Episode Book

EPISODE #6226

Sarah Tuttle-Singer: The Writer Who Lives Inside the Story

PUBLISHED	23 October 2026 at 13:16 UTC
DURATION	19:11
LISTEN	myweirdprompts.com/episode/sarah-tuttle-singer-old-city-71856/
HOSTS	Corn, Herman, Daniel, Lars, Hilbert
SCRIPT MODEL	anthropic/claude-sonnet-5.5
VOICES	chatterbox-regular+meorav (chatterbox-local)
PIPELINE	V5.20
BOOK GENERATED	24 October 2026 at 07:26 UTC

SYNOPSIS

Sarah Tuttle-Singer grew up on Yiddish lullabies and civil rights anthems in Venice Beach, the daughter of a Freedom Rider who spied on the Klan before auditing Los Angeles City Hall. Today she lives inside the walls of Jerusalem's Old City, writing first-person dispatches from the middle of the story — including the courtyard gas explosion that killed her neighbor. This episode traces the family habit of turning up somewhere and refusing to leave, from a great-grandmother sent back from Jerusalem a century ago to a preschool teacher who chose to stay.

TRANSCRIPT



Corn

...and the thing about people who write about a city after a weekend there is that they always know how the story ends. The ones who stay never do. Anyway, that's the long way round to what Daniel sent in this time.



Herman

It's a decent way round, Corn. Sarah Tuttle-Singer, the Los Angeles kid who ended up living inside the walls of the Old City.



Daniel

I know Sarah, so I'll skip the introduction. Most people who follow her know the Old City, the Times of Israel, the book about the four quarters. I want the side of her that her followers don't already know. The stuff you only find if you dig.



Herman

Then the grounding gets about thirty seconds. Born in nineteen eighty-one, raised in Venice Beach, studied at Berkeley, came to Israel and made it official around twenty ten. Times of Israel as social media and new media editor, then the blog. Jerusalem, Drawn and Quartered came out in twenty eighteen, and there's a newer book called Fairy Lights in God's Backyard.



Corn

That's the version on a conference name tag. Now the rest.



Daniel

Where does she come from? I've heard her father has a story.



Herman

A big one. Rick Tuttle. In nineteen sixty-one he's a UCLA graduate student riding on the Freedom Rides. Two years later he's recruited to SNCC and sent to Greenwood, Mississippi, to register voters, and while he's there he briefly spies on white supremacist and Klan meetings. Threats push him out of the state. Then he's arrested in Savannah, Georgia, for disturbing the peace and sits in jail for a month or so.



Corn

He went from spying on the Klan to auditing City Hall. Same instinct, better lighting.



Herman

Close to literally true. He was elected Los Angeles City Controller four times, from nineteen eighty-five to two thousand and one. The person who checks whether the money went where it was supposed to. And there's a detail in his biography I keep rereading. He reportedly phoned Medgar Evers for help only hours before Evers was killed.



Daniel

Hours. That's hard to hold in your head. What happened to him afterwards?



Herman

Later he became an associate dean at UCLA and directed the Dashew International Center, which looks after international students. So the man who got run out of Mississippi spent a career making sure that people from somewhere else felt welcome somewhere new.



Corn

Herman, that's a lovely line and you've clearly been saving it.



Herman

I have, and I'd defend it. Nobody sets out to build a career like that on purpose. It accumulates.



Daniel

And she grew up inside that?



Herman

In her own words, as she's put it, Venice Beach on Yiddish lullabies and civil rights anthems. On a podcast she's said both her parents were involved with the farmworkers' movement, and that her mother kept marching with them even while she was dying of cancer. Her mother was Muff Singer. She died in January two thousand and five, when Sarah was twenty-three.



Corn

There's a post about that, isn't there? About what she inherited.



Herman

There is, from January twenty twenty-two. Her mother was a writer who helped shape Sarah's paragraphs, and a gardener, and one of her mother's rules was that you don't do something to a living thing unless you can do it with love. Then the post ends on a turn. Sarah's own daughter looks at their hands and says they look nothing alike.



Corn

Her mother edited her paragraphs. I'd guess she would have kept that ending.



Daniel

There's something about a great-grandmother in Jerusalem too. That one I only half remember.



Herman

Another Sarah. In a book excerpt she says her great-grandmother went to Jerusalem about a hundred years ago as an au pair, fell in love there, and was sent back to Poland. Years later she ended up in Chicago. On Israel Story she tells it with Galicia instead of Poland, which can be the same stretch of map depending on whose border you use.



Corn

Sent home for falling in love, and the great-granddaughter comes back and takes the whole city.



Herman

Now see, that's the sentence I wanted to say.



Corn

Of course it is. You've been holding a sentence since the first minute.



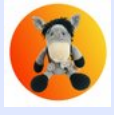
Herman

Since the very first line, actually. The father who went to Mississippi and wouldn't be moved on. The great-grandmother who was not allowed to stay. And Sarah, who stays. A family habit of turning up somewhere and refusing to leave.



Corn

Is it too neat? Families get tidied into patterns after the fact.



Herman

Fair. Do you think she'd buy it, Corn?



Corn

She'd write it herself and then argue with it. That's most of what I know about her.



Daniel

What I find interesting is that the great-grandmother story exists in more than one telling. Does that bother you?



Herman

It would bother me more in a court record. In a family story, the variations are the story. One telling has Poland, another Galicia, and what stays fixed is the arc: a young woman, Jerusalem, love, and being sent back.



Corn

Every family has one of those. The one where the facts wobble and the feeling doesn't.



Herman

Mine has a donkey who was told he'd never be a DJ.



Corn

Your family has no such story and you know it.



Herman

It's a work in progress.



Daniel

So how did she actually end up staying? I think she was a preschool teacher before any of this.



Herman

In Los Angeles, yes. This is from a Jewish Telegraphic Agency profile in twenty eighteen. She married an Israeli, they had children, and at his request they moved to his childhood kibbutz. She says she felt isolated at home with the kids. The marriage ended within about six months, and she chose to stay in Israel.



Corn

The kibbutz outlasted the marriage.



Daniel

How does she talk about that time? It sounds hard.



Herman

Briefly, and on her own terms. What she's said is that she felt isolated at home with small children in a place that was his home, not hers, and that when it ended she made a decision to stay rather than go back to Los Angeles. I'd rather stay with what she's said than guess at the rest.



Corn

A preschool teacher from Venice Beach on a kibbutz. Most people would have booked the flight.



Herman

Would you have, Corn?



Corn

I'd have needed a few months to pack. By then I'd have been staying anyway.



Daniel

Had she been to Israel before that?



Herman

As a teenager, on a summer trip her mother or parents pushed her into. She wanted the pool and the mall. Then she stood on a rooftop looking over the Old City and fell in love. The sources disagree on whether she was fifteen or sixteen, so I'll say teenager. There's also a story about being stoned at the Damascus Gate and bleeding from the head, and being afraid of the Old City for years afterwards.



Daniel

And she moved in there. Inside the walls.



Herman

That's the part I like. A colleague, Avi Issacharoff, encouraged her to go back, and the fear is the reason she chose to live there.



Corn

Most people move away from the place that scared them. She moved into it.



Daniel

How does a preschool teacher turn into a Times of Israel editor? Did she just apply?



Herman

According to that same profile, the blog started as an outlet after the divorce. A personal post, about a rabbi and a marital aid at a party, went viral, and that led to the job. One profile is the only place I've seen that, so hold it loosely.



Corn

Career advice that never makes the commencement speech.



Herman

Would you have hired her on that, Corn?



Corn

I'd have read the post first. Then hired her.



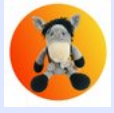
Herman

She's also been clear she doesn't love being called a journalist. In that profile she says people should get to know her first, and then she'll give them plenty of reasons to dislike her.



Daniel

Why would she resist the word? She works at a news site.



Herman

My reading, and it's only that, is that she writes in the first person, with her own life inside the story. Journalists are trained to leave themselves out. She puts herself in the first paragraph. There's a piece from that period asking whether Hatikvah is racist, and she concludes that it isn't.



Corn

Which is a very first-person way to settle an argument. Here's how I felt, and here's where I ended up.



Herman

Is that a flaw, though? I'm asking you, Corn. You read more of this stuff than I do.



Corn

I read it slower. It's not a flaw when you can see the writer's hand. The weekend-visitor columnists I mentioned at the start hide theirs.



Daniel

And that's the difference between her and them, that she's inside the story.



Corn

She lives in the thing she's describing. Her neighbour's well is the well in the paragraph.



Daniel

Then there's June. The gas explosion in her courtyard.



Corn

We did that one. Is Gas in Our Homes a Needless Risk used her as the case study, and I opened the episode with it.



Herman

Which is a good reason to hear her own version, because her account adds things we didn't have. She wrote it on her Times of Israel blog under the title When your home becomes a headline. She smelled gas in the courtyard, went back for keys she'd forgotten, and the blast came. Her neighbour Claire, who was eighty, died. Another neighbour, Izaak, was badly burned.



Corn

Our episode had her hearing a hiss and stepping out to check. Her post says she smelled gas and spoke with Claire. Hers is the better source.



Herman

She says forgetting her keys is what saved her life. Her door jammed from the shock wave and neighbours pried it open. The police cordoned off the property. And these were neighbours who had sheltered together in a Byzantine well during the Iran war.



Daniel

What did she say about the house itself?



Herman

A yellow kitchen, a garden strung with fairy lights, Armenian tiles she painted herself. Her line was that the house is still standing but the foundation isn't stable. I haven't seen what she's decided to do since.



Corn

Nobody sensible writes that sentence about only a building.



Daniel

What struck you about how she writes it? The headline thing.



Herman

The title, for one. She's spent years writing other people's stories, and suddenly it's her address in the headline, with the police tape and the neighbours. The title alone tells you she's the news now, instead of the person who writes it.



Corn

Which is the reverse of a weekend visitor. The story arrives at her door.



Herman

The part I'd put weight on is that neighbours are the ones who pry the door open. The same ones, in her telling, who sat together in the well during the Iran war. A courtyard that shares a shelter shares everything else.



Daniel

I want to ask about how she changed. Her politics, after October seventh, in her own words rather than somebody summarising.



Herman

December twenty twenty-five, an essay called Before October Seventh, I Was a Hellenist Jew. She describes herself as a former universalist who was suspicious of Jewish power and who mistook discomfort for righteousness. She says October seventh broke her illusions, not her values. She says she didn't become more extreme, she became more awake.



Corn

And she's not asking anyone to sign up. She says she still supports Palestinian safety and self-determination.



Herman

Yes, and she writes that particularism is not the enemy of morality. In twenty eighteen she was leaning left, critical of the nation-state law, and got attacked from the other direction. A petition called for a boycott of the Times of Israel over her work, a counter-petition backed her, and a hostel run by a Kahane follower banned the paper's staff.



Daniel

So she's been under fire from both sides.



Herman

Corn, does the essay read to you like a conversion or an inventory?



Corn

Inventory. She lists what she's keeping. A convert burns the old stuff.



Daniel

Was that shift visible in the way she wrote before, or does it come out of nowhere?



Herman

In twenty eighteen she was already the writer who wouldn't pick a tribe. She was critical of the nation-state law and of attacks on the media, and the same year she's defending the country's anthem. So you can see someone arguing with herself in public long before the essay. What changed is that the essay says the argument has an answer, at least for now.



Corn

I'd add that she names her own earlier position as a mistake of feeling. Mistaking discomfort for righteousness is a very specific confession. Plenty of people say they were wrong. Few say what it felt like to be wrong.



Herman

That's a sharper reading than mine.



Corn

Write it down, you'll want it for the show notes.



Daniel

And she doesn't say she's abandoned the universal side?



Herman

She says the opposite, that she hasn't, and she still supports Palestinian safety and self-determination. Her claim is that the particular and the universal can sit in the same person. How you hear that depends on where you start, which is why I'm only reporting it and leaving the judging to listeners.



Daniel

What about the ordinary people she writes about? I think there's a whole series.



Herman

Peoples of Israel, running from July to October this year. A jeweller who makes pieces from breast milk, a Chickasaw Zionist, a self-described kamikaze documentarian, a cholent maven, a cat rescuer, a Palestinian fabric merchant.



Corn

A series with a cholent maven and a kamikaze documentarian has range.



Herman

And in August she profiled Marcus James as the spiritual mayor of Jerusalem. We've got a whole episode on him airing alongside this one.



Daniel

Do you know anything about how she picks them?



Herman

Not beyond the pieces themselves. The tone is warm and curious. She lets the cat rescuer talk about cats and the fabric merchant talk about fabric, and the politics comes in only where the person brings it.



Corn

Which is harder than it sounds. Most profiles want the subject to stand for something.



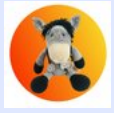
Daniel

Why does she go for those people instead of the headline names?



Corn

Because they stay put. A cat rescuer doesn't leave the cat.



Herman

Let me bring in a colleague for this one. Our guest today is Doctor Lars, honorary chair of the Uppsala Institute for Domestic Subtraction and author of a book called The Allen Key Gospels. So Lars, you are our guest expert today. Tell us, what can you tell us about the less-known story of Sarah Tuttle-Singer?

L

Lars

I have studied Sarah Tuttle-Singer. I have removed everything that is not Sarah Tuttle-Singer. What remains is a small, elegant surface. I call it the Tuttle. It holds one book and no opinions.



Herman

There are two books, Lars, the one from twenty eighteen and a newer one. And plenty of opinions, if you read the blog.

L

Lars

Her father, the Freedom Rider. I removed the bus. The bus was structural but not load-bearing. What remains is a man standing very still in the correct place. I call it the Singer. It comes in birch.



Corn

Hm.

L

Lars

Her early life in Los Angeles. Los Angeles is a large object with too many parts. I took away the traffic, the palm trees, the ocean. Now it is a flat plane. You can put a coffee cup on it. It is called the Rick. Very affordable.



Herman

Rick is her father's name, Lars, and he ran the city's books for sixteen years.

L

Lars

Jerusalem. I removed the stones, the prayers, the argument. What is left is a hinge. The hinge is the entire point. The hinge is called the Sarah. It folds. It does not explain itself.



Corn

Mm.

L

Lars

So her story, when you remove the story, becomes a shelf. The shelf holds the writer. The writer holds nothing. This is the correct arrangement. The shelf is called the Tuttle-Singer. Assembly required. Two people. No tools.



Herman

The writer holds quite a lot, Lars. A column, a book of Old City stories, a long series of profiles.



Corn

The profiles are what I keep thinking about. She writes people as they are on an ordinary Tuesday, not as the best version of themselves.



Daniel

Does she ever say why she stays herself? Not the family pattern, in her own account.



Herman

The nearest I've seen is the Old City fear. She went where the fear was, and then she was at home there. And it comes back with the courtyard, where the neighbours who sheltered in the well are the ones who pried her door open.



Corn

Staying isn't a decision once. You decide every morning, and some mornings someone has to pry the door open.



Herman

That gives me a thought about her father. Greenwood was voter registration, which is not one brave afternoon. It's the same unglamorous work, repeated. Staying is mostly that.



Daniel

Is there a line from her that gets at that?



Herman

The closest is the December essay, where she says she didn't become more extreme, she became more awake. Being awake is a repeated thing too.



Corn

You can tell when someone's been awake a long time. They stop explaining themselves.



Hilbert

...so I said brass, and Mr. Dov Alkalay said no, nickel, because brass goes green on him by Purim. Forty-one copies of the same key, for the front door of a house he has not bought the land for. I rang the locksmith on the corner while you were on the courtyard. I wanted one spare. Herman, you said a month for Savannah. It was six weeks. You round down when you're enjoying yourself.



Corn

The practical problem is that a key depends on the lock.



Hilbert

He has the lock. Five pin, in his sister's garage in Holon. The locksmith cut off that.



Herman

Then it's the sensible half of the plan. If the locksmith can work from the lock, the land is the only open question.



Hilbert

Eleven shekels a copy. Four hundred and fifty-one for the lot. He asked for a receipt for each key.



Herman

Forty-one keys to one door. That's a lot of people allowed in.



Corn

Sarah has one key and a door that took a crowbar. Maybe the number of keys isn't the question.



Herman

What is, then?



Corn

Who's on the other side when it jams.



Herman

Then my forward thought is this, Corn. Somebody in Holon is holding a lock for a house that doesn't exist yet, and Sarah is holding the story of one that stood. I'd like to see what she builds in that courtyard next.



Corn

We'd like to thank our producer, Hilbert Flumingtop, for keeping the sessions running. This has been My Weird Prompts. If you want more, the archive is at my weird prompts dot com.



Daniel

Thanks for listening. See you tomorrow.



Herman

See you tomorrow.