



Library podcast

Sarah McBride discusses 'Tomorrow Will Be Different'

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[00:00:35] Hi everybody. I'm Stella Brandon. Thanks so much for being here. I'm the literature and humanities program manager here at the Seattle Public Library. Welcome to this evening's program with Sarah McBride presented in partnership with the university bookstore and the good folks at Human Rights Campaign. Thank you to our author series sponsor Gary Kunis and to the Seattle Times for generous promotional support of library programs. Finally we are grateful to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Private gifts to the foundation from thousands of donors helped the library provide free programs and services that touched the lives of everyone in our community. So for those library foundation donors here with us tonight thank you very much for your support. I am delighted to welcome Chris Williams who is on the steering committee of Seattle Human Rights Campaign. He is going to introduce Sarah McBride.

[00:01:31] Hi everybody you're not here to hear anything I have to say so I'll make this quick because I'm standing between you and Sarah but I just wanted to say a few words about Seattle HRC. For those of you who don't know HRC I think you probably all do. We're the leading LGBTQ advocacy organization in the country doing great work. Sarah is part of the leadership of HRC. We're really honored to have her. We have a very active presence here in Seattle. We hope maybe you'll come see us Pride Fest in June at our booth and look for the whiskey involved with us if you'd like. Sir really doesn't need an introduction but I'm going to just say a couple of things about her anyway. I got to meet Sarah a few months ago when she was here as our keynote speaker for our 2017 Seattle gala for HRC and it was a real honor to meet her in part because I have a 15 year old grandson and we got to be a part of the program. And Sarah reminded me that she actually never has met Ryan my son because they were in different parts of the of the gala. But she's been a great inspiration to us and to our family. She's a real trailblazer. She's 27 and she was on Fresh Air with Terry Gross. I know that the Seattle Public Library crowd will appreciate being on NPR. Right. She's done a lot. She's national press secretary for HRC. She spoke at the Democratic National Convention in 2016 was the first openly transgender person to do that. And she's wise beyond her years and so we're really proud to have her here in Seattle.

[00:02:57] And I will turn that podium over to her thank you so much for that wonderful introduction and thank you so much to the Seattle Public Library for hosting me. It's an honor to be here. And thank you all for braving the rain and the traffic to join us this evening. I'm going to talk a little bit about my own journey a little bit about this moment in the fight for LGBTQ equality. And then I'd love to open it up for questions so that we can have a conversation. I can hear from you and answer any questions that you have. My name's Sarah McBride I'm 27 years old. I'm the national press secretary at the Human Rights Campaign which is the nation's largest LGBTQ civil rights organization. I'm a native of Wilmington Delaware a proud graduate of American University and I'm a transgender woman.

[00:03:49] It took me 21 years to muster up the courage to say those last two words transgender woman. Today they are among my proudest identities. And this evening I can stand before you as the person that I am but I also don't have to tell you that it hasn't always been that way. I remember as a child lying in my bed at night praying that I would wake up the next day and be myself to just have my parents be proud of me and to still be able to dream big dreams. Growing up I loved history and I loved to read about the presidents I loved to read about politics and I always dream that at some point in my life I'd be able to work in government work in politics and pursue my dreams. But in reading the history books it became abundantly clear to me that no one quite like me had ever made it very far at least no one who was out and growing up. It seemed like my dreams and my identity were mutually exclusive. I think it's difficult for folks who aren't transgender the term cis gender for folks who are cis gender to understand what it feels like to have a gender identity that differs from your sex assigned at birth in the fight for gay rights. It's a little bit easier to empathize and to enter into the conversation because most straight people understand what it feels like to love and to last but for says gender folks they don't necessarily have an analogous experience for transgender people. And all I can say is for me that experience of being in the closet. That experience of being unseen. It felt like a constant feeling of homesickness an unwavering ache in the pit of my stomach that would only go away when I could be seen and affirmed as myself and I'm like homesick miss with geography which dissipates with time and getting used to her new surroundings. For me that homesickness it only grew with age and distance.

[00:05:46] But I kept it inside.

[00:05:48] I told myself that if I could make it worthwhile for other people for me to stay in the closet by making a difference in the world by making my family proud by pursuing my dreams that maybe those things would somehow bring me the wholeness and completeness that I side in 2009. I moved down to D.C. to attend American University and during my sophomore year at American I was elected president of the student body and it was through that experience that was through advocating on a whole host of issues including on LGBTQ equality that it became abundantly clear to me that the things I told myself would make me feel whole.

[00:06:25] But those things wouldn't actually and at that point that homesickness had become so all encompassing that my gender identity and the fact that I wasn't actually living my life became a fact that I thought about every single waking hour of every single day.

[00:06:41] And so at the end of the day with the realization that those goals those dreams would actually bring me wholeness and with growing pain of being in the closet I decided that I had to take the steps I needed to to be seen and affirmed by society.

[00:06:58] So I came out to my parents on Christmas Day in 2011 and I totally ruined Christmas but my parents responded with nothing but love and support. They made clear that wow they weren't totally sure or understood what it meant to be transgender and while they were certainly scared of rejection in every sense of the word that were that their job as parents was to love accept and embrace. And so with the courage that my family and friends gave me in May of 2012 during the last day of my term as president of the student body I came out to the broader world as Sarah in an op ed in The A student newspaper.

[00:07:40] Now I have to admit I was very scared about the reaction from the University community is a pretty progressive campus and I had seen how supportive the campus was of gay lesbian bisexual and queer students but I had never really at that point in time seen how the campus would respond to a transgender person. And I was fortunate enough that when I came out the response from the campus was nothing but supportive. It was overwhelmingly joyous. One student commented that the response by the campus community felt like you had won a sports championship. And I don't know how we would know that because we don't really win sports championships although. Although this year we're actually doing well in one sport but I don't know. So I don't I don't know which one it is but it was

[00:08:25] It was truly an incredible experience and it wasn't about me it was about the fact that at that moment in 2012 our school was demonstrating to the country that while we still may be learning about transgender people and identities This is how you respond with love with kindness and with support. But in looking around campus it became abundantly clear to me that the experience that I had was not shared by far too many transgender people on campus and certainly not by far too many transgender people across this country. The day in America. Far too many LGBTQ people still wonder whether the heart of this country is big enough to love them too. Far too many transgender people and LGBTQ people more broadly are rejected by their family face discrimination in employment and housing and public spaces. And as I came out thinking about that process that journey which was for me the hardest thing that I had ever done. Up until that point I looked around and I could see that it was still relatively easy compared to the experience of so many others. So I felt a deep responsibility to make sure that the privileges that I had were no longer privileges but rather a right guaranteed to everyone no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity. It shouldn't be a privilege to keep your family shouldn't be a privilege to keep your job or your home or your school shouldn't be a privilege to be safe from violence. And so for me I went into advocacy first.

[00:09:57] I went back to Delaware and began working with equality Delaware in my home state to pass legislation protecting transgender people from discrimination because at that time Delaware like a majority of states to this day lacked clear and explicit protections for transgender people in work in the workplace and housing and public spaces and insurance and day in and day out. I joined with

other transgender people to go to our state legislature to talk to those legislators to remind them that behind this national conversation on transgender rights are real people who love and life hope and dream.

[00:10:34] Fear and cry just like everyone else. Transgender people hurt. One more mocked that we hurt when we're discriminated against and that we just want to be treated with dignity and fairness.

[00:10:45] It was clear to me as I began talking with these legislators I started talking about all the mistakes and all of the facts. And while those are important.

[00:10:55] It became abundantly clear to me as I watched my parents reach these legislators that so often our stories get lost our humanity gets lost. And it became clear to me in that process that vulnerability was oftentimes the best path toward equality and justice because vulnerability it transcends geography it transcends ideology it transcends race religion gender everyone understands what it feels like at some point to feel vulnerable. Everyone understands what it feels like at some point to be rejected or other or others are stigmatized. Everyone understands what it feels to be insecure or you don't want that for yourself and hopefully you don't want that for other people. And so when we are vulnerable when we share our stories when we share our hopes dreams and yes our fears we allow people to see us contextualized within our full humanity.

[00:11:50] Unfortunately in Delaware we were able to demonstrate that humanity to enough state legislators that we were able to pass the gender identity non-discrimination act. And following that I went back down to D.C. to bring the change that I was able to see in Delaware the change that you've seen in many cases here in Washington State to the nation.

[00:12:10] Now I enter this fight not just as someone who is transgender but also as someone who has loved someone who's transgender. I met my future husband Andy who was a transgender man fighting for equality and we fell in love.

[00:12:27] I admired his extraordinary advocacy and marveled at his courage his optimism and his humor and he was fighting to make sure that LGBTQ people could be protected from discrimination in health care and specifically that transgender people could access medically necessary transition related care.

[00:12:45] One of the most frequent forms of discrimination against transgender people and shortly after Andy and I started dating he was diagnosed with cancer. He went through radiation chemo and had surgery. He got a clean bill of health in early of early 2014 and then just a few months later Andy received the news that every cancer patient fears his cancer was back. It had spread. And for him it was terminal knowing and loving and he left me profoundly changed and he taught me how to love and be loved.

[00:13:29] He taught me how to live the values I fight for at work. But more than anything else my relationship with Andy underscored for me that change cannot come fast enough.

[00:13:39] Andy asked me to marry him shortly after he got the terminal diagnosis and of course the answer was yes. We married on the rooftop of our building three weeks after his terminal diagnosis. Before family and friends and then just four days after we married he passed away.

[00:13:59] And I share that story because it underscored for me that every single day matters when it comes to building a world where every person can live their life to the fullest. I went through all of the different stages of grief after Andy's passing and went through disbelief and sadness and then I arrived at anger a quiet unyielding anger. I couldn't be angry at his cancer. There was no one to blame Mary couldn't be angry at the lack. There was no one to blame Mayor but I was angry at society. I was angry that Andy had the courage to come out at a relatively young age have the courage to come out in his early 20s who was three years older than me. He was supposed to have three quarters of his life as his authentic self because of circumstances outside of his control he had less than a quarter. Some people have even less time than that and I was mad that society had taken that time and truth away from him that people wake up every single day and when given the choice to love or hate decide that they will put up barriers to other people people like Andy living their life to the fullest for however long we have. Hope can be limitless ideas can always be found. Inspiration is often endless but time that is the one resource none of us can afford to waste. We are at a critical moment in the fight for LGBTQ equality and particularly the fight for transgender equality. Over the last year and a half we have seen attack after attack after attack on the trans community just a few months after taking office. Donald Trump Mike Pence Betsy DeVos and Jeff Sessions rescinded lifesaving guidelines promoting the protection of transgender students. They've appointed Antifa quality extremists to the federal bench and administration positions they've granted a sweeping license to discriminate to government workers federal contractors and even healthcare providers against LGBTQ people. And in one of his most shameful moves yet in a series of erratic tweets the president targeted transgender troops for his discrimination by trying to ban transgender people from serving openly.

[00:16:21] But we also know that the challenges facing this community do not begin and end with the trend. With the Trump administration over the last several years we have seen a rise in hate based violence no doubt emboldened by politicians all too eager to appeal to the darkest undercurrents of American society but also no doubt rooted in prejudice that existed far beyond the election of Donald Trump.

[00:16:45] 2017 was the deadliest year on record for the transgender community. Twenty eight transgender people mostly trans woman of color were killed.

[00:16:55] 28 who we know about we also know that today in America LGBTQ people and a majority of states and at the federal level still lack those clear and explicit protections from discrimination that LGBTQ people are afforded in Delaware and here in Washington and we've also seen last year an increase in the number of anti LGBTQ laws that have been introduced in states across this country. More than 130 anti LGBTQ bills were introduced in 30 states around the nation and the two most common that we see are bills that seek to legislate and license discrimination under the guise of

religious freedom. I don't want to hear one more thing about religious freedom from politicians who are trying to ban an entire religion from entering this country. Religious freedom is a core and fundamental American value but what it has always been it is has always been a shield against government persecution for religious minorities and not a sword to inflict harm on marginalized Americans. The second kind of legislation we are seeing the second kind of attack we're seeing that we've seen now at the federal level particularly against transgender students is the legalization and licensing of discrimination in restrooms against transgender people so often I get a question I get questions around why are we hearing so much about restrooms.

[00:18:24] And there are two reasons. One is that opponents of equality understand that everyone feels a little bit vulnerable in restrooms. Everyone feels a little squeamish and restrooms and that makes restrooms fertile ground to stoke fears and to spread misinformation. They realize that bathrooms are oftentimes the best way to try to halt progress.

[00:18:47] They used this tactic during the Civil Rights Act movement. They used it in the early days of the gay rights movement they used it in response to the Equal Rights Amendment. They used it in response to the Americans With Disabilities Act.

[00:18:58] And they are using it again today. But it's also a little bit different and also a little bit more insidious than just that they understand that if they can legislate discrimination in restrooms it becomes the closest thing to a silver bullet to legislating discrimination throughout daily life because if a transgender person or any person for that matter cannot easily and safely access a restroom that makes sense for them that it becomes much more difficult to go to work to go to school or to really even leave your home for more than two or three hours.

[00:19:32] We would frankly much rather be talking about things other than bathrooms. Those are just one aspect of daily life that we need protection in.

[00:19:39] But the reality remains that if they lose on every single other issue but when on bathrooms they will pursue an agenda that is just a thinly veiled attempt to legislate and push transgender people out of public life. And so we need our allies to stand up. We need our allies to be accomplices in this fight to put something on the line because we have been called to a righteous cause. And it's not just our nation's children who are watching us. It's also posterity the countless generations for whom this moment this time right now is a chapter in their history books of tomorrow. And while every chapter may be influenced by politicians and presidents we know that in the end they are written by all of us by the decisions each one of us make every single day to either be silent in the face of prejudice or persecution or to speak out to fight back and to bend the arc of the moral universe just a little bit more towards justice.

[00:20:43] One of the things that I've been thinking a lot about and one of the things that this book has allowed me to do is that in the aftermath of the last election it's been in many ways a path back to hope for me. Because in reflecting on my experiences I come back to a moment that I write about in the book with my brother Sean is a radiation oncologist and in the last month of Andy's life Shawn

said to me this is going to be very difficult. But takes stock in the acts of Amazing Grace that you see all around you every single day. And I truly I saw that amazing grace all around me in the last month of Andy's life and the miracle of our friends and family organizing a wedding for us and five days on the rooftop of our building.

[00:21:32] The miracle of Andy's surviving long enough to get married when by all accounts he probably should have passed away a couple of days before and then reflecting on those experiences. It reminds me that even in the darkest moments even in the most troubling times all of us we are all capable of bearing witness to acts of Amazing Grace. Reminded me that hope only makes sense in the face of hardship. When I came out six years ago it seemed like my dreams and my identity were mutually exclusive. One of the things that I have seen over the last six years is that change is and always will be possible. I see it every single day in my job with HRC in the countless young transgender kids I meet across the country youth that are sometimes 7 8 9 years old. We see it in the young transgender kids who I watch march into the Texas state capitol with their heads held high to demand dignity and fairness holding in one hand the knowledge of all of the hate that exists in this world. But holding in the other the knowledge that their identities are worth celebrating and that their lives matter we see it in a seven year old transgender girl named Lulu who I met shortly after speaking at the convention. And when I met Lulu she asked me a question that wouldn't have made sense to my shame filled 7 or 8 year old self. She asked me quite simply what's my favorite part about being transgender. I see that change is possible and someone who provides me so much and for inspiration a young transgender girl named Stella who when I met her and asked her what she wants to be when she grows up she declared without any hesitation that she will be the first transgender president what once seemed impossible. But we could live our truth and dream big dreams is now very real to kids like Stella. The mere fact that young people like Stella exist today demonstrates how far we've come.

[00:23:39] I'm excited to say that actually Stella who makes an appearance in my book is right here. She's right here Stella standing up and

[00:23:50] I told stelo and I met her that I felt like I was meeting the first transgender president and I still believe that today. And a couple of weeks ago I was I was talking with Stella's mom and I asked How Stella was doing given all of the attacks on the transgender community and her mom who is also here today said that you know with each attack by this president I think it only strengthens Stella's resolve to kick some ass. And that resolve that unending hope that amazing grace is the story of the last year.

[00:24:27] It's the story of the LGBTQ community from Stonewall to the steps of the Supreme Court that no election no presidency can silence our voices or halt the momentum of our movement. We have a long way to go. We have so much work to do before No Child must be forced to defend their dignity or give up on their dreams. The fundamental truth remains that no one in the LGBTQ community or any community for that matter is totally equal until everyone from the gay Muslim refugee to the Queer Undocumented Immigrant the transgender woman of color living right here in Seattle until every single one of us is treated with dignity and fairness make no mistake that day will

most definitely come and when it does when our understanding of We The People finally includes all of us a young trans kid or a young queer kid will grow up and learn about the struggle for justice and equality in their history books and never have to know what this progress felt like to those of us who are LGBTQ because they will never know anything different and that will be because of advocates and activists who dreamed of a different world. It will be because of LGBTQ people who marched and fought for a better tomorrow. It will be because of allies who stood up or spoke out. It will be because of all of us.

[00:25:50] So thank you all very much for being here. Thank you for listening. And I'd love to answer any questions you have

[00:26:04] Yes. Well my hope is that I can run for office and maybe Stella can then run for office and be ready to run for president

[00:26:12] Because I don't want to be president. That doesn't seem like a good life. But but but Stella she definitely should be president. I appreciate you. I appreciate you saying that. I mean I know growing up

[00:26:24] My love of politics was never about politics it was always about the potential of politics to make change. And right now I feel like I get to do that every day in my job and I think this is truly a critical moment. Maybe down the road. I'll make the decision that because politics is the one place where every avenue of society converges and allows you to make change on a multitude of issues that that's the path I want to go down. But right now I love what I get to do. I love that I get to stand with a community that's finally being seen and our authenticity and our beauty and who knows maybe down the road. But right now all of my cards are in Stellus Stellus card yes.

[00:27:01] Oh yes sorry I didn't repeat the first question apologies. So so your question was What can sort trans elders do to support the next generation. You know first off I would be remiss if I didn't say and didn't acknowledge this that I think so often right now people come out to me and say the progress that the trans community is making is happening so quickly it's incredible. Things at a certain point do hit a critical mass where things start to seem like they're moving quickly and frankly never quickly enough. But the reality is is that this movement would not be where it is today. It would not have the infrastructure or support that it has day if it were not for generations of transgender activists who fought when we were being ignored at best and certainly outright mocked at worst. People like Marshall Johnson and Sylvia Rivera who inspire me everyday in the work that I'm doing.

[00:27:56] You know I think trends elders have a lot of wisdom to provide to the community. And frankly I think one of the most important things that we need right now is we do need help we need help.

[00:28:14] And I think folks who have experienced the degree of change that has existed. Right. That's not been evenly felt and it's certainly not enough. But folks when you can give us that perspective on the change does occur. And the truth of the matter is is that we have transformed and

possibility into possibility into reality. And you know I try to impart that reality of that fact on people like me.

[00:28:42] And I think folks who have seen even more progress and even more change in their lifetime can provide that really critical window that can give hope to so many people in the community including so many young people who might feel alone or might feel discouraged by what they're seeing on the news. You know and also the second thing I would say is that we need all voices of every age sharing their stories. You never know what story what perspective what angle is going to reach someone and every story is necessary in this fight that every story that's that people are comfortable and feel safe sharing.

[00:29:26] And I don't want to put the burden on people of always having to be out and sharing their stories. But if you are willing to share your story. I think so often we think oh well my story's not dramatic enough for my stories not exciting enough for my story isn't isn't the kind of story that that's helpful for the movement. And that's just not true. We need a diversity of stories people of every age race religion gender identity speaking out demonstrating the full diversity of our community demonstrating the diversity of our hopes and experiences demonstrating the diversity of our fears. Demin demonstrating the diversity of our lives. And so those are the two things I would say providing that hope because I think translators are uniquely capable of doing that. And also even even if sometimes you feel demoralized. One you know one feels demoralized themselves.

[00:30:13] And the second is to continue sharing those stories.

[00:30:17] Yeah. Stelo is just on. Megan Kelly on The Today Show Delow is making the point of the need for positive stories. And I absolutely agree we need that diversity of stories we need the stories that demonstrate the urgency and the significant need for nondiscrimination protections for inclusive policies. But we do also need stories of success and people pursuing and reaching their dreams because if we don't provide that diversity I know that that the reality can be is that if we end up only modeling the most negative stories it can end up actually isolating transgender people in the public's mind even more. And so that diversity of stories. Like I said before you never know what story is going to reach a different person. And so having that diversity is so important and giving people reason to know that there is hope for change that there is the possibility of being a young transgender person and pursuing your dreams that it's possible for families to love and accept one of the things that my parents understood when I came out the first thing that my parent my dad did after I came out as he went on Google and he searched transgender and he came across a really startling report.

[00:31:33] Called injustice at every turn which is was issued by the National Center for Transgender Equality and the National LGBTQ Task Force. Up until that point the largest survey of transgender people ever conducted in the United States in the survey found that 41 percent of transgender people attempt suicide at some point in their lives.

[00:31:52] 41 percent.

[00:31:54] I mean it is a statistic that is just unheard of. I mean it's dramatically higher than veterans. It's dramatically higher than so many other communities and it's not because the transgender community itself is predisposed to attempting suicide it's because of the hate that exists in this world because we also know from that survey that when a transgender person is accepted by their family that percentage drops dramatically and then when the transgender person is not just accepted by their family but accepted by the community it drops even further and we've seen that when young transgender people are able to live authentically after being insistent consistent and persistent that they report the same mental health outcomes as their cis gender peers so my parents saw that statistic and they understood not just how important their acceptance was but how important society's acceptance was for me and my mental health.

[00:32:44] But they also understood that in doing so they had no matter the challenges they were going to face. They had to create a standard for our community that their acceptance would create an expectation and any perception of rejection would create an excuse.

[00:33:04] And so when your people are just learning about things they they look to model behavior they look to other people as to how they should respond and if all of our stories are negative. The perception is going to be well that's what's expected of me is to respond negatively and so Stella I think your point is just so well taken and so important not just in the broader fight but also that we can model the right kind of behavior the right kind of way of embracing and loving transgender people. So thank you for sharing that.

[00:33:34] Yes I will repeat the question what are my thoughts on or sort of advice for engaging with family members or friends who might be supportive and sort of the day to day but are engaging in political actions that end up harming LGBTQ people or frankly other Americans or the people in this country.

[00:33:55] You know I think that the language of pain is truly language that can move people.

[00:34:02] And I think so often we try to rationalize we try to argue the the merits of a candidate and this isn't going to work for everyone.

[00:34:13] But I do truly believe that if you can if you can go to a person and say this is hurting me this is causing me pain. I do believe that that kind of language does allow people maybe not in that moment but it does allow them to at least begin to rethink their actions when they understand that it's not abstract that a person that they love right in front of them is hurting because of what they're doing because what they're doing is demonstrating that they don't truly see me in my full dignity and my full worth. They can profess that they can say that they can on a day to day demonstrate that but at the end of the day voting is probably the most significant moral choice that we make. And if you're voting against or voting for a candidate who opposes equality and you have someone in your life who is LGBTQ there is no more fundamental decision you are making about that person's worth and so I think we need to enter into that language of pain through that language of hurt to demonstrate that

this is the political is personal for us. Again it won't work for everyone but that's usually how I go about it.

[00:35:28] That's a great question. You know I think there are there's no question that there are world leaders from around the globe who are stepping up to fill the vacuum that now exists because the United States after the election has rescinded from its place of championing human rights around the world including LGBTQ equality. HRC has a global program that works to support advocates around the world who are fighting for dignity safety and rights for LGBT people in their individual countries. And so you know there are certainly world leaders who've helped to fill that gap. You know Justin Trudeau and in many ways has stood up on the issue of LGBTQ equality internationally. But frankly I don't look to political leaders or world leaders with maybe a couple exceptions as inspiration in this fight. I think for me one of the most profound experiences that I've ever had in my experience as an advocate was last fall I went to South Africa on behalf of HRC to join transgender advocates from a number of southern African nations who are fighting for their rights.

[00:36:38] Now Africa is is not a monolithic continent. There are countries within Africa that are where the governments are either supportive or where there's been a lot of legal progress. When I was there Botswana had just had an incredibly important case for transgender people an identity document changes.

[00:36:59] But in meeting these advocates that are doing work in what is truly for me unimaginable circumstances.

[00:37:08] I mean the thing the stories that I heard from from these incredible activists of you can't even advocate in the public for your rights and some in some of these communities and some of the countries that they were representing. It was truly a humbling experience and I don't use that word lightly. I think it's oftentimes a trait overused saying but it was truly a humbling experience.

[00:37:30] And I find so much hope in the advocates and activists who are doing that hard work who are doing that work in the early stages of a movement in circumstances that their governments not even not even just not friendly but doesn't even provide the basic level of freedom of expression for them to organize safely. Those are folks that I find inspiration from but there are I mean there are some global leaders who've stepped up Justin Trudeau is one but the advocates on the ground are the ones who inspire me what's my favorite movie. That's a really good. Oh my God what is my favorite movie.

[00:38:12] I feel like I haven't seen a movie in a long time.

[00:38:15] Can I say TV show. Because that's what comes to my mind. First OK.

[00:38:21] So my my two favorite TV shows are the West Wing obviously boring answer and Big Brother but terrible reality. I didn't watch this season of The Bachelorette but or The Bachelor but usually the Bachelor and The Bachelorette are also on that list.

[00:38:38] I like terrible reality television. It's. Don't get me started on on all of that. What's my favorite movie. I have to think about that ask me that after OK while I have some time to think about it. Because. I haven't looked at when I last saw my facebook for favorite movies in a long long time. That's a good question. Stumpy. What's my favorite. My book now

[00:39:08] Also I'm super boring and one dimensional. My favorite book is actually a team of rivals by Doris Kearns Goodwin. It's about the Civil War and Abraham Lincoln's cabinet. And I think it is one of the most incredible books on leadership that I have ever read.

[00:39:22] It tells the stories you're like so interested in this answer. It tells the story of of all of the different cabinet members of Lincoln's Cabinet their bios their backstories their hopes their ambitions their positions.

[00:39:37] And then the second half the book then puts them in the cabinet and tells the story of all of these different competing personalities during the Civil War and how Lincoln was able to lead the nation lead this war and also lead this team of rivals within his cabinet.

[00:39:55] It blew my mind when I read it the first time and I read it like three times since that's my favorite book.

[00:40:01] Ok. Besides my own yes.

[00:40:07] So that's a great question. As I said there was no one in the history books that in the history books that I had.

[00:40:14] Right. People existed. People were doing great work. There just weren't featured too often aren't featured in and our history books. But I remember I remember reading about Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera I remember reading about Christine Jorgensen the blonde bombshell G.I.. I mean I just devoured anything I could get my hands on.

[00:40:35] You know the person that I think inspired me growing up particularly 13 and onward was this is the one political leader who didn't Spiderman's.

[00:40:47] It's frankly it's Barack Obama.

[00:40:49] Whether there are positions that he had that that you agree with or disagree with aside I think reading dreams from my father reading about his own struggle and search for identity and that journey to reconciliation with his own racial identity and his own pursuit of his own dreams I thought was really fascinating and I think you know a person reaching their dreams is not.

[00:41:17] You can't draw from that that things have been solved that everything's perfect. But I do think that those individual examples of people transforming impossibility into reality and the idea that

40 years before Barack Obama's election just blocks from the White House Washington D.C. was ablaze after the assassination of Martin Luther King. That even in 40 years you could go from that situation to having the nation's first black president. Is it I think a transformational change that we don't fully appreciate now 10 years after that election sort of it's now become just oh well that happened. But that is an anomaly and when you truly look at that history that is a truly transformational change and it inspired me and demonstrated to me that if we can make that kind of progress again.

[00:42:12] There are if this the last two years have demonstrated enough racial injustice and racial prejudice is still just as deeply held and just as much of a problem as as it's been for the last several decades.

[00:42:27] But it was still politics at its best which is not the art of the possible but the art of making the impossible possible.

[00:42:37] I mean there always there always needs to be more and I'd be just brought up bathroom rags in schools and I'd be remiss if I didn't say that I know a lot of people in this room are incredibly thankful when the initiative that would have truly harmed transgender people in the state failed to be adopted on and put on the ballot. That was that was huge and that was no small feat folks. And so many organizations including gender justice Esli here in Washington state did incredible work to to make sure that that didn't happen in terms of amplifying voices and stories.

[00:43:15] I think the structures exist for us to share those stories. I think social media I didn't repeat the question and I didn't repeat your question. How do we amplify stories. How do we sort of have systems change to make sure that more voices can be heard. I think the potential of social media there's a lot of negative potential. We've certainly seen that. But I think the positive potential of social media is that it is allowing us to elevate voices that historically have not been given a platform. It's allowed for marginalized communities to connect with one another and mobilize in unprecedented ways. And I think the challenge that we face and I think sort of your question is a question that I don't have a good answer to because I think the ultimate question for our generation is how do we channel the changing technology that we experience for good and not for evil.

[00:44:06] How do we cross the divide that is accentuated by individualized media sources whether it's social media or news media where you know one side truly cannot talk to the other side. And so I think the challenge for our generation for my generation and the generation coming up behind millennials is to figure out how do we bridge that divide how do we meet that individualized technology and media and information with solutions that allow us to actually finally reach one another. I think if there is a generation that's capable of figuring that out it's the generation right behind them millennials who are true digital natives or you have grown up in social media. And I think one of the most incredible things.

[00:44:54] And I don't know that we were removed enough from this to know exactly what's happening and how they're doing it. But I think the Parkland's students have truly figured out how to

leverage social media and leverage technology and leverage their voices and their stories to finally make change on an issue that has seemed so intractable. I mean the fact that Florida which has been like the playground for the NRA for the last two decades passed admittedly imperfect and insufficient but passed some gun violence prevention measures is truly a testament to their to their advocacy and I think they are demonstrating that it's possible to bridge that to that media divide and figure out how to share our stories in this new changing world.

[00:45:42] How do I stay positive. I mean I think I've touched on this but like Stella keeps me positive. Like knowing Stella exists truly is like one of the things that keeps me positive. I know that's what we're like we met like once but like. But but truly twice.

[00:45:58] The last chapter of my book. I got past the convention and I'm like crap what am I. How am I going to. Where do I find my hope.

[00:46:09] And that's what I sort of talked about is that this writing this book actually allowed me to refine my hope and it forced me to look at my life and take free and interrogate my experiences to find lessons from those experiences and the two things which which I touched on in my speech.

[00:46:30] But the two things that keep me motivated that keep me optimistic that keep me able to but one foot in front of the other in these dark political times. Is one that perspective that my brother that almost tritely but transformative Lee shared with me about Amazing Grace and that if you truly if you if you if you truly look around you can find beauty and tragedy that that you can that you can see it even in a moment. If if I was able to find beauty and tragedy and hope in an experience where a person what do you say to a person who's who's got terminal cancer.

[00:47:19] Right there isn't it will get better.

[00:47:20] There isn't that kind of answer and if you can find hope in that moment I feel like if I could find hope in that moment I feel like I'm prepared to find hope in moments that are dark in many different ways. But a situation where it's definite that something like that's going to end the way it was going to end. And so looking around and finding that Amazing Grace gives me strength. And then finally it is truly nothing invigorates me nothing provides me more hope and passion than meeting trans youth across the country. I mean if if as I said if these trans youth can hold in one hand the knowledge of all of the hate that exists in this world but hold in the other the knowledge that their identities are worth celebrating and their lives matter if if they can do that at 7 8 9 years old if they can if they can look at their identities with all of the challenges and ask not a question of how do you deal with the burden but what's your favorite part about being transgender. If they can have that perspective then dammit I'm going to try my hardest to have that perspective too. Great question. What can folks who aren't in the trans community do to support the trans community.

[00:48:30] The first is BIEC out.

[00:48:33] I mean I know that's obvious but I don't just mean speak out when they try to put an initiative on the ballot. Undermanned undermine trans rights.

[00:48:41] I don't mean just speak out when it comes to supporting the Equality Act which is the comprehensive LGBTQ non-discrimination bill in Congress. I mean speak out when you hear a joke that someone makes that is at the expense of transgender people. I mean speak out when you hear someone intentionally or unintentionally misgender a transgender person. It's not just important to speak out in those historically significant political moments. It's just as if not more important to also speak out and those individual moments that in their individuality might not seem like much but in their totality can have fatal consequences. And so we need our allies to not just be allies but be accomplices. Put something on the line and that might mean being uncomfortable because you're surrounded by friends and being the person who says that's not cold that's not right.

[00:49:37] It might be kind of like being a downer but we need people we need people to have those difficult conversations to make a situation uncomfortable when someone again intentionally or unintentionally has done something that reinforces the prejudice the stigma the discrimination and yes the violence that so often comes our communities way.

[00:49:58] We also need our allies though in the broader political sense to write an e-mail your lawmakers and your policy makers every time people are like why am I live in a district that is filled with supportive people and my member of Congress or my state legislator is supportive.

[00:50:15] They need to hear from you just as much as the person who's on the fence and just as much as a person who's anti equality because one they need to know that their constituents expect them not just to support equality but to be fighters and champions of equality. So making sure that you're reaching out when you see a negative bill happen or when you see a positive bill pending make sure that you are reaching out and talking to your legislators and demonstrating that equality is a threshold issue for you if you are not good on equality then I don't I will not support you. And of course this coming November's key voting voting voting voting voting we have so much at stake.

[00:50:57] If we do not ensure that at least one chamber and the federal government is pro equality a majority pro equality. And of course that means blue. If we don't ensure that then I don't know what what we're going to face because they're going to realize that if they think that they can get away with all of the hate that they're doing now without losing I don't know what they're going to do next. So we need people to vote.

[00:51:23] One more question. It's a really good question. So I would say to the question of how do you balance sort of public vulnerability with keeping certain keeping aspects of your personal life personal. You know for me I'm

[00:51:38] Pretty much an open book. There are some things that I don't want to talk about and I'm very comfortable saying my personal medical history is just that it's personal.

[00:51:48] I think so often we think that if people are willing to be vulnerable frankly so often we just think if you're a marginalized person that society is entitled to every piece of information they want to know. Commenting on you and your life and your identities in ways that are just absolutely inappropriate. So that that just exists more broadly.

[00:52:11] But for me I I think it's it's sharing one story can be incredibly empowering.

[00:52:20] But it is it's individual in terms of figuring out empowerment verse versus discomfort and for a long time I didn't talk about my experiences with sexual assault and sexual violence because of fear of not being believed because of fear that if I brought up sexual assault at all that people's minds would then immediately go to the bathroom myths. I worried that people would say no one's going to want to sexually assault a transgender person so we don't believe you because transgender people are you know insert whatever word they would use to describe us. But then it was actually through me to that that I finally gained the courage to to to share that. And afterwards I was like I don't know whether I'm actually comfortable about Hajaj shared that. And it was that sort of mix of empowerment versus discomfort. The one thing for me that I always say I will not and actually talk about this in the book is my transition. I talk a little bit about my transition in more detail than I usually do in the book because I don't think it would be fair to my relationship to Andy to not talk about how I benefited from both his work and his caregiving particularly since I talk about being a caregiver to him but I also say in the book I'm never going to talk about this again publicly.

[00:53:33] And I think I'm entitled to lay down that line and to say you want to learn about that read the book but I'm not going to talk about that anymore. I think it's individual for everyone. But I think everyone deserves to know that like let's say you're sharing your story publicly let's say you're trying. You're talking to a reporter. I think so often we think what a blessing that someone cares about my story and if they ask me this you know what I don't want to I don't want to risk them leaving this conversation or shutting down this conversation because I refuse to answer a certain question and I get that and sometimes I have that experience. But I think everyone needs to know that you can always stop a conversation. You don't have to answer every question. I think being patient and and allowing people to understand why something was a mistake or was inappropriate to ask in a kind way is important. If it's if it's truly done out of ignorance not out of malicious intent but don't feel like anyone is entitled to anything that you're not comfortable giving and it's individual for everyone there is no one size fits all well.

[00:54:39] Thank you all very much for the wonderful questions and I look forward to signing some books. Thanks again for coming out this evening. I really enjoyed it.

[00:54:58] This podcast was presented by The Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to The Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening.