Upstander Ripple Effect Episod... Dark featuring Zahava Rendler

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**SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

upstander ripple effect, light and darkness, Holocaust education, civil rights advocacy, historical comparisons, resilience, Holocaust museums, misinformation, General Kelly, Adolf Hitler, hurricane aftermath, human resilience, Rutka musical, Blink festival, Zahava Rendler

**SPEAKERS**

Jackie Congedo, Werner Coppel, Kevin Aldridge, Zahava Rendler

**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 from

**Jackie Congedo** 00:13

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** 00:27

Hello and welcome everybody to the upstander ripple effect Podcast. I'm Jackie Congedo and

**Kevin Aldridge** 00:32

I'm Kevin Aldridge, and we're excited to bring you all our sixth episode with the theme light and darkness, and we've got some great news to report. We've reached 100 subscribers on YouTube, and this month's... from the archives has already gotten an incredible number of views, and that means people are here. They're listening, they're watching, and we are oh so grateful for all of you who have tuned in.

**Jackie Congedo** 00:59

There you go. Make sure you copyright.

**Jackie Congedo** 00:59

Yeah, it's exciting to see the traction. In fact, the story we're sharing today from the archives, the full segment of that interview actually has more than 2000 I think 2600, at last check, views on YouTube. So great. You know, we'll see how many people out there are watching based on the little clip that we provide today. I think this is a, this is a really compelling example of light in the darkness, which we all can use these days. You know, I was in thinking about this theme of light. We've had a busy week at the Holocaust and Humanity Center. We had hosted our annual meeting, and we had a good friend of ours, Eric K Ward, who is the Executive Vice President of Race Forward, and really a long time civil rights advo-cist... strategist and advocate. I just invented a new word.

**Jackie Congedo** 01:28

You heard it here first, and he joined us, actually, in conversation with our scholar in residence, Dr Sarah Crane, who this is a role. It's in partnership with the University of Cincinnati, where she teaches a couple courses at the university on Holocaust and genocide studies, and then is with us, you know, as part of our education team, sort of embedded from us, you know, helping to deliver the best, most current scholarship in the field. And the conversation was really illuminating.

**Jackie Congedo** 02:28

You know, it was, it really focused around these times we're living in, which are in some ways unprecedented, and trying to sort of navigate hour by hour, day by day, what our role is as a holocaust organization, a museum, a resource center during a time that's really challenging, and you know on one hand, not wanting to make comparisons where they are inappropriate - at best inappropriate - at worst, offensive and dangerous, but at the same time, we have this mission, which is really about not just education for the sake of education, but education for the sake of inspiring action today. So there is this through line. There's this conversation between the historic and the contemporary that we navigate every day. You know, how explicit are we about that? How implicit is that? Where is it appropriate? Where is it inappropriate? How can we look for the patterns and the conditions? Maybe, instead of the just, you know, this, is this the comparisons? And Eric was really, I think, insightful in helping us sort of wrestle with that in front of our audience of supporters. And I think it's important actually, that sometimes it feels like in the seat that I'm in, and certainly our team feels this way. It's like, well, we're trying to get this right, but we're human beings, and we're not perfect. So it was helpful to have, actually, this kind of group wrestling, 250 people there to hear like, wow, these are the considerations that we're trying to deal with in real time. Yeah, and Eric really talked about how, you know, his case was that, you know, the spaces for these conversations to be happening in our society are shrinking. They're not growing.

**Kevin Aldridge** 04:26

Right.

**Jackie Congedo** 04:27

And he was talking about the resilience of the field, the fact that, and I mentioned like, I don't think that's coincidental. I think this was a field built by the people who, people who survived the Holocaust, talk about resilience, and so, you know, the fact that we have the space and the charge to maintain the space where the past can come into conversation with the present in a way that's responsible, and also, you know, inspiring and informative and ideally helps. Understand what our role is in the current moment is really important. And so, you know, we're gonna, we're gonna continue to try and lean into that in a way that walks the right line. But it is a day to day, hour by hour challenge.

**Kevin Aldridge** 05:15

Yeah, well, I think the fact that that you're being thoughtful about it and looking at, you know, how do you continue to evolve and berelevant in these days and times? I mean, I think you make a great point about Holocaust museums. And I think any museum that reflects on the history of a peoples is particularly important in these days and times where you see bans on books and pressure being put on public educational institutions in terms of what they're teaching about history and and even the fact that while we're having conversations, the conversations that we're having are more about screaming, screaming at each other, yeah, than having dialogue that's meant to kind of try to understand one another and understand the histories that that we all come from, and how they mesh together. And I think that that's incredibly important. And I think that that Holocaust museums can and should be that place in our communities where people can go to wrestle with these these complex issues and these difficult conversations, because you know, you all have the expertise. You put in the time you've you've done the research, you

**Jackie Congedo** 06:28

We have the facts and the history

**Kevin Aldridge** 06:30

Right

**Jackie Congedo** 06:30

and grounded in a space of actually education and information, absolutely,

**Kevin Aldridge** 06:34

which is important because there's so much misinformation and disinformation out there, there have to be institutions within our community who take that, that that solemn responsibility of of dealing in facts right and and people need a place where they can go to get that and trust that the information that they're receiving is not being processed through some sort of political filter or the agenda of of someone else who has a who has a different space and and, you know, that's important, because it brings me to, sort of, to bring it into current situation and what we're dealing with. I mean, we just have seen reports about General Kelly coming out and and talking about some of his conversations with former President Trump, and former President Trump expressing an affinity for Hitler and Hitler wishing that he had Hitler's generals and and Hitler did some good things. I mean, things that we know to just be offensive, objectionable, really deplorable forms of thought that are now being expressed openly in our society by a candidate who's looking to to lead our country. And you know, you have some folks who are sort of falling all over themselves to to justify these comments, and it's troubling things like these in these days and times that says why these things are important. You know, General Kelly to, you know, to his credit, maybe kind of tried to give the former president some grace by saying, Well, maybe he didn't, maybe he didn't know or understand the history I, I mean, I think that's a that's being very generous in the in that situation. I don't know anybody out there who doesn't you know, know about Adolf Hitler and sort of his history and and shouldn't have a general

**Jackie Congedo** 08:30

Well, and he knew enought to say he admired, sure he knew of him. He certainly didn't know, you know, but,

**Kevin Aldridge** 08:34

but that's all the reason why it's more important that we have institutions like Holocaust museums that can tell the true history of these situations, so that people can clearly understand that when things like that get said, you know, what the impact of that really is, and what that could bode for all of us? Yeah.

**Jackie Congedo** 08:55

What does it mean? What does it mean? And in a time when Holocaust denial and trivialization right? And just revisionism of history in general, is is growing more and more rampant. I think it is really important that you know, we can second set the record straight to say, let's be clear about who Adolf Hitler was, what the regime that he led, did, and, yeah, I mean, it's, it is, this is an example, I think, where, you know, there's, there's some hesitancy that I think we all feel to not want to politicize a conversation, or, you know, get, get involved, necessarily, if you know, you know in a way that could, you know, that could draw comparisons that are problematic. But when someone themself, this, you know this is not saying "this thing is like that." We have an we have a candidate for the highest office in our country, who, according to, you know, Kelly, has said these things.

**Jackie Congedo** 10:10

Now, I think it's worth noting, just in the sake of objectivity, that Trump and his campaign have dismissed them. Have said these didn't happen. This is all made up, you know. And even Kelly himself said, you know, he would trump, in his recalling of these conversations, that Trump would quash the conversation by saying, well, nothing Hitler did, you could argue was good, but that he would bring up the topic again. And so, you know, we have sort of this, like, you know the murkiness of that, but, but the fact that you have a general who's coming forward to say this is something that the American people need to know about is, is really, I think, pretty, pretty monumental. And when someone says that they admire in any way. You know, the things that hit, you know, "Hitler did some good things," is what Kelly said, that that Trump had shared, and even that he had raised the idea of needing, well, Kelly raised the idea. Kelly recalled, and I'm quoting here that when Trump raised the idea of needing German generals, Kelly would ask if he meant Bismarck's generals. Referring to Otto von Bismarck, the former chancellor of the German Reich who oversaw the unification of Germany. "Surely you can't mean Hitler's generals?" Kelly recalled asking Trump to which the former President responded, "yeah, yeah, Hitler's generals." And again, this is all per the interview with Kelly, what he claims was said, but it is, it's, it's so it's so concerning. And I think it just speaks to the fact that this language, this rhetoric, hasreal consequences when it's normalized like this, yeah.

**Kevin Aldridge** 11:59

And I think the, I think the danger, and again, just keeping this in the historical context of what we can learn from history. And you wonder how Germany became to be what it was, how Hitler cameto a rise of power, and how that can happen in an area. And I know that that we tend to think here in America, that we're untouchable, that we're invincible, that our democracy will never fall, and that except, yeah, these things, these things can't happenhere, but a lot of that was kind of a prevailing thought and mentality even in Germany at that time. And these are how these, these sorts of things can begin to manifest. And I think when, when someone expresses these things, I mean, think about this. Until recently, a comment like that would have been an automatically disqualifying comment by any candidate for office. I don't care if you were running for dog catcher

**Jackie Congedo** 13:00

or forget, candidate for, you know, athlete,

**Kevin Aldridge** 13:03

yeah, yeah,

**Jackie Congedo** 13:04

music icon, right? You know someone who glorifies Adolf Hitler

**Kevin Aldridge** 13:08

is a career, career killer, yeah, no matter what

**Jackie Congedo** 13:10

broadly speaking,

**Kevin Aldridge** 13:11

no matter what area you're in. And I think the fact that we are,

**Kevin Aldridge** 13:16

yeah, and I think the fact that we are entertaining this, giving serious consideration to someone who would express these ideas is a is a telling point about sort of where we are in this country in terms of what people will justify to get what ends they would like to get, whether that's a tax cut or whatever it is that you think you're going to get by electing this individual.

**Jackie Congedo** 13:16

or should be,

**Kevin Aldridge** 13:49

And I know some people will say, Oh, well, this is just what this is what General Kelly said, and it's his word versus the former President's word. But I think one of the things you got to take into consideration, which is something we used to do in this country is a person's track record and their character. On one hand, you have this decorated general who has literally laid his life on the line time and again for his country, whose son lost his life in that same manner, someone who has no record of falsity. And on the other hand, you have the former President who, I think we've lost track of how many quote, unquote, lies or misleading things he said over the last decade, and who you know dodged his service to to our country. So I think you know, if I'm going to look at the two, and I'm going to say, Who's more likely to be telling the truth in this situation, me personally, I'm going to believe you know, General Kelly, and I think the fact that you know so many people are willing for whatever purposes that they think that America is going to be better. Under this guy, I just don't see, you know, as they say, the math ain't mathing. And for me, I don't know, how do you get, I don't know how you get to that equation from someone who would espouse these type of ideas. And I think we're in a, I think we're in a dangerous situation in terms of of the mentality and what we're willing to accept in this country. And it's,it's, you know, again, when you wonder how democracies fall and people get to places like this, it's not too difficult to see.

**Jackie Congedo** 15:28

Yeah, it is. It reminds me again of this conversation we had with Eric about, you know, how can we how? What is our role? And I think our role is to help people understand. For anyone who doesn't, when someone says, anyone says, whether it was former President, whether it's somebody else, you know, there have been people throughout history who have made the mistake, or maybe for them, it wasn't a mistake. They this is what they wanted to say, of glorifying, or in some way praising Adolf Hitler. It's our job as an education institution to help people understand exactly what that means, yeah, exactly who he was, what he led, and yeah. Andso I think, you know, we well,

**Kevin Aldridge** 16:12

I don't, I don't think the former President that Yeah. I don't think the former president says anything he doesn't mean to say. In fact, that's one of the endearing qualities that, you know, many of his followers, yeah, as espouse, that they like about him is that, you know, he says what's on his mind. And so clearly, in this conversation with General Kelly, this is what was on his mind, yeah, so unfortunately,

**Jackie Congedo** 16:36

it's, it's, it's, it's a continuing, sort of disorienting space to be in. ButI think it's important that we, that we recognize, you know, that's this conversation we're having now is not a normal conversation at

**Kevin Aldridge** 16:54

all. Unfortunately, it's but, but it's become again, it's become normalized, right? We talk about these things that we we fight against the normalization of, and you're totally right. Like, these conversations didn't used to be normal. You know, I said it before we started, you know, taping the the pod today, is that people arenow having to say things that were just generally understood, things like, well, words matter. Well, like, yeah, right. Like, is that, isthat even something that we even need to say these but, but we're living in times where that has, that does have to be said, because we're, we're fighting against a wave of abnormality that is fighting to become the new normal. And I think that right, that those of us who are resistant to these ideas becoming accepted have to push back. You can't stay silent on these sort of things. Which is, which is why I'm glad General Kelly finally decided to break his silence and go on the record it's a little later than I would have liked to have seen. You know, considering how long he's been, he's been kind of sitting on these, on these stories, and Idon't know maybe he was hopeful that that Donald Trump would just kind of go away, that the phenomenon would fade, and he would never have to tell these stories until now. But I think that people of good conscience and of goodwill can't afford to be silent on matters like these and sit on the sidelines. I think, you know, endorsing Adolf Hitler, anything that Adolf Hitler did has to be something that I think all of us have to stand up and say, "No." that's

**Jackie Congedo** 18:34

That's a line. Yeah, that's a line, yeah? Well, as we all head to the polls and do our do our civic duty. I, you know, I hope every election that whoever you're voting for please go out and vote so important, and it is the backbone of our democracy. So, you know, as we all head, regardless of what side we're on, feeling like this is a pretty precarious time. I hope that we can all take pride in our responsibility as Americans to go cast our vote and do it with pride and honor and, you know, and resolve. So hopefully we see a very peaceful, you know, the power of democracy in action on Election Day is always something that sort of grounds me, and I'mreally hopeful that we will have another strong, lots of people participating election in our in our country.

**Jackie Congedo** 19:37

So there's my dose of like, sprinkle of hope that's moving us into a story that actually in some ways, is also what a terrible story with some glimmers of light in this dark in this dark moment, related to the horrific ongoing fallout from these hurricanes. I. Um, which are becoming, it seems more and more common and more and more devastating. You know, from western North Carolina all the way down through through Florida and, you know, the the southeast. It's just it is, I mean, awful to think that there are still so many people who are trying to figure out how to go on after losing everything. And what's really hopeful is that you see these helpers. I think it was Mr. Rogers who said, you know, in tough times, look for the helpers. Look for the upstanders - that's my take on it. And we have so many upstanders who are rising to meet the moment here locally, even though, you know, I think largely, Cincinnati was pretty unscathed. A couple of us went without power for a while. But who are saying, "What can we do?" And really just making small, small steps in whatever ways they can to to have a difference?

**Kevin Aldridge** 20:59

Yeah. I mean, I think, and again, this is a perfect example of our theme light and darkness. You know, these, these weather events are, are certainly horrible things, whether it's, it's hurricanes in Florida and southern parts of the states or, you know, we see the same thing when tornadoes sort of rip across the Midwest that we see from time to time. You know every spring and summer that it that when bad things happen most of the time, 99% of the time, it brings out the best in all of us. It sort of makes us recognize and channel our inner humanity and understand that. But for the grace you know of God, go, go. I that any of us could be in these in these situations, and if you get away with having to go without power for a few hours or or even a day, that you you recognize that that pales in comparison to what some other families and other places are experiencing. And I think that people tend to dig down deep and want to be a part of helping their fellow neighbor, and that's one of the things that that that gives me hope about where we are as a country, because there are there are times, there are glimpses that show what we can be when we decide that we want to be better and that we don't want to let our petty differences divide us. Because, you know, people who are contributing to hurricane victims come from all races, all backgrounds, all socio economic situations, yeah, and there's sort of this oneness that says we, we're all kind of living in this fragility of life that this could come for, for any one of us in one way or another, and and we see our commonality in that, and sometimes in the day to day political wranglings. We forget that. And so it's it's great to hear about these stories like like John Trautmann story, who was actually from Cincinnati, who went to a wedding event in North Carolina and suddenly found he and his wife found themselves caught in the midst of this terrible storm. And he sort of recounted in an op-ed in the Enquirer about their harrowing few days involved in this and their their attempts to get out of there and get back to Cincinnati. And he talks about, you know, being huddled in the lobby of the hotel where they're at, and the people in there are pooling whatever food resources they have together. You know, somebody's got a some pizza here, somebody's got some cheese and crackers here, and how they're sort of pulling together this community of of, you know, Storm victims who are in the lobby of this hotel just trying to get something to eat because nothing's nothing's available. And you know, he goes on to talk about, you know, his experience at gas stations, where you've got, you know, 2000 cars trying to get into four or five pumps for gas, as as people are kind of panicking in that situation. And in the midst of all of that, he found some local folks who were willing to kind of help he and his wife through the back roads and the hills of of North Carolina, get out and make their way back to Cincinnati. And he referred to those people as as angels, as his angels who helped to he and his wife escaped hurricane Aline. So, so there are all kinds of great stories of heroism, people who are willing to, I mean, even risk their own lives in a storm, you know, to help somebody else get out and get back home. And it's stories like those that they can give you hope in times where it seems like we're hopelessly divided.

**Jackie Congedo** 24:48

Yeah. I mean, I was just like looking at this story that, as you said, John Trautmann, you know, the piece he contributed, it is really, I tell you. Yeah, people should read this, because it does restore your faith in the goodness of each other. And you know, we've talked about this before, it's a shame that sometimes it takes these horrific things to, you know, to shock us into sort of our shared humanity. There was actually, I'm participating this this year in Leadership Cincinnati. And we were, we had a session yesterday, and we were talking about, you know, someone made the comment that we're talking about the politics of the region. Somebody made the comment that, you know, sometimes things have to get bad in order for people to wake up. And in the work that we do, that makes me very nervous, because it's a slippery slope between the kind of wake up bad and the kind of, it's too late bad. I hope that we're still in the wake up bad moment, but so as not to detour too bad. This, this, this kind of story, reminds me that maybe, maybe it's not too late, you know, maybe I actually think, you know, at the end of the day, we're all human beings who want to just get home safely at the end of the day to our families and in our lives and and the fact that that he had this experience with different people from all walks of life who were able to help him do that. And then they went back home. Yeah, they went back to Asheville. He says, Oh, by the way, we ask our angels what they're all going to do. They're going back to where they live. They said the young woman had left her other six children there. Their double wide trailer was gone. They said they'll get a camper and wait it out. God bless, right? So, just incredible resilience. And, I mean,

**Kevin Aldridge** 26:42

Yeah, think about that.

**Jackie Congedo** 26:43

Care for each other,

**Kevin Aldridge** 26:44

yeah. Think about that. These are people who, like they have problems of their own, yeah, right. And, you know, set that aside to help strangers, get get home, get to get to safety. That's, that's an amazing thing. And I think that, you know where we are in our country, to your point of, you know, things getting bad, but not getting to the point where things get too late. I think what we have to learn to do again is just channel that inner humanity a part of us, and get away from the political talking points, get away from these ideologies and whatnot that we might have, and begin to look at people as people, right, and not statistics, you know, not, not some form of policy or something like that, start to look at one another as people. Because, you know, here's the thing about these natural disasters, you know, the when they hit and the results of them, they're undeniable. You can't you can't politicize a tornado. You can't politicize a hurricane, even though, in this situation, some people will try, but, but the reality is, the results of the devastation and what's left behind and how people need to rebuild like that's undeniable. You can't argue with that. You can't dispute that. And so what we see is what we know to be the reality. And I think we've got to get back to that and say to ourselves that what we see and what we hear tend to be the reality, and begin to look at each other, you know, in sort of that compassion and and dealing with the harsh realities and helping people in our country sort of dig out of where we are. Yeah, yeah. It's sort of what we all have to do, and that and that requires eachof us to kind of look in the mirror and and check our spirits a little bit, yeah.

**Jackie Congedo** 28:40

Because sometimes we think, you know, especially in this history, it's like scarcity drives, it brings that's a condition that tends to bring out the most primal aspects of who we are as human beings.

**Kevin Aldridge** 28:49

John Trautmann talks about this in his op-ed there, while there were angels, there was also the gentleman at the gas pump, if you there was a part in here where he talks about when he went to that gas station, and people are waiting, you know, like, four hours to get to a pump, there was a guy who, even after he filled up, kind of, sort of refused to move out of the way and let John get in there. And when John said something to him, the guy told him to, you know, to go to go F himself, you know, which is, you know, kind of an example of here you've got a whole bunch of people in a desperate situation, probably worried about, hey, are they goingto have enough gas to fill up my car and all, you know, like, like, that's a real situation where you can see, like, the worst impulses of people can can tend to take place. If you're just worried about, Hey, I gotta fill up my car at the expense of, you know, whoever else you know, that kind of mentality can can certainly take place.

**Jackie Congedo** 29:51

But that's why these kinds of moments are such an interesting andimportant study of human behavior, because just like that. Same night. There was that guy, there were these angels, absolutely, who were in the same situation, who were living the same dire straits. And, you know, I think about, you know, the history that you know we teach at the museum. It's like this idea of of the people who stood up right those conditions forced a lot of people to make choices. Yeah, right, and many of those choices catered to the darker nature of humanity in an environment of scarcity and fear. And still, there were these moments of light in the darkness of people who chose the way of strength, who chose the way of selflessness, who, I mean, so, you know, we're not inherently good or bad. We are the product of our choices. Yes, and I just think it is also helpful to remember that that's, you know, it all hangs in the balance. Sure, it's, it's all on each one of us in each moment to make the choices that pull us towards our better nature, that that, you know, bend the arc of humanity towards the better, right towards the more just, towards the more caring and and it's possible, even in moments of scarcity, to do it.

**Kevin Aldridge** 31:16

I hope people will go back and read this, because even though I think we're doing a good job of talking about it. I still think he does a much better he does a much better job of telling the story. But to your point about choices, the other thing that I love in here is at that same gas pump when they first pull up there, and there are all of these people, he describes it as pure chaos, like everybody's everywhere, and there's this conversation going on in the car between he and his wife like, hey, somebody's got to get control of all of this chaos, because people are all over the place. And Mr. Trautmann, the author, is like, I'm not getting out of the car. So his wife does. She makes the choice to get out, and she starts to orchestrate and make sense of all of these cars that are chaos at this gas station. And so here's a, here's a a, an example of a husband and wife in a situation where the husband made a choice like, Hey, I'm not, I'm not getting out into this madness. You know, I'm staying here in the car. I'm not going to subject myself to that. And the wife was saying, No, somebody's got to do something, because if something, somebody doesn't do something, not only might not, we get an opportunity to get gas, but it's just going to be a mess. Yeah, and so. So I think you know this, this story, in and of itself, is filled with a lot of lessons and themes that we talk about on the upstander ripple effect. And it really is worth a read, just for, yeah, just for that. And Mr. Trautman did a, did a great job of telling you

**Jackie Congedo** 32:45

She might have Karen, his wife, might have actually had a strength. We talked about people who, you know, activate their strengths. She might have had a strength, absolutely at that moment, to get up and get out of the car. And, you know, maybe it was one of bravery, maybe it was one of, you know, perseverance, or sort of another action oriented strength. He has another strength, right? And his strength is one that actually, I'm trying to think of what the right one would be, but thefact that he was thoughtful enough to document this whole thing for the sake of other people to learn from it, that's a strength also.So, you know, we like to think, well, you know, was she the upstander? And he was like, still trying. No, he was doing his own upstanding.

**Kevin Aldridge** 33:24

I think that was even the theme of one of our earlier episodes. Wasn't it about, you know, setting the I can't remember what it was, setting the record straight, or keeping the record or, I can't remember exactly what. I'm certain it was one of the scenes of themes of one of our this very thing about documenting and keeping well,

**Jackie Congedo** 33:42

yeah, yeah, it's about, about bearing witness.

**Kevin Aldridge** 33:45

Yes, exactly.

**Jackie Congedo** 33:46

That's that was the last, last one.

**Kevin Aldridge** 33:47

Certainly that was

**Jackie Congedo** 33:48

totally, he's someone who has a strength of bearing witness. Yeah,speaking of bearing witness. So moving to another really interesting light, bright light in the darkness. I had the privilege of being at the opening night of Rutka, the new musical at the Playhouse. This is an incredible story, which was brought to life by a producer team. So Rutka, you know, takes this. This sets the stage in 1943 war-torn Poland, a young girl, 13 years old, Rutka and her friends are trying to live life as normally as possible while confined in the Jewish ghetto. And so it really is just a snapshot of this teenage girl and her humanity and the humanity of the people she was trying to literally survive with as they face all of these forces of dehumanization and violence and real terror. And it's and yet it is so grounded in the story of like a 13 year old girl who's worried about boys and keeping a diary. And you know what's what are her what is she wearing? What does her hair look like, you know, where they go to school, how do they feel about going to school or not going to school? It's just it was so human and beautifully brought to life in this new musical at the Playhouse. And so just a shout out to the team that delivered this, the you know, the team of actors, the producers, and then we were fortunate enough to actually host some of the folks in from out of town on opening night at the museum, and we had so it's worth spending just a minute to tell you about the way this came to life. So Rutka, at 13, wrote this journal - similar to the story of Anne Frank, right? She kept a diary, a journal, and she was friends with a Polish girl a little older than her during the time of the war, and they maintained some relationship and friendship during this time, you know, when they were relocated to the to the ghetto in Poland. And at least as far as the musical sort of portrays they were living in the so Rutka and her family and many other Jewish families, this is very crowded conditions. Were living in this apartment that had been occupied by this Polish girl and her family. And so Rutka told her friend, you know, if something happens to me, I will hide my journal under this floorboard, and you can find it because this, this is my legacy. This, you know, if I don't make it out of this, this needs to make it out. Talk about bearing witness. And so the her friend finds it after the war, holds on to it. And I believe it's her nephew who eventually discovers that his aunt has this many years later, and is able to find the half sister of Rutka. So Rutka's father survives the war. He goes on to have another family and a daughter, and that daughter, who's 20 years older, finds an album and says, "Dad, this girl looks like me. Who is this?" And he says that, "Well, that was your sister who we lost in the war."

**Kevin Aldridge** 34:11

Wow.

**Jackie Congedo** 35:07

And so then she realizes, oh my gosh, there's this notebook that she kept. So, you know, these producers find the story. They find the notebook. It's been reproduced in many languages, and, you know, it's out there. But they're like, this really is the kind of story, because it's so raw, it's so through the eyes of this teenager, it's so human. It deserves to be told in sort of a larger than life way through musical and they produced a really incredible artistic experience, which is getting its start here in Cincinnati. So if you haven't seen it and it's still out there, go see Rutka. It's it's really powerful, and it is a testament to this little spot of light in such a dark time that outlived her, right?

**Kevin Aldridge** 37:48

Yeah, absolutely. Well, I've definitely got to make it, make it my business to get out and see that something that, unfortunately I wasn't able to make my business to get out and see. But I'm sure many of our viewers, possibly you were the only person in Cincinnati, Cincinnati that didn't get to BLINK, right? Yeah. Well, what can I say? You know, I've been before, but I wasn't able to to make it this year. But, but talking about an event, literally an event of light in Cincinnati that brings people together. I love the the the the quote that BLINK has on its website where it talks about "Light was the medium. It is fundamental to the human experience. It connects us all. It can illuminate a path toward inclusion and possibility." and and when you think about that, that's like literal and figurative at the same time, because that, in essence, that is what Blink is. It's, it's about bringing us together, inclusion people of all backgrounds and stripes, and in Greater Cincinnati come around to just see this magnificent and beautiful light event and and there's just something about it that's just just uplifting, you know,

**Jackie Congedo** 39:01

it's so illuminating. Yeah, it's like the experience of actually seeing these amazing installations, and you know, that are just so bright and dynamic and inspiring. And then there's like the meta experience of experiencing other people experience it, you know, and like seeing the way, like this fabric of humanity that comes together in the streets of our city, you know, open acts, equal access for everybody to experience this together. And I didn't get to me. I did make it down, actually, with my kids, but we didn't go down to the banks. I heard the the giant. There was a giant, like helicopter blade, almost of LED lights. And from what I understand, there was like a pad that was under, you know, underneath of it, everybody could just lay down and sort of look together and look up at this thing together and just, you know, there are very few fewer and fewer, unfortunately, moments as I was watching this show at Music Hall where I looked across and I looked behind me, and it's every people of every you know, creed, background, race, religion, you know, political ideology, who are just taking in this experience of light together. And that, in itself, as I was saying, was a real moment of light.

**Kevin Aldridge** 40:21

Yeah,

**Jackie Congedo** 40:21

it was really cool to see.

**Kevin Aldridge** 40:23

Yeah, I mean, when you think about too how they, how they they flash the lights upon structures and buildings that around that we see every day, yeah, a lot of times take for granted, sometimes, yes, but, but it just goes to show that when you shine a little light on something that you maybe take for granted or ignore. You tend to look at things in an entirely new way. So there's a little theme there for us to kind of think about, about, you know, shininglight on things, yeah.

**Jackie Congedo** 40:56

And possibility, yeah, the possibility of that pivoting to our story from the archives this month, which is really such a poignant example of light and darkness, both literally and figuratively, we're going to introduce you to a really special person. I am so excited to get to share her story. She's one of our survivors. Has become just, you know, I've gotten to be close with her and learned a lot from her. And if you can just imagine, you know, making, having to make some of the choices that her family had to make during the war. You just, it's just unimaginable to think that this is how life began for Zahava Rendler, yeah.

**Kevin Aldridge** 41:46

Zahava was born in Poland in 1941 to Jewish parents. She had two older sisters when she was less than a year old, her family got word that they were no longer safe from the reach of the Nazis. Her parents made the incredible, hard decision to go into hiding with with their children. But since Zahava was a baby, hiding was not enough to keep them safe. They couldn't risk her crying and giving away the whole group, so they had to give her sleeping pills. Sleeping pills. Wow, that's it, just to keep her quiet. Here's a part of Jackie's conversation with Zahava,

**Zahava Rendler** 42:22

I remember my mother crying and giving me away to a man I did not know. Who was that man. Later on, I learned that was Stachek, our caregiver that saved our life. And then I remember very well, I must have been about two and a half the nuns in the convent, a lot a lot of very nice women with long brown co like a coat or a dress, always smiling and always patting our hair and saying something in Polish, wow, I think it is just like, like later on I learned, because when I was almost told the end, they almost used to say lad, najiv chinka, which went pretty girl or something like that. And I remember them with love, that's what I can say. And today, as an adult, I am very, very grateful that these women, Catholic women, that sacrificed their life many times in order to save me and other Jewish children, and there were many children in the convent.

**Jackie Congedo** 44:13

So before we get to the convent, you know, the Nazis come to power, they invade Poland. You have this early memory of your grandmother crying, watching what was happening, holding you as a baby, and at some point, your family recognizes that the only way to possibly survive, right to stay safe, was to hide, was to go into hiding. Talk about your family's you know what your what your parents later told you about their decision to do that. Bring us through that part of your story.

**Zahava Rendler** 44:54

Stachek was a friend of my father. My father and his siblings had a factory, a leather goods factory, and Stachek worked for him. One day, Stachek came to my father and he told him, "Mendel, the Nazis are approaching our city, and everything, what you have, will be taken away." And you probably know family will send away too. I have a hiding place that can host 32 people, and you must come. I'm offering that place to you. It didn't take long. And we entered the bunker. My mother, my sister, my father and me, I had underground, underground, a cellar. It's like today, I would say, a basement, but it was dark, no windows. Everybody was quiet. It was very cold and probably very filthy. People spoke in whisper, and my parents gave me sleeping pills and sleeping shots. I was about a little over nine months old, and most of the time I was sleeping,

**Jackie Congedo** 47:12

you know, Zahava shares that eventually it was just too hard to have a baby in the bunker like this, you know, for fear that if she would cry, that you know, they could be given away, and they would all face, you know, a certain fate. And so, in an unimaginable act, her parents have to make this decision to send her away to live with strangers, and the woman who they who they sent her with, kept her for for a period of time, and then she became too concerned that, you know, she would be found out, and so she handed Zahava off to a convent in the care of some Catholic nuns who kept her and other Jewish children, as Zahava says, at the risk of their own lives. And this is where Zahava, at two years old, survived the rest of the war. And this, I mean the conclusion. I don't want to say the conclusion, but the end of this part of her story. It's again, another sort of miracle, light in darkness, that her family survived. Her father was able to find her after the war at the convent, they reunited. But it just unimaginable, unimaginable. And you know, as I'm sitting there having this conversation with her, it's just chilling to think this person in front of me had this experience. This was not generations ago. This This was I'm talking to the human being who spent the first two years of her life in darkness, or the first chunk of her life, right? It's just remarkable, yeah,

**Kevin Aldridge** 49:07

I think, I mean, I think that's a great point that you make. Because I think a lot of times we feel like we're farther away from some of this history than we actually are, that there are actually people who are still alive, who are the descendants of or directly experience, you know, these, these types of things and and I think it's important to to hear those stories, because they always are a reminder to me of asking the question of what type of individuals could do this to another human being, and sort of feel like it's okay to force somebody to make these types of choices, or to to flee for their lives or their safety, that that what kind of fear hate I don't. What you know, you want to assign to individuals who would perpetrate this onto another set of human beings. But it really does call into question, you know, the the the humanity or lack thereof that it takes to to force people into making just these, these heartbreaking choices. I mean, I couldn't imagine one, you know, having to leave behind my home possessions, everything that I have, and then to go live underground in a cold, dark, filthy bunker where, you know, even the risk of of talking, you know, exposes me to capture, you know, torture, death, you know, all types of horrors and living like that for an extended period. And then, you know, having to give my child sleeping pills like constantly keep my child in a constant state of sleep, just to avoid like that, even that has to be, Oh, my God, just a very tough decision because of what you're doing to your child, not just for your own survival, but for the people around you, like even just making that decision in and of itself,

**Jackie Congedo** 51:12

choiceless choice, yeah,

**Kevin Aldridge** 51:14

and it only gets worse from there. You know, the choices that you have to make for for survival and and how that must make, you know, we talk about the people who perpetuate this, but you know, when you're a parent having to make that choice, how do you feel about yourself having to make that choice? So I it's, you know, it's just, it's a, it's a horrible situation that I think if we all take the time to sort of learn from this. What it should do is make us check at all points and times in terms of the decisions that we make, you know who we choose to support, and what we choose to support, what we choose to get involved in, and

**Jackie Congedo** 51:54

how we consume information,

**Kevin Aldridge** 51:56

like all of that, all of that

**Jackie Congedo** 51:58

that's the gatekeeper, I think

**Kevin Aldridge** 51:59

yeah, all of that, all of that matters, especially if we're going to try to take this attitude that we want to be a part, we want to be the light that we bring, versus the the darkness, you know,

**Jackie Congedo** 52:10

yeah, yeah. And there were moments of light. I mean, the fact that there were people - Stachek, right? This man Polish, man who worked for her father, who saw what was coming and said, We've got to get you. You all. I mean, that was we brushed that off as like, Oh, well. And then he did that. Well, no, I mean, there were so many people who were not doing that and who were doing the opposite. And the fact that he said, I will - at risk to my life - hide you and your family. And then, you know, the upstanders, the brightness of this Polish woman who took her of the nuns who helped basically raise her in those early years and keep her safe in this convent. You know, those are incredible acts, as we were talking about during a moment of scarcity and fear and real, proximate danger that people, people stood up, and then also just, you know, the light of Zahava, which I should mention, is actually the Hebrew, which means gold in Hebrew, okay, she went on, you know, she and her family went on. They and they lived in Israel for many years after this, before coming to the United States, and just the courage and the heroism to bear witness and continue to keep that story alive is, is really admirable. And so such a light in and of itself, you know, the light of education in the midst of sort of the darkness of ignorance,

**Kevin Aldridge** 53:41

yeah, for sure. And you could tell, like, even in the recounting, you know, some of this was just difficult for her, my gosh, even tell. And so the courage of just sort of, because every time you tell those those stories, you relive them to a certain degree, and and that just has to be as I can't imagine, as chilling as some of that was to hear. I can only imagine, you know, what it's like for her to tell that

**Jackie Congedo** 54:08

story or relive it, relive it. And she remembers things from when she was so young that were so impressionable. You know, she was so impressionable, and they made a real impression on her these, you know, remembering being held by her grandmother, who was in tears as the Nazis were approaching. And you know, remembering what it was like in the bunker, you know the just the feeling of darkness and cold, it's it's chilling and it is. It's so inspiring to watch her continue to make that choice every day, to let that light shine, the legacy of that. So thanks to Zahava, you can catch the full episode. You and 2600 other people will have watched it on our YouTube channel. The link is in our show notes, and then as we wrap up, I just wanted to move to our upstander shout out that we're trying to do now. Now every episode, and just give tremendous gratitude to the Schneider family. This is Anita and Hank Schneider and their kids, Ben and Ronna and Jessica and Micah and their grandchildren. Actually, they came together three generations to make a beautiful gift to the center that's going to allow us to provide free public general admission in the month of January, into perpetuity, which is huge. And this, this willcoincide with Holocaust, international Holocaust Remembrance Day in January. We're going to, you know, really, sort of publicize it, obviously, broadly, and spread the word, you know, with, with the anniversary, this January of the 80th, the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz is this January on Holocaust Remembrance Day. And so it's a, it's just such a beautiful - Hank was a survivor. I mean, well, his parents, his parents were survivors. They met in the camps. He, I believe, was born, you know, in a DP camp and came here as a as a child. But their story is remarkable, and the fact that he and his family are taking on the charge of that legacy to expand access for, you know, to this history for the sake of all of humanity is really admirable. And such an upstander move absolutely

**Kevin Aldridge** 56:25

and just again, just falls into our our theme of light. You know, the gift is certainly the act of an upstander. But, you know, I believe information is light, and so through that gift, being able to give essentially free light to, you know, all those who would come to get it. And I would encourage, you know, anyone listening or watching to to take that opportunity to

**Jackie Congedo** 56:55

you don't have to wait till January, but you should come and then come back in January as many times as you'd like. Yeah. So, yeah, absolutely for sure. And then, you know, I wanted to just share another nugget from, from my little upstander, who I live with our youngest, who the other day talking about light my husband was, you know, saying taking her to school, and was saying, Gosh, it's such a gloomy day. And she just, she just, without thinking twice, said, Dad, there's always rainbows if you know where to look for them. I mean, four years old, man, I'm like this girl. She knows how to find light, she knows how to find it. And that's that was just like, you know, wisdom out of the mouth of babes, yeah?

**Kevin Aldridge** 57:40

Well, you know, kid, what is it? The show used to be, kids say the darndest, yeah, the darndest things. And sometimes they say the most insightful thing. And, you know, I do think that's just so important that, you know, we do have to learn to to look for the rainbows, you know, because after, after every storm after every, you know, rain, dark period. You know, that's That's true there, there are rainbows, and you you know, too often we don't do enough to look for them. You know, we focus on the storm damage, as opposed to, you know, trying to look for the beauty of the rainbow that that comes after.

**Jackie Congedo** 58:23

And you know, if this idea that if you're looking around, you can't find any rainbows, and you don't see any light, then maybe it's you. That's the Rumi quote. If everything around you seems dark, look again, you may be the light.

**Kevin Aldridge** 58:32

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, you know that's, that's what we that's what we talk about here. That's what, that's what being an upstander means. It means letting your light shine, you know, not, not hiding your light under, under a bushel or under a table. That we want to, we want to let our light shine. And whatever character strength it is that we possess, you know, if, if we want to be the difference, if we want to be the the change, so to speak, that we want to see, then we've got to, we've got to be able to do that, and particularly in these times where it's so easy to just complain and despair and and want to talk about all of the darkness, you know, that really is around us. I think we've got to take more control and more charge and just cut our light on and every day, even if that's just a smile, you know. I mean, I try to extend that, you know, to everybody I come across every day, is to give them a smile and a hello. You know, even that little bit of light, you know, might be enough to make a difference in somebody's day

**Jackie Congedo** 59:35

or carry them to shine their light a little brighter. So we have a charge for you if you're listening and you want to help, spread some light. Shameless plug, spread the word about the ripple effect. Podcast, text one person, share the show with them, see what they think, ask for their feedback. You know, we love growing our community of listeners, and it's exciting to see where we you know, where we come, where we've come from, where we are. But there's always, there's always more, you know, minds to open and hearts to change. And we, you know, we love to be in conversation with with everyone who's listening about this stuff.

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:00:15

Absolutely, I look forward to the day where we can come in and talk about hitting 200

**Jackie Congedo** 1:00:19

Yeah, there you go. Right, right. There you go. And that wouldn't take that many. So if everybody texts one person, that's right, we'll be there tomorrow.

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:00:26

It just every subscriber that we has bring one, bring one to the party. There it is. There's

**Jackie Congedo** 1:00:31

200 there's 200 Well, we will end

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:00:35

on a note of just encouraging people, not only to just watch and subscribe, but to also think about how you are bringing light to whatever darkness is around you and letting that light shine as brightly as you possibly can.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:00:50

Love that, love that. All right, we'll be back next time. Thank you for joining us. 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 Holocaustandhumanity.org/podcast. You can also connect with us on Instagram and Tiktok @holocaustandhumanity and X 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 ispart of the Cynthia & Harold Guttman Family Center for Storytelling. Visitus 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. Select music is by Kick Lee, and this is recorded at Technical Consulting Partner studios in Cincinnati, Ohio.