

The Hum Podcast

Episode 7: Real life is way crazier than anything I can make up

{Theme music begins}

{Amar's voice begins to come in over top of music}

Amar: I feel pretty Canadian now, but for a long time I just felt like an Indian living in Canada because, frankly, Canada wouldn't let me feel Canadian.

{Music increases in volume}

Male voice: You're listening to The Hum.

{Music fades off}

Gilad: I figure, you know, here's the, here's the thing about this podcast: we've been getting a lot of great feedback and one person didn't even know that there were two hosts.

Amar: Wait really? I find that hard to believe because, like, I have this very like deep, sexy, masculine voice and you sound kind of like a chipmunk, or possible some sort of ground squirrel?

Gilad: I'd go for squirrel. But what I was going to say is here's our coming out - there is only one host!

{Both laugh}

Amar: Gilad Cohen and Amar Wala are the same person {humourously}.

Gilad: {laughing} We've got a fight club...

Amar: We've somehow pulled off the, uh, six foot one brown guy, five foot eight Jewish guy...

Gilad: Five foot eight and a half **{Amar laughs}**. I heard this thing that anyone who's under five-eleven includes half, so if you actually average up I'm five-nine, which is closer to six feet than five so I'm really six:

Amar: Okay, I can buy that logic.

Gilad: So, uh, it's been an interesting ride so far. We've done now, what, this is our seventh episode? We've met a lot of interesting people here in the city. What have been your thoughts so far on this podcast?

Amar: I mean I think it's going really well. I think, uh, you and I are learning a lot as we go along. I'm certainly learning a lot. I interview people pretty much regularly for my living - like I'm a documentary filmmaker, so it's kind of what I do. But, this is really different because my voice

is part of the show essentially and your voice is part of the show. And normally what I do is, you know, when I ask questions, I'm not really going to be a part of the answer, so you're never going to hear my voice. So it's very different, a lot more intimidating when you're a part of it and you're - you know you get a taste of what the guests go through when you hear your voice regularly. And so I'm learning a lot and the guests have been fantastic and the feedback's been really good except that nobody really knows who you and I are, so that's why you and I are doing this episode and so...

Gilad: {over Amar} Here we go!

Amar: We give you guys a chance to know about us a little bit. And frankly, I don't know anything about Gilad other than he runs an organization called Jay-yu {intentionally mispronounces for humour} - how do you say, how do you pronounce that again?

Gilad: It's sort of one of those things where we we can have one of those really crummy Mailchimp ads - "Jay-yu? Ji-yu? Mail-kimp?" {intentionally mispronouncing for humour}

Amar: {talking over Gilad} Well you, well yeah, I mean that'd be great if Jayu is willing to give us some sponsor money you know we can plug them all we want! I'm still waiting for my first paycheque from this gig.

Gilad: It's on its way.

Amar: Okay.

Gilad: So, it's called Jayu, it means "freedom" in Korean. And it's a non-profit, human rights organization that was founded in 2012. It's grown quite a bit. When we founded it, uh, it came out of, I would say an interest that I had in North Korean human rights issues. If you guys were listening to an earlier episode, I talked about taking this trip to North Korea in 2008. I got involved in North Korean refugee issues both here and in South Korea. And I had all of these amazing things - amazing experiences that happened along the way. I got to work with some incredible people, I got to meet some incredibly resilient folks. I got to speak at the UN in 2012 and a number of other things. But there was always one thing I could never do, and that was get my family to care and it bother the hell out of me. It bothered the hell out of me. You know, I grew up in a Jewish household and my grandma, uh, when she was three, her father, so my great grandfather, was, was killed by Nazis. And so my grandma being the youngest of six children, her mother couldn't take care of her, she had to grow up in an orphanage her whole life, eventually had to flee, go to, go to Israel to find a safer place to be. But, the stories in my house growing up were very similar to some of the things that North Koreans are going through today - concentration camps, starvation, and all that sort of stuff. So whenever I tried to get them to give a damn and they wouldn't it just pissed me right off. You know "this is not a Jewish thing, this is their thing. We should be focusing on Jewish issues..."

Amar: {Interrupting Gilad} Why, why do you think that is? Why do you think there is that disconnect for your family in particular, but also, I guess, people at large about, you know, these issues when they kind of cross cultural lines?

Gilad: I think the world is a very overwhelming place. A lot of times people ask me, you know, “How do I get involved? There’s so much going on.” I think just the easier thing to do, for most people, is to just stay in their own lane. This is our issue, this is our thing, let’s just stick to that. And there’s also, I find, within the Jewish community, at least - maybe more so than others, I have no idea - I’m Jewish, I can only speak to being Jewish. But, there’s this tie to Israel and the human rights issues that are going there. And with that being as large as it is, why focus our energies on anything else?

Amar: So I take it that Israel is, like a topic of pretty heated conversation at your house?

Gilad: Yeah. It’s interesting, right, like I grew up in my house, so my mom - everyone in my family grew up in Israel, I was born there, I moved when I was a year and a half old - but they went through that whole system. Right, they went to the military service, they grew up - they were fed everything that that government and that country - they ate everything that was fed to them with regard to Palestinians, all the neighbours. And so growing up in my house, it was really interesting because, you know I would look out into the world and I’m like “Everyone says that the Middle East conflict is so confusing, but it’s not! There are good guys and there are bad guys and we are clearly the good guys. It is so easy.”

Amar: And, and now it’s a bit more complicated?

Gilad: It’s a bit more murky... {Amar laughing}. Let’s just say, let’s just say so, you know, being called Gilad Cohen, I might as well just walk around with a star of David branded on my head. If it’s not, if it’s not obvious that I’m Jewish or Israeli. So a lot of times I get tied to the politics of

that country - now I'd like to say that I don't really have a firm opinion on what's going on there. It's complicated. There are people doing wrong things on both sides. And, I mean, at the end of the day, death is never the answer, and tons of people are dying.

Amar: How do you - do you have trouble reconciling that you have all these, like, very firm opinions about Netanyahu and the current Israeli government. But also you're, you're fully aware that anti-Semitism in, in your city and in, in our home is still pretty, pretty rampant. And you now, how do you reconcile - you know, it's different for people kind of, of outside of that system. I'm pretty - a lot more critical of what's going on with Israel openly than you are, because you've obviously got, you know, your family kind of tied into all of that. But, you're still a Jewish man in a time where anti-Semitism is still alive and well, so what's that like for you?

Gilad: It's interesting, cause a lot of people will argue that it isn't alive and well.

Amar: That's silly. Those are also the people that say that racism no longer exists because a black guy became president.

Gilad: That's a good question. It's one that I, I'm not sure that I have an answer to. You know when I see anti-semitism or when I feel it - growing up in University I, I was the only Jewish guy in a house of non-jews, let's just say. I felt anti-Semitism a lot. I felt, uh, different. I don't know, I don't know the answer to that question. It's interesting though, it's interesting, because being, uh, white and being a male, I definitely fall into some - let's just say doors of privilege are open to me.

Amar: You're also straight.

Gilad: Yup.

Amar: We're both straight, which is a huge privilege.

Gilad: Of course, and, and, and - let's build off the last episode - we're able bodied.

Amar: Absolutely. Yeah, and I mean that's, for me the reason I'm really enjoying doing this is because I'm learning a lot about my own privilege, I'm learning about people that I think are - you know people always, when you make movies about, especially when you make movies about human rights issues, people constantly tell you how, how great you are and how awesome you are. And you're, you're kind of part of that, is that the reason we became friends is because you liked my first film and that's how we started talking and all of that. And it's hard sometimes - cause you know, I have an ego and sometimes that stuff feeds to your ego - but it's, it's important to remind yourself that when you make movies about issues, there's a huge benefit to you if the movie is well received, right? It's a huge benefit to me and my career. Everyone thinks I'm cool. I play at film festivals, I hopefully, you know I hopefully get jobs out of it, I make money down the road. Uh...

Gilad: **{Interrupting Amar}** Let's, let's talk about that money though **{both laughing }**.. It's not...

Amar: **{laughing}** Okay, okay there's no money, but down the road one day - I've just started directing some television stuff so, you know, the money's getting better. But I think that, you

know, I've basically spent my entire adult life well below the poverty line. But that's, that's okay, you know I knew that going in and I'm, I'm totally okay with that. But, you have to remind yourself that, just because you make movies, that doesn't mean that you're actually - (a) it doesn't mean that you're actually going to make a difference cause there, you know, it's still up in the air whether movies really do help or not. But I think the other part of that is that the people that are the real heroes, the people that are truly inspiring to me are the ones that are doing the work. The ones who are out there doing the work. So, if you make a film about Black Lives Matter TO, that's great, but you're not the hero. The heroes are the people that are out there, sleeping on the steps on police headquarters and confronting politicians and doing that work. Cause there's no personal benefit to them -

Gilad: {Interrupting Amar} Well, let's, let's backtrack though, like let's not kid ourselves. You, you've had tons of opportunities as a filmmaker to take commercial jobs, to sort of - we were kidding around one time I remember about selling out, but you're very mindful not to. You, you tend to stay away from it because you do want to continue making films that focus on a social justice issue, which I might say comes with tons of sacrifices. (A) the pay, (B) the...

Amar: {interrupting Gilad} I mean, I think that's part of it. It's not just that I want to make films about social justice issues. I mean, if a really great comedy idea came to me I'd make that, if a really great, you know, romance idea came to me I'd make that. I just, I think filmmakers, especially when they're young and they're kind of like finding their footing, have to be themselves. You really have to be like who am I, what are the things I care about? That's what my films need to be about. And for me, ever since I was in my early 20's it was human rights issues, ever since I found out about security certificates and, you know, some of the things that

Canada was doing. I think part of the reason why I make the films I make is because I, like so many people, bought the Canadian hype. I bought that Canadian myth-machine that says we are this multi-cultural beacon of humanity, the world needs to be more like us, we're amazing. I bought all of that. And as I got older I realized that that's sort of a marketing gimmick that has been sold to Canadians for an extremely long time.

Gilad: And we do it well.

Amar: We do it extremely well. We, we lie to ourselves extremely well. We tell ourselves these truths and we, we believe them, cause it's, it's, everyone wants to believe they come from a beautiful, noble place, right? But, when you do that, you completely deny the real history of this country, you completely deny the present for a lot of people - people of colour, people who are not able-bodied, uh, women. I, I didn't hear the term residential school til I was like 23 years old; I've been in Canada since I was 11, I never heard that term. So grade 6 all the way through to the end of university I never heard the term residential school once, right? That's a problem. That's fucked up. So, I think that we basically - I don't know I guess we - my films are a reaction to that. To this bubble kind of bursting in my face when I realized kind of "holy shit," we do have huge problems with islamophobia in this country and we're locking up Muslim men without charging them with crimes and no one seems to give a shit. That was part - I think it was similar to what you were talking about, getting your family to care - I would tell people stories about how these guys were locked up without being charged with crimes and people would be like "oh, that's kind of, that's crazy." But, in the back of their mind I could tell they were like, "Well, they must have done something. This is Canada. We don't do that kind of thing unless, unless there's a reason." And so that "unless there's a reason" part is extremely dangerous, right? I

don't believe for a second we would ever accept locking people up without charging them with crimes, without showing the evidence, if those people were white. That - it's a thing that happens to marginalized communities. These laws are always applied to people of colour. And so, for me these human rights issues are inevitably tied to race issues.

Gilad: {interrupting Amar} So I, let's just, let me ask you a question -I'll stop you here, cause I, if I don't stop you you'll go for half an hour, we know that.

Amar: But, but this is like a two hour long episode, right? You promised me I could, I could just vent.

Gilad: So the whole season I told Amar he could never bring up Secret Trial 5, until this episode...

Amar: I think I've mentioned it like eight times already.

Gilad: {laughing softly} I know you sneak it in all the time. So, you, you said earlier that it could be argued whether or not film makes a difference, but here you are, working as a filmmaker and, and focusing on social justice issues through film. Why, why film?

Amar: Because I like film. Because that's, that's the primary thing is I, I like, I always wanted to make movies. You know my, I don't know my awakening or whatever the hell you want to call it, like, to issues of justice, or like social issues, didn't come until later in my life. I had already decided that I wanted to make movies for a living. I wanted to be like Scorsese or Tarantino. I

was like, uh, one of those, my trajectory early on was being one of those like bro filmmakers. I really love sports and I really love movies. And I figured one way or the other I was going to make really cool, awesome films. And I think now I am making cool, awesome films, they're just very different than the films that I thought I'd make when I was 16 or 17. And that, once you, I don't know, once you, you hear about the stories - real life, the other thing with documentaries, real life is way crazier than anything I could make up, right? If I was to make up a story about the Canadian government locking up five Muslim men for 30 years combined without charging them with crimes people would say that's hard to believe and like that's very far-fetched and you're kind of just being sensationalist.

Gilad: It's a George Orwell book.

Amar: Come on, they'd be like "come on Amar." But when that really happens, and you make a film about it, it's really powerful.

{Pause, and music begins in the background}

Woman's voice (sounds like a news anchor): On your program today, five Muslim men, 30 collective years behind bars, no charges laid. Filmmaker Amar Wala on his documentary "The Secret Trial 5" and how Canada's national security measures have affected individual rights since 9/11.

{fade out, then different music begins}

Another woman's voice (also sounds like a news anchor): Homeless and at-risk youth in Toronto are being given the opportunity to tell their stories through photography. To explain, we're joined now by Gilad Cohen, project coordinator of "Capture the Streets." He is also the founder of the non-profit organization Jayu. Thanks for much for being with us.

Gilad: Thank you so much for having me.

Second woman's voice again: So tell us about this project "Capture the Streets." How did it...

{Voices and music fade out}

Gilad: So, we talked about superheroes, are the heroes, aren't necessarily you or I - you as a filmmaker or I who creates a platform to showcase some of this artworks.

Amar: It's definitely not you.

Gilad: I would argue against that. I was, I've had media last year, I'm a hero {humourously}

Amar: {laughing} Yeah. I wanted to ask you this. The media really seems to like, to like you. You're always on the front cover with your big beautiful smile and stuff like that. Why do you think that is? You think part of it is because you're a white guy? Like do you think that it's easier for them to kind of get behind the like straight white guy who's doing great stuff?

Gilad: For anyone who is eating the shit that Amar is feeding you right now, we don't get enough media. Go check out jayu.ca and check out the media page. We had media last year, but that was more relationship based I would say. It's interesting because we've been, we've been fighting here in the city. We're entering now our fifth year of our human rights film festival and we do, I would argue, some really remarkable things. I would argue that what makes us different from other organizations is we really place the emphasis on these heroes that you're talking about. We create platforms where people can come and speak after a film, we never do a screening without a Q and A. We've made differences in numerous lives, I would argue. I've heard this first hand from some of these superheroes that we're talking about, yet we don't get that media, because here in the city, we are, while we're, well I would say a unique film festival, we are one of 70. And I..

Amar: {Interrupting Gilad} I think there's more than 100 now actually.

Gilad: Yeah and I think you would be surprised to find any one of those 100 didn't call themselves unique in some sort of way as well. So, media's interesting here. Tell me, tell me if you agree but we've been doing this for years and I have a whole community of people who, you know, I'll post things on Facebook and Twitter, and it seems like sometimes nobody gives a shit about any of the stuff that we're doing. But all of the sudden we get like a Toronto Star article and everyone's like "Congratulations Gilad, you're doing such remarkable things! You're, you're making such a difference!" Why is it, why is it that validates the stuff we're already doing?

Amar: {Interrupting Gilad} Cause you've been, it's, it's, the idea is that you've been vetted by a mainstream structure that they believe is, is legitimate, right. And you're right, it is bullshit,

right. Secret Trial 5 was the same way. We were this little tiny film that, it was like, “Oh, cute you’re making this human rights documentary, good for you.” And then we premiered at Hot Docs and got all these great reviews in all these papers and suddenly it was legitimate. It wasn’t any less legitimate before that happened, but I think we still have a belief in these sort of like mainstream organizations, and mainstream media organizations. Legacy media is still a big part of how we promote ourselves. And I think, you know, people are talking about how mainstream advertising and that kind of press doesn’t matter anymore. I would argue that it matters more than it did before social media took hold. Because, with social media you can reach a lot of people, but everyone’s trying to do that, right? There’s a whole lot of noise on the internet. And so, with a, when a mainstream publication kind of picks you up people assume that “Oh, there’s something to this.” You’ve reached another level, right? You’ve been vetted by this big organization and they think you’re legit, so now I’ll pay attention. And that’s a tough thing to fight against frankly. I think it’s something that we all need, as much as we don’t want to do that we all need to play that game a little bit to get our work out there, to get, to get your work out there. But yeah, I think you guys are doing pretty well. I think Jayu’s a pretty awesome organization, I’m glad to be doing this with Jayu.

Gilad: So, while we’re on the topic of Jayu. Jayu is a platform that provides the opportunity for people with a human rights story to share. Is there anything you would like to share? Have you ever experienced a human rights... {pause}

Amar: Yeah, I mean, I don’t know, I grew up as a, a man of colour in this, in this city, so I’ve had the experiences that I think most people have had. I was an immigrant, I immigrated here when I was 11, so I faced a lot of racism those first few years.

Gilad: From India?

Amar: From India, yeah. I don't know, I mean I was in Salt Lake City recently shooting a, shooting a documentary and, uh, on the second day I was there, uh, my cameraman who is a six foot five white guy went downstairs to grab the van and then I was standing out on the front lawn of where we were staying in Salt Lake. And in the two minutes that it took him to go down and get the van and come up, a cop had literally driven his car up onto the lawn - like right at me - stopped and got out and asked me who I was and what I was doing there. He told me, uh, you know, you don't look like you're from around here {laughs}. Which is, which is not an uncommon thing for me when I, when I kind of leave this city.

Gilad: {laughing} What do you have to look like to be from around there?

Amar: {laughs} I don't know, I guess, in, in America people often think I'm Latino, so... And, and you know, he was a polite racist, so it was fine. I told him who I was and he - and then he saw...

Gilad: {Interrupting Amar, laughing} God I love these polite racists!

Amar: {Laughing} He saw Andrew, the white camera guy who was like vouching, I guess vouched for me - he was like "he's with me." "Alright, the white guy says you're cool, you're cool I guess."

Gilad: {Laughs} You're in with us

Amar: You're in, right. And then he just, he just kind of politely drove off. So, so that, that kind of stuff still happens, especially when I go to the states. But, but I don't know that my experience is that much worse or better than, than most young men of colour who grew up in this city. I think I have a lot of privileges as well, like I grew up - even though we were immigrants my family came here with money. We're like, our background is one of privilege in India. And, the interesting thing for me was seeing my parents struggle after they immigrated here, having never struggled in India. So, or maybe struggled a little bit, but they both came from families that were well off. So, so it was a very different experience for them, kind of being on their own and this dream that they thought - move to Canada and succeed right away - not really happening. So that to me kind of, like - that immigrant experience is kind of deeply rooted in all the work I do. So that's why so far all my work seems to be about immigration and, and issues around immigration in some way, shape or form. And identity - like what it means to actually be from a place or of a place. That's where my work kind of comes from and that's why I tell these kinds of stories.

Gilad: Did you know that going in or have you sort of, has it sort of in a way been sort of therapeutic? Like you, like you look at your film and your realize. "Oh, oh maybe this is the reason why I've been making films" - or did you, did you know? Did you know growing up that being an immigrant and all that influenced the way...?

Amar: Nah. No, when you first immigrate, you just, you just want to be - uh, this sounds weird to say, but you want to be as white as possible as quickly as possible, right? And what I mean by that is, what white supremacy teaches you when you're an immigrant is that the things that

make you unique or the things that make you weird are bad. Right? So you just want to fit in as quickly as possible. And a lot of people are surprised that I don't have an accent, because like I worked very hard to get rid of the accent - I didn't want any trace of Indian in my voice. And now obviously as a 33 year old man I deeply regret that and I'm sad about that.

Gilad: It's interesting because, like, growing up it was the same exact thing, like my name actually is pronounced Gee-lad - that's how I should be saying my name. But in an attempt to fit in with the white community here I've had to bastardize it to make it sound something more Anglican...

Amar: {Interrupting Gilad} Yeah, yeah I think that's a very common - like, do you, do you know how to say my name for real?

Gilad: No. Ah-mar?

Amar: You, want to know what it is?

Gilad: Yeah.

Amar: Ahm-ar.

Gilad: We might have to censor that.

Amar: Try it. Try, try, try it.

Gilad: {in a deep voice, mimicking Amar's tone} Ahm-ar .

Amar: Yeah, that was pretty good!

Gilad: {in a deep voice} Ahm-ar.

Amar: Usually people aren't even close!

Gilad: Right.

Amar: Alright, that's pretty good. That must be uh, the uh, the Middle-Eastern Jew in you that kind of gets that tone of voice.

Gilad: Mmm, mmm. I'm going to kind of answer my own question to you, because I have found recently that my artwork - or not my artwork, but the artwork that I'm involved in - has been very, very therapeutic. When we started doing this work at Jayu, it was mainly just a way to get stories out as easily as possible. I thought, I thought film and art - and I still think film and art - are the best ways to do that. It's the best way to pack a room full of people, it build empathy. You can see the human rights issue right in front of you. But somewhere along the way I also realized how important conversation was to that whole thing. And that is something that I've learned along the way. And so someone asked me the other day, like "Why do you guys do Q and A's?" And what I realized was that until you have a forum - and let's say within a safe space - you can't begin to heal. You can't begin to heal at all. Like whether or not it's one person

hearing your story or a group of people hearing your story, that whole healing process, which is really important when we're talking about human rights, can't begin to happen. And I started thinking about what why that was with myself. And so, this is something that I've only started talking about recently, but I feel - I'm starting to feel more comfortable talking about it. So growing up, around 16 or 17 I, I developed an eating disorder, I don't know if you know that?

Amar: No, I didn't.

Gilad: So, it started with anorexia when I was 16. I was like, uh, I wasn't overweight - I was chubby, I was healthy, let's say. Uh, and I started developing this eating disorder. So it started with anorexia and then I started with bulimia. And for (a) a male - let's even say a straight male - this is, it's unheard of. There's so much stigma around eating disorders to begin with, but when you, you put it with a male, a straight male, it's even more so. So I sort of found myself in a situation where I couldn't talk to anybody about this. And everyone around me knew. Everyone around me growing up knew - they could tell. I think at one point I lost something like 50 pounds when it first started in two months. My family saw it happen, my, my community saw it happen, my school saw it happen, but nobody spoke about it. And so it went unchecked like that for about ten years. And it's only now that I am beginning to speak up and speak out about it because I'm starting to realize how important that healing process is. It's sort of been like this dirty secret that I've kept inside of me for years, but there's no shame. There's no shame in sharing about the things that make us vulnerable, the afflictions that we have, and some of the battles that we have. And I, I think that those sorts of things, those environments, are the things that help us heal, but also help build community around others who might be struggling with that

as well. So it's, it's interesting because Jayu sort of, in a very weird, therapeutic way, tapped into that for myself. It made me realize the real importance in speaking out.

Amar: So is this kind of like the first time you've - it's definitely the first time you've shared that with me. Is this kind of the first time you've shared this publicly?

Gilad: I put a Facebook post out about it like two weeks ago. Wentworth Miller, the guy who was from Prison Break...

Amar: Right.

Gilad: He, he put on a lot of weight, he was talking about his eating disorder, and you, you know, and the media was like "Wentworth Miller is a big fatass, he's useless now - look at this fat fuck." And so he just like spoke out cause he also deals with depression and it encouraged me to speak out as well.

Amar: Yeah, yeah I mean I was having this conversation with my friend. I play a lot of basketball and we were having this conversation with my friend recently about - they were playing the game and there was, uh, the other team was chirping one of the guys about being short, right? Just like making fun of him for being short.

Gilad: {laughing} What a loser!

Amar: Yeah? **{humourously}** And it's like, I hope we've gotten to a point where these body things, or like physical attributes, are now like off limits for trash talk, for poking fun at people. And I know we're not there yet and it's going to take some time, but even I still make, like "oh" like jokes about someone being fat or jokes about someone putting on weight like that.

Gilad: {interrupting Amar, laughing} How did we start this podcast?

Amar: That, that needs to go away. Right? And it's always, it's always, we talked about this on the last episode with Luke, right, the harder part is not getting people to understand why it's wrong, right, to make fun of someone's body type or to make fun of them for being short. But, the harder part is to realize that if they don't do something about it they're the problem, they're part of the problem. So, you don't, it's not just that you don't do it, it's not just that you don't call people fat. When people do it, if you don't call them out, you're kind of perpetuating that issue.

Gilad: It's, uh, silence is louder than words.

Amar: Absolutely. I, I think that's the thing that - this is like one of the biggest things that is happening in our hometown, in Toronto, right now is Black Lives Matter TO has made some real headway in getting an inquiry into the death of a man named Andrew Loku and also getting a public meeting with the mayor of this city, and they did that through sheer determination..

Gilad: {interrupting Amar} They didn't get that meeting though, did they?

Amar: I think they did, I think he put out a press release yesterday saying he's going to meet with them.

Gilad: Publicly? I did not, I did not know that.

Amar: Yeah and I think that's going to happen. And that's a huge accomplishment for them, right, because the - part of the problem in our city, because Toronto is a very good place to live for most people - and every time I leave Toronto I come back with an even deeper appreciation for it. Because as much as I have problems in Toronto, you know cops don't drive up on lawns to talk to me here. We, we are a diverse city. It is one of the better places to live in the world - there's no denying that. But then that makes it hard to deal with the actual issues we do have, and those issues are - they run pretty deep. Just because we're doing better than the rest of the world doesn't mean we're doing all that well. The world kind of sucks for a lot of people, for most people I'd say. So, I think it's, it's amazing that Black Lives Matter TO has made this kind of like headway because in this city it's very hard for people to acknowledge that racism actually exists. We don't have this history that the Americans have of talking about race issues, particularly race issues that pertain to the black experience - we didn't have a civil rights movement. Most people think slavery didn't happen in Canada and that's bullshit, it totally did happen, that's just another one of those Canadian myths. So, I'm hoping that what we do with this show is encourage people to talk about these things and say hey, you know what, this is the conversation that me and Gilad have over beer all the time. We watch the Raptors and we talk about these human rights issues and you can do that too. You can have these conversations casually and you can learn from each other. This doesn't have to be a stuffy - it doesn't have to be work to begin this conversation, right? And the people who are doing this work, the people

who are suffering through human rights issues are right, you know, it's not heavy, they're not boring, right. They're smart, they're funny - they have tremendous senses of humour. I would hope we've articulated that on this show. You've just seen that from Angel to Adil Charkaoui to Tanisha to everybody, everybody is really funny. And you can learn a lot just by having these conversations in a casual way and making these conversations part of our day-to-day lives.

Gilad: Right. And remembering that the people who experience human rights abuses are humans before they're anything else. And that they're not defined just by the struggle and the abuse that they went through. Correct?

Amar: Yeah and I, as, as Luke was saying, they're not defined by their disability, right? They're a person first, the disability comes second.

Gilad: In the same way that that person is not a rape victim, they are a person who has experienced rape or violence.

Amar: Yeah, absolutely.

Gilad: I don't know if you'd agree or not, but, I've, I've had the pleasure of meeting very incredible people my whole life, especially through this field of work, and Luke really touched me in ways that I, I couldn't even imagine. I learned just so much from him, and he's, he's just a dude here in the city doing remarkable things. And, and, when you sit down with a lot of these people you just start to realize that they're all just people doing remarkable things in their own way.

Amar: Yeah and I think the danger for us is that, you know, uh, not everyone who's in a wheelchair is going to be like Luke. People, some people, like Luke is extremely charming, you know? He's a good looking guy. Not everyone's going to be like that, you know, people are people. But I really hope that by listening to Luke the next time people see someone in a wheelchair they realize you know what he was saying in the sense that that's not a person who is in a wheelchair, that's a person who has to use a wheelchair to get around as a device. That's it. That person is still a person. So, I mean, I think that was a huge interview you know for me. Luke, I think he taught me a lot. And that's why I'm hoping we can keep doing this and, and keep getting better at it, because these conversations are teaching me a lot, and hopefully if they're teaching me a lot that means that the people who are listening are actually learning a lot as well.

Gilad: Before we, we wrap up here, what are you working on?

Amar: So like I said I've been doing some directing for, uh, for some TV documentaries. Primarily for Vice's new channel, you know Viceland. And i just finished a short film that's called "Stateless" about a man, young man in Ottawa named Deepan Budlakoti who, despite being born and raised in Canada and literally never setting foot outside Canada, was told after a criminal conviction that he was not a Canadian citizen. So his passport was revoked, his status was taken away, basically by the government saying we were never supposed to give you this status anyway because you're parents, who are also Canadian citizens, technically worked at the Indian embassy when he was born. Now there's controversy about whether they actually did work at the embassy or not, but the idea that a person who's born here and raised here is not

one of us is mindblowing and disgusting to me. So, I mean I hope the film resonates with people and I hope that can help kind of get his story out there to a larger audience. Cause if a guy - and his family is from India originally - if a guy who's born and raised here is not Canadian - Canada says he's Indian - what does that make me? I moved here when I was 11 years old from India {Gilad laughing softly in background}. So, that's a film that I'm just finishing up now and hopefully it's out later this year.

Gilad: As shocking as that story sounds, I'm more - I guess I'm more shocked that I'm not shocked by that shocking story.

Amar: I mean that's a good, that's a good question to end on, right, is at what, at what point do we start - stop being surprised by all of these issues. They seem to be - we hear these stories every day. At what point do we stop being surprised and stop being motivated and just throw our hands up in the air and go "It's fucking too much. There's just too much bullshit in the world," like, "forget it." Are you worried about that happening to you one day?

Gilad: Waking up one day, jumping on whatever news source I jump on, looking at it and just saying "That's it, I fucking give up!" {Amar laughing in the background} "This is fucked."

Amar: Yeah

Gilad: No! {theme music starts to come in under Gilad's voice} No, because I think that once I lost that sense of hope, I lose my purpose for doing the sort of work I do. I would be a hypocrite if I woke up every day - and dumb, considering that I'm working in the not for profit

sector and not making money off this - I'd be dumb if I lost that hope. I'd be dumb and the work would have no purpose.

{theme music gets louder}

Amar: No, no that's a good way to put it. I'll come back to you when, uh, Donald Trump becomes president and ask you the same fucking question.

Gilad: Ahh, fuck. And with that, it's a wrap. White mamba, out!

{Amar and Gilad laughing as music fades out}