congedo** 11:52

What I love about what you shared is this idea of holding so much. It's like really, for people who are doing that work, particularly as the environment further polarizes. It gets so heavy and it feels really lonely, which is why I think what you all are doing with this podcast is so special because, because it's like a glimmer of light that there are people who are thinking deeply about things in ways that centers the humanity of the other side, in ways that allows for conversation and relationship across these like seemingly intractable differences that we have. And I think we just need to see that modeled. We need to see that it's possible. We need to know that there's that, that you're not alone in the world if you're trying to, if you're trying to do those things. Tell me a little bit about your journey in this podcast. And first, like you guys are friends, obviously. I mean, just take me back to the beginning, where your friendship started, and how you've gotten where you are today. Around this podcast work well,

**Sarah Stewart Holland** 12:51

Beth and I went to college together, and we weren't particularly close to college. We were sorority sisters, and we were in the same grade and as a tiny liberal art so we were, you know, closer than most people probably are at bigger schools, but we stayed in touch after college, sort of through Facebook, as people did in the early aughts and

**Beth Silvers** 13:10

that really dates us

**Sarah Stewart Holland** 13:10

yeah. And then we both had children around the same time, and had reconnected around natural childbirth, actually, and so I had been running a parenting blog where I would just roll in with a political post. I would like do a stroller review, and then I would talk about the Syrian civil war. I did not care. And Beth was on maternity leave and reached out and said, "Would you ever want a guest post?" And I'm like, "Absolutely, because that's one I don't have to write." And so she did a guest post... a couple, and one was called "Nuance," and it was about like, "I cannot sum up my entire humanity in one social media post." That's back when we were arguing about, like, Cecil the lion, our bless, our sweet hearts. And so it went over really well with my little audience. And my husband had been arguably harassing me to start a podcast. He was like, you'd be so good at it. The time is right. You should really do it. And I thought about doing an interview podcast, and I did one interview, and it just sat there. I didn't I like to be the one at being asked questions, not answering questions or asking them. And so I reached out to her, and I said, "Would you ever want to start a podcast?" And she said, "What's podcast?" And I said, "Don't worry, my husband has it all figured out." And we did like, a test call. I said, Let's just talk on the phone. And we thought maybe we'd talk about Kentucky politics, and we talked on the phone for like an hour as I drove around my town because my youngest child was sleeping in the back seat. And after about like 45 minutes, I said, "We're not gonna do this anymore unless we're recording it," because we had really good conversational chemistry from the beginning, our personalities, you know, we have similar lives, but very different personalities, and they complement each other beautifully. And that was evident from the very, very beginning.

**Jackie Congedo** 14:48

And you all have different political perspective. I mean, we all do, right? It's like, that's part of the problem here. I am feeding into it this like binary of like, you're here and you're here, but in our system, that. We understand politics in you come from different perspectives on on issues.

**Beth Silvers** 15:06

When we started the show, I was a registered Republican, Sarah was a registered Democrat. I always held that a little bit more loosely than than Sarah did. You know Sarah is very committed to the party and has run for office and been an elected official. I'm more of a news junkie, like I care more about the news than the political aspect of it. So we I was more conservative, she was more liberal, and we told people, as a shortcut, that's what we're doing. Right woman from the right, woman from the left. I pretty quickly started to get emails from people on the right explaining to me that I was not a good representative of the right for them, and the right changed pretty dramatically. We started the show in November of 2015 which became an earthquake for the right and what the Republican Party represented. So over time, I changed my registration to Democrat. I changed it back to Republican so I could vote in local elections. I always tell people, I hope that my party identification is the least interesting thing about me.

**Jackie Congedo** 16:08

Yeah, I love that.

**Beth Silvers** 16:08

I think that there are issues on which Sarah is much more progressive than I am. There are some issues where I'm more progressive than she is. I think about things like prison reform and bail and incarceration in general. So we're both fluid, and I hope getting more fluid and more difficult to characterize as we get older, because we spend so much time thinking and learning about these issues.

**Jackie Congedo** 16:35

Yeah, and probably, like you said, it's dynamic, because the entire nature of what you're doing is about, it's, it's like, iterative, right? So it, it's like, the fact that you're in this relationship and you're in conversation with each other and with your audience is a living, breathing thing, right? And, and the fact that you're up for that, right? But that, that's the whole premise of it, is that to engage in that kind of transform transformative conversation. You have to be, I think you have to be Have you have to have the humility to know that, like, maybe I'm not seeing the full picture. Maybe there's something I'm missing, maybe someone else has something valuable to add to this conversation. There's, like, a healthy level of humility and curiosity that comes with that. And so, yeah, I mean, shame on me for even asking that question. Because the reality is, the whole thing is dynamic. That's the point.

**Sarah Stewart Holland** 17:27

Well, I think it's in part because of the medium too. You can't skim a podcast and just find the things you want to be mad about. You could try, but you could try, but it would be fool's errand. I mean, it's also a very intimate medium. People spend hours a week with us, in their ears, they feel like they're in conversation with us. We hear all the time. I know we're not friends, but I feel like we are, and I would say we are friends. We have a type of relationship with our listeners, even the ones we've never met or talked to. You know a lot about me, and I know a lot about them, you know, even if I don't know their individual lives in detail, and I think that's part of what's been so rewarding and has allowed that curiosity and that vulnerability is because the medium itself rewards that. It's not a comment thread. The worst moments of interaction often they're not even members of our audience. They're just people who roll into our Instagram or our Facebook feed and find something to be mad about, and pretty quickly, our listeners will be like, "Are you new here? Do you actually listen to the podcast? Like, what are you talking about?" Because we so rarely get that with people who listen to the podcast regularly. That's a that's a pretty rare occurrence, because it is collaborative in a way. You know, they work on us. We work on them. You know, some of the best comments we get is when people say, look, I was mad the first time I listened, but then I listened against or like, you know, we get a lot of what you are hard pressed to find in modern politics, which is the benefit of the doubt. People assume goodwill with us. They they've spent a lot of hours with us, and they even if we say something that they think is wrong or they strongly disagree with they built up a lot of capital with us along the way so that they don't assume the worst from something we've said, because that's what we do with each other online. We assume the worst. We don't give goodwill. We don't assume good motives or good intent. It's the opposite. And so that's what's been so rewarding about this work is because the way the medium works and the way we've built our audience in the way we are in communication constantly with our audience, has allowed that flow of goodwill and communication that really frees us to be humble and curious and vulnerable. Yeah,

**Beth Silvers** 19:36

and Jackie, you said, you know, maybe, maybe I'm missing something. What I've learned doing this for nine years now is I'm always missing something. I'm, for sure, missing something every conversation we have, we sometimes will articulate on the podcast like, "Hey, this is just one conversation. It's a huge issue. It can't contain everything. I'm certain that you'll tell me what I've missed," and they and and the audience does. Yes, I realized early on that this was gonna be the most fascinating work of my life. When we had a conversation about 9/11 and we were just talking about how the buildings collapsed, we wanted to do a series for people who are quite a bit younger than us and don't know much about 9/11 and and after we released the episode about the buildings collapsing, we got an email from like, a thermonuclear engineer who had really studied that issue and wanted to tell us more about the physics of it. And I thought, I want to do this. I want to do this forever. I love that. Everything we talk about, we hear from someone who knows it better than we do. And so I just now start with like, "What? What am I missing?" I'm sure that I am, and it's great. I feel like if, if learning in public is my job, that's the best job in the world, and if we could all bring more of that orientation to politics, like every one of these questions is hard, and I am definitely missing something, right? Um, it just, it really breaks you down and opens you up.

**Jackie Congedo** 20:57

Yeah? And that gives me so much hope that you know you all are have a wildly popular podcast, how many listeners on average?

**Beth Silvers** 21:04

I mean, it's a it's a hard industry to know the metric

**Sarah Stewart Holland** 21:06

They don't really tell us, is the problem.

**Jackie Congedo** 21:08

Okay, fair enough, but, but you know, you've been featured on, you know, major cable news station. I mean, this is something you guys have dedicated most of your time to, yes and and you have great uptake. And so that makes me feel really hopeful, right, that despite what headlines want to tell us about how divided we are or how polarized we are, that actually there are a lot of people who are craving that space of nuance, the curiosity, a space of curiosity and learning, that actually want maybe to be challenged or to challenge in a way that you know always centers and doesn't ignore the humanity of someone else. I just think that is so important. We think, you know, we think about our upstander work here as one of the biggest lessons, I think, coming out of this chapter of history is that when extremism, extremism leads to very dangerous things, and when people lose faith in the fact that we can actually govern ourselves, that we can figure this out together, that that there are people who think differently than I do, who are still good, who still have humanity in them. That is actually what open space creates space for extremist ideas and views and and footholds right and and one of the biggest dangers and threats, I think, of extremism, as we see in this chapter of history, is the idea of dehumanization. And what happens when people are dehumanized. And so in our upstander work, you know, if I hope that people come through this museum and they leave with one thing, it's because we wrestle with this sometimes, like, you know, people are coming through and they're learning about their strengths, and they're learning how to stand up to injustice. Well, the question is, my justice is your injustice, right? That's, there's that's like in the eyes of the beholder, right? And so what do I hope everyone leaves with is that when they stand up, that they do it in a way that recognizes and honors the humanity that we all have together, right? It's this idea of pursuit of justice in a way that inspires other people to come with you, in a way that grounds what you're doing in our shared humanity. And so I think that, I think you guys are modeling that, and it gives me a lot of hope to see that people are hungry for that. What's one of the you mentioned, you know, this thermonuclear expert who what's, what's one of the hardest moments that you've had in your conversations over the last how many years have you been doing this?

**Beth Silvers** 23:52

Nine

**Jackie Congedo** 23:53

Okay, so almost a decade. Was there a moment where you're like, Ali, I don't know if we can keep doing this. This is,

**Sarah Stewart Holland** 23:59

um, well, I think to what you were saying about how many people are hungry for this in politics, there's always a real 80/20 situation that the 20% are the loudest. Social media amplifies those voices. The most common political perspective in America is someone who's checked out of politics. That's the largest group of people...are the people who really want to just withdraw

**Beth Silvers** 24:23

and getting bigger.

**Sarah Stewart Holland** 24:24

And when you when you force a binary where people can't find themselves, it encourages them to withdraw. That's what's so hard to convey to people who care deeply, is when you make it I'm good and they're bad, and people don't 100% agree with either side. They just check out. And if you're organizing, that's not what you want.

**Jackie Congedo** 24:43

And checking out benefits the extremists.

**Sarah Stewart Holland** 24:44

Yes, absolutely. And I think that that's, that's what's just so hard to convey, is because people think, well, the stakes are so high, it has to be that I am good and they are bad because the stakes are so high. Bono has a memoir that's fabulous, and I highly recommend it. I. And he's done a lot of work around social justice, and he talks about like, when he was working in Africa that, well, I'm working for children, so that means I'm on the right side. And everything I say is right, right, wrong. That's not how it works. It doesn't matter how good your cause is. If you start to dehumanize, if you start to turn the other side into bad, evil, no good, then there are risks. Then you're, you're, you're stepping into dangerous territory. I don't think it's an accident that we, you know that we do that so often around World War Two. What's the first word we all go to Nazi. You're in being a Nazi. They're a Nazi. You know, like, I think that that, that that desperate need, especially when something is impossibly, the act itself is impossibly, evil and hard to face that we want to do this, this really two dimensional painting of everything and to in the the hardest moments on our podcast is when the stakes are high and people want to do that, and we say, But wait. You know around the confirmation of Justice Kavanaugh, any election, issues around abortion? Absolutely,

**Sarah Stewart Holland** 24:51

I just watched a fantastic documentary called The Basement Tapes where, in the 90s, in Boston, they had two really horrific acts of violence to get abortion clinics against abortion clinics where two receptionists were killed. And as a result, three leaders of the pro life side and three leaders of the pro choice side met in secret for 10 years to talk. And

**Jackie Congedo** 26:31

that's a story I didn't even know existed.

**Sarah Stewart Holland** 26:33

Yeah, exactly. And there's lots of those. And they in the very beginning, they had to decide how to talk what words are we going to use? Because they put all the words that they felt were incendiary to either side up on the board. And one participant was like, I don't know what we're going to talk about. We don't have any words left. Of course, one of the central ones they had to decide is what to call the fetus or baby, because people use both words, and they're both incendiary to either side. And so when you were talking about centering humanity, what they ultimately decided to say was human fetus. That's what they that was the compromise they reached. And I thought, I get that, I like that. That's going to be the language I adopt, human fetus. And I because it's what's the first word there, human and I think that that's such a hard thing to do. So in those moments where everyone is livid when you say but the other side is human too, then it's really hard. People do not want to hear that. They want you to rah, rah with them and say they're the worst. How could they That's disgusting. Their it's a garbage fire, their dumpster fire, and they're human garbage, neurologically, like, feels good. Yeah.

**Sarah Stewart Holland** 27:42

So, I mean, listen, I love being self righteous. It's my favorite emotion. But it is a siren song, man, it is a siren song. And so and those moments where we have to push back and say, it's not that simple, they're not just the worst. We still have to live in community with these people. They are still human beings like that. Those are the hardest moments, because people don't want to hear it. They just don't,

**Jackie Congedo** 28:05

yeah, and I think that's where what you're doing bumps up against what we're doing in education, because so often, like, where's the missing link? Why can't we understand each other? And it because we don't have, you know, we don't have the awareness or education about someone else's perspective, or their lived experience, or what are you hearing in this rhetoric that makes you say hooray, and makes me say like I'm disgusted by that, right? That there's a difference in lived experience, which is a part of it, that is education, right? Like how you go about the world, the things that you learn, you know what you're doing on your in your day to day, informs your worldview, informs how you show up and what you prioritize and how you act. And so I think that you know one of the big the opportunity, and opportunity in this moment is just trying again to be more curious and to learn to just develop a an app healthy appetite for knowing that you're probably just not getting it all. There's probably something you're missing.

**Jackie Congedo** 29:06

So I want to talk about the strength of perspective. There's a lot of strengths I see in the two of you. Do you think that so? So perspective, actually, before I ask the question, is a strength actually within the category of wisdom? So there's, there's six categories of strengths according to the VIA classification of strengths. Can learn more if you're interested on our website, and one of those categories is wisdom, and perspective is the strength that lives within wisdom. Would you for a minute, just tell me about how you think about the strength of perspective and that value of wisdom when you think about each other, like, when you know Sarah, when you look at Beth and Beth, when you look at Sarah, like, what about the person who has different opinions about certain things reminds you of their wisdom.

**Beth Silvers** 30:07

I think I've learned a lot from Sarah, and one of the the main things that I've learned from Sarah is that you can, I always joke about her emotional elasticity. She said she tear it up, and then she can tear up, and then she can be like, right back into her string of thought. If I tear up, like, we're gonna need about half a day for me to recover from that. I do not have that ability to move in and out. But what I've learned from that that's much deeper than than that ability to tear up and keep talking, is that she can also be really angry about something while holding the humanity of others. She can be really frustrated with a person and still love them very deeply, like she's always able to kind of hold a paradox emotionally. I think a lot of people can learn to hold a paradox intellectually, but Sarah can hold it like in her cells and and that creates a lot of space. You can explore more when you're willing to say, "This really makes me mad, and I'm okay. You are so wrong about this, and I love you. I think you're great. I want to spend more time with you." You know, she, she just really has a gift in that way that I think allows for more perspective and for more wisdom to be created, because nothing is off limits when you're able to hold all those things together.

**Jackie Congedo** 31:28

So beautiful. There she goes again.

**Sarah Stewart Holland** 31:29

I know don't worry. She's pinching my hand so that I don't totally lose it. Um, I think when we started the podcast, I was in a very like debate driven frame of mind. And I anybody would have told you that I like to argue. I like to argue. I like to feel self righteous. I like to feel liked I'm trying to use past tense. I liked to feel that I was making all the best points, exercising all my emotions surrounding the situation in Enneagram One. I feel I'm motivated by justice. I feel sort of the black and white of things very strongly. And, you know, almost a decade in partnership with Beth. What I've watched her do from the beginning, and what I've learned from her really profoundly, is the art of persuasion, which is completely different.

**Sarah Stewart Holland** 32:35

I think for so long, my politics was about me, it wasn't about other people, and watching her, who's an Enneagram Two, who's always motivated by other people, really taught me to think about, what am I doing? Is this about me? Is this to make me feel better, or is this to persuade the other person? Is this to influence the other person? Is this to make, you know, make space for different ways of viewing and different ways of being and different outcomes? I think I thought I was a pragmatist. I think I thought that I was putting in the good fight, and I would just, you know, send the right article, and they'd really see the light, and the scales would fall from their eyes, and it'd be great. But I think the the ability she has to articulate her perspective, her changing perspective, the sincerity with which she will share where she is from a sincere place of care for where the other person is, is something I've learned from her, and that's really just chipped away at my own wall of, you know, self preservation.

**Sarah Stewart Holland** 33:43

 And, you know, I sit in this space and I think about, you know, so many survivors, and the books we read and the philosophy that came out of so many Holocaust survivors is so much. There's, there's not self righteousness. It's not, this is what they did wrong, and this is why they were the worst. It's you can choose. The only choice you get is how you react. You know, Elie Wiesel, like this is the choice you get is how you respond to something that's it, and how powerful that is. And, I mean, I thought that I was operating from a place of power, but I think watching Beth, over nine years, I've seen the power of influence and that that that is the power to take in someone's life, is to play the long game and to say, I love you and I want to continue to influence you, and I can't do that if you shut down because I'm shaming you and gilding you. Because I think I'm right.

**Jackie Congedo** 34:36

Wow, are there people who have you gotten any feedback from your audience? And I've read a little bit about folks who have, like, rejoined their family, or who have decided to, like, have dinner again with someone who they had sworn off. Like, could you give me an example of of something that has bounced back at you from people who've listened that really brings you hope, or that like has shown. That what you're putting out there really makes the difference for people.

**Sarah Stewart Holland** 35:03

I mean, there's just so many people voting for the first time, people running for office, people staying in marriages, people leaving marriages. I mean, it's we have a little Christmas Card Exchange where our listeners send us their Christmas cards, and it is just the most powerful thing to hold someone story in your hand and say like you influenced me. I mean, the most powerful for me individually doesn't have to do with politics, but my youngest son was diagnosed with type one diabetes, and I told the story of his diagnosis, and I get, I've gotten probably five or seven cards that that were, "The story saved my child's life because I saw what was happening with my child, because you told what happened to yours." And there's just a million different versions of that. "You articulated how I felt, so I was able to articulate it with my father, and he heard me for the first time." Or, "I felt like I had the words. I found the words through your words to say what was important to me."

**Sarah Stewart Holland** 36:04

You know, one of the biggest things we emphasize is that you don't have to be an expert to participate in these conversations. One of the the motivating principles from Pantsuit Politics from the beginning was that, you know, I, as an overtly political person, was like a safe space for people to talk about politics, particularly women. And I wanted people to feel that, to understand like you don't have to know the ins and outs of Middle Eastern policy to participate in American political life. And I'm so proud of the messages we get where people say like, "I was so intimidated by the news. It depressed me, but I found a space with Pantsuit Politics, to be a citizen, to go to a meeting, to vote for the first time, to run for office. What, you know, to go to my kids school and participate there." Whatever it is, opening up that path to people, to... for them, to not shut down. You know, to not do that. There's only two ways to be, and if you're not one of these two ways, then there's no space for you. But creating people, space for people to participate is, you know, just an incredible, incredible gift. And I'm so grateful for the work. For that reason,

**Beth Silvers** 37:11

it's so personal, too. I mean, I I think about a listener who very early in us starting the show, reached out and said, "I've decided that you're going to be my internet aunt." He was he was young, he was gay, his family was not very supportive. He was kind of on the path to estrangement. And so I became his internet aunt, and he reached out every now and then and told me what was going on in his life. And we would text. And years later, he came to Cincinnati for his birthday. We went out for his birthday to celebrate. He sent me when he got a new job and had to make a slide show about himself, a picture of me in it, where he was like, "This is my internet aunt, everybody." What's so beautiful is like when his first email was, "I can't believe that women from the South who identify as Christian. You know, I would never have imagined a Kentucky woman of your age sounding like someone who cares about me." Wow, and and now he is reunited with his family, and I get pictures of him with his mom, and to get to walk alongside someone who's who's doing the really courageous work of keeping those relationships and building those relationships. It's incredible. And and we have, we do have so many stories like that. And you can... when I just think, like I sit in my closet and talk to my friend about things that I think are interesting, and here's what, here's what I get to witness because of that. It's, it's just such a gift.

**Sarah Stewart Holland** 38:43

It's really powerful to watch people get married and have babies, and people who started listening to us in high school who are now like getting their first jobs. I think the the hardest one for me is I know that there are listeners who passed away, and we just don't ever know. That's the one we don't get to know about. That's really, really hard, that we know they're parts of our community that we're losing, yeah, but unless their, like, best friend is a listener or something, we don't know that. And that's something, you know, we try to hold the whole life cycle at Pantsuit Politics and the difficult parts of life. So that one's hard, I mean, but we have listeners who go through cancer treatment and reach out to us and start businesses, and just being a part of their lives along that whole journey is just, it's, it's, I would say it's, it's the gift of my life, like, it's incredibly powerful.

**Jackie Congedo** 39:26

Wow. I want to ask a question about capacity and the ability, you know, the gifts that you both have to hold all of this right, and how hard that is. It just occurred to me, like, and you know, Sarah, you were talking about your evolution from a place of debate to a place of wanting to understand and persuasion and the personal growth that comes with that. Like, how do you you know if someone's listening or watching this and they're like, Wow, that's kind of an interesting way to be. I can't imagine myself being that way. How. Do I get there? Like, how do I get to a place where I can hold...

**Sarah Stewart Holland** 40:02

 lots of tears, tissues and tears,

**Jackie Congedo** 40:06

and also, like, I mean, what would you say? How do you... how do you grow your capacity to hold different perspectives, to hold nuance, to consider things differently, and how do you evolve like that?

**Beth Silvers** 40:22

I don't think the level on which we do it is for everyone, you know. So I'll start there. Like I don't think you have to be able to, because it is especially you know. Sarah referenced the Kavanaugh hearings earlier, our email became flooded with stories of sexual assault during those hearings. It is not for everyone to hold all of that that that is a skill set that we've developed. We've seen therapists, you know what I mean, like, we've brought a lot of support to be able to do that. That's not for everyone.

**Beth Silvers** 40:53

One of the things I say all the time is just to remember, around politics, when you are sitting with your family, you do not have to reach a conclusion. You do not have to get up from the Thanksgiving table with comprehensive immigration reform legislation. You don't have to endorse a candidate as a family. So I think it's really about lowering the stakes and lowering the expectation for yourself and saying, I just want to remain connected to my people, because that opportunity to influence only happens if it's mutual. You can't influence someone who's not influencing you back then you've made them a project, and nobody wants to be someone else's project.

**Beth Silvers** 41:31

So, you know, people reach out and say, like, gosh, my uncle just drives me bananas with his rants about this and that. And I think he's listening to a totally different information universe than me. What do I do? And we always start with like, do you like some sports, like, what do you all... what...what did you talk about before this became a thing? Go back to that. Layer the hard stuff in, but don't make your relationship about that tension point. The ability to stay connected with our families, I think, is politically transformative. I think the reason that we have the divisiveness that we do today, and the reason that everyone feels so depressed about that divisiveness, because it's not new. All through American history, there's been divisiveness, I think the depression about it is that sense that we cannot overcome it. This is the sum and substance of our relationship now, and it's not so like, go back to talking about football for a while. Remember what you like about each other, remember what connects you to each other, and then hold those political opinions loosely. And I get that that the rubber meets the road when you're talking about someone's identity, when you've brought home your husband who is Black and your family's not accepting him, you know, because you're a white person, whatever, there are moments when you cannot hold it loosely anymore. Don't go looking for those moments. You know what I mean? We bring, we bring that same intensity to the table sometimes, when it's not necessary. When it is, then you then, then it gets really hard, and you have to make some choices and be really honest and open about what those choices are with everyone. But I think we're doing that around things that are very far from our personal experiences sometimes because we practice doing it. We practice everything as though the stakes are life and death, when, when we do, fortunately, have a universe that is just disagreement, and so let's work within that with a little bit of space around it.

**Jackie Congedo** 43:28

That's great advice

**Sarah Stewart Holland** 43:29

Well, and I think what I hear from wise people, since we're talking about wisdom, is that if you are committed to humanity, there is no way to manage that. You know, that's not a that's not a control it and stay in one place. We use a metaphor of a stream, like put your good things in the stream. It's all you can do. But a rapid is probably a better metaphor for humanity. And if you hold on in the middle of a rapid, you're gonna drown. You don't get to stay in the place and stay in control and commit to humanity. That's not what I hear from survivors. That's not what Irwin's saying when he stands at the gates of Dachau and wonders about the German youth. There's no way to control that. When you're open to humanity, you're open to all of humanity, and that's an intense experience always. But if you let go and you float, you get carried to some really magical places. And that's been my experience with this work, is when I try to grasp it, and when I try to control it, and when I try to stay in a place that makes me feel comfortable, I drown. And when I let go and I let the humanity wash over me, I get taken to some really magical places.

**Jackie Congedo** 44:41

That's such a beautiful metaphor. Is there anything else you would like to add as we wrap up? I mean, that's such a like great mic drop moment. I don't even know that I have. I'm sort of speechless, but I want to just also share the gratitude that I have for our time together today and for the fact that I am now a different person than I was when I walked in here to sit down.

**Beth Silvers** 45:04

Well, it's an honor to be in this space and to be in conversation with you. Thank you so much.

**Sarah Stewart Holland** 45:10

Thank you

**Jackie Congedo** 45:11

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 and 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.

**Jackie Congedo** 45:50

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 and Humanity Center in Cincinnati, Ohio.