

First Half (30 minutes)

Seth Davis: [00:00:01] All right. This is Seth Davis. I'm here with H. Gelfand He's a professor at James Madison University. It is Thursday October 25th at three thirty nine p.m., it is a cloudy afternoon. Would you mind just stating your name age and what you do?

H Gelfand: [00:00:17] Yes hello I'm H and I teach in the history department I also teach interdisciplinary liberal studies and honors.

Seth Davis: [00:00:22] Awesome. What brought you to Harrisonburg?

H Gelfand: [00:00:24] I got offered a job here.

Seth Davis: [00:00:26] Really?

H Gelfand: [00:00:27] Yes.

Seth Davis: [00:00:30] Where do you come from originally?

H Gelfand: [00:00:31] I grew up in northern New Jersey right outside of New York City and stay there until I was 17. Do you want me to tell you the whole story?

Seth Davis: [00:00:39] Yes please.

H Gelfand: [00:00:40] Okay so I was there until I was 17 and I graduated high school then I went to University of Georgia where I got my undergraduate degree. Then I went to the University of Kentucky for a year and a half and got my first master's degree. Then I moved back to Athens Georgia and I worked for a history professor for two years. Then I got my second master's degree in history. Then I moved to Tucson and went to the University of Arizona where I got my history PhD. And then I moved for one year to Phoenix where I taught at Arizona State University. Then I moved back to Tucson and taught for two years at year of Arizona. And then I started teaching here.

Seth Davis: [00:01:15] Awesome.

H Gelfand: [00:01:16] In a nutshell that's the whole thing.

Seth Davis: [00:01:18] What made you get into--

H Gelfand: [00:01:19] (Jokingly) No other questions.

Seth Davis: [00:01:20] No other questions!

H Gelfand: [00:01:20] What got me into history?

Seth Davis: [00:01:23] Yeah.

H Gelfand: [00:01:24] So it's it's a strange story but I'll give you the abbreviated version. So in between what I just told you I had graduated from the University of Kentucky and the degree was in diplomacy and the goal was that I was going to work for something called a Foreign Agriculture Service. And the idea was that I was going to go to Africa and attempt to help people figure out more efficient methods of agriculture so that in drought or I guess you would say like areas stricken with some sort of like horrible problem that we would go over and educate them as to how to plant better how to plant more diverse or something like that. And while I was in the process of training for that the federal government eliminated the entire project. So I was left no job and so I was trying to figure out what to do. So I went back to Athens where I knew a bunch of people and I was trying to find a job and I could not find a job and one day I was walking by the history building at the University of Georgia and there was this light on and it was the office of this professor who I'd had when I was a freshman. So we're talking like six years before that. So it just sort of out of desperation I went up to his office and I was just like... I think he remembered my face but not my name. No idea who I was and I told him my situation and I said "I just need a job. Do you know of anything?" and he said "No." And as I was shutting the door he said "Wait come back" and I went back in and he made a phone call and he had this conversation. He said "My best friend in this department just found out today that he has cancer, and he's going to need somebody to organize all of the papers in his world so that all of it can be organized and given to the library before he dies. Could you do that?" And I'm like "Fuck yeah."

****omitted****

H Gelfand: [00:06:28] So that's how it happened.

Seth Davis: [00:06:34] All right. Other than teaching what have you done with your a history degree.

H Gelfand: [00:06:40] Well I've done a bu-- I guess a bunch of things. So when I went out two years of Arizona, I realized that because getting a PhD is really intense that I was going to need something and kind of take my mind off of the intensity. So I don't know how or why it occurred to me now but one day, Tucson has this enormous air force base in it because all of the planes that the military stores they're all stored at this Air Force Base and so there's tens of thousands of airplanes. So there's very sort of strange facilities all around the city of Tucson. And so one day I just drove to the Air Force Base, this was way before 9/11 when you could still drive on military bases, and I met up with the the base cultural resources manager and I said to her "I'm H I have a Ph-- or I'm getting a PhD. I said Do you have something that I could do as a volunteer job" And she's like "What do you want to do?" And I'm like "I have no idea what needs to be done?" And she said "Well" she said "We have a couple of old airplane hangars that we're trying to get preserved. You could write the reports on them" and I'm like "Fuck yeah. So every Friday, because they did a class on Fridays, I just go sit in this tiny little like wooden building at this Air Force Base that was built during World War 2. And I would just go over all of these architectural plans and all these logs and I wrote these two reports. And-- then one day just by some weird coincidence this other graduate student said to me, ****omitted**** "Don't you do something at the Air Force?" and I said "Yeah." And he said "Oh because I'm looking for a summer job and I saw this in a printed it out for you." And it was in advertisement for a job working for the Air Force doing historic preservation work which was exactly what I was doing for the Air Force in Tucson. The only problem was that this was like, on, I don't know it say, like a Wednesday and the due date was on the previous Monday. So I was like (gestures confusingly). So I called the phone number and I said to the guy you know "I realize some company is late. Have you already filled the position?" And he said "Do you have a fax machine?" And the history department had a fax. So I fax in my resume. And five minutes later he calls back he says "I want you to apply right now." And I'm like "Okay."

So I apply and I get this job and so what it led to is that all the summers of my PhD I was employed by the Air Force.

Seth Davis: [00:09:07] Wow.

H Gelfand: [00:09:07] And so I got to go to all these Air Force bases around the country. (Walks over to bookshelf) So if you look at all of these books here that have these stealth fighters on them I helped to write or edit all of them.

Seth Davis: [00:09:19] Really?

H Gelfand: [00:09:19] And those were all out of an Air Force Base in New Mexico and then I was at an Air Force Base in Virginia down in Hampton, Virginia. I was down there for a while. And then I was at an Air Force Base outside of Tacoma, Washington. That was one summer, and then one summer I said-- spent living in Santa Barbara even though there's not an air force base there. There is a government contracting firm that was doing a big products live there. And so I got all these publications and I got all this expertise in historic preservation. So that's part of what I do now on the side of-- of the teaching part, is I'm the head of a historic preservation organization in New Jersey.

Seth Davis: [00:10:04] Really?

H Gelfand: [00:10:04] And it's called the Bergen County Historical Society. That's that certificate up there.

Seth Davis: [00:10:09] Mm hmm.

H Gelfand: [00:10:09] And basically what I do is I am the person who advocates for all these buildings being kept standing around. This is a county that is across the Hudson River from Manhattan. So it's the greater New York City metro. So there's as you might imagine a lot of pressure a development because people want to make a lot of money. So right now, I don't know if I've told you this before, but right now the big project that we're working on is a place called the Van Gelder studio which I did not even know about. We have a professor in the history department named Lamont King who is a jazz musician and Lamont and I talk about music all the time and one day he gave me this

uh, this John Coltrane CD. And he said "You should listen to this." And I'm like "OK." And I'm reading all the liner notes and I see it is recorded at this place that's in a town up in the county where I grew up and I'm like (makes surprised expression). So I called them up and I'm like "What is the deal with the studio?" He goes "It's the most important music studio in the world." He's like "How do you not know about it?" And I'm like "I have no idea." So the next summer I go to New Jersey and I look the place up in the phone book and I call. And the guy at the time was 92.

Seth Davis: [00:11:16] Really.

H Gelfand: [00:11:16] And he had built a studio in 1958. It's designed by a couple of students of Frank Lloyd Wright. And it's believed to be the first music studio that was ever designed and built as a music studio, because most of them are just in other buildings like Sun Studios where Elvis-- it's a little just a storefront.

Seth Davis: [00:11:35] Mm hmm.

H Gelfand: [00:11:35] And then NBC and CBS they did all these jazz and rock and roll recordings in New York City but they're all just news office buildings. So uh-- so yes I've been the lead person on this big effort to get the building saved. So it's a really incredible project. Yeah. John Coltrane recorded what a lot of people consider to be the most important recording of all of music which is called A Love Supreme.

Seth Davis: [00:11:59] Mm hmm.

H Gelfand: [00:11:59] In that studio.

Seth Davis: [00:12:00] Wow.

H Gelfand: [00:12:01] Yeah. And then his last recording which came out just after he died, he was a heroin addict and he-- he died the year that I was born. And a couple of months later his final CD came out and it's called Interstellar Space. And that's the specific recording that if you read Beyonce, Kendrick Lamar, Dr. Dre, all these people they say this is the piece of music that created hip hop.

Seth Davis: [00:12:28] Really?

H Gelfand: [00:12:28] So it's just kind of interesting that the tail end of his career the beginning and the end is two big recordings are in that studio. Yeah.

Seth Davis: [00:12:34] I've just really gotten into Kendrick Lamar so I should try to check that out.

H Gelfand: [00:12:37] You should check-- yeah. If you listen to A Love Supreme it's very very sort of beautiful interesting recording where he attempts to bring in a lot of tribal music from various places in Africa. It's a very very interesting recording. Yeah. A lot of people have thought about that but Interstellar Space is a totally different ballgame. You might really like that. It's a little bit out there that sounds kind of fun.

Seth Davis: [00:12:58] So going back to you where you grew up in New Jersey you might tell me a little bit about your childhood?

H Gelfand: [00:13:04] Well I guess the sort of kicker of it ****omitted**** is that I'm adopted.

Seth Davis: [00:13:14] Really?

H Gelfand: [00:13:15] Which I did not know. So I basically just you know grew up in this very modest middle class household, older sister, parents. My dad was a superintendent for a school system. My mom was the vice president of a company that makes furniture fabric.

Seth Davis: [00:13:29] Mm hmm.

H Gelfand: [00:13:30] And then I just kind of ordinary middle class New Jersey lifestyle you know nothing particularly fancy. You know like a lot of other people you know went to New York all the time to do-- for a while my parents really big into go into Broadway musical so we did a lot of that and, just kind of average lifestyle. Yeah. ****omitted****

H Gelfand: [00:13:56] Anyway.

Seth Davis: [00:13:57] All right. Let me find another question to ask. I have a lot so don't worry. Let's see.

H Gelfand: [00:14:04] You're welcome to ask all of them.

Seth Davis: [00:14:07] Huh?

H Gelfand: [00:14:07] You can ask all of them.

Seth Davis: [00:14:09] Okay, let's see. All right. So you mentioned that these books here you helped write, are there any books that you've written yourself?

H Gelfand: [00:14:18] Yeah. It's called See Change at Annapolis. It's about the Naval Academy. And uh-- yeah that-- so one of these summers that I had been working for the Air Force I was working at the Pentagon and, sort of a funny story because the woman who is my supervisor just decided from day one to dislike me. So I called the supervisor and I was just like "I don't know what to do because this woman apparently is not going to like me." So he then arranged for me to get a job working for the National Park Service for the summer.

Seth Davis: [00:14:49] Really.

H Gelfand: [00:14:49] Doing the same thing just with the National Park Service. So that turned out to be a much much better job. And the woman who is my boss who has incredible title, her title is the keeper of the National Register of Historic Places. So she is like in charge of making all the decisions about what gets listed or not listed in terms of historic purposes. So once a week I had to go to the Library of Congress and get her books for her. And uh the library Congress is not like most libraries. You make a request and then hours later somebody arrives with your books because they have so many books there everything is in storage. So a couple of weeks before, there is this one day that I go, a couple weeks before this friend of mine, his dad is an Air Force general down at Langley Air Force Base in Hampton, invited me to come down for this big party weekend that they were going to have and he said "Is there any way you can on the way down here can you stop in Annapolis and take this friend of ours up?" and I'm like

whatever. So this kid went to the Naval Academy which I'd never been to before so I go in and pick him up and then we have like a three hour ride down to Hampton so we're chatting the whole way and I'm learning all this stuff at the Naval Academy and then I bring him back. And he says "Have you ever gone on a grand tour of the Naval Academy?" and I said no. He's like "Well then why don't I show you around?" So look around and I'm like you know very interesting place I know have you've been there before. I've been to West Point a bunch of times because it's right by New York City but, so this one afternoon I'm just waiting and waiting waiting for these fucking books at the Library of Congress. And I needed to pick a topic for my dissertation.

Seth Davis: [00:16:27] Mm hmm.

H Gelfand: [00:16:28] And so I just typed into the computer "Naval Academy" and almost nothing comes up. And then you type in "West Point" and it's like every year dozens of books are written about West Point because all these war generals came from there and so people are like obsessed with West Point. And then all the world war 2 generals. So the next day I call over to the Naval Academy Library I do what you're not just do I call the reference desk. And I'm like you know here's who I am and I need a topic. Do you think-- you know the woman said you know "What kind of things you're interested in?" And I said "I've been envisioning doing something either deals with race or ethnicity or gender or maybe all three of them." And she said "What are you doing at lunchtime tomorrow?" and I said nothing she said "Can you say can you drive over here?" and I said yeah. She said "I'll arrange for a tour of the archive." and I said OK. Well as it turned out I got the history librarian. And so I get over there and she and the archivist and I were walking through the archive and I don't know if you ever seen like a documentary archive it's basically rafters that are filled with boxes from the floor to the ceiling. And this guy says "Well you know we have like these fifty seven boxes about the integration of black people here that have never been opened. So I have no idea what's in them." And we go down the next row and he says "This entire wall is papers about the integration of women. These things have never been opened and I'm like (surprised expression). So I called my dissertation advisor back in Tucson I said "I think I have a topic." There's like hundreds of boxes of shit that has not been opened. So-- so I ended up living at the Naval Academy for two years and the guy who was the admiral who headed up the school was John McCain's roommate for all four years. And so I

subsequently later on got to know John McCain and John McCain wrote the foreword to the book.

Seth Davis: [00:18:17] That's amazing.

H Gelfand: [00:18:17] Yeah. So it's sort of like a really fun topic. Yeah fun project. Living in a place like that was a really extraordinary experience. It was a very interesting thing. ****omitted**** It was a very very intense and memorable two years in my life. Yeah. And then the dissertation turned into a book.

Seth Davis: [00:19:03] That's awesome.

H Gelfand: [00:19:04] Yeah it's very exciting.

Seth Davis: [00:19:05] So you mentioned you knew John McCain.

H Gelfand: [00:19:08] Yeah.

Seth Davis: [00:19:08] And I see there he wrote you a personal autograph.

H Gelfand: [00:19:10] Yeah.

Seth Davis: [00:19:11] Do you mind, uh, sharing a little bit about any encounters you had with John McCain.

H Gelfand: [00:19:14] Yeah. So what happened is um-- so one of the nice things about the PhD program at the University of Arizona is that they allow graduate students to teach their own classes so that when we go on the job market we've now told our own classes which is basically how I got the job here because by the time I taught here I'd already taught nine different classes and most-- mostly at University of Arizona, few at Arizona State. And so one of the classes that I was teaching every summer is the class called Vietnam and the Cold War, it's a Vietnam War class. And it's done in what is called The Summer Precession there which is a three week period. So you go to class every day for four hours Monday through Friday for three weeks. So it's very intense. Students are only allowed to take one class at a time. And what's really awesome is,

because we're together all day, they-- it's just a very intense learning experience because you're just sort of living and breathing only this well because it's also so short. You can't really assign very long books. So John McCain has this one of his uh-- autobiographies which covers the time of Vietnam. So I assigned it. And so the first year I just sent him a letter and I just said you know "I'm teaching this class they're reading your book do you want to come here?" Nothing. Second year, same thing nothing. Third year I don't know why I did it the third year but I faxed the invitation, and-- maybe like two weeks before the class. And then on the last week-- I want to say it was like on Wednesday, I get done teaching and I'm leaving the building, and one of the history secretaries comes running after me. She's like "Don't leave yet don't leave" and I'm like "What's the problem?" She goes she has this piece of paper she goes "You have to call this number" and I'm like "What is this number?" she goes "It's John McCain's office" and I'm like oh dear God. So I call and it's his scheduler up in Phoenix. Phoenix is about about an hour and a half to two hour drive from Tucson. So I call the woman says "McCain is coming tomorrow to Tucson. Do you want him to come to your class?" And I'm like fuck yeah. And she's like "He can only spend 15 minutes" and I'm like if he can spend 15 seconds that's great. So I'll tell you this story because it's actually so funny. So our class is being held in the business school and the College of Business Arizona is this massive thing. It's very highly ranked. And so they have a building which is sort of like a a big rectangle and there is this huge outdoor atrium in the middle. And it has like all these palm trees and it has like a waterfall and a pond and all this stuff. It's very beautiful. And our classroom was off of this courtyard. And, uh, but-- that sort of sunk it into the ground so to get to our classroom you have to actually enter from the floor above which is facing the street. So I get all dressed up. I'm outside by the street waiting for McCain to show up. I have no idea how McCain is showing because I don't know what the protocol is for a senator coming into campus. So I don't know if there's gonna be like a police escort or a helicopter I have no idea what's going to happen. So I'm waiting and waiting and all the sudden like 10 cop cars come like, sirens full blast come pull up before the building and these dudes all go running in the building and I'm like holy shit this is awesome. So I said to one of them. I said "Are you here for John McCain?" And he goes "No I'm here for the naked guy." I have no idea what that means I'm just like OK. And then this Honda Accord pulls up and out pops John McCain and McCain I'd like-- I'm like-- Seth I'm just like totally dumbfounded because there he is.

Seth Davis: [00:22:52] Yeah.

H Gelfand: [00:22:53] I'd seen it on TV like a million times. And he was a lot shorter and a lot more crippled than I had anticipated he would be. And so I walked up to him and I shook his hand and he said "What's with all the cop cars?" And I said "I'm not really sure exactly. I thought maybe they're coming for you." and he's like "For me?" and he's sort of laughing he's like "I'm not that important." Like, OK. So we go up these stairs into the building and then down the stairs. And when we are approaching the waterfall part. There's this homeless dude who just decided to take his clothes off and just go swimming in this pond. So as McCain and I are walking by the guy is like this (mimics being handcuffed) junk out right in front of us. And McCain just stops and he looks at me and he says "You know, I've been a guest at Arizona State University many times. They've never arranged to have a naked guy to greet me." I was just like-- And at that moment I knew that he was going to be like totally awesome.

Seth Davis: [00:23:50] Yeah.

H Gelfand: [00:23:52] So uh-- so instead of spending the 15 minutes he spent the entire four hours with our class.

Seth Davis: [00:23:57] Wow.

H Gelfand: [00:23:57] And his son if you saw, I don't know if you watched the funeral, the son that was sitting with his wife who is in the Navy now he was graduating high school that night.

Seth Davis: [00:24:05] Oh really.

H Gelfand: [00:24:05] And McCain was late to the graduation because he was in my class.

Seth Davis: [00:24:08] Wow.

H Gelfand: [00:24:09] And he first lectured. And then when he got done lecturing his assistant who drove him she was like sort of hinting that they needed to leave to get on the road back to Phoenix. And he comes up to me he whispers in my ear and he says

"Do you mind if I talked to all of your students individually?" And I'm like "I'm sure they would love it." They all had their books. And so he said at a desk and each one of them came and sat, talked to him face and he asked you know who are you, where are you from, what's your major, what's your life plan. He signed your books and up until he just died two of those students were still working for him, one in Phoenix and one in DC. That's how fucking nice he was. So on the way out he said to me "I didn't even ask, like, who are you, what do you do?" and I said "I'm a history PhD student." And he said "What are you studying?" And I said "Well I'm writing my dissertation it's about the Naval Academy." And he goes "Do you know that I went there?" and I'm like "Yeah because your roommate is the guy that ran the school for the two years" and he's like "You know Chuck Larson?" And I'm like "Yeah." And then he looked at me all funny he was like "Oh.." I was like "...Okay whatever." And he said if you ever write it up as a book I'll write the foreword to the book. So he wrote the foreword to the book.

Seth Davis: [00:25:18] That's amazing.

H Gelfand: [00:25:20] So since this woman from my class got hired as one of his staffers every time he came to Tucson she would email me and say McCain's gonna be here/there whatever. So I have all this shit with his signature on it. I have books, T-shirts, pictures, all the stuff. So sometimes he was just going to like an Elks Lodge. Sometimes he was going to like speak to some class. Sometimes he was just going to a bookstore or whatever and I would always go. And every time that he saw me. I don't think he had any idea what my name was. But he would go like this, he would go "You're the Naval Academy guy I know you!" And I'm like "Yeah!" And he would say, he would always ask the same thing he would say "Tell me a story that didn't end up in the book."

Seth Davis: [00:26:00] Really.

H Gelfand: [00:26:01] And then I would just tell him some random story. And so the last time I saw him, which was the last conversation I ever had with him he said "Tell me a story that I don't know-- what was not in the book."

[00:26:10] And I said well I said your roommate was Chuck Larson and Larson was the admiral who was running the Naval Academy and I said I wrote a letter to Admiral

Larson asking if I could come do all this research at the Naval Academy, and in the letter I asked to go through something called the pleeb summer which is like the initial training that all the kids there go through. And I thought it would be as an outsider a really quick and easy way for me to learn everything because it's simultaneously like a total military indoctrination, a total Naval Academy education, like the whole overview of the history. And everyday you run like eight miles and you do like eight million push ups and sit ups. And I'm, you know, in relatively good shape and this was also like 20 years ago so I was in much better shape then. And I didn't hear anything back for like a month. And finally the department head at the University of Arizona she said "Did you ever hear back?" And I said no and she called out there and the next day I got this letter from Admiral Larson telling me you can come and so Larson later told me that the delay was that he thought that the letter was a joke because he couldn't believe somebody was volunteering to go through the pleeb summer. So he was sharing this letter with all these people as if it was a joke and finally somebody said you know this actually might be serious. And then my boss called and said you know the kid was waiting to find out if you can come out there or not. So I told McCain this whole story. He goes I told you to tell me a story I didn't know, I already knew that story." I'm like "You knew that story?" He said "I knew that story the day I met you" and "I'm like you did?" He was like "Because Chuck called me up and said 'this crazy person from Arizona wants to come here to do research what do I do about this.'" And he read the letter to McCain, and McCain said well he must be serious about it so let him come. So he also inadvertently ended up being in part responsible for my being even able to go there.

Seth Davis: [00:28:02] That's amazing.

H Gelfand: [00:28:03] Yeah. So you see now I got really emotional when he died because--

Seth Davis: [00:28:08] Yeah.

H Gelfand: [00:28:08] You know even though he's not somebody I had, exactly, a personal interaction with on a regular basis-- nice enough. And then, Seth uh, like a week after he died his wife's secretary called.

Seth Davis: [00:28:19] Yeah.

H Gelfand: [00:28:21] And says we're going through all his papers do you want the papers that have your name on the file and I'm like "My name is on it?" So what they sent me this is a copy of the last version of the book before it got published so that he could read the book and then write the foreword from it.

Seth Davis: [00:28:41] No way.

H Gelfand: [00:28:42] So he literally touched all this, but anyway.

Seth Davis: [00:28:45] Oh my gosh.

H Gelfand: [00:28:46] So it was really funny. So I said yes and then one day one of the secretaries in the department goes "Oh my God John McCain sent you something and he's dead" and I'm like--

Seth Davis: [00:28:57] From beyond the grave.

H Gelfand: [00:28:57] Yes from beyond the grave I got mail from John McCain.

Seth Davis: [00:29:01] He truly was a once in a lifetime person.

H Gelfand: [00:29:03] Yeah. A really really super guy. I didn't agree with most of his politics but--

Seth Davis: [00:29:06] Yeah.

H Gelfand: [00:29:07] You know, that's neither here nor there. He was just at the end of it just a very nice person.

Seth Davis: [00:29:12] Yeah. Sounds like it. So it sounds like you really you know look up to John McCain and draw inspiration from him, are there-- is there anyone else that you sort of, you know, connect with, draw inspiration from?

H Gelfand: [00:29:25] Sure lots of people. So Seth, uh do you see that broken door behind the door.

Seth Davis: [00:29:29] Yes.

H Gelfand: [00:29:29] So that door came from the house of a guy named Charles Gatewood, have you ever heard Charles Gatewood?

Seth Davis: [00:29:35] I have not.

H Gelfand: [00:29:37] So do you know, uh, the Indian leader who's named Geronimo.

Seth Davis: [00:29:40] Mm-mm. Oh wait yes I do.

H Gelfand: [00:29:41] Yeah. So Geronimo very famously kept the American army chasing him for a decade in Arizona, New Mexico, and in Mexico. And there was an Army officer who befriended him he was named Charles Gatewood and befriended him to such a degree that he learned the Cheracow Apache language and used to hang out with Geronimo in Geronimo's camp.

Seth Davis: [00:30:03] Really.

H Gelfand: [00:30:03] And when it was-- the sort of pressure was on for Geronimo to surrender, he's the individual who rode horseback about thirty-five miles found Geronimo in a canyon and convinced Geronimo to surrender. And that guy was from Harrisonburg.

Seth Davis: [00:30:17] No way.

Second Half (28 minutes)

H Gelfand: [00:00:00] And that door is from his house.

Seth Davis: [00:00:03] Wow.

H Gelfand: [00:00:03] So when the guy who owns it was doing some work in the house he called me up and said "I'm going to get rid of this trashy door do you want it and I was like "Of course." So there it sits. Yeah. So Gatewood, he's one of the few people-- he was from Harrisonburg, he graduated from West Point, and he never killed an Indian person because he was so religious. I'm not terribly religious but his religious sentiment was such that you love people you don't kill people. So he went to all this extent to learn the language and then his papers are actually kept at the University of Arizona, so when I was out there one summer I read all of the papers. He was out in all these different little towns in Arizona collecting money for donations for the Cheracowa Apache.

Seth Davis: [00:00:50] That's amazing.

H Gelfand: [00:00:51] Anyway so that's somebody who inspires me a great deal.

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H Gelfand: [00:03:42] Yeah. And then I guess you know there's like this whole host of other people

omitted

Seth Davis: [00:09:43] Yeah. So as a-- as an historian what do you think is the importance of oral history? Do you think it's-- do you think it's as credible as written history, and do you think that it should be something that should be looked into more?

H Gelfand: [00:10:00] Well for that dissertation I interviewed 350 people, roughly, at the Naval Academy. So yeah I'm very big on oral history especially where we are today when people don't write letters anymore and paperwork is just simply not generated anymore. Andrew (Andrew is one of H's former students who sat in for the latter half of the interview) is sitting over there in front of those two blue containers that are filled with all these photocopies of things that I got from the archives at the Naval Academy. But people don't print that shit up anymore. So, when you look at today's world where we

are in terms of communication oral history becomes very very important because that is mostly the only way you're ever going to get to know stories.

Seth Davis: [00:10:39] Mm-Hmm.

H Gelfand: [00:10:39] But the other thing that I really like about it is it really brings a human face into archival material. So for example like one of things I was doing-- I was intending to, uh, to interview all of the people who were in the top two positions at the Naval Academy from 1949 when I started until 2000 when I finished. And when you read people's papers you know you sort of get a sense of them a little bit but mostly not. Then when you sit one on one with them, it all kind of starts coming together and you sort of get a sense from what people tell you, are they bullshitting you or they're being serious, do they drink Kool-Aid, you know. You really get an idea of who they are. And so that's like one of the great joys that I have had as a historian is doing oral history projects because it really allows you to talk to people who can fill in answers to the questions that you have. We can tell you the details that are not written down. Just as an example, like, Gloria Steinem was the first woman ever invited to the Naval Academy. Do you know who Gloria Steinem is?

Seth Davis: [00:11:43] I've heard the name.

H Gelfand: [00:11:44] She is a very famous feminist who started the most important women's magazine it's called Ms Magazine.

Seth Davis: [00:11:51] Okay.

H Gelfand: [00:11:52] And she was very famous. She-- for a writing assignment she dressed up as a Playboy bunny for one of Hugh Hefner's Playboy Clubs and served as a waitress. You asked about my earlier life, my parents used to take me to the Playboy clubs around New York City as a little child. I can remember the whole thing so vividly. As a little kid it was you know not as much a sexual thing it's just like there's women dressed up as rabbits like what's the deal bringing around drinks and bringing me Shirley Temples and it was all very exciting. I can remember that so vividly. So she did that and then wrote a series of articles that exposed the sexual harassment, the rape that went on with this whole system and then subsequently became this very famous

feminist leader. So when I found in the paper that she was the first woman to be invited I sent her a letter and I was like "Is there any way that I can interview you?" And she was like "Of course!" And she was like she called me up and it was the most amazing thing. It's not very often that I get to interview like super famous people. And she's like she was laughing she said "In a million years I would never have remembered that I even went to the Naval Academy." And in order to rile everybody up it's this very very famous moment in the history of the Naval Academy because they got the entire student body together in an auditorium. And when she saw that it was all guys and there was literally not another woman. The first thing she said it was to get everybody riled up. She said quote "There is no job I can think of that requires a penis or a vagina." And then there's just this uproar, people booing like "What the fuck!" and all this stuff.

Seth Davis: [00:13:34] Yeah.

H Gelfand: [00:13:35] And all of the guys who were there very very vividly remember it. The admiral who was the head of the school at the time very vividly remembered the whole thing. And then I interviewed her and she dumps forward all of this information which none of them share with me about the experience and I'm like "Fuck." And it was great we were on the phone for like two hours. The next day she calls me back again because the conversation just kind of like evoked all these other memories about that day. So I would know none of that without having had done that oral history. And on the other side I got, I think I calculated it was about a 14 percent reply rate to the letters that I sent requesting interviews.

Seth Davis: [00:14:15] Wow.

H Gelfand: [00:14:15] And then as soon as that book got published I-- somewhere in the drawer here I have the hate mail file. All these people are like "You've got this story wrong!" "Why the fuck did you say this when it was that!" And they were all people that I'd asked for interviews. So I handled them all letters back and I said "I'm sorry that you don't feel that this is how it happened." I said, that's part of what's in those blue folders I kept carbon copies of everything I sent out, I said "On like April 24th of 1999 I sent you a letter asking for an interview you never replied. So therefore I cannot know this." So that just sort of underscores how important it is to we get people-- now they may or may not be telling you the truth but at least you're gonna get some ideas.

Seth Davis: [00:14:59] Exactly .

H Gelfand: [00:14:59] Like the very first guy who I interviewed was the the dean of students when women came and he was fairly old at the time he lived in some suburb of D.C. and I drove out to his house and he was very lovely. We sat down on his back porch. He made a sweet tea. And he looked at me and he said "I've read everything you sent me and this is what I don't understand." And I said OK. With a smile on his face he says "You're making women out to seem like some big deal. We were told they were coming. We made it work. So why do we have any questions?" And I know damn well women were raped, sexually harassed, the whole nine yards and he's acting like none of it happened. And I'm like "You really don't think any of those things happened?" He's like "If any of that had happened I would have known about it!"

Seth Davis: [00:15:46] All right.

H Gelfand: [00:15:48] So yes I do think oral history is incredibly important but-- on its own, may not help you that much when it's backed up with archival material, the newspapers then it's very very useful. Very useful.

Seth Davis: [00:16:01] Only two more questions left. The next one is, as a professor what is one thing that you hope all of your students take away from your class?

H Gelfand: [00:16:11] Now the one thing that they're not going to take away is any information because they're all going to brain dump the information. So basically I think at this stage of my teaching career-- however many years, the first class I taught was in 2000 so or 18 years in-- is to try to encourage people to read and to think for themselves. Those are the two most important things that really I can do. Because most people are not going remember-- Andrew took like seven classes with me, Andrew doesn't remember a single fucking thing that he learned in my classes. I can guarantee you. But, people need to be reminded all the time to keep reading and keep learning. The knowledge base continues to expand exponentially every hour. And in order to keep on top of things you need to keep reading all this stuff. And this is what I would say. This is what is the most helpful thing that I can try to do to encourage people. But I think also, you know, then-- as you have probably gathered there are some students

with whom I develop personal interactions because they're just awesome people. And with those people I would say I'm trying to encourage them to live good lives. You know, do interesting things. This is the only thing about my life which has been really awesome, is that most of the time-- not all of them but most of the time-- when given unusual opportunities I've just gone with the flow and just done them. And as a result I've ended up meeting a whole bunch of interesting people, interacting with others, having strange and interesting interactions. Because, you know what, when you put yourself out there things happen and that's an important life lesson it's the only thing that has really been interesting about my life. When I look back, like if I were to die today and look back at all the things that were interesting, they've all been about the moments where I was just like fuck it and just go balls out and do whatever. Because--.

Seth Davis: [00:17:59] Yeah.

H Gelfand: [00:18:00] If you're given an opportunity and you don't take it what might happen you know and all sorts of things happen. You meet people who you know have these things take place it's very interesting. That was not a very good answer.

Seth Davis: [00:18:13] That was a very good answer.

H Gelfand: [00:18:15] I don't know.

Seth Davis: [00:18:15] Alright so my last question is: What do you want people to take away from your story? What do you want the listeners to hear and get from your story?

H Gelfand: [00:18:22] From my story?

Seth Davis: [00:18:23] Yes.

H Gelfand: [00:18:26] Just keep exploring. Because you never know what you're going to learn about yourself. And keep talking to people who knew you when you were young and knew you along the way. Because, in the process of the whole thing about finding out about my adoption, I found out, just by asking all the people that were aware of it, things and pieced together a lot more than I knew because everybody had a little tiny pieces. But just keep talking to people because-- this is one of the things that I find

interesting like this is an example. A few years ago I started talking to people randomly on the subway in New York. Now I do it all the fucking time. And then what you find out is that you have all these unusual things in common with people that you would never know if you didn't just simply sit and talk to people. And then you end up with people that you interact with later on. This is how-- half the people I'm friends with on Twitter or Instagram how I know them. Like I-- Seth I'll give you an example. One last story. OK so I don't even think I told Andrew this story but so in August I was giving this conference paper at a place called Santa Clara University out in California. And I was gonna be there for enough days that I was going to have to have some kind of transportation. Normally one-- if you're in a big city you just used public transit, if you're not going to be in a big city you've got a car or whatever. You provide a budget to JMU, JMU pays for all of it whatever. So San Jose doesn't really have very good public transit. And I knew that, because the conference is gonna go late in the day and there's no real restaurant scene around the campus or I was staying, I was gonna wanna get somehow to the downtown of San Jose to eat at restaurants. So I proposed getting a bike. So JMU finally agreed to let me get a bike. I rented a bike. And it was fucking awesome. And so one of the things that I was just sort of like doing was, everyday as soon as the conference was over I got on the bike-- well, I went and changed I got rid of the tie-- and then I plotted from (gets up and points at a map of San Jose) basically from Santa Clara to the downtown of San Jose which was about six miles. Plotted a different route each day. The destination was the same restaurant because this restaurant, I was obsessed with, a taco restaurant. It was just so fucking good. And then every night afterward I just went and tooled around in San Jose and just explored. So the last night that I was there it was a Saturday night. I get done with dinner I'm all excited about life. Well, San Jose State University is this huge ca-- college campus in the downtown of San Jose. And I've taught about it. I've read about it. There's a lot of significant and important people went to school there. For example Gaylord Nelson, the founder of Earth Day, went to school there. A lot of interesting people. So I go over there and I'm just kind of like astounded because the place is stunningly beautiful. So I'm just like on the bike and I'm just like taking it all in. And somebody taps me on the shoulder, and it's a group of Punjabi kids, and they want to know if I'll play cricket with them. And I'd like and they've got the whole paddle and everything and I'm like "I would be happy to watch you play. But I do not know anything about it" but. Anyway they come watch us. And they barely speak English. They were just students there and they were awesome. And we had this really great time and I was like very stoked about life. So I hang out with them for a little while and then I notice that

it's going to be coming to about the time of the sunset and the bay area is surrounded by mountains and I'm thinking to myself it would be beautiful. So I'm trying to figure out how can I get up high so I can see above the buildings. So I see this parking garage so I hike up with the bike to the top of this parking garage and just watch the sun go down, it's glowing on all the mountains and I'm like-- so beautiful, this place. And I'm hearing this noise that sounds like construction noise and I'm like why would there be construction on Saturday. Well it turns out it's not construction noise. It turns out it's this group of about 80 kids half students half alumni from San Jose State who are in this organization preparing for this Ganesh festival. This is in August. The Ganesh festival is in September. So they all have these enormous drums that are made out of steel, like basically like drums. Sort of like Jamaican which is much bigger and they have all of these animal hides that are all covered with Sanskrit and they're all just like pounding. I've never heard anything like this in unison that's what the noises that I thought was construction was.

Seth Davis: [00:23:01] Wow.

H Gelfand: [00:23:01] So half of them are drumming. The other half are doing this dance which is unlike anything else and I'm just standing there going "What the fuck am I looking at here." It was like mesmer- it was so loud, because it was in between buildings, that it was making my heart skip. And it was just like I was in a trance and they stopped to take a break. And these kids came over to me and they're like "We don't ever have an audience who are you?" and I'm like "I'm just a guy from the East Coast and I'm here" and they're like "And you came here?" and I'm like "Yeah" and they're like "What the fuck." I'm like "I know." And I'm like "What are you doing?" and they explained the whole thing to me and it's the only group of musicians that performs this particular thing in North America.

Seth Davis: [00:23:41] Wow.

H Gelfand: [00:23:42] And because they're the only one and it's in the middle of Silicon Valley-- so it's all these people from India-- they are live broadcast back to India. And I'm like what the fuck is so crazy. So they get done. I go on my way. I go a few buildings over and I come upon this statue and I'm like-- I'm just mesmerized you know the famous Black power salute at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics.

Seth Davis: [00:24:07] Yeah.

H Gelfand: [00:24:07] The two dudes who are black were students San Jose State at the time so the center of the campus is this like three-times-larger-than-life statue of them. And it's amazing. This is so fucking cool. And I'm like standing there and I'm just like taking it in and some dude taps me on the shoulder and I turn around and is this African-American guy. And he goes "Can I ask who you are and what you're doing?" I'm like Yeah. And I told him. And he's like "So let me get this straight. You came all the way here. You've got a bike. And now you're just tooling around on our campus?" and I'm like "Yeah." And I'm like "Who are you?" and he goes "Oh I'm actually kind of doing the same thing you're doing." And I'm like "What!" And he goes "Yeah!" And I'm like "What's your deal?" And he goes "Well I grew up in Tucson." and I'm like-- (makes surprised expression) which is my adopted hometown-- and I'm like "What?" And he goes "Yeah I have a computer science degree from the University of Arizona and I work for Intel and I work," and he points to this building he goes "I work in that building and I look out at this campus every day. And tonight was the night to come after work and kind of tool around on the campus." So we get into this huge conversation. He has an Instagram account that's called everyday encounters which is all about exactly what I'm talking about, which is just randomly talking to people. So we sit down on the lawn in front of this big statue of the Black Power statue and he's doing exactly what you're doing. Interviews me puts me on Instagram.

Seth Davis: [00:25:30] Really.

H Gelfand: [00:25:30] And then we go on our way. And I'm just like, I'm on the bike and it's now pretty late at night and it's Saturday night and I'm just like, this has been one of the strangest evenings of my life. And I'm just trying to like take the whole thing. And so I'm on a side street and I'm about ready to get onto the main street through the downtown of San Jose which is a big city and then ride that back to the campus. So I'm at this traffic light and all of a sudden, this mass of probably two to three hundred people on scooters, skateboards, rollerblades, bikes, all come by. Everybody is wearing like you know those like necklaces that are like neon color. And some people are pushing baby strollers and there's music blaring and I'm like "What the fuck!" So I have no idea what this is the light changes I pedal as fast as possible I catch up to the end of this

mass of people. And I'm like riding alongside of these two women that are in a tandem bike and I'm like "What is thi?" And they're like "We don't know we're just from Germany and we just saw these people riding so we joined them." I'm like "What the fuck." So I go further up and this guy says "Oh this is called San Jose Skate Night." And I'm like "What the fuck is San Jose Skate Night?" And the guy goes "Every Saturday, just, we're given a-- on, there's a Facebook page you can look it up it's just called San Jose Skate Night-- and the guy who runs it says "Meet at this intersection." And hundreds of people show up who do not know each other. Some of them are high. Some are not high. Some have babies. Some of them are kids. Some are in costume. Some are like professional cyclists. And just as a communal activity they ride three or four miles together through the downtown of San Jose. It's always a different route. Never the same people. So I just rode around with them. And everybody was like "Who are you?" I'm just like look at all these people. I got back to the dorm room that night and it was just like, what in the name of God. If I had not gotten this bicycle this entire evening would not have happened. And here just I interacted with people from all over the world in fucking San Jose. It was one of the most memorable nights of my entire life. That's what I'm talking about when I say be open to when random things happen. Just go with it because you never know what is going to happen.

Seth Davis: [00:27:47] Yeah.

H Gelfand: [00:27:47] Now I'll probably never see or talk to any of those people ever again.

Seth Davis: [00:27:50] But at least you have the experience

H Gelfand: [00:27:51] But it was a moment.

Seth Davis: [00:27:51] Yeah.

H Gelfand: [00:27:52] You know a moment of interaction with fellow humans.

Seth Davis: [00:27:56] That's amazing. Thank you very much for sure.

H Gelfand: [00:27:57] You're very welcome Seth. It has been a pleasure interviewing you.

H Gelfand: [00:28:00] And you.

Seth Davis: [00:28:01] Thank you very much.