**Ripple Effect Episode 2 “Turning Point: Moments of Upstanding” featuring Werner Coppel and Debra Messing - transcript**

**Kevin Aldridge** 00:02

What do we mean by the upstander ripple effect?

**Werner Coppel** 00:06

Stand up against hate and prejudice, even if it does not affect you.

**Jackie Congedo** 00:13

From moral dilemmas in today's headlines, upstanders who rose for justice, and stories of survival,

**Kevin Aldridge** 00:19

be prepared to walk away from this conversation inspired and motivated.

**Jackie Congedo** 00:28

I'm Jackie Congedo.

**Kevin Aldridge** 00:30

I'm Kevin Aldridge. Thanks for joining us.

**Jackie Congedo** 00:32

We are here Episode Two, it is June at the time of this recording. And for us here at the Upstander Ripple Effect podcast, June is a really special month because this is the Cohen Family upstander month where we shine a spotlight on the upstanders in our world, in our community, these everyday heroes who are using their strengths to really step in and make make the change. And so we have some incredible upstander stories to share with you this month coming out of our upstander awards and coming out of our pilot launch and a lot of people sort of listening and, and offering their own stories as well.

**Kevin Aldridge** 01:10

Yeah, I mean, I'm excited to see how people continue to respond to what we put out here. And, again, we look forward to your feedback. So tell us what you think about the Ripple Effect the pilot episode and, and it's just exciting. Yeah.

**Jackie Congedo** 01:25

It is it is exciting. I feel like now that we're in, we're fully in episode two, we were saying we're like, We're veterans. Now, we don't really need scripts, we're just going to have a conversation here. So we'll be interested to hear your feedback on first episode, and, of course on what we talked about today, which is primarily going to be stories of upstanders. In in keeping with our theme of our upstander month. Before we get into that we wanted to talk just a little bit about some things that are happening this month going on in our world and in our community. And some reflections on that. So you know, to start today.

**Kevin Aldridge** 02:04

Yes.

**Jackie Congedo** 02:05

Is is the day of this recording might not be the day that clearly that you're listening. But the day we're recording, this is Juneteenth.

**Kevin Aldridge** 02:12

Yes.

**Jackie Congedo** 02:13

And it's a it's a special day to reflect and to think about the progress we've made and the the progress that we still have to make.

**Kevin Aldridge** 02:21

Yeah, absolutely. I and I think we ought to think about all of our, all of our national holidays. And in that respect that I don't think that we often do. A lot of times we kind of look at these as days off and days to relax and recuperate from our jobs. But I think it's important for us to reflect on on Juneteenth and other national holidays, just about how far we have come as a country, and how far yet we still need to go and what we need to do to make sure that we continue to protect the freedoms and liberties that that that our forefathers and mothers, you know, fought very hard for us to, to obtain.

**Jackie Congedo** 03:02

Yeah, sometimes I think we we get lulled into this idea of you know, well, the works behind us are, here we are and like you said, it's a day off. But I think days like today really remind us that progress is possible. But really, it's because of intentionality. And the work that we put in, that these things happen. It's not. It's not predestined, that we're going to continue to make progress on these things, we have to really dig in and do the work. And so celebrating all of the upstanders, who are still doing the work today who are writing the next chapter of civil rights, across, you know, all identities, and really the future of our multiracial, multi ethnic democracy, which is, which is in a moment having a moment, isn't it?

**Kevin Aldridge** 03:58

Yeah, well, for sure. I mean, it even harkens back to Ben Franklin's quote about us having a democratic republic if we can keep it, right. Yes, that very quote, in its essence, talks about, that it's not something that's established and will exist forever, that the work has to be put in regularly for us to maintain what we built because there are always going to be forces who are going to test the boundaries of what we're trying to establish, test the boundaries of our freedoms and liberty and, and if we want to protect those things for every American, you know, that's a process that we have to be very diligent about every day. And you know, I often think about historical figures and this getting back to our upstander focus, is that often wonder if people in historical moments actually thought that they were going to be historical people, or if there was just people living in times trying to do things and make a difference. And so who knows any of these upstanders that we talked about on this podcast or even some who are flying under The radar, you know, 50, 100 years from now could be viewed as significant historical figures who are just simply, everyday people who are just moving through the day trying to make a difference. So

**Jackie Congedo** 05:12

History will tell that

**Kevin Aldridge** 05:13

Yeah, absolutely.

**Jackie Congedo** 05:14

It's like, you know, in the opening film in the museum, the challenge from survivors is, you're going to be tempted as you read about this history. And you learn about the history to think about what I would have done back then. And actually, the answer to that question is, but what are you doing today? Yes, we're writing the history today.

**Kevin Aldridge** 05:33

Yeah.

**Jackie Congedo** 05:34

And our children and grandchildren, and great grandchildren, and so on, will be reading and learning about what we the choices we made today. And sometimes I think, like, it's just because of the way we're wired, we don't always start there.

**Kevin Aldridge** 05:48

Yeah. Yeah. You know, I often think about, and we'll probably get into this, and in some way, shape or form as we get into some of our other discussions of current events. But, you know, just in looking back on Black history, and I always think about people who are in these old black and white photographs, who are, who are either standing in places where they're protesting against, you know, the integration of schools, or people sitting at a lunch counter. And I wonder if those folks ever thought about being on the wrong side of history, in terms of where they are? Because when we look at it in the modern context, those photos don't age well, for those folks. In fact, there are some people who are in prominent positions today. I think the Dallas Cowboys owner had to answer some questions about, you know, him being in some of those photos from back in the day and, and why he was there, and what he was thinking in those moments, so. So I think it's very important for us to understand to your point, what are we doing today? Where are we at? Because at some point, we might find ourselves in some old picture 50 to 100 years from now being judged based on where we were, what we were doing and what we were saying.

**Jackie Congedo** 05:49

Yeah, and that's the challenge. I mean, it is it's not an easy task, I think it is really hard in the moment to try and have that perspective to be able to say, wait a minute, this is where I am right now. But, you know, what is the legacy of this? Or what does it look like in 50 years or 100 years? Or? And, you know, the other piece I know we wanted to talk about today is we you know, we're in the middle of Pride Month, yes. Which is an awesome time in Cincinnati. It is it is such a amazingly beautifully vibrant pride scene. And, and so as people are celebrating, you know, what's bubbling in some ways, underneath and to the top are some real tough conversations about ally ship. The fact that members of the Jewish community have been sort of made to feel, if it's fair to characterize it that way is if you know, they're they're not really wanted in their full identity. You know, I think this started with, Well, it certainly didn't start I think this is happening in different ways at different places. But there was sort of a watershed incident in Cincinnati where there were a number of members of the of the LGBTQ community who were in in Covington for Northern Kentucky pride. And and they saw some folks who were there who were using rhetoric, or they had signage that indicated that Netanyahu right, is the prime minister of Israel is his exacting the "final solution" against Palestinians. And, you know, in the context of our work at the Holocaust, & Humanity Center, we know that language to mean something very specific, and that that's a very specific reference, not just to genocide, but to the genocide of Jews in Germany, perpetrated by the Nazis and throughout Europe. And, and so that the use of that term is something that strikes a very deep raw chord, and has a very particular identity, you know, definition for for Jews, I think, and, and, and actually, for all of us, I think all of us here, final solution, and that's Hitler's Germany. Right. And, and so, you know, the weaponization, in my opinion of the trauma, and sort of the inversion of that I know has been terribly painful for the Jewish community. And, you know, when these these members of the Jewish community who are also part of the LGBTQ eye community raised a concern about this, from what I know, organizers of Cincinnati, or I'm sorry, Northern Kentucky pride, ask those folks who had those signs or were using that language to leave. But now, what's happened is those two members of the Jewish community who raise their voices on this has been sort of ostracized in the pride community, or among the pride community don't want to speak in broad strokes here, there's there's been enough, according to them, that's happened. It's made them feel pretty unwelcome. And, and so we're now approaching are, you know, again, as of the taping of this episode, our pride, big Pride weekend in Cincinnati, and there's a lot of discussion and hurt in the I know, in the Jewish community, and I'm sure in the LGBTQ community as well. And certainly, we should talk about the fact that these are not mutually exclusive communities, right, there are people who hold these identities together, and certainly so painful for them. Who are are really struggling with how to participate and what to say and what to do. Thinking about, you know, the Jewish Federation, and they're encouraging people to participate, I think in whatever way they feel comfortable, but actually sharing, right? You know, if you're wearing something that outs you as a Jew, some insignia of your identity, you should know that you're more likely to be the target of harassment. So this is like, very challenging times. And it's so sad to me that this is during a moment that should be about celebration of diversity, pluralism, and LGBTQ pride, that this is where we are. And this is the conversation.

**Kevin Aldridge** 11:28

Yeah. Well, I think I think if you look at sort of where we've been, you know, not just in the past few months, but you know, maybe over the last five to 10 years, we haven't really been able to kind of celebrate these sorts of occasions without some underlying political issue or social issue, social justice issue. That's, that's sort of permeating all of these celebrations. I mean, I think you touched on it. The interesting thing to me, and this is is, and I always try to think about this, these things from the, you know, the human element, you know, just sort of, you know, removing the the politics, per se, per se from from the discussion. But if you are a member of the LGBTQ community who happens to be Jewish, as well. And you talked about this intersectionality of identities, where all of us are more than just one thing. Yeah, you know, you're Jewish, you're a woman, you're a mother, you're redhead, right? Yeah, you've got a lot of art. Yeah, a lot of different defining characteristics that make up who you are, right? And in this time, if you're a Jewish person who's already feeling alone, or if you're a member of the LGBTQ community, who, for a variety of different reasons, may not even be able to find solace within the Jewish community. Now you were in a space where maybe the one area where you thought you had ally ship and friendship now your Jewishness is complicating even the factors of where you thought you might be able to find a safe space there. So how is that individual dealing with the challenges that are coming with what we're seeing here? And how alone must that that individual feel or unsafe that individual feels and where, where you felt like maybe the one safe space that I might have might be within the LGBT community. And now I'm not even saved there. Because if I'm identifying myself as a Jewish person, because of the politics of what's going on, I could even be under threat among, you know, people who I thought I would be the safest with, and it's in it just, you know, my heart absolutely just goes out for folks who find themselves kind of trapped in that situation right now, because it's just not an easy space to occupy.

**Jackie Congedo** 13:59

Yeah. And and when I think about, you know, looking for the upstanders the people who are sitting at the intersections of this really painful situation are leading, let me just say are in a position to... many of them are leading the way they are, you know, by insisting that all turns on people having to confront the humanity of both of these identities, living in one human being, that that's what changes things for people is just being again confronted with this idea that guess what, these identities are reconcilable not just reconcilable, but they actually beautifully exist together inside me.

**Kevin Aldridge** 14:42

Yeah.

**Jackie Congedo** 14:42

And so the more we can be in proximity with each other in that way, and we can understand those things, I think, the more progress that we'll make, and again, I just think the secret to so many of these challenges that we're facing today is centering the humanity and the other person just trying it And sometimes that's really hard, right? Because it feels good to be grounded in your truth in a way that's very black and white. And in a way that sort of positions you as the, you know, well, I have the moral high ground here. And the reality is that most of the time, particularly when you're talking about a space of ally ship, and you know, shared values, somebody else also has humanity in them. Right?

**Kevin Aldridge** 15:24

Yeah, absolutely.

**Jackie Congedo** 15:26

Just confront that,

**Kevin Aldridge** 15:27

You know, this, this thought just came to me, so it could be completely stupid and I'm sure I'm sure people will let me know about it if it is. But But I think the one thing that kind of, is really surprising to me. And as we talk about ally ship, we're talking about communities who are minority communities, many that have been put upon discriminated against who know the feeling of inhumanity. And you would think that, we would have a better sense of how to come together and dialogue around differences, right, because we know what it feels like, to not be listened to, to not to not be heard. And so you would think that even within our disparate communities and experiences, that based on that, we would be able to come together and better hash out issues of difference. But what seems to me to be occurring is is that the pain and trauma that we have all experienced in our creates a block where even though we know better, we still have that inability to be able to communicate effectively across that, that we can't get past the we can't get past the pain and the trauma to see that we know how to talk about these things. We know how to deal with them, because we talk all the time about how we wish that that other factors would be able to do that. But across those these marginalized communities, we're unable to take those things and effectively, but have those conversations

**Jackie Congedo** 17:12

And make no mistake, that's what marginalization does.

**Kevin Aldridge** 17:15

Yeah,

**Jackie Congedo** 17:15

right.

**Kevin Aldridge** 17:15

Yeah.

**Jackie Congedo** 17:16

When you're told you, you have this tiny, little sliver of the pie, and that's it, then it's, it's like, there is no abundance mentality, there's no, can it possibly be true that you're right, you have an identity that comes with oppression, and I also have an identity that comes with oppression, and that in the cases of people, you know, in the, in the context of this conversation who hold both identities, right, who are gay and Jewish, or trans and Jewish, or, you know, the again, that's why I think that it's a heavy burden. And it's not all on these people who have both identities. But I think that the opportunity for leadership, particularly in those intersectional spaces right now is so huge.

**Kevin Aldridge** 18:04

Yeah.

**Jackie Congedo** 18:05

And so I'm just thinking about all my friends in the gay community, all my friends in the Jewish community, all my friends who live in both communities, and trying to send them lots of strength, and just just that I see them in all their humanity in this moment and hope that we can move through this in a way that gets us closer to a better spot.

**Kevin Aldridge** 18:28

Yeah. And that's the point, right? Like, that's the point of celebrating Pride Month and Juneteenth and all of the things that we talked about is trying to recognize and see people in the fullness of of who they are.

**Jackie Congedo** 18:41

Yeah, yep. The other piece that we're celebrating this month is our upstanders in our upstander awards, beginning of the month, we had an awesome

**Kevin Aldridge** 18:52

Fantastic event. I mean, it was it was it was beautifully put together well done.

**Jackie Congedo** 18:57

I wish I could take credit but um, I'm giving a shout out to Kara Driscoll who is our amazing Director of Marketing & Events and the team really the our whole team that pulled that off. It was a heavy lift, but I'm glad that it came across.

**Kevin Aldridge** 19:09

Yeah, I mean, even the creativity and overcoming the acoustical challenge

**Jackie Congedo** 19:12

Oh yeah. The headphones

**Kevin Aldridge** 19:13

in the rotunda at Yeah, at Union terminal. I thought it was just it's just very creative. Very well put together

**Jackie Congedo** 19:19

No, thank you on behalf of our team, I mean, we we it's such a special moment I you know, it's just sharing with someone I don't think I will ever tire of watching ordinary people be recognized in an extraordinary way. And in a way that's like a surprise in that moment. They don't know what's coming. It's it's so it's like infectious just seeing how they receive that and what it means to them. You know, it's so deeply meaningful. There were so many tears on stage.

**Kevin Aldridge** 19:46

Yeah. Well, I think everybody a lot of people go out and do the work and they're not looking for any type of recognition or reward, but at the same time, it is still gratifying to know that other people Paul, see what you're doing and recognizing the value and the quality of what you're bringing to the community. And that's got to feel good. And like you, you know, seeing the smiles and the tears and the joy on on people's faces and, and talking to some of the people in the aftermath of the award ceremony, just kudos to them, great job for them. And Cincinnati is very lucky to have so many dedicated selfless individuals who are trying to make make life better for a lot.

**Jackie Congedo** 20:30

Yeah, and doing it without any expectation that he was going to say anything about it. So you know, there were two, two stories from that, that we wanted to highlight here. And there's, there's so many I mean, we could talk the whole next hour and a half, or whatever we're going to do here about these alone, but we're going to feature some conversations with some of our upstander award winners in future episodes. And so there will be more to come on this. But the ones I thought that were particularly sort of really impactful and relevant in this time, are in this moment. So Lamont Ragan, who is volunteers with La Soupe, he was actually nominated by I think Suzy DeYoung at La Soupe. And he has built from his own really experience of growing up in a place where he saw proximately that like, having access to after school activities, and sports and rec was hard. Yeah, for a segment of kids in our community, and including him. And so he he decided I'm going to do something about that. And he built this nonprofit where he has after school sports and rec activities for kids. And he knew that for himself. It was it was actually the opportunity to dig deeper and learning that helped him advance. And so as a condition of participating in these free after school activities, you have to do some tutoring. And so he's built this whole incentive model. And he's he's got such warmth. And you know, just the experience of having been there himself. What an incredible guy. And so we recognized him this this this month with the in the awards, and it was really special. And I was thinking about him because of what's going on right now in Madisonville with this horrific the aftermath of this horrific shooting in Bramble Park where five people were shot. And, you know, police coming out and saying, you know, we're doing what we can, but we need help in the neighborhood. And, you know, it's on all of us to try and figure out how to create spaces where where violence is unacceptable or where we can you know that that provide some level... bubble of immunity to the these kinds of things and and Lamont is doing it. I read that story. I thought, wow, well, have they met Lamont Ragan? He's just doing this? Yeah.

**Kevin Aldridge** 23:00

This was a family reunion. Yeah, I think I think there are a lot of Lamonts in Cincinnati who are who are trying to do things to give kids opportunities to do other things or to be involved with things. The challenges that are there never enough right like there there. There are way more kids that need mentors, that need, you know, positive opportunities than there are Lamonts out there who are doing it. I think and I always feel it necessary to say this when it comes to the violence and I think the police would cosign on this is that, you know, we are talking about a very small percentage of individuals who are wreaking a lot of havoc, you know, like this is, this is not a the... not to diminish the problem. It's a serious problem, but is not as pervasive in terms of the number of people who are involved in actual committing violence. In fact, there are far more of the kids that we're talking about who are traumatized by these individuals than who...

**Jackie Congedo** 23:26

I mean, this is just a bunch of people gathered together to like, celebrate and have a good weekend and one actor. Yeah, I think I mean, I haven't read, you know, the follow up on it. But a small group or one actor came in and disrupted that whole thing.

**Kevin Aldridge** 23:26

Yeah, Absolutely. And that... and that's the way that it is in most cases, but a lot of times it gets broadly painted. As you know, this is a huge community wide issue. So I think it's necessary to say that, that you've got a very small percentage of people who are creating a whole lot of problems. But getting back to that I do think there is still this element of we do need to have more things and more and more things that our younger people can be involved in and be a part of, because a lot of what leads even that small percentage of people to that activity is not having a sense of belonging or being a part of something and a lot of kids wind up in gangs. gangs and other things, because they're looking for they're looking for love, they're looking for a sense of belonging and community and, and that is what's around them. And that's what they see. And that's what they fall into. I think if you talk to a lot of kids, you know, if you live in an area where gang activities is prevalent, sometimes you don't have a choice, like becoming a part of that, that lifestyle is what you have to do to be able to survive, to even walk to school, you know, safely is to be a part of that. And so it's never as cut and dry as we think. But I do think programs like what Lamont is doing are critical. One of the things that kept me on the straight and narrow, aside from having two really good parents, was sports was a big part of, you know, my development and sports exposed me to so many different things. It taught me so many different life lessons, how to deal with the success, how to deal with adversity, you know how to deal with competition, there are so many good things that kids learn from sports. And we know with funding being the way that it is in public schools, and sometimes now you have to pay to play in sports. And if you're coming from a tough situation where you're coming from a low income household, you might not be able to afford to play sports in some of these places. And so having access to free activities like that they can keep kids involved, make them a part of a team have mentorship and tutoring being provided there, I can remember we had tutoring when I play basketball and study hall after school where we had to go in so. So there's structure that comes from that type of programming that can be very good for helping to keep kids out of out of things that might not be so positive, you know, they say an idle hands are the devil's workshop, so to speak. And so there is a big component to this problem of having more positive options for kids to take part of and the free part is a is a key piece to that. Because knowing some of the challenges that we have with with poverty here in Cincinnati, these have got to be options that are available to kids, and that they can participate in at no cost. And that's a key piece to it. So hats off to him.

**Jackie Congedo** 27:24

Yeah, he's... he's incredible, and is out there, just I'm sure today doing the work, you know, without any expectation of recognition. So it was really special to be able to celebrate him at the upstander awards. Thinking about what you said, the power of education and the fact that you know, if you believe that every person is inherently equal and good, then what's the gap? Like? Why why do some of us make certain choices and others make other choices? And I firmly believe it is about education. And about just access and exposure, right? It's which is in itself sort of different forms of education, liberally interpreted. I was thinking about this other story with another was actually two women who want another one of the upstander Awards, the Irwin Hurley award for perspective, was given to Beth Silvers, and Sarah Stewart Holland of the Pantsuit Politics podcast. And these are two women who have different political sort of leanings. And they have launched this conversation podcast series where they tackle really tough issues from very different perspectives and sort of model this way that's grounded in perspective, you know, perspective, your own perspectives, but understanding that there are other perspectives out there and perspectives that are grounded in humanity that can be different. And the reason I was talking about education here is because something really special happened at the upstander awards, when Beth and Sarah whether it was actually Beth, I believe, who was there to receive it, Sarah couldn't be there. But Beth went up on stage. And we had Irwin Hurley, who was a, you know, an officer in World War II, his son, Dan Hurley, who we know from news, from, yeah, he's done so much amazing work in our community outside of his time in television, but So Dan and his sister were on stage to present the award and Dan brought a copy of a letter that his father wrote to his mother while he was serving at the end of the war. And, and it's really powerful. It's about education. So I want to play that now. Not the letter can't play a letter yet. Stay tuned technology. But Beth and Sarah talked about this on their podcast, and they talked about the letter they received so I want to play that real quick. I think it's really, really powerful.

**Kevin Aldridge** 27:56

Sure.

**Beth Silvers** 29:57

On Sunday night Chad and I attended the Nancy & David Wolf Holocaust & Humanity Center upstander awards in Cincinnati, Ohio. These awards recognize people using their strengths to stand up for themselves and others. Hundreds of people were nominated, I got to meet and learn about some of them and it is an absolutely incredible group of people out doing the kind of work that makes you smile and cry and feel a sense of humility and awe and unshakable hope. And because of the caliber of people who were nominated and chosen as finalists, I was absolutely shocked when Sarah and I received the upstander regional Irwin Hurley award for perspective. Irwin Hurley lived in Northern Kentucky, he was deployed to Europe during World War II, and his son and his wife were there for the ceremony and his son gave me a letter, along with the award that Mr. Hurley had written to his wife, Marjorie, on May 16, 1945. In that letter, Hurley, who did many things to stand up for justice and equality and humanity during his career, wrote about what he saw at Dachau, one of the largest concentration camps in Germany. He wrote about the incredible cruelty he had seen firsthand. And even as he was watching, and waiting for the war to end, he was looking around him and forward with a lot of insight and compassion. So I want to share this brief paragraph from the letter with you, because I'll be thinking about it for a long time. He wrote, "The German people are completely conquered. Of that I am most certain, but it's the young ones from 15 to 22, or 23, that we have to worry about. They never knew anything except Hitlerism. It is this group, even though aware of the horrors of Dachau, shrug their shoulders and shut their eyes to it, disregard it, or rather ignore it as if it didn't exist? They are the dangerous ones to the future of this nation. Ponder for a minute, if you and I would have been reared in that atmosphere never had the opportunity of knowing anything else. If we would have been any different, maybe, maybe, I hope so. But not too sure." I will read this letter 100 times and keep it in my heart. I cannot tell you how honored and touched I was to receive this award on behalf of Pantsuit Politics. And when I say that I mean not just for Sarah and me or for Sarah and me and Alise and Maggie, but for all of us. Because everything that creates that Upstander Ripple Effect happens way beyond our audio files. It's the way you listen and reflect and discuss and everything that you do in your families and communities. I wish I could put this gorgeous trophy and letter in the mail and send it on a little tour to every single one of you listening. Thank you to the Nancy & David Wolf Holocaust & Humanity Center for this tremendous honor. And for all of the work that happens there. It is vital to our community.

**Jackie Congedo** 33:10

Yeah, incredible, right?

**Kevin Aldridge** 33:12

Yeah, yeah, that, I mean, that gets sort of like right into my wheelhouse, you know, thinking with sort of an empathetic mind to sort of think like, it's easy to sit back and be judgmental of people, right. Without sort of putting yourself in, in their position and in their shoes. And I think about this a lot in terms of even what we were just talking about, about the way that we look at some of our, our young people are people who descend into into violence, and it's sort of like, we're all sort of a product of what we know. And what we see. Yeah. And if you don't know anything else, and you don't see anything else, that you become that which surrounds you.

**Jackie Congedo** 33:57

Yeah.

**Kevin Aldridge** 33:58

And I think we don't think about that enough. When we, when we are standing in judgment of other people, we're all the sum total of our experiences, and the knowledge that we have, you know, I can make certain choices that might be better choices than somebody else, because I've got access to way more information, I might have access to more people, I might have access to more books and resources that other folks can have. I can watch things on TV, some people don't even have a TV as crazy as that sounds in 2024, there are people who exist in information vacuum, where a lot of people don't have access to things that we take for granted. And we just assumed that they do well, how could somebody not know you know, I hear that a lot. How could somebody not know this or not be exposed to that and you will be amazed I say by the number of kids who don't make it out of their neighborhood or don't make it out of their city to see other things and that we take for granted. And you would say well, that's crazy. See how could you know, a kid from Cincinnati have never been to Dayton or you know, even across the river to Newport or Covington, yet those situations exist. Yeah. And

**Jackie Congedo** 35:13

yeah, I mean, instead of saying there's inherently something wrong with this person, right, instead of denying their humanity, yeah, just to have the humility in ourselves to say, wait a minute, exactly what Irwin wrote in that letter, I would like to think that I would have done could do better, but probably not, you know, probably not like, so. But that is that's the transformative power of education. I think it starts with a level of humility, right, then like, if we're all grounded in the fact that our experiences are categorizations, about things, the way we perceive the world might be a product of where we're sitting, and that we might not know it all. And there is access to education to help expose all of us to the things that are outside of our bubble. That's really what transforms and yeah, it's such it's such a timeless piece of wisdom.

**Kevin Aldridge** 36:10

Yeah. So So you say everybody would like to say that they think that they would do? Oh, yeah. But the reality is, we probably wouldn't have because if we look at we can even look at in our discourse within this country, you talked about it stepping outside of the bubble. Most people won't do that even people who have access, they willingly stay inside of their own bubbles, and won't venture out to get new information, or they refuse to see things beyond their own experience, or even imagine that things could possibly be different than the reality that they know. And that is the same sort of mindset that we're sort of talking about here. It's easy to villainize it, because we're talking about Hitler and Nazism, right, like that's an that's an easy target. But we don't we don't see often see it in ourselves, that we won't venture outside of the knowledge base that we have to possibly conclude that we're not as smart as we think we are, that we don't know, as much as we think that we know. And that there's that that several different types of truths can exist in the same space based on individual's experience. And you know, that's why I've always said that I think the education system is probably one of the most important things that we have. And it is one of the great equalizers that we do have in our society, it does, it doesn't overcome everything. But it does create a situation where you are able to overcome more, the more information that you have, the more educated that you are, the better decisions that you can make. And the more that you can change your destiny. And I think that why investment in that more serious investment in that if we really want to change the trajectory of our country and where our kids are at, like that has to be a bigger focus for us is is is really in digging in, and making sure that we're really creating an informed educated populace. That's, you know, that that's the key.

**Jackie Congedo** 38:10

Yeah, yeah. I think, you know, people want a quick fix, and a band aid and education is a long, it's, it's the long game.

**Kevin Aldridge** 38:16

Yeah. Absolutely.

**Jackie Congedo** 38:18

The things that we're doing now will show returns and benefits in our society, in a generation, in 10 years. I mean, we, we might not see it tomorrow. So I think that's the other problem is that people want like some kind of quick fix to this. And the reality is that this is, this is going to require changing the way we think about how people consume information and access to information and you know, and critical understanding of history, you know, looking at it, not as some removed detached list of facts that we have to memorize, but as an exploration of humanity, for sure. And what are the lessons we draw from that, that help us think about the times we're living in and what we're doing,

**Kevin Aldridge** 39:05

You can't know where you're going, if you don't know where you've been? And if you if you just take an excerpt out of that clip, Mr. Hurley talked about in his letter, what we need to be concerned about, is this group, this young group right now. Yeah. And where are we going to be in 10? Where are they going to be in 10, 15 years, because where they are, what they know, and how they see the world is what's gonna impact is what's going to have the greatest impact not just on them, but on all of us who might be around in 10 or 15 years. So as we look at our country, we've got to say, we've got to look at our generation of kids and where they are now because these are these are the future people who are going to be running, who are going to be running our country and if we're concerned about where this generation is now, if you really say you're concerned about America, and you're I mean, you know everybody's talking about this this November election and the ramifications of what that's going to have on the country, what really is going to have ramifications on our country is how we're preparing this generation, for 10 or 15 years now, where, you know, many of us are going to be maybe collecting Social Security, who knows? But around that time, or if there's any left, yeah, exactly. Yeah. They, in fact, they, you know, they may have some saying that, but, but making sure that we're investing in the education of this generation, and that, that we're creating a really group of smart and I think that's one of the things that also kind of bugs me, and I know, we gotta get, we gotta get ready to get into

**Jackie Congedo** 40:38

what you're saying, Actually, I think is a segue

**Kevin Aldridge** 40:42

you know, one of the things that really kind of frustrates me is that this notion of, you know, intelligence used to be something that we aspire to in this country. And now intelligence is being couched as some sort of coastal elitism in our politics that doesn't speak to the to the common person. And I'm just like, where did where did that come from? Where did becoming educated? When did being an educated person become a, a negative or a dirty thing, or something that we should not be proud of like, like that information? Intelligence, education was something that we used to aspire to, and as a country, and now it's sort of like, we're talking about the low information voters and people without college degrees and all of these things, and I, and I'm not even suggesting that education has to equate to a college degree. I'm just saying, developing a knowledge base, the value of trying to educate...

**Jackie Congedo** 41:51

Learning

**Kevin Aldridge** 41:51

Yeah, yeah, exactly. And I think that, and we've got to change the conversation around that in that country, because that is in our country, because that is so self defeating. I just don't... I don't understand.

**Jackie Congedo** 42:02

Incentivize learning and curiosity. Absolutely, you know, museums are a good way to do that. Just saying... just put it out there. Anyway, today, we're featuring a story from the archives about an amazing human being by the name of Werner Coppel. He was a Holocaust survivor. And, you know, he had this incredible life. He, he described it as two life's lives. Actually, he described it as his quote is, "I arrived in Union Terminal with a wife, a baby and a suitcase. And that ended the first part of my life." What had come before was, you know, at 19 years old, he was forced on a death march out of Auschwitz, where he had been imprisoned, and miraculously, he escaped, he survived the war. And he rebuilt his life with his wife and his baby and his suitcase. In Cincinnati, he met his moment, so to speak, when he read something actually, it was an unpaid insert in the Enquirer. And he knew he had to speak. And I was thinking about the person who's quoted in this paid insert, who said this really hateful thing that he wanted to speak up against? This person was, I'm not I'm not sure. I don't think they were in Germany, necessarily. But this was a generation. Growing up, as with German heritage, coming out of World War II. And these were the ideas, right, this was the, this was the sensibility at the time, in that, you know, in amongst some in that community, right. And so, as Werner read this, he said, "This can't stand." and up until then, no one had spoken out publicly about their experiences in the Holocaust. He was the first survivor in Cincinnati to do that. So we talk about upstanders... My gosh, it's like hard to imagine an upstander story that is more foundational to our work at the center than what Werner did courageously and heroicly and the fact that he chose how he wanted to respond to this. In a way that didn't become what he was speaking out against. And in a way that leaned into education is really special. So yeah, so we've got the story from the archives. And I joined Cori Silbernagel, our director of collections and exhibitions to take a look inside at some really special pieces about Warner story. So we'll show that now. Hey, so we are here in the archives of the Nancy & David Wolf Holocaust & Humanity Center. This is not something that's open to the public. It's behind many closed doors for safekeeping. And we are here with our incredible curator, Cori Silbernagel, who really takes incredible professional but also you have a personal passion for this work, caring for our amazing collection, which includes documents, you know, firsthand real documents that are survived was brought with them and others and also some artifacts that sort of illuminate these stories as well.

**Cori Silbernagel** 45:05

Yeah, so our collections document the stories of Holocaust survivors, other eyewitnesses like American soldiers and liberators, rescuers, each one of their stories is different and the things that they saved is so different. So today I want to share with you some of Warner couples collection. Warner was someone who was very close to our center. Because sharing his story was really important.

**Jackie Congedo** 45:35

So it was like a pioneer in doing it. Absolutely. Yeah. Walk us through a little bit of what you have in these but I need to put my gloves on. Yes, yeah, we are very careful. If you want to touch anything, that's right, your gloves and make sure that we are not.

**Cori Silbernagel** 45:48

So the first things I want to show you today are two two photographs of Warner. I want to give you kind of a face to the story. So this is Werner Coppel. He is was born in Moers, Germany. He was a survivor of Auschwitz. So both of these photographs were taken very shortly after the war. After the war, he didn't return to Moers to stay. He went to Berlin. So this is his personal identification card that was sort of

**Jackie Congedo** 46:00

This would have been after the war that this

**Cori Silbernagel** 46:17

yep, yep. So this was issued on May 3, 1946. We can learn a lot about Werner from this card, we learned that he was born in 1925, his hometown, first name, last name, even his finger fingerprint is there. And then another photograph, so

**Jackie Congedo** 46:45

the German government postwar issued these, for anyone or for people who were

**Cori Silbernagel** 46:51

Yes. So he, he was German, but he was also stateless. Right? So this document would have been probably one of the first identification documents that that was issued to him. This isn't his passport. This is just his his national identification card.

**Jackie Congedo** 47:15

Wow. Yeah. And this portrait of him, which was also taken after the war, this is featured prominently in our points of light theater. And if you have not been done to the museum, you can need to come because we have an amazing film that talks about Warner and his story, and the activation of his strengths in that story. And yeah, this this image sticks in my mind from that film. Yeah. So

**Cori Silbernagel** 47:39

Warner story is one of the stories that's throughout the entire museum. So we we start the museum experience sharing his story in the lobby, and then it continues throughout, you know, winners, a great example of just one person who I think found found a moment to speak up. And that's what that film is about. Yeah. Yeah. powerfully. Yeah, absolutely. So let me share. Wow, over here, we kind of can continue revealing Warner story through the archives. So this is this is an affidavit that was issued by Sam funk

**Jackie Congedo** 48:18

in 48. Living in Avondale at the time. Yep, so

**Cori Silbernagel** 48:22

he's living in Avondale. But he owns a farm in New Richmond and Clermont County. He This is an affidavit that really, you know, in many ways afforded Boerner and his family, their American visas to immigrate. Wow. So Sam funk is sponsoring Warner, noting that he's going to give Warner employment that he won't, you know, be a burden on American society. Yeah.

**Jackie Congedo** 48:51

And you had to have that in order to in order to immigrate as a refugee.

**Cori Silbernagel** 48:56

You had one of many documents. Yeah. So this document notes, you know, Warner's name and includes his wife, and he had a son that he came on. So Werner and Trudy, his wife had two sons, Ron and Steve. Ron was just a baby when they arrived here. And then Steve was born in Cincinnati,

**Jackie Congedo** 49:18

That's his quote, I arrived in Cincinnati with a wife a baby in a suitcase, right?

**Cori Silbernagel** 49:21

Absolutely. Absolutely.

**Jackie Congedo** 49:24

There was the baby.

**Cori Silbernagel** 49:25

Yep. Yep. Then kind of continuing the story. We have his public school certificate of citizenship classes, so Werner and all of the new immigrants arriving to Cincinnati or elsewhere, whether they were coming from Germany or somewhere else. They wanted to become American citizens. So many people took night classes to learn English. They took citizenship classes to you know, learn a variety of things and Cincinnati Public Schools facilitated that in our community. So this is Werner's certificate. We also have Trudy's.

**Jackie Congedo** 50:10

I was gonna say and I think Trudy's is the one actually that's in the stairwell, right and on the way down to the museum. So again, yeah, you come to the museum, and you can see this, you know, in in large print, the facsimile of it, proudly, sort of on the wall there, down the stairs, as you come into the museum. I was assumed that Warner had one obviously, as well, but I've never seen that. Yeah, never seen it. So

**Cori Silbernagel** 50:31

this was issued in 1954. They gained citizenship shortly after. Werner was part of New Hope Synagogue in Cincinnati. He was connected to the Jewish community here. And he was someone who I think, I think he shared his story, but not very publicly for a long time. So the next thing I will show you is this article. This, you know, you can learn much more about this in the museum. But this is the article that they learned and I are Yeah, it inspired Werner to speak out. So one day, he opens the Cincinnati Enquirer. And he sees in the insert inside of the newspaper, an article, "German Americans Pride vs Politics," and in it, Eugene von Riestenberg, who is at the time, the president of the German American Citizens League of Cincinnati, He is quoted in this article saying that the Diary of Anne Frank is a fake. Yeah, I mean, he's he's survived a death march out of Auschwitz. And this was outrageous, this Holocaust denial that he experienced.

**Jackie Congedo** 51:52

Is this when he the piece he kept? This is... this was the copy, a copy of that article that he kept.

**Cori Silbernagel** 51:58

Yeah. So this is a copy of what he kept to us that he, you know, what he kept and donated to us.

**Jackie Congedo** 52:04

You can see even marked as these are his markings, there where that peace... I can, I actually can't imagine what that was like to read that after what he'd been through. And to think just all of the things that went through his mind about how he should respond, but, you know, we know how the story played out and how he ended up responding, right, which was to speak his truth, the truth about what had happened and and that started this wave of survivors, and others having, you know, the inspiration and the courage to speak out publicly as well.

**Cori Silbernagel** 52:40

Yeah, I think. You know, Werner, again, is just an example of one person who, you know, found a way to, to react, and he found a way to, you know, write the good history, instead of to, you know, continue to play into this general Holocaust denial and to be silent and to ignore it. He wanted to, he wanted to let people know that the Holocaust certainly did happen. Yeah. Because he was there. And he experienced it.

**Jackie Congedo** 52:40

Yeah. And I think about the the need, like, we would like to think that this whole trend of Holocaust denial, revisionism, et cetera, oh, that's a crazy thing that happened back then. And it's not around anymore. Unfortunately, we know that there's a growing school of that. And I think about Werner and his choice to speak and his courage as sort of a grounding. I mean, I know for all of us, it's kind of a it's a grounding piece of the work that we do every day, right. It's in a moment of continued, you know, proliferation of hate and antisemitism and Holocaust denial, remembering how he chose to respond to that, by educating and by illuminating is really powerful. And I think it's instructive for all of us as we keep doing the work. So

**Cori Silbernagel** 54:04

and, and Werner's just one act, which then again, is this ripple effect that carries through the rest of his life of continuing to speak and speak and speak more and more? It reminds me doing that work that, you know, we can have soft voices, but make a huge impact too.

**Jackie Congedo** 54:25

I love that. It is so true. And I you know, I talk about this sometimes in the humanity galleries, I'm leading tours, but it's the same thing here. Werner didn't wake up one day and say, "Oh, I envision this future with an archives like this and you know, a museum that educates." He said "This, I need to respond to this. I need to figure out how to act. This has activated me in a way that that calls me to the meet this moment." And, and he did. And to your point, the ripple of that right that became this and that became this and other survivors were inspired to speak, and he found sort of this, you know, rhythm of education that he carried with him throughout the rest of his life. And here we are today because of it. So yeah, really special. And, and there's one other piece that I want to see here

**Cori Silbernagel** 55:16

Sure. There's one other item I pulled out from Werner's collection. That is really, really special. We don't exhibit it often in the museum because it's in very poor condition. But this is a haggadah that is used during Passover Seder. This Haggadah was buried in Berlin. During the war, it wasn't buried by Werner by someone else. But after the war, when Werner was in Berlin, he and others unearthed these items, which included Judaica prayer books, and this Haggadah was part of that.

**Jackie Congedo** 55:57

Wow.

**Cori Silbernagel** 55:58

So it was used in one of the first seders after the war. And he brought it with him here to Cincinnati. So, you know, Werner's connection to Judaism. His connection to his culture, to his family, his tradition, I think was really important to him. And I'm certain that that must have kind of called him to, to speak.

**Jackie Congedo** 56:27

Informed his activism in that moment.

**Cori Silbernagel** 56:30

Yeah.

**Jackie Congedo** 56:31

And his his, his telling of his story. This I like, was getting choked up. Just listening... looking at this, and being so close to it, something that survived, right? Such a catastrophic chapter of history. And I just think about the amazing survival and perseverance of the Jewish tradition. And the fact that you could look back over chapters of Jewish history for 1000s and 1000s of years and whether there are collapsible menorahs, you know, that then were hidden during I think it was actually during the Inquisition, I saw one in a museum in one of the synagogues, the more synagogues in the south, to something like this, that, you know, Jews at the time knew that there were going to be other Jews who would need this. They had the they had the forethought and the hope. And the the audacity to know that this wasn't going to be the end of the Jewish story, and that there would be Jews who would need this. And they kept it and they saved it, and they hid it. And the fact that it was found and it continues today is just like, yeah, yeah, really powerful. Yeah.

**Cori Silbernagel** 57:44

And, you know, because it was brought here to Cincinnati. I think it also gives way to this idea that, you know, the Holocaust is, is international history, right? It's European history. Global History. Yeah. But, but it's our local history, too. And this Haggadah also has a story here. That part of it story. Yes. Here and it continues today.

**Jackie Congedo** 58:15

Yeah. Did he? Do you know if he ever used it after he found it? Or was I'm sure he wanted to keep it?

**Cori Silbernagel** 58:21

Yes. So I know that it was used, you know, in that first Seder, but I don't know how often it was used after the war. It'd be an interesting question to ask Steve or Ron, if they remember having this in their home.

**Jackie Congedo** 58:38

Wow.

**Cori Silbernagel** 58:38

Growing up, or,

**Jackie Congedo** 58:40

Yeah, and the story of you know, the Haggadah. For those who don't know, the Passover story is all about liberation. Right. The whole thing is about a journey to freedom. And, you know, having a piece that survived its own chapter of liberation, its own chapter of... that is really, really amazing. Wow, well, people will get a sneak peek of something that we don't often put in the museum because again, it's so so fragile. You can tell just by looking at it. It's It's um,

**Cori Silbernagel** 59:05

yeah, it's a treasure, though. It's really it's you know, every everything in our archives tells a really important story. But this is a story that, you know, we have to be sharing, and we can't forget.

**Jackie Congedo** 59:18

Yeah, absolutely. Thank you for sharing with me. So there's one other piece that I know you want to show folks, and I can't wait for people to see because it's, it's just so special.

**Cori Silbernagel** 59:29

Yeah. So this is another piece in our collection that we don't often share in the museum, but it is. It's amazing. It has an amazing story. So this is the suitcase that Werner and Trudy packed all of their belongings in and traveled to Cincinnati with.

**Jackie Congedo** 59:47

Wow.

**Cori Silbernagel** 59:48

So Werner... when I used to hear Werner speak, he spoke to students as long as he could. When Werner would share his story. He would always begin by saying, "I arrived in Union Terminal with a wife, a baby, and a suitcase. And he would say that began the second part of my life. Now, let me go back and tell you about what happened before." So this suitcase is that suitcase that he would talk about. It's really special. It includes hand written on it, his name, Cincinnati, where they will arrive to, you know, so as, as Werner and Trudy and Ron traveled on a ship to the United States arrived in New York harbor. This suitcase also did, the suitcase went on the journey too.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:00:48

Wow. And this. So he had this suitcase and you said one other with it. And that was that was everything?

**Cori Silbernagel** 1:00:55

Yeah, as far as I know. So he also brought with him a wicker trunk that contained things also. Werner was the only survivor of his family, though. He, he didn't have many things, or people around him after the war. So he began his rebuilding in Germany, and the rebuilding continued here. So...

**Jackie Congedo** 1:01:23

The Haggadah was one of the things that was in the suitcase or possibly with him on his, on his person as he arrived. It's so it's, I mean, just for scale, like it's shorter than I am tall. And I just, you know, some of us think about, you know, how long trip to Europe or something, and they would pack this much. And this is this and one other suitcase about the same size. Yeah, is contained everything that that Werner in his family had with them to start their second chapter of their life here in Cincinnati. It's so, so powerful. And you can see even though the handles the leather handles on the side, one over here, I think is broken. It's just, it's amazing. So this would have come, I guess, through freight. Right. If he was coming off the train, everyone, everything came into, as you said, into New York harbor. Yeah. Yeah. And then he would have taken he and his family would have taken the train. Yeah, come through Union Terminal.

**Cori Silbernagel** 1:02:26

Probably, yeah. Yeah. So you know, at some point, this, you know, again, it made the journey. It made the journey as his family did. You know, artifacts like this have so much power to tell amazing, deep stories that people might not otherwise ever, ever know about. So every chance I get I tried to share Werner's suitcase.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:02:52

I was gonna say, where do you share it? I mean, do we have opportunities to put this out? Or to show kids you know, as in different settings?

**Cori Silbernagel** 1:03:01

Yeah. So we recently, it was recently exhibited two years ago now in the Jewish Bicentennial exhibit as the city, you know, celebrated this, you know, huge Jewish history here. This, this suitcase, along with others were shared to, you know, represent all of these people that richly contributed to our city, new America. Yeah. So they, they were shared to symbolize this rebuilding. And Werner's story is certainly so interwoven into the fabric of of that narrative. We also recently shared the suitcase with teachers at our Kaltman Institute, you know, to help help teachers also find creative ways to storytell, to help their students make connections, and to find to find their own connection to these people who, you know, may seem very old to them, very, you know, far away. But it's not far away.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:04:10

This is right here. I mean, you can - Can I touch it?

**Cori Silbernagel** 1:04:12

Absolutely

**Jackie Congedo** 1:04:13

With my gloves on. Yeah. Oh, my gosh. And you can see it even in the back how that fabric, yeah. Like it's wrapped in fabric and kind of painted.

**Cori Silbernagel** 1:04:19

Yeah. So there's some parts that are really fragile and on it,

**Jackie Congedo** 1:04:24

to see that the same, you know, same with the address, which would have been where it was headed, I can't even imagine, you know, and he had never, we take for granted, you know, the coming people coming and going these days. It's like, easy to hop a plane or whatever, you know, to train, but in these days, you know, he this was a whole new world. I mean, you've never been outside. Have you ever been outside Europe before the war?

**Cori Silbernagel** 1:04:47

I don't know. I don't know. I don't think so.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:04:49

I don't think so either. So, just the courage. I can't even imagine the courage it took to and to have your child with you and your wife with you and to feel like you were pioneering this new...

**Cori Silbernagel** 1:05:01

and responsible to take care of your family?

**Jackie Congedo** 1:05:05

Yeah, really. And think about the Coppel family now. Right? They have generations of couples who are here and part of our community and our neighbors and friends. And yeah, on our board. And it's

**Cori Silbernagel** 1:05:17

Well, and I would argue, I mean, even the, you know, this courage and the bravery that Werner had, yeah, is been passed down to his children. Yeah, sure. In the way, Steve and Ron both share their family stories, that legacy of of, you know, standing up and speaking out, continues.

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:05:38

So many thoughts. Just watching that, that video, just how powerful it is. And, and first of all, just, you know, just from a historical standpoint, the power and the impact of artifacts, right, and just being able to have those things that connect you to a period of time and to be able to see it and touch it, and to see how time, the effects of the time has had on it and almost kind of try to transport yourself back mentally, in your mind, you know, to those times. And, you know, I was thinking about, you know, if I were a kid, yeah, coming through the museum, and with my modern day sensibilities, and looking at, you know, Werner's suitcase, I'd be like, "Well, you know, it's just a suitcase, you know, what's the big deal about you no big deal about a suitcase?" But when you think about what that suitcase represents, not just that everything that he had, he was bringing in that suitcase with him to sort of start a new life. But it all it is also representative of everything that he had lost, and was leaving behind as well. Because if we think about I was thinking about man, if I'm, you know, if I'm traveling, or I'm moving to someplace, you know, I gotta get a moving truck I got to do I got all of this stuff that I'm taking with me to wherever I'm going. And then the notion of that everything that you have, you've compacted into this suitcase, that you're taking with you to start over. And that's not only a symbol of what you have everything that you have, but what are you what have you lost? And what are you leaving behind it's like, and when you start to think about things like that, it really does help you wrap your mind around the gravity of why Werner felt that he had to literally respond to that article that he read, you know, without, without thinking about all of that, you know, one might say, you know, and these days and times where there's so much misinformation that's out there, you know, it's easy to kind of say, I'm not going to try to respond to every crazy thing that I see on social media, or the or in the internet, or that sort of thing. We kind of slough a lot of that off is just crazy talk or, you know, nobody's really going to believe that, although we know that that's, that's not necessarily true, like people believe a lot of people believe a lot of misinformation. But, but back in these days, and these times, for someone who went through the experience of the Holocaust and lost so much, it's easy to understand how he just could not abide someone saying that that didn't happen. And feeling compelled, you know, to have to say something and not just sit on that. And and, and I think you know, the great thing about the history and the archives and seeing that it really kind of helps you understand a little bit more than mentality that drives somebody like Werner to say, you know, I'm not gonna allow that.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:08:53

Yea, and to speak for, obviously, what he had been through. But on behalf of the 6 million people who aren't here to tell what happened to them. That's I think, and I know, that's the responsibility that so many survivors and their descendants feel right. You know, we can relate to that in any marginalized community and identity. It's like, you know, you're not just speaking for you, you're speaking on behalf of an entire people and certainly those who aren't here to for sure to speak for themselves. So it is a remarkable story of upstanding and it really grounds us, we have a great conversation in our video series Hear My Story on YouTube, which there are links to in the notes conversation with Brad and Steve. So, Brad, Steve Coppell, Werner's son and and then Steve's son Brad got together and talked about his legacy and this moment of upstanding and beyond, and so you'll definitely if you want to hear more about Werner's story and hear from his son and his grandson, you should check that out as well.

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:10:06

I think don't underestimate too, you know what it must have taken for Werner to tell his story. So, so again, this is just how my mind works and how I think, here is a man who's sharing the most traumatic experience of his life. And if you've ever in if anybody's ever endured a trauma, think about how difficult that it most people don't want to relive that, let alone let alone tell that story like, right like you don't want to think about, uh, you don't want to have those memories, let alone feel the need to have to come out and experience that pain and tell it to offset, you know, just sort of a nasty, vicious lie or untruth. And so let's not underestimate you know, what it what it took to have to revisit, you know, as you're trying to as you've rebuilt,

**Jackie Congedo** 1:11:03

You're just trying, I mean, I think there was this common, so understandable idea that I'm just want to fit in, yeah, I don't want to be different. I want to be American, I want to learn the language, I want to, you know, it's like this otherness, had created such hardship, and had been associated with so much trauma. That yeah, I mean, it was it. I think so, so many of many of the survivors just wanted to, "I'm just like everyone else," you know, and so yeah, it was tapping into that vulnerability in the deep trauma and sadness, you know, and having to relive that, but it was also having to actually kind of say, "I'm different."

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:11:54

Yeah.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:11:56

And, you know, in a way that in a way that had, because of the hatred of other people, had caused such terrible loss in my life and trauma. And so yes, I think courage is an understatement. And strength, certainly strength and stamina. But, you know, look, look at what it inspired.

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:12:18

The ripple effect is, is just so profound by that, and not in only when he encouraged, you know, other survivors to come out and share their stories. But what that eventually became, and even the reason why you and I are here, now, you know, even having this conversation, again, it just goes to show the power of the ripple effect and how standing up and one moment, doing one seemingly small thing, you know, can have huge, huge impacts that benefit that benefit a whole lot of people. And I think we're all better today, because of what Werner did, you know, all of those years ago, and just standing up and saying, "You know what, I ain't gonna let that I'm just I'm not gonna let that slide."

**Jackie Congedo** 1:13:10

Go unanswered. Yeah.

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:13:11

And, and sometimes, you know, on my end, at the Enquirer, I get a hard time, particularly around issues of race. People say, you know, Kevin, you've always got something to say, you know, some readers you always writing about, about race, why can't you let it? Why can't you just let it go? Why do you have to say every time there's something Why do you have to say something? I think Werner is a perfect example of why you have to do that. Because yeah, you you know, it can be annoying. It can get on people's nerves, but it's necessary sometimes to call things out for what they are and to say, "You know what, I'm just not going to let I'm not going to let that stand." Yeah, you know

**Jackie Congedo** 1:13:54

So well said. And so you know, we had a another upstander this month, another upstanders story we wanted to feature, which is really a name that many people are familiar with is Debra Messing, who is an award winning actress, and actually was our celebrity host at our upstander awards. You know, the biggest event of our year. As we've talked about, we spend that whole evening celebrating upstanders we also I was so privileged to be able to have a conversation with her. Yeah and she she joined us that night to honor this community of upstanders here in Cincinnati and the share a little bit more about her life and her work and her advocacy for human rights. So I want to talk a little bit more about your upstanding work your sort of role as an upstander. You've been an advocate for so many causes for of course, the Human Rights Campaign, and the LGBTQ sort of community and issues, but also the global fight against HIV and AIDS as global ambassador for PSI, visiting prevention programs in several African countries, even testifying before Congress to help secure 100 million dollars in aid for that work. And now you've really become an upstander, I would say actually continued to be but sort of moved into the front of your advocacy against antisemitism. Can you talk a little bit about your work on this issue today, and sort of what compelled you to center that in your advocacy?

**Debra Messing** 1:15:38

Charlottesville was the pivotal moment for me, when I saw people with Tiki torches, walking and saying, "Jews will not replace us." It was so chilling, and so terrifying. That I, I felt like, Okay, I have to get involved now. I think growing up every day, my parents spoke to me about the Holocaust. Their conversation conversations where you have to have more than three children so that we could replenish the people lost in the Holocaust. But I think what happened was, because the Holocaust was so unimaginable that it I think my generation felt like it was almost a promise that would never happen again, that we would be educated about it. But it wouldn't happen. And I think October 7, was when I was ignited into action.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:16:54

So you've you've really used your platform, to raise awareness about Holocaust education to combat not just antisemitism, but really the rampant hate that is unchecked in online spaces. And you've been doing more and more with organizations like ours, Holocaust museums and organizations. And now you're producing a documentary on antisemitism sort of what we've seen in particular in the United States since October 7. Why is Holocaust history in your mind, so important right now?

**Debra Messing** 1:17:29

Education is everything. Facts matter. And I think our educational system has failed us. I believe the number is 65% of of schools in America actually teach the Holocaust at all. And that's unacceptable. When I heard that, kids today, when you say the word Auschwitz, most of them don't know what that word is. It just became so clear to me that Holocaust education is everything. And we need places like this in every single town.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:18:32

You can clap for that.

**Debra Messing** 1:18:39

We do. Because for some reason, the Jews as a people are segregated from every other kind of racism and hatred in in all of humanity. And it's always been that way. And it may not it may not fix the problem. But it will educate people so that they're not ignorant. And as long as people have the facts and today that is a very, very challenging thing to accomplish, because of all the propaganda and all of the lies and all the denialism I feel like that is our most urgent call to action is to educate about the Holocaust.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:19:48

It was a pretty it was a pretty impactful evening all around and, you know, she she's been a really strong voice in this space. Um, It was really interesting to hear her talk about what ignited that. Yeah, in some ways, actually, it's the same stories. And it's like, I heard them saying that, and I just couldn't let it be right. Werner the same thing.

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:20:13

Yeah, yeah, I think it goes back to - and I love the thread that's kind of gone through this whole podcast from the beginning, because we sort of started talking about national observances, and the intentionality of making sure that we maintain freedoms, and so forth and so on. And the thing that spoke to me about her was sort of being jolted into action. And there's this sense that I think we've all got to recognize that it shouldn't take, or we can allow it to necessarily take for tiki torches and marches or an October 7, to propel us into activity, we got to do more preventive maintenance, as opposed to reactionary responses. And so I think, and it's human nature, I mean, I think it's, you know, part of it is we all have to be kind of shaken out of our, our comfort or complacency, and to in the moving into action. But I think, you know, we all need to develop a sense of, and I get it, it's exhausting. You know, we're all looking for an opportunity for respite and, you know, where's my day off kind of attitude. But the reality is, is that when we take days off, the tiki torch holders, they're there, they're not taking days off, they're continuing to mobilize and, you know, kind of try to affect strategies to roll those back. And so we do have to be vigilant, but that was that was just something that, that I thought about, as I as I heard her talk about, you know, just sort of that spark is that that's great. And we need more folks like Debra and others to sort of step up and use their platforms and their voices. But, boy, we got to get to a place where it doesn't take, you know, just unconscionable or outrageous events that to spark us into into that type of activism.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:22:13

Yeah. And I gotta say, you know, she's she has been, she's been really actually unique. You know, you look at Hollywood. Yeah. And they're, you know, there are few people, relatively few people speaking, she is one of few. And so I give her, you know, a lot of credit, as you do to, you know, for, for stepping in. Yeah, in that moment when others have stayed silent.

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:22:41

Yeah. Well, she kind of talked about that, you know, in her in her remarks that night that, you know, there are some people who just aren't willing to risk what comes along with what potentially comes along with lending your voice. Yeah, that that people are very are protecting, you know, very self interested in protecting what they have going for them, and they're not willing to step out on the platforms and show the courage that she has shown to stand on these these sorts of issues. And that's, and, you know, I mean, we even see that we even see that here in our community, a lot of the silence that, you know, we see around a lot of issues in this community, is people are not willing to risk fear.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:23:25

Yeah, fear of retribution.

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:23:27

I mean, and there is that I mean, you know, we live in a time where people are going to come after you if you if you take a stance in a particular situation that they don't like, and, and a lot of people are just not willing to risk that.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:23:41

Yeah. Yeah. You have to be able to at the end of the day, look at yourself. Yeah, mirror. And I think that she, she can do that. So it was such a privilege to have her in conversation. Really? Yeah. Awesome to have her in Cincinnati.

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:23:55

Yeah, for sure. For sure. Well, I think we have probably used more than more than enough of our time.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:24:02

If you're still with us. Amazing. Kudos, congratulations, come back next time. You know, leave your reviews and ratings for us. We want to be able to incorporate those and be in conversation around some things you're thinking about as you're listening. And you can also listen to the full interviews with with Werner Coppel's descendants, his son and his grandson, and with Debra Messing on our Hear My Story series, which is on YouTube. So you'll find the links to those in the show notes. And it's it's been fun. We'll do it again in a month.

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:24:40

Yeah, looking forward to it. And I sincerely hope that that we will hear from our listeners and let us know what we can, what we can do better what you want to hear more of, and all of that will contribute to making this a really great experience, I think for everybody who wants to be a part of the Upstander Ripple Effect.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:24:59

Truly, there's there's a there's there's room for all of us. Alright, we'll see you next time. Let us know your thoughts on this episode. Our email is in the show notes. You can listen anytime on Spotify, Apple podcasts, or visit Holocaust & humanity center.org/podcast You can also connect with us on Instagram and Tiktok @holocaustandhumanity and X and Facebook @cincyhhc. The Upstander Ripple Effect is a production of the Nancy & David Wolf Holocaust & Humanity Center. The Center's mission is to ensure that the lessons of the Holocaust inspire action today. This series is part of the Cynthia & Harold Guttman Family Center for Storytelling. Visit us in person at historic Union Terminal in Cincinnati, Ohio or online anytime at holocaustandhumanity.org Managing producer is Anne Thompson. Consulting producer is Joyce Kamen. Technical Producer is Robert Mills and Technical Director is Josh Emerson. The opening sequence is by Ken Furman. Archive videography by Michael holder. Select music is by Kick Lee and this is recorded Technical Consulting Partners studios in Cincinnati, Ohio.