The Upstander Ripple Effect Episode 7 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

All right, everybody. Welcome back to the ripple effect Episode Seven. I'm Jackie Congedo

**Kevin Aldridge** 00:35

and I'm Kevin Aldridge, and our theme for today is going to be building community. And I know right now that might not be sound like a great thing, or even a possible thing, for where we are right now in the country, following the election, where we are dealing with a very divided country, and the election results in a close election, when you look at The margins of the election, maybe not electorally, was still very close, and I think a lot of people are struggling with the results of that, if you are not a Trump supporter, and of course, if you are, you know, a Trump supporter, you're obviously very happy today, and, you know, looking forward to the direction that the country is going on. And I think a lot of people you know who are not fans of Trump, are really trying to reconcile and wrestle with how their neighbors, you know, could vote for someone that they find so unfit, so detestable, for lack of a better word, in some cases, someone so lacking in and moral character that then suddenly you kind of start to look around, and you looking at your neighbors a little bit sideways now wondering, like, if you really know those folks after all. And, and it's difficult to sort of understand this concept of trying to build community when people are feeling that way.

**Jackie Congedo** 02:02

Yeah, and I think, you know, it's not just the folks who may have voted for Harris who feel that way about their neighbors. I would argue, even though you know the folks who supported the former president are pleased with the outcome, I think they still probably carry, you know, certain ideas and fears and concerns about their neighbors who didn't. Yeah, so you know what is different now than it was before the election? Well, we know who the winner is, but what has not changed is the sort of divide in our in our country, related to, you know, both sides feeling in their bones that the other side is not just another side, but an actual existential threat, yeah, to our country, to their security as human beings, to their values and so. So I think you're right. I think that this idea of building community, we looked at the our producer, Anne, and said, Are you crazy right now? And she said, guys, you're just gonna have to to dig deep and and the more we talked about this theme, the more you know now I really am. I'm sort of fully converted. I think that it's the it is the essential project of this moment, and it's something that's, I think, going to be very hard for both sides to do, but, but, but the stakes are quite high if we don't prioritize that. So I think I would first just say that, if you're listening right now and you're like, this episode isn't for me right now, that's okay. You should go for a walk in the woods. Get a massage, you know, hug your dog, whatever you need to do to find some space, to continue to process where you're at and to take care of yourself. Because I think there are a lot of people who, you know, I say that sort of placating, but who are a lot really struggling right now, and you can't really be expected to, like, effectively engage with people who and to because you have to, you really have to, like, channel your best self to do that work and to extend that kind of benefit of benefit of the doubt, particularly when the stakes are this high, I think there are a lot of people who just aren't there yet.

**Kevin Aldridge** 04:26

Yeah, and dealing with the emotions is an important part of this. Because I think that what's going to be required of us to build community is not that our not that our emotions don't do us credit, but our intellect, our logic, our pragmatism, is going to be the thing that kind of helps us move forward and so and that's all offline in an emotional state, right? And sometimes, when our emotions are heightened, it's difficult for us to think sort of clearly. Sometimes our emotions can help us become more clear eyed. But if. Actually at a certain point, we have to get to a point where we have to think through these things and and try to problem solve without, without getting too swept up or caught up in our emotions at any one given point

**Jackie Congedo** 05:13

in time. Yeah. I'm curious, have you talked with anybody who feels differently than you have since the election? Oh,

**Kevin Aldridge** 05:19

yeah. Oh, you mean, like somebody who voted for Donald Trump, yeah, yeah, yes. And it's not different than what you might expect. I mean, I think they're much more, much more sober. And have, you know, a soberness that comes with the victory of being on the winning side.

**Jackie Congedo** 05:36

Do the governing? Yeah, yeah.

**Kevin Aldridge** 05:38

I think you can. You can kind of expect that there was, there wasn't really any gloating or anything like that in the people that I've talked with really kind of trying to, you know, to put it in the face, but more so just kind of reiterating their points about where they feel like the country is, and that, you know, many people felt like the country was moving in the wrong direction, and now this is an opportunity, of course correct, and I think that that's really what's at heart here, when we're talking about, you know, community building. We we're we're always at this. If there's one thing that we can agree on as Americans, it's that we want to build a more perfect union. I think the disagreement is, what does that what that union looks like, and how, and how do we get there? And I think that's where, that's where the struggle is, and that's where it can become this notion of, if you don't agree with my direction, then you're not about trying to improve the country. You're about trying to destroy the country. And I think to some degree, we can't, we can't be so binary and myopic that we look at things in that fashion. Because I think when we do that, we cut out, we cut out the middle ground, or the possibility that, hey, neither vision is probably 100% the best vision. Maybe the truth is somewhere in between, and maybe we have to get to that. You know, that in between, point of compromise where we're able to actually get to that, that you that more perfect union, or the principles of the country that we that we wanted to live up to, because to hear everybody talk, everybody loves America like everybody wants the best thing.

**Jackie Congedo** 07:23

I mean, one of the one of the positive pieces. I think it was among you're going to correct me, because you're more synced up with, sort of the actual facts around this. But the highest voter turnout, one of the highest voter turn. I mean, so that's to your point. Regardless of what side you fell on, everybody wanted to participate. Yes, this time, and, you know, in bigger numbers than ever, and so that that definitely, I think, tells the story about people who care deeply about building that more perfect union, a better country. It's just two different ideas about what that looks like and how to get there. Well, you know, I want to just along the lines of talking about building community in the context of the history. So I was doing a little bit of research about, you know, what the concept of community looked like, you know, in Nazi Germany and and it turns out that, you know, in the 1920s Hitler and the Nazi Party were seeking to create this National Peoples or national community. And so we think about building community. In German it's the volksgemeinschaft, I think, is what, what it's called, or what they called it. And so, you know, we think about building community. There was this kind of community, right, that that the Nazis were sort of engaged in the act of trying to build, and this was based on the foundations of race, ethnicity and social behavior. And so, you know, it excluded groups and individuals that the Nazis considered racially, biologically, politically or socially undesirable. So this, this was a very intentional articulation and sort of movement to build a certain kind of community. And we, we know, we know in hindsight, now, and many I'm sure knew at the time, but certainly we can all say now that this was a very bad form of community. This was a community that had catastrophic consequences for for Jews, for all of the victims of Nazi persecution, for Germany and for the world and all of humanity, right? And so, you know, I've been thinking about the project of building community right now, and along the lines of, kind of how we approach these things at the museum, we can learn from sort of the darkness in that history. But the But the bigger question is, well, what does the alternative look like? Right? Can say this is not, this did not right. Exemplify the best of humanity, right? This was, this was a this was the wrong path. The question is, what is the what is the right path? What does it look like? How do we articulate that vision for what building the good kind of community to look like? And and actually, I think there are a couple of models out there related to what positive, healthy, strong, inclusive communities, and the project of building those, one of them, obviously, is Dr King's idea of the beloved community, right? And I've just been thinking about, you know, what the difference is between the differences are between the volksgemeinschaft, the Nazis volksgemeinschaft peoples, or national community, and Dr King's idea, or concept of this beloved community. And it occurs to me that one is grounded in dehumanization and the other is grounded in humanizing. Yeah, absolutely right. So it's this exercise of building community that's grounded in our shared humanity and in seeing the human being in someone who may look, think, feel, act, pray, you know, identify differently.

**Kevin Aldridge** 11:15

Yeah, yeah. I think that, you know, Dr King talked about in his concept was kind of a community where everybody is cared for and where there's where there's space for everybody. So when we talk about, what do good communities look like? Good communities make space for everyone. Good communities don't expect for everyone to be the same. They don't look at diversity as something that is a an ankle weight. They look at it as something that elevates, not holds us back, and it embraces diversity, you know. I think this concept of America, you know, and I've heard this a couple of times, you know, it used to be, we talked about America as a melting pot, right? So a melting pot is basically, you know, whatever flavor, right, right, whatever ingredients you bring to the table, you know, the shared flavor, right? You're, you're dropped into this, this, this thing, and you become a part of this mix. And I think there are many folks in America who sort of feel like that, like, if you're, if you're an immigrant who comes to this country, then you assimilate, and you become a part of America. And many immigrants who have come into this country over the years, I would imagine a lot of you know, Jewish people in Cincinnati sort of feel the same way that when they came to America, they wanted to become Americans and

**Jackie Congedo** 12:38

and language, customs, sort of, you know,

**Kevin Aldridge** 12:41

absolutely, and I think somewhat over the years that has, that has morphed into this idea of less of a melting pot and more of, kind of like a salad, you know, where all of the toppings are, you see there, and each, you know, the tomato, the crouton, the onion, whatever it all adds To the overall flavor, but it keeps its distinctness there. And I think as we've become more culturally diverse and different, that has created some of the challenges in terms of our sense of community overall. And there are some people who chafe against that idea the salad versus the the melting pot and and, and are even resistant to that, you know, why do you have to be an African American? Why can't we just be Americans? You know, you hear, you hear those sorts of things sort of being said that that almost like the effort to highlight the diversity, create some of the divisions in and of themselves. It's almost kind of like a weird way of thinking about it. It's like, Hey, by talking about race, you create, yeah, you create more racism. Or by talking about gender issues, you create more sexism. By by focusing on these things, you gin up, you know, perhaps in those folks who maybe just want to kind of think of everybody as sort of the same, that you you're highlighting the differences, which makes things a little bit more challenging to create community.

**Jackie Congedo** 14:14

Yeah, and I think that so, you know, if we look at that as a project that's ahead of us right right now was been reading some of the pieces in the inquirer since right before and since the election. My friend Ari Jun, who wrote in talking about how you know, regardless of how this goes, this is before the election, half the country is going to feel like you know is going to be, I would say, deeply unsatisfied, is probably an understatement with the results of this election. And so how, how can we be good losers and winners? Yeah, his, his was particularly, I think his was actually, how do we, how do we care for people whose outcome is not. Or, you know, the outcome, right, that we got, or whose desired outcome is not, but that's a two way street, right? How do we handle the dynamic of winning and losing? Yeah, and so this concept of building community in a moment like this seems impossible, but I think is the only way forward. And what does that require of us? There's been some things written. My good friend Eric Ward, has been talking for a long time now, but I'm seeing it gain maybe a little bit more traction. I hope that, I hope that in this environment, it actually really holds about this idea of sort of the radical, pragmatic center. And Greg talked about this too. Representative Greg Landsman, who won his race in the first district in Ohio, congressional race, sat down with you to talk about this idea of pragmatism. Right? The foundations of democracy are built on bipartisanship and pragmatism. And then he actually, you know, it was actually really kind of healing to read that piece, because he's he feels like that hasn't changed. His ability to do that work will be there tomorrow like it was before the election, and he's had some luck with that. And he sees that there are pragmatists on the other side of the aisle that is sort of sit close to the center on the right, as far as he's concerned, his orientation, who are willing and understand that the stakes are too high, yes, and that actually, I think what he says and in this piece, or what you say, I guess in this piece from the interview, is that, you know, open to bipartisanship, because there's too much on the line. So, you know, I think there's going to be a lot of temptation coming out of this election for people to double down in their ideological bubbles. Absolutely,

**Kevin Aldridge** 16:51

and that's dangerous. You got to resist that. Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I think, I think one of the things that we've got to venture into on all sides is an attempt to understand better one another's point of view, right? I mean, we're all the sum total of our experiences, our lives, lived, our interactions, how big our cert how big or small our circle is. And so that formulates a lot of the ways that we, that we see the world. And I think, like, right now, you know, it's always after these elections, like people do these autopsies, and they're trying to understand why voters voted, voted a certain way, this, that or the other. And it's like, you know, well, shouldn't more effort of that be done on the front end, right? Like, it's like, you would think, like, more would be invested on the front end of trying to understand where people are and how they think. So maybe you can, you can earn their votes. Like, that's, that's the whole thing you know about, like, politics, cart chasing the Yeah, horse, right? Yeah. And, and, I mean, there's nothing wrong with it. I mean, I think in any instance where whether you're successful or unsuccessful in an endeavor, it's always good to kind of debrief and say, Hey, what did we do? Well, what could we have done better? But I think the reality is, is that if you're looking at your neighbor and you're trying to understand why they voted for Trump, don't do it from a place of judgment, right? Like sometimes it's a rhetorical question when we ask, Why did somebody vote for Trump? How could you possibly, yeah, exactly, right, right. Like you're not really looking for the answer for that is really more of a judgment than it is a question, how could you vote for Trump? What we have to do is, or, how could you vote for Kamala Harris on the other side, I think what we have to do is really kind of try to endeavor to understand, you know, where, where people are coming from. Like, how do you see it? What? What are your main issues? You know, undoubtedly there are people who had hateful intentions, who voted, you know, one way or the other. And undoubtedly there were people who that was not in their mind. They were concerned about their pocketbook status quo.

**Jackie Congedo** 19:03

Didn't like the status quo. I mean, there's a lot that Greg has said in here about how, you know, the vote against Kamala Harris was a vote against incumbency, and that's, yeah, you know, people aren't liking how they're sitting right now after four years of Joe Biden, yeah. And so they're voting that way, right? It's not necessarily an affirmative vote for Trump, but it's a vote against the status quo? Yeah, I think that's really important. And I think that, like the trend, the default right now, the what's going to be incentivized more so more and more so is this idea of, particularly in a landscape of MIS and disinformation, right where there are actors out there who want to sow chaos and division, there's an industry around it, right, to try to get you to feel a certain way about the person who voted differently, to manipulate you into demonizing somebody who may have made a different choice at the polls. And to sort of manipulate you into ascribing, you know, the worst of that side to everybody who checked that box, right? And that is that's the only way to actually break that down and prevent that from happening, is to build community, because in community, we find trust, we find relationships. And like we were talking about, if somebody tells me about how all black men are, I'm gonna be like, well, happen to know a couple of them, yeah, and I don't, I don't believe you, right? I have a relationship. If somebody asks you, like, starts talking about, you know, Jewish women in a certain way, you're gonna go well before I sort of wholesale believe that, or take that to be, you know, the fact I have some real experience in relationships with people who have that identity, and I know that that's actually not really true. So as much as we want to retreat into our sort of ideological um bubbles and and it feels comfortable to live there, and kind of soothing to live there, particularly at a moment like this, which is why some people might need to live there a little longer, yeah, but I think it's so important that we resist that urge to absolutely.

**Kevin Aldridge** 21:12

I mean, you know the saying A house divided against itself can't stand. So the reality of it is, is that we can't continue to go on as a country where, where, where half of us, you know, where, where half hates the other half or can't, can't get along with the other half. I mean, I, I just look at the way that I live my life every day, like I live my life every day around people who I, I'm sure, and even know for a fact, you know, voted for Donald Trump and Kamala Harris alike, and in my daily interactions with folks like the politics are not what I'm dealing with when I'm dealing with them, right? Like I deal with people pleasantly in the grocery store when I see them, I deal with them pleasantly at work, this is what Marie says, Yeah, I deal with them in the everyday interactions that I have. I think people, by and large, want to get along with their neighbor. They want to live in in peace. I think what they don't want, I think they don't want to be put upon primarily by the government or others, to to live in ways or be in ways that they might not be comfortable with. And I think that, and that's not always sort of rooted in rooted in hate, or it may just sometimes be rooted in preference. You know why justice is your injustice? Yeah, right, yeah, yeah, exactly. And so I think that, you know, we have to know where. And I think most people, I think most people, get this between, you know, where they're, where there are social pleasantries and graces, and where people are feeling like they're sort of being forced to go to places that they're not quite there yet. I mean, listen, we're talking about people taking time to deal with the election results, right? Like some people just aren't ready to talk about that. Imagine if somebody was in your face, 24/7 saying, Well, you just need to get over it. You just need to accept that. You need to move forward, like, right now, like, and this is the way that it is, like most people would, most people would chafe at that, right? And I think, like, there are certain changes and things that we're experiencing in society where we're taking that exact same, you know, sledgehammer to folks and saying rigidity of that, yeah, like, like, fall in line with this right now. And if you don't, you're this, that or the other, label that, whatever it is that we want to ascribe to them. And instead of saying, instead of recognizing like, you know this, this might be a longer term project than we think. And how do we how do we bring folks along slowly? Because the reality is, no matter how much we wish that it weren't the case. Change happens slowly. Yeah, you know, and I think we've been somewhat spoiled in recent years that you've had some major changes that have happened relatively quickly after decades of non movement. And so I think that it's tough when you see change happen quickly to want to go back to that, that slower pace, right? You know, the more liberties and freedoms people get, the more they want. They're not just satisfied, yeah, with a small piece, once they take Yeah, once they've tasted it. But there's also the very real reality that that too much change too quickly can result in more resistance than you than you might think. Now that doesn't mean that we don't continue to push for change and try to get as much change as we can, as quickly as possible. But in some cases, you know, in the battle, you got to realize that that some some people, you got to slow walk them to get. Them to where, yeah,

**Jackie Congedo** 25:00

yeah. And I think it's also just about being open to the possibility, the possibility that it could be different, right? I think we run the real risk as a society right now, regardless of what side we're on, falling into the pitfall of, like, sort of a, you know, immobile despair, where it's like, there is no hope. It can't be different. And I think that it's really important to remember that and to be open to being surprised, right, the curiosity, and saying, like, you know what? Wow, that was like a real to being surprised by someone else and also surprising yourself, I think, and actually, you know, as I'm thinking about, like, the stories we're highlighting this month, these are, it's one of the, one of the reasons why stories from this chapter of history are just so remarkable because the stakes were so high. And you know, it really is like the microcosm and sort of the pressure chamber of humanity in this chapter of his Holocaust history, where we can really unpack the way human behavior can happen, the way choices are made, and and see that actually, in the midst of This there, even then, there were surprises. Yeah, right. And I mean, this is why we have survivors of this history, yes, because there were surprises. So Rob Herman, amazing local guy whose parents were survivors, or are survivors, rather, and his his father, Ed, his mother, Halina, both survived the Holocaust. His children, both of their stories of survival are absolutely remarkable. Ed was a young boy in the Warsaw Ghetto with his mother, who organized a plan to smuggle him out to freedom. Worked except the people who were entrusted to care for him, abandon him, but then, in a moment of surprise, a community of upstanders literally saved his life, taking him and other orphans in off the streets, right? Yeah, that's I mean, if there's anybody who has the right to be hopeless and full of despair and thinking there's no other way for this to go. Yeah, it would have been folks in that situation. And yet, there were surprises. There were moments of upstanding Yeah, absolutely.

**Kevin Aldridge** 27:32

I mean, Rob's mother, Halina, was was hidden with a Catholic family for so long that she no longer remembered her Jewishness. And can you even imagine that she was in complete shock when her mother eventually came to retrieve her and informed her that she was not Catholic, but instead Jewish, and would be leaving with her that day. So let's take a look at part of Rob's story. Yeah,

**Trinity Johnson** 27:55

and you touched on this a little bit when he was smuggled out of the Warsaw ghetto and makes it to Budapest, and then he's just abandoned in this coffee shop. And this is a really pivotal moment in his story, right? He doesn't know the language, and he's left alone and he's scared. What happens? How does he continue on from that?

**Rob Herman** 28:18

I think for my dad, it's a single biggest moment of his life. It's so pivotal. It's so emotional, even now, my dad is 92 years old, and if you asked him what the most significant moment of his life was in terms of emotion and and just not knowing where his life was headed, that would be it. What happened was he was abandoned. His crowded cafe. Didn't speak the language, but there were enough people there that saw and my dad was crying softly in a corner. I mean, but imagine, you know, at his age, what what he was dealing with, he was able to hold it together. Somebody took him to a woman's house for a meal. And that, even though it was far from being a perfect situation, this woman, Mrs. Schweitzer, in Hungary, gave him a meal and told him he could come back again for meals. That, being said, my father was homeless at that point. He slept in churches, he slept on streets. He dealt with bed bugs, you know, wherever he was, and lice and everything else. So it was far from perfect, but he was able to use that kindness of somebody being an upstander and bring him in for an occasional meal. And eventually, this woman was able to form an orphanage under the guise of being a Christian charity, Catholic charity, and a lot of kids that had no parents around them were able to stay in this orphanage for a period of time, and it really gave them an opportunity to have a life and not just live on the street, but you. That's where my father was able to find a path forward. And you know, it's some of these stories are heartbreaking, little stories that will come out for my dad over time. For example, he shared a bed with another boy who had seen both of his parents murdered, and the kid would wet the bed every night my dad had to deal with he said he would wake up soaking wet. And you feel for this kid. You think about that kid who lost his parents, who was scared and had really nothing in this world, and again, this orphanage, while being far from a perfect life situation for my dad, it at least gave him a chance, and that's that, that's really what he was able to move forward from.

**Trinity Johnson** 30:42

And I understand that a couple people who helped at that orphanage and organized it and cared for a lot of the refugee children were recognized as Righteous Among the Nations. Yes, exactly

**Rob Herman** 30:54

right. As a matter of fact, my father in the early 1970s went back to Israel and was able to see Mrs. Schweitzer. She was named, to your point, not only her, but she was named among the righteous. And again, think about the incredible difference she made in these kids lives, giving them a chance for survival. I

**Jackie Congedo** 31:17

just think about all of the ways that that story was supposed to go. And I think, you know, it's just a lesson about not letting the worst case scenario or what you think is inevitable, define your real, the realm of possibility.

**Kevin Aldridge** 31:37

Yeah, and that's what, that's what Greg Landsman sort of talked about. He's like, you know, like, right now, if you are on the losing side of this election, and you listen to some people talk, it's almost as if democracy has already fallen, right? Like it's like, it's a done deal. It's said and done. America as we know it is, is no longer going to exist. And there's this, there's this sense of of hyper despair at this point, and nothing's even happened. Trump hasn't even taken the, you know, the oath of office, both of us office at this point yet, and and folks have already kind of surrendered to the to the worst cases. I mean, if you're someone who believes that the moral arc of justice, or the moral arc of the universe bends towards justice is long. Yeah, right, exactly. You recognize that we're not exempt nor immune from having to endure darkness or endure dark times where where things might appear bleak. But I think, as Congressman Landsman said, you know, throwing up your hands and saying this is awful only makes the awful that much more likely, right? It's, it's, it's staying in the fight. It's persevering. It's, it's leaving yourself open to the possibilities and options and upstanders, people who you might not think or expect can stand up in a moment. We do that. You know, I've heard so many people talk about, when Landsman talks about these pragmatic people on the right, there's, oh, they're just afraid of Trump. They're just going to wind up going along with whatever he says. Like, that's sort of the sort of the cynical view of that, but it leaves no room for the possibility that they're that they're up, yeah, that there, there are up standards, that there are people who are going to say, You know what, I'm not going to let this go too far. I'm not going to let people get hurt. I'm not going to let things go over the top. And, you know, again, I mean, I think Greg was very sober that, like, on the other hand, it could very well turn out that that could, in fact, be the case. But the reality is, is that there are options, and it's, it's the decisions and the choices that each of us make as to whether or not we're going to make, you know, decisions that that lead to light or decisions that lead to darkness. So I think you know, this is a perfect example of a story of where, where it could have looked like the end of the story. As you said, were already written. But as you can see, there were, there were many options there now. Were they all perfect options, like I was thinking about, as he was talking about this notion of, here he is being rescued in this in this orphanage, right yet, and still he's in community with people who are in this orphanage, who are who are traumatized, yeah, as well, maybe in a different way than he he was traumatized, and his dad was traumatized, but certainly traumatized nonetheless. And here you have to share space with somebody who's traumatized, who's wetting the bed, but also soaking you in the process. So it's like, you're you're in this community that's basically there's

**Jackie Congedo** 34:47

a collective sort of like ripple effect of trauma Absolutely, swallowing everyone

**Kevin Aldridge** 34:52

absolutely so it's like sometimes, for lack of a better metaphor, when it feels like somebody in your. Community is kind of, for lack of a better term, urinating on you. You know, it certainly doesn't feel good, but, but you recognize that you are in community with people who are also dealing with with issues and trauma that might be very different from your own, and that may be part of the reason why you're, yeah, you know, being affected by their their issues as well. Yeah. So I think we got to be mindful of that, you know, that we don't, we don't always know everybody's story, you know. And while a vote for Trump might feel like somebody's wetting the bed on you, there's a story behind why. You know, somebody made

**Jackie Congedo** 35:39

this well, and that's that's curiosity, and that's really like, I think, one of the biggest strengths that this next upstander story that we wanted to highlight today brings to the to the conversation. Yeah,

**Kevin Aldridge** 35:53

Beth Silvers and Sarah Stewart Holland of the pan su politics podcast, they've been discussing politics for almost a decade, and always approach the subject with the maximum amount of grace and nuance possible. We don't, we don't ever talk about that. No,

**Jackie Congedo** 36:08

no, you and me, yeah, we're just ideologues who are stuck over here on either side of the table, shouting at each other past each other. So Beth and Sarah are amazing. They were given the Irwin Hurley award for perspective. I would argue, they have a strong sense of curiosity. Talked about this too at this year's upstander awards. We've mentioned them in the previous episodes. Erwin Hurley was a US Army captain from Northern Kentucky who was assigned to lead a unit of black enlisted men as World War Two played out in Europe, including the liberation of Dachau, Hurley felt great empathy for the men in his unit as they faced intense discrimination at home, and this was reflected in his letters home to his wife. He's, you know, the idea the character strength of perspective that, like Erwin, was sort of a man who was straddling two worlds, and he he had this. This gave him the gift, I think, of perspective, which, which really sort of informed, you know, how he thought about the world and his values. And Beth and Sarah, you know, coming from different ideological standpoints, engaging with a sense of curiosity with each other, like, why does she feel that way? Yeah, it was just awesome to see it modeled and to listen to it modeled. If you haven't listened to pasta Pantsu podcast, you should. But yeah, let's, let's listen to a little bit of my interview with Beth and Sarah. Now, when we

**Beth Silvers** 37:25

started the show, I was a registered Republican, Sarah was a registered Democrat. I always held that a little bit more loosely than than Sarah did. You know Sarah is very committed to the party and has run for office and been an elected official. I'm more of a news junkie, like I care more about the news than the political aspect of it. So we I was more conservative, she was more liberal, and we told people, as a shortcut, that's what we're doing. Right woman from the right woman from the left. I pretty quickly started to get emails from people on the right explaining to me that I was not a good representative of the right for them, and the right changed pretty dramatically. We started the show in November of 2015 which became an earthquake for the right and what the Republican Party represented. So over time, I changed my registration to Democrat. I changed it back to Republican so I could vote in local elections. I always tell people, I hope that my party identification is the least interesting thing about me. Yeah, love that. I think that there are issues on which Sarah is much more progressive than I am. There are some issues where I'm more progressive than she is. I think about things like prison reform and bail and incarceration in general. So we're both fluid, and I hope getting more fluid and more difficult to characterize as we get older, because we spend so much time thinking and learning about these issues. Yeah, and

**Jackie Congedo** 38:54

probably, like you said, it's dynamic, because the entire nature of what you're doing is about, it's in, it's like, iterative, right? So it, it's like, the fact that you're in this relationship and you're in conversation with each other and with your audience is a living, breathing thing, right? And, and the fact that you're up for that, right? That that's the whole premise of it, is that to engage in that kind of transform, transformative conversation, you have to be, I think you have to be Have you have to have the humility to know that, like, maybe I'm not seeing the full picture, maybe there's something I'm missing, maybe someone else has something valuable to add to this conversation. There's, like, a healthy level of humility and curiosity that comes with that. And so yeah, I mean, shame on me for even asking that question. Because the reality is, the whole thing is dynamic. That's the point. Well, I

**Sarah Stewart Holland** 39:46

think it's in part because of the medium too. You can't skim a podcast and just find the things you want to be mad about. You could try, but you could try, but it would be a fool's errand. I mean. Yeah, it's also a very intimate medium. People spend hours a week with us, in their ears, they feel like they're in conversation with us. We hear all the time. I know we're not friends, but I feel like we are, and I would say we are friends. We have a type of relationship with our listeners, even the ones we've never met or talked to. You know a lot about me, and I know a lot about them. You know, even if I don't know their individual lives in detail, and I think that's part of what's been so rewarding and has allowed that curiosity and that vulnerability is because the medium itself rewards that. It's not a comment thread the the worst moments of interaction, often they're not even members of our audience. They're just people who roll into our Instagram or our Facebook feed and find something to be mad about, and pretty quickly, our listeners will be like, Are you new here? Do you actually listen to podcasts? Like, what are you talking about? Because we so rarely get that with people who listen to the podcast regularly. That's a that's a pretty rare occurrence, because it is collaborative in a way. You know, they work on us. We work on them. You know, some of the best comments we get is when people say, look, I was mad the first time listen, but then I listened against or like, you know, we get a lot of what you are hard pressed to find in modern politics, which is the benefit of the doubt. People assume goodwill with us. They they've spent a lot of hours with us, and they even if we say something that they think is wrong or they strongly disagree with, they built up a lot of capital with us along the way so that they don't assume the worst from something we've said, because that's what we do with each other online. We assume the worst. We don't give goodwill. We don't assume good motives or good intent. It's the opposite. And so that's what's been so rewarding about this work, is because the way the medium works, in the way we've built our audience, in the way we are in communication constantly with our audience has allowed that flow of goodwill and communication that really frees us to be humble and curious and vulnerable. Yeah,

**Beth Silvers** 41:55

and Jackie, you said, you know, maybe, maybe I'm missing something. What I've learned doing this for nine years now is I'm always missing something. I'm for sure, missing something every conversation we have, we sometimes will articulate on the podcast like, Hey, this is just one conversation. It's a huge issue. It can't contain everything. I'm certain that you'll tell me what I've missed, and they and and the audience does. I realized early on that this was going to be the most fascinating work of my life. When we had a conversation about 911 and we were just talking about how the buildings collapsed, we wanted to do a series for people who are quite a bit younger than us and don't know much about 911 right and and after we released the episode about the buildings collapsing, we got an email from like a thermonuclear engineer who had really studied that issue and wanted to tell us more about the physics of it. And I thought, I want to do this. I want to do this forever. I love that. Everything we talk about, we hear from someone who knows it better than we do. And so I just now start with like, what, what am I missing? I'm sure that I am, and it's great. I feel like, if, if learning in public is my job. That's the best job in the world. And if we could all bring more of that orientation to politics. Like every one of these questions is hard, and I am definitely missing something, right? It just it really breaks you down and opens you up.

**Jackie Congedo** 43:16

What I love about Beth and Sarah is, you want to talk about an example of building community. Yeah, they've created probably one of the rarest community spaces and the most necessary community spaces. And I would actually argue, Kevin, that, if I don't say so myself, your role in your work about create like there is a certain community that you are curating as part of, you know, lifting up different opinions and sort of engaging with them in conversation that's and we all in the city benefit from being part of that conversation and that community. So I think, I just think that there are fewer and fewer spaces, and there will be fewer, I think, unless we are really intentional those spaces where we can actually sit there in a spirit of curiosity and humility and do the real work of building community, not the Bengals one this weekend. Where did you celebrate? Where did I celebrate work, but the real work of leaning in with curiosity, sure and humility, to understand and listen and act and that that's an act of humanizing that's actually like what it requires. Yeah, it's a, it's a the shortcuts are all

**Kevin Aldridge** 44:38

dehumanizing, yeah, but, but I think we also have to recognize, and it absolutely everything you said is absolutely worth it. But I think we also have to recognize, what a heavy lift that that oh my gosh, because to go deep, to sit and listen when you've got your own problems, when life is so heavy for you all. Ready when the stakes are getting high and when you do have a spare moment, do I really want to spend that time, you know, digging deep and engaging in these, in these types of conversations? Or do I want to sit home with a beer and, you know, just kind of scroll on scroll on

**Jackie Congedo** 45:16

Facebook? Yeah, feel validated in my own Sure. Yeah.

**Kevin Aldridge** 45:19

So I think, I think, you know, we, we cannot underestimate, you know that what we're talking about here is a heavy lift for some people, yeah, to, you know, to get to that point, but it, but it is a necessary and worthy lift. You know, if we're, if we're willing to engage in it, you know, my philosophy has always been, you know, this belief that what I know is vastly outstripped by what I don't know. Right it? It starts with the premise that no matter how smart I think I am, like, there's a whole lot that I don't know. In fact, there's way more that I don't know than I do know. And I kind of feel like I'm a reasonably intelligent person, I would agree with that, but, but, yeah, but there's, I'll take that, but that's the humility that you're talking about. Is that, you know, it leaves space that no matter how sure I think I might be of something, there's a possibility that there's a perspective, a way of looking at things, some information that I have not considered and hasn't come into my into my consciousness yet, and that's one of the great things about the seed as seed I sit in at the inquiry. I always say that not that I feel like I'm any better than anybody else, but I do feel like because I read and hear and listen and interact with so many different types of people from around the city, many people who don't think like me at all, but I kind of because it's my job to listen to them. I get to listen to them. It gives me a perspective that oftentimes will back me down, even when I feel like I may still strongly disagree with somebody. But I can at least say I can understand how you got there right now. Let me, let me, kind of help you understand what you don't know about why I am, where I am, and how I see it differently. And at the end of that conversation, they may not have moved an inch, but at least they can say, yep, you know. Well, now at least I can understand where, where Kevin is coming from. I don't agree with it. You know, I still have the way that I see the world. I think this is the right solution to the problem, yeah, but you have perspective now, and I think that that's the most that that we can expect from anybody is to try to develop perspective. It's not necessarily, not necessarily that we agree, but we got to try to understand, yeah,

**Jackie Congedo** 47:38

I mean, and I think that the challenge, the real because you're right. We should be careful not to, like, oversimplify this, like, this is, this will be, this is the American project before all of us, and it is the defining project of our time, I think, to try and figure out how to do this and do it better. Because when you look at the systems and the frameworks, the incentives are all against the work of doing that. Absolutely, incentives of how it feels to actually hold that maybe you're not 100% right. You get punished for

**Kevin Aldridge** 48:13

that. I mean, think about what Beth said in the I think it was Beth that said, yeah, in the piece, she said, you know, the greatest thing about her job is learning in public, and politics doesn't allow for you to learn in public. You know, it doesn't, because what people expect are answers. They expect solutions to, sometimes simple solutions to very complex problems, and they expect you to deliver on it within a term. You know, as President, you got four years. You got four years to deliver, maybe two depending on what the makeup of the houses of Congress look like. You know, does anybody realistically think that these decades, centuries old problems that we've been discussing can literally be solved by one person? And you know, two to four years? No way, but, but because people are struggling and they don't want to struggle, or they want to solve issues quicker, sooner rather than later, it forces us into this political environment where saying, I don't know,

**Jackie Congedo** 49:20

caution, ability, yeah, associated and social and sort of social costs associated with that, right? Or like, cost within the system, yeah, I think, I think, but, you know, I was talking to somebody, and then we're gonna wrap, I promise guys, we're not going to drag on too much longer. I was talking with somebody about this concept of, like, you know, you've heard the concept of design thinking where you, like, Take yourself completely out of the context and say, How are in other places, people solving for, like, similar kinds of problems. And I, you know, what we're basically challenged with as a society is, in some ways, something that doesn't. Feel at all good, that is against that, that sense of like what you know, gratification or what you know kind of continues to incentivize you. But it's essential, and it's actually critical for health, in the long run, for the health of our society, right for the health and security of people who live in a democracy. And so I've, I'm thinking about it in, like, a design thinking way of, like, what other industries have had to figure out how to get people to behave in a way that is good for them but doesn't necessarily provide the immediate gratification that doesn't feel good in the moment, right? So, like exercise, right? Health Food, right? Always, rather a bag of Skittles than, like, a nut butter sandwich. But is you that even healthy? That's how bad I am at that.

**Kevin Aldridge** 50:53

Anyway, you're asking the wrong guy.

**Jackie Congedo** 50:54

I what? Okay, right? So I don't know, some wild grain instead, I don't know but, but you know, how have other industries figured out how to incentivize things, or how to help get people to intentionally choose something that is not the default? It's not the immediate, that's not what feels good, that's not what's reinforced in your echo chambers. That's not, you know, what people are gonna sort of be drawn to as a result of the media, disinformation, you know, ecosystem that we're in. And so I just think that, like, we just have to remember that the best things in life sometimes, you know, the things that are really worth it, worth our effort, don't feel great in the moment. They're hard,

**Kevin Aldridge** 51:39

yeah, but most people take, and I'm a victim of this, since we're talking about exercise, most people take the easy way out, rather, yeah, rather than doing sit ups, you'd rather buy the contraption that'll jiggle your abs for for 40 minutes, and you'll pay $150 for that, rather than, you know, rather than go into the gym and put put it, put in the hard work to do that. And I think, you know, we've got to get over that. We've got to get over the easy way out the, you know, coming up with the quick fixes. Because I think that's one of the the downfalls of our society. The decadence of our society is that, is that we get too, too comfortable, and we want the easy road, and we don't want to recognize that everything we want is just on the other side of hard, as my cousin always likes to, likes to say the last thing, yeah, I'll add, because I know we got to get out of here is, you know, we also got to have this serious conversation about this notion of what our shared values are, You know, like I, I I always hear, you know, former President Obama talks talk about this, and others talk about our shared values as Americans. What exactly are those? You know, because we move forward like with this assumption that we all have shared values. But I think if there's one thing that this election has shown is clearly we don't, because that's the biggest hurdle that you're trying to get over right now, if you're somebody who's not, if you're not a Trump guy, he violates some, some serious values that, that you know that I have, that some other people have, that you look at and you you Say, you have to ask yourself, like, Well, my my neighbor can't have those same values. Or if they do, those values clearly are not a priority over other values, but these are high priority values for me. So when we talk about, you know, what are our shared values as a nation, or as we talk about building community like that's something we gotta

**Jackie Congedo** 53:42

but that what you just said is about that is the exercise of actually trying to define what we're for and not what we're against, right? And I actually think, call me a complete naive, you know, a naive person in this moment, but I think that the exercise of talking about what we don't like is much easier than sitting together to talk about what we do want, what does it look like? And that back to where we started, is this idea of Beloved Community. It's why we haven't achieved it yet, because it's a hard thing. It's a hard thing to fight for, it's a hard thing to achieve. It's a hard thing to collectively aspire to. And I think that we, this election has shown us that there were a lot of people who went out and voted against, yeah, yeah. Like, what are we what are we moving together for? Yeah, as as a, you know, as an organization, at HHC, at other organizations like, we have these, this work of actually articulating our core values we don't articulate. Here's the list of things that we're against, right? It's like, what are we striving for? And I think that actually, if we engage in sort of a strategic plan as a nation to figure out what our core values are, I. Um, that we might have more similarity in that exercise than in any exercise around what we don't want.

**Kevin Aldridge** 55:08

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. I agree with that 100% you know, and too many of our elections, particularly of late, have been about voting against something, yes, or someone, versus voting for someone, or a direction, you know, that that we want to go, and I think we've got to figure out, you know, again and again, it's the nature of our politics. You know, the the villainization, the dehumanization of of one's opponent. It's sort of like a foundation of political campaigning these days that it's more about, how can I make my opponent look bad versus make myself look good? Like it's become this unpopularity contest, who's more unpopular, not, not who's who's more of somebody that I would want to, you know, want to cast my ballot for because I think they're a good, decent person who's going to take us in the in the right direction, yeah.

**Jackie Congedo** 56:05

I mean, the the Nazis people are national community, right back to the volksgemeinschaft that we were talking with that was a community defined by who doesn't belong,

**Kevin Aldridge** 56:16

yes, yeah, and that's... So what is it, the conversation that we're having, community

**Jackie Congedo** 56:20

of who does, who right? What does it look like? What is the affirmative vision, right, for how we move forward together? Yeah. And I

**Kevin Aldridge** 56:29

think that's what everybody wants. I think everybody wants to start to have a more affirmative conversation about America. Yeah, you know, it's, it's, it's so much about, about what America is not and here's the piece that maybe I'll leave us on a positive note here about community in terms of giving us as a nation some credit overall, right when we think about how sharp our differences are politically and everything like that. You know, outside of our brush with this on January 6, we are mostly a society that, despite our differences, manages to live and deal with our politics, you know, in healthy ways that don't involve people killing and shooting and bombing one another. And so I think that let's give ourselves some degree of credit in that, because as bad as we think it is, could always this type of division wouldn't would result in something much worse than a lot of other places in the world. And so to our credit, in terms of what we've constructed and even who we are, no matter how bad we might feel our neighbor is, we are at least not there, not yet, anyway, right? And, and, let's, let's take some some solace and, and some pride in that. Fact, yep, you

**Jackie Congedo** 57:51

want to give the upstander shout out. Yeah, I

**Kevin Aldridge** 57:53

do. I want to. I want to give an upstander shout out to to a friend of mine and a former journal, or a, well, she is a journalist, a syndicated columnist, and used to do my work with the Louisville Courier Journal, until very recently, she was the opinion editor there. Her name is Bonnie Jean Feldkamp, and Bonnie wrote a piece after the election that was titled, you know, be the light that that Trump's hate is forced to face, and it's really all about speaking to folks who did not support, you know, Trump in the election, and you know, acknowledging their their feelings of despair and hurt in this moment, and even somewhat talking about some of her fears in terms of worrying about, you know, groups that she cares about, LGBTQ community, African Americans, others who are vulnerable and who are who are fighting for rights, but, but then she kind of ends the piece, and in sort of the same way that we talk here on the ripple effect is, is, what can I do, You know? And there's a line where she talks about not allowing the election results or our feelings to harden our heart in this situation. You know, this notion of of keeping your heart open, keeping your mind open to the possibilities, and looking at what light you can bring to the situation, right? And that's what this is calling for in this time, you know, going out volunteering, you know, helping a person, doing one kind act at a time, not becoming overwhelmed with the the state of things, so much so to the point where, where it paralyzes you or mobilizes you, but, but asking yourself on a daily basis, you know, what is that little bit of light, which, you know, was a theme of one of our recent, recent podcasts, being that light that we can bring into into the situation. So I appreciate her and her taking time to write this piece in the wake of the election, where, where everything else is is. Of focused in on the the this is the end of the end of the world type scenario. She was challenging all of us to channel that, that inner, inner light. And if we're concerned about hate taking over, then it's even more incumbent upon us. Yeah.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:00:17

Response has to be love. Has to be kindness, because darkness doesn't drown out darkness, only light can do that. Right? Absolutely. Dr King, that's right, yeah. So we, you know, and, and to bring it back to where we started, we understand if you're just not there, yeah, so, but it would be good to hear if you're listening. How are you, are you? Are you even thinking about building community? If so, how are you thinking about doing it? What's maybe one thing, maybe not today, maybe not this week, maybe not next week, but one thing in the next little while that you can do to build a sense of community, to reach out with some measure of curiosity or humility, depending on what side of this you're on. And how can we all be part of, you know, bringing more light to a situation and meeting meeting this sort of darkness of, you know, division and dehumanizing and othering with the light of humanizing. I think it's is the question. So, yeah, thanks for joining us. We'll be back next time. Let us know what you think. Yeah,

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:01:24

we're building a sense of community here as well. We are building we're building our own community here, and so we want you to continue to be a part of that, that community where everyone is welcome. Thanks

**Jackie Congedo** 1:01:36

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 Holocaust and humanity.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 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@holocaustinhumanity.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. This is recorded at Technical Consulting Partner studios in Cincinnati, Ohio.