The Upstander Ripple Effect Episode 12: “Empathy” featuring Conrad Weiner & Tulane Chartock

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** 00:27

Welcome to Episode 12 of the Upstander Ripple Effect. I'm Jackie Congedo

**Kevin Aldridge** 00:32

and I'm Kevin Aldridge.

**Jackie Congedo** 00:33

Today we are talking about the theme of empathy, and empathy has been sort of in our public debate recently, but before we get into, and I think that is just like, actually also a sign of the times that we are debating empathy. But here we are, and before we get into sort of unpacking that, I just want to like level set first with the definition of empathy. So empathy is, according to Cambridge dictionary, the ability to share someone else's feelings or experiences by imagining what it would be like to be in that person's situation. Merriam Webster says the action of understanding, being aware of being sensitive to and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts and experience of another. And the American Psychological Association says understanding a person from their frame of reference, rather than one's own, or vicariously experiencing that person's feelings, perceptions and thoughts. So we're talking about, in some ways, taking on somebody else's lived, trying to take on someone else's experience or humanity, to understand what it's like to walk in their shoes, to really feel it and sort of take it as your own for a moment.And so, you know, there is this conversation out there around the value of empathy. You know, I Kevin, like I I teach my kids my parenting mantra, I probably have said this before, is empathy and resilience. Empathy and resilience, like, if I can teach my children how to feel what other people are feeling, and hold that, just to hold it, not necessarily, to let it inform their opinions or or, you know, actions necessarily, but it's important to see other people's humanity and hold that, I think, and secondarily, resilience. This idea. In fact, I was just talking with Junie this morning in the car about it. I was like, what happens when we get knocked down? She's like, we get back up. Like, okay, she's got so empathy and resilience is my parenting mantra. And so this whole idea, when our producer, Anne, brought this conversation to me about this, this term called "toxic empathy" that is circulating was really baffling to me, actually, and so I...I... as an empathizer, I wanted to understand what is behind this term and why people are using this and what they have to say about it. And so there's a couple of examples that I'll lay out, and then I want to hear kind of your thinking about this. So looking at an article with an interview of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary leader,this is make sure I get his name right. This is Albert Mohler, who was asked, "What's your broader concern with empathy right now?" And he said, "I think the broader concern is that it's an artificial value, and I want to lean into authentic values, and I think it is used politically in ways that are very destructive and manipulative." Elon Musk is also on the record saying that the fundamental weakness of Western civilization is empathy, the empathy exploit. Musk said, there, there, there, it's they're, exploiting a bug in western civilization, which is the empathy response. Empathy, he said, has been weaponized. So what do you think people mean by this? How are you thinking about this? I'm also, you know, as a man of faith, someone who, you know works in this space. Hearing people talk about empathy is sort of a and, you know, not the antithesis, but like a deterrent or something that gets in the way of truth is interesting. What do you think?

**Kevin Aldridge** 04:23

Yeah, no, I reject that. I don't think empathy gets in the way of truth. I think empathy is a tool in which we use to help us get a better understanding of what truth is. I think, you know, yes, empathy could be viewed negatively if you view it through a political lens, but if you view it view through a spiritual lens, you see that that empathy, empathy is the way that we are called to...Again, when we think about our goal and rule we we think about it to treat others as we ourselves would want to be treated. And I think empathy is a big part of that. And I think oftentimes what we do misinterpret with that is, is when you say, "Treat others the way that you want to be treated," that still is the focus on you and not on them. I think at its spirit, it's treat others the way that they want to be treated as you would want to be treated. You would want someone to treat you the way you would want to be treated. I think is the is the larger view. And so I think that that empathy helps us get there. Empathy is not the same as saying I agree with where you are or that I agree with your decisions. I think empathy is what helps brings bring us to a point of understanding, which then can dictate better our responses, our actions and our words, and how we deal with people and deal with situations. If I can better understand how you arrived at a place, then I can better understand you and how to deal with you and sort of like what you even need in that moment. And it's not necessarily that a person's... that you're validating a person's point of view or lifestyle or action, but what you are validating is their lived experience, which cannot be invalidated. Right? Like no one can tell you that what you've lived isn't what you've lived, right? Like that's the that's the epitome of arrogance for me to look at you and say, You telling me an experience that you had, and say,"That's not your experience!"

**Jackie Congedo** 06:23

It's just missing someone else's human humanity?

**Kevin Aldridge** 06:26

Yeah, absolutely. And so I think, you know, holding room for someone else's experience, even if we wouldn't have made the same decisions or arrived at the same point, if we were in their shoes, still leaves space to say, "Okay, I understand maybe how you got there." Because even the most empathetic of us, as much as we want to try to relate to someone else's experience, we are still in our own heads and our own experiences, and we still think the way that we think. So, even as we're processing somebody else's situation, especially if they're making decisions that we can't understand or we wouldn't have made, even if we think we're in that same situation, our empathy can only go so far based on just kind of how our own hearts and minds operate. And so I think, you know, going into it with that humility that just says, "I'm going to try as best I under...as I can to try to understand, you know, Hey, how did you get here?" Whether I agree or disagree with it or not, I think that's the I think that's the politics side of it, that that the politics side wants to equate empathy with total and 100% agreement or endorsement. And I don't think that's what empathy is at all.

**Jackie Congedo** 07:38

So I so this is interesting because, and I should mention the reason we're talking about empathy, empathy today on the podcast of the Holocaust & Humanity Center, talking about upstanders, is I happen to think, like you do, that empathy is a critical it's a critical tool for upstanding you know, we certainly talk about standing up for yourself, and that's important. But when we're talking about standing up for someone else, if you can't humanize their experience, if you can't internalize that to a certain degree to understand what that is for them to experience that, I mean, that that's that is a it's a capacity builder for upstanding I think, and I think it has a lot to do with how we teach the history in the museum. I mean, we're, you know, we're not going to sit here and run through, you know, a timeline of events during World War II. We're taking you through personal stories of individual people who live this. Because the whole point is that we want people to empathize. You know, we can't. We certainly can't ever put ourselves fully in someone's shoes like that. We can't understand what it was like to experience it. But we can experience it, but we can. We can hold someone else's humanity and experience long enough and deeply enough that it transforms. It can transform us, right? And it can allow us to to your point, if we're not going to change our mind, it can at least allow us to arrive, I think, at stronger conclusions, but I will say it's hard.

**Kevin Aldridge** 09:01

Oh Absolutely.

**Jackie Congedo** 09:02

This is really hard. And, you know, I understand in today's world, there's a lot of suffering, and it's like, well, when you meet an empath, right, people who have this uncanny, we've all met people who have some some, like, kind of a God given gift, to just absorb the essence of other people. And you know, these are the kind of people who could sit on the subway, and they've got a lot of people talking to them, telling them their problems like this is therapists. I think, you know, people who go into into clinical therapy and things have this gift. And I think, I think any of them would tell you, it is exhausting, and it's hard because, because what I think is challenging politically about this is that to hold someone else's humanity in a way, sort of through the vehicle of empathy, and still hold your own truth or your dissent or your disagreement. I. It's a lot of tension there, because you have to, you know, I mean, in this interview with those at Mahler, am I getting that right? Yeah, Mohler, you know, they asked him to give an example, right? And he says, on the immigration issue, the open embrace of empathy in that platform is on the part of people who basically are using empathy as an argument against having any meaningful citizenship, nationality, national borders, etc. National borders, etc. Personally, Jackie...myself, me myself, and I disagree with that, but I, but I, I, what I hear him saying is, like, don't make Don't complicate this for me.

**Jackie Congedo** 10:35

Don't complicate this by asking me to step in in an emotional place and try and understand someone else's suffering, because I have very clear ideas about what I think is right and wrong, and that is complicating for me. I see it more as, how else do we arrive at solutions that are grounded in our shared humanity if we can't empathize?

**Kevin Aldridge** 10:35

Yeah,

**Kevin Aldridge** 10:55

Sure, and and so I think, I think empathy is a gateway and a doorway to compassion and mercy, right? So let's just, let's just use the the border as an example, since you brought that up. I can absolutely hold that we are a nation of laws, that you ought to be able to come in here the right way, that there are plenty of people who who do that every year, and that we need to maintain our border at a certain level for national security reasons. I wholeheartedly, 100% believe that, hold that as a US citizen, but I also, through empathy, can hold space for people who are fleeing drug cartels, corrupt governments, starvation, famine, things, of those other things, of that other variety that says that while we are a nation of laws, our compassion and our mercy, says, tells us, yeah, that we should not be a country that steps over people, you know, who are suffering. And this is not, this is not just a Oh, woe is me, like these are people who are facing serious, serious challenges, and things in a nation of plenty look contrary to what people will say, we have plenty of room, you know, here in America to accommodate, you know, refugees and things of that nature. So I think with that compassion and mercy, it opens the door to have conversations versus, I think, I think the the least complex thing is just turn them all away. Just turn them all away, right? Is Right? Right? Like,

**Jackie Congedo** 12:31

that's an easier place.

**Kevin Aldridge** 12:32

Yes, that's an it, but, but it's only easier if you don't bother, if you don't bother, to take the time to sit in your humanity and think about what the consequences of turning that away is, and that's where the political conversation goes. Is that, you know, the politics is is so cold. It's numbers, it's statistics, it's these things that oftentimes it's easier to go ahead and adopt a policy for numbers than it is to actually talk about the human toll. And that's why, when you start to put faces on these things, some people chafe at that and reject that. They're like, Oh, you're just trying to tap into my heartstrings. Absolutely like, that's, that's what it is,

**Jackie Congedo** 13:12

destructive and manipulative, is what they would say,

**Jackie Congedo** 13:15

refugees,

**Kevin Aldridge** 13:15

Yeah, well, that's not destructive and manipulative. It's, it's the manipulative thing is to is to ignore the humanity. That's what's manipulative to to suggest that we ought not to care about people. Like I think that that's that's the manipulative thing, and I think it's a dangerous thing, that it's a dangerous thing that gets us to a place where we don't see each other as people. We see each others as others, or numbers or whatever. Yeah, that need to be solved. So where I think empathy comes in is that it says, okay, yes, we want to show mercy and compassion. So the discussion is, how do we do that, within the framework of our laws, and what we can do right to make sure that we're extending mercy and compassion where it's appropriate. And people who are just coming over here, I just don't simply think like wanting a better job is a reason for you to be able to break the laws and to come over here. You ought to be able to wait your turn in line like everybody else who's trying to do it that way. But if you are, if you are fleeing, you know, corruption or violence, or famine,

**Kevin Aldridge** 13:16

those types of situations, then we should be as we have always been as a country, and open door to those types of folks. And so I can hold those two truths at the same time if I want to, but some people don't want to.

**Jackie Congedo** 14:31

Well, and I think that also we're just, I mean, this is the this is the vein of our... I feel like every conversation we have is the loss of capacity, societally and individually, to be able to hold things that are complicated and make us feel conflicted. I mean, you know, isn't that, isn't that the isn't that what it is to be human? Like, you mean, you were saying this before, like, you know the difference between and actually, sort of the the counter perspective to this. Um. Um Pope Francis, may his memory be a blessing. You know, was sort of known as this incredible Empath, right, who really sort of took the church in a new direction, or more boldly, in the direction of caring for the suffering of the poor and of you know, the the the the outsider, the immigrant. You know, this was a priority for him, and he, he said that this, this animation of empathy, right? This capacity for empathy is what differentiates us from machines. This is what makes us human. Said, "Know how is not enough. Performance is not everything. Machines will increasingly suffice for this," (And I don't know when he said this, he really... man, he is a little clairvoyant there, December 18, 2024 so since then, it's only gotten more so that way,) "what matters is the intelligence, imagination, empathy and creativity of the human heart. We are one of a kind. Let us help each other remember that."So, you know, the minute I think, yeah, why even bother having human beings in the driver's seat if we're just gonna compute like, you know, this is the formula for someone's value. This is the formula for someone's lived experience, and it's certainly much cleaner that way. But that's what makes us human. That's what makes us human,

**Kevin Aldridge** 16:19

sure, well, but that's also what, you know, what you just described, sort of the robotic nature is also what makes us more selfish, which is, yeah, you know, the antithesis of what we talk about when we talk about, you know, empathy, it is a whole lot cleaner. Look, love is exhausting. It, I mean, it just is, I mean, in its truest sense, to exercise love in in the way that that God intended. It's, it's exhausting. It's, it's hard. It opens you to attack. It makes you vulnerable. It does. It. It creates all of these feelings in us that make us uncomfortable. The uncertainty of love is,

**Jackie Congedo** 16:58

well, it's a surrender of control

**Kevin Aldridge** 16:59

Absolutely, which we don't do well with as individuals, and so the opposite side of that, or hate, or, you know, dehumanizing, those sorts of things, are much easier, or much cleaner. It's much easier for me to just write you off and dismiss your humanity, because then whatever happens to you isn't on me. You know, it's like, it's, it's, it's, it's on you, and it's your fault, and I don't have to live with the consequences ofthe decision that I made. I don't have to wrestle with what happens to you after I turn you away. I don't have to wrestle with you after the homeless guy on the streets asked me for $1 and I don't give it to him, even though I've got it, because I don't have to think about him again anymore once he's out of my purview. But those who have, you know, empathy and compassion and humanity, if you pass that guy up, it's going to bother you. You're going to think about that like, on some level, you're like, "Man, I I could've helped them," you know, I and we don't like those, you know, those untidy parts. You know, I like to think from the the Christian faith. You know, the most empathetic line in the Bible is, "Jesus wept." I mean, it's, it's the shortest passage of scripture. It's probably the most empathetic passage of Scripture, "Jesus wept."And it's very simple. I mean that that that passage of scripture comes from a time where Jesus is feeling what, you know the mourners in that, in that you know vert, or that passage of Scripture, are feeling, he's, he's there with them in that moment, feeling what they're feeling. And that that is, in essence, what, what I believe God calls us to do is, is to be empathetic. You know, another example, which I think maybe speaks to our politics of today, was the woman caught in the act of adultery, and if you remember, the man who brought her to Jesus wanted to stone her, because adultery back then was a crime punishable by stoning, and never mind, they just brought the woman. They didn't bring the man she was with there. But that's a whole other topic. But, yes, but the, you know, we know the the famous line where Jesus says, "Let he who was without sin cast the first stone," right?

**Jackie Congedo** 19:10

That's right.

**Kevin Aldridge** 19:11

And everybody had to walk away because they recognized that they were not being empathetic in that moment, right? Because had they, they would have recognized that, "Man, I've done some pretty shady stuff in my past, and how would I feel if somebody wanted to stone me for the things that I had done?" And so being convicted by that, they all had to turn and walk away. And again, you know, Jesus saying, you know, hey, where are your where are your accusers? And she's like, they're gone. And he's like, Well, you know, I don't condemn you either, but, you know, change your ways. Do better, right? So, so that's where I'm saying, like, where there's space for empathy, where I say empathy is not necessarily in agreement or in condoning an action, but it is in saying, you know, Hey, we realize you're human, you make mistakes. You're not perfect. None of us are right, but we gotta go do better. You know, not gonna condemn you for it. Just let's try to do better. And I think that that's what empathy calls us to do, is to get to that place to say - none of us are perfect.

**Jackie Congedo** 20:18

I'm sitting with you in the mess.

**Kevin Aldridge** 20:20

Yeah, we all make mistakes,

**Jackie Congedo** 20:21

yeah, yeah

**Kevin Aldridge** 20:22

But let's, let's do better.

**Jackie Congedo** 20:23

Yeah.

**Kevin Aldridge** 20:24

And I think that's what empathy calls us to do, is to figure out ways to be better.

**Jackie Congedo** 20:29

Yeah. So, you know, pivoting to another headline recently that I think, I think actually empathy might be sort of at the heart of some of the disconnect on this as well. Recently, you know, an arsonist, basically, an, you know, an armed intruder broke in, essentially to [Pennsylvania] Governor Josh Shapiro's home, set fire to his home. This was the evening of Passover, after his family had celebrated Passover in the same room where the fire sort of raged. Hours later, his family was able to get out, fortunately unharmed. And you know, we've now found out that the the you know, the person who has been arrested, right, the alleged perpetrator here was motivated by some pro Palestinian. Maybe it's better to say anti-Israeli, anti-Jewish, you know, just by virtue of the attack on Shapiro, who is not an Israeli, who is not in the Israeli government, who is not calling the shots about what's happening thousands of miles away across the ocean. You know, so, so I think what's interesting, we were talking about this, I didn't read much about this. Yeah, I heard it, I heard it happen, and I heard the reporting on it initially, but, but, like, maybe a headline, I you know, and, and I think there's actually two reasons for this. I think the first is that we have gotten to a place where political violence has been disturbingly normalized. So things that used to shock and appall us in the past were just we're in this sort of burning news cycle where there's fires in so many places that people can only hold so much. And the second, I think, is that you know when, when it was discovered, right? That this, this antisemitism, and we can, I think, safely call it when you have someone who targets a Jewish elected official or anyone on the basis of what's going on in Israel that is definition antisemitism. You know, once it was uncovered that this was someone who had, who had sort of an, I don't even want to call it an activist agenda, but probably what they would say is an activist agenda, you know, on the left. It's not even really fair to say on the left, on the far left. I think it wasn't a convenient political narrative for the left to embrace. And I think, you know, we talked a little bit about this, about how it's so much easier to point the finger at the other side. It's much harder to say, Hmm, how can we sort of step up and, you know, and lead here in our own camp, it requires a lot of vulnerability, and in moments like this, vulnerability is really hard to find,

**Kevin Aldridge** 23:31

yeah,

**Jackie Congedo** 23:32

so, you know, but, but I think it's also worth noting, and I think it requires empathy too, that you know, it's what causes people to say, well, there's another side to that. Or, you know, I can sort of under it's, it's like, I would say that it's lacking in empathy for the victim of this crime, to be able to be able to understand, like, whether it was a guy with swastika tattoos or somebody who, you know, had a, you know, an ax to grind with Israel, the the result was the same for Governor Shapiro and his family, which is that they had their home burned, and they almost, they were almost killed in their their own home on Passover. So, I don't know, I'm struggling with sort of, you know, not wanting to normalize any aspect of that.

**Kevin Aldridge** 24:34

So, yeah, nor, nor should we. I mean, I think, I think we all have to be able to unequivocally say, no matter what side of the any issue that we're on, that political violence of any nature is not an acceptable response. I think that I would agree with much of what you said, except for the fact that you know you're talking about the governor of Pennsylvania. I mean, you would think that this would have been a, how, however inconvenient the narrative. I mean, this is, you know, the state's top executive who's has, you know, had his house fire bombed. You would think that that would be a huge, huge national story and not be suppressed in any way because it was perpetrated by someone on the left against someone on the left. I mean it, it no matter where they fall on the spectrum. And so I think this is one of the things that we have to get around in our politics, is our unwillingness to criticize people on our side when they do despicable things, is one of the things I criticize people on the right for.

**Jackie Congedo** 25:48

You're pretty good at that.

**Kevin Aldridge** 25:49

Yeah,

**Jackie Congedo** 25:50

I will give you, like, a lot of credit in your role at the Enquirer for, I think pre being pretty even handed about, you know, Devil's advocacy.

**Kevin Aldridge** 25:57

Yeah, I think you have to be. I mean, because I think you either you either believe in something or you don't. You either believe that political violence is wrong or you don't. There is no "but" or there is no "and" involved. It's either you think about this is never an acceptable means outside of, you know, war. And then there are people who have, you know, varying degrees of feelings about whether, you know, whether war is an acceptable diplomatic

**Jackie Congedo** 26:22

the idea of a "just war"

**Kevin Aldridge** 26:23

 solution, right, but, but even in war, there are rules you know to the war that you know that they try to, that they most of the time, try to abide by their you know, in the understanding that you know, typically, you don't try to target civilians and things of that nature in in war type situations. I think here you're attacking someone who has absolutely nothing to do or zero influence over what's happening over over there. So it's almost like, and I'm not saying this would be acceptable, but you could at least understand, like, if somebody, if Netanyahu is, you know, home got firebombed or something like, he's, he's the guy calling the shots over there and or, you know, people in the in the government over there, not that even that would have been acceptable, but you could at least say they were trying to target somebody who actually had some influence on what was going on. Shapiro has zero influence over that. And it's, it's just another case of just displaced frustration,

**Jackie Congedo** 27:23

and it's guilt, guilt by simply by being Jewish.

**Kevin Aldridge** 27:28

Sure, yeah, it for, your - pardon the crudeness of what I'm about to say, and I hope it's not offensive to anybody - but it's kind of like, you know, "any Jew will do," you know, if you can, if that's the one that you can get to, because you can't get to Netanyahu, somebody's gotta feel the pain. And that's where I say, like, you know, sort of the the displaced anger in this situation, you're not affecting what you what you want to affect in that situation. In fact, you're actually making people less sympathetic to your cause. I think when you do, when you do things like, like this, and so I just think we gotta, we've got to come out of this. We got to denounce this type of stuff. And even if it's from, you know, people that we might want to support, yeah, it's

**Jackie Congedo** 28:15

and of course, there are plenty of examples on the right as well, right where it's like, well, that's not convenient for me to make a lot of noise about that. And I think, I think this is what leadership actually calls of us right now, wherever we are, wherever identity or ideologically we stand. You know, so often it's just so much easier to go after the other side. And I just think if we all did our own jobs, a better job at keeping our own house in order,

**Kevin Aldridge** 28:40

absolutely,

**Jackie Congedo** 28:41

then we would be in a better place.

**Kevin Aldridge** 28:43

And I don't understand how someone thinks, even if you I mean, I really just want to try to get again empathy, you know, trying to understand the mind frame that that even if you had been successful, what what harming Josh Shapiro or his family would have, would have accomplished in the Yeah, in the in the grand scheme, in the grand scheme of things. And that's where, again, I think, if you, if you kind of think these, and I guess you know, it's not a logical act. So trying to, trying to assess an illogical act logically, is probably the dumbest thing that you could - the dumbest exercise you could possibly probably participate in. But I think, you know, it is one of the things that we wrestle with when we when we see these types of things, is is trying to understand, you know, what folks think they're going to accomplish, or hope they're going to accomplish? Look, I I am probably, I don't know that I'm the number one Donald Trump detractor out there, but I gotta think I'm pretty close. I mean, he's, he's a guy who, who I don't care for at all, but I don't want to see the guy dead, you know, I mean is even when, when they I wanted to see him beaten. I wanted to see him out of public life. But. But not, yeah, political, yeah, right, politically, but not that way. And so when the attempt was made on his life, you had to come out and say, that is not, that's that's not acceptable, because just because he's not my guy doesn't mean that when my guy is in there that I would have wanted, you know, people who disagree with that,

**Jackie Congedo** 30:24

That's a very dangerous

**Kevin Aldridge** 30:26

Yes, exactly.

**Jackie Congedo** 30:27

Accepting or justifying or normalizing that sort of political violence is very scary,

**Kevin Aldridge** 30:32

absolutely. And that's and that's why it has to be denounced, condemned, whatever the harshest terms that you can come up with.

**Jackie Congedo** 30:39

Well, yeah, I mean, one more point on this before we go to our testimony that we've been trying to get to for three episodes we're actually getting there. Can you guys believe that we're actually gonna get to this testimony?

**Jackie Congedo** 30:49

We've been trying for what, two episodes?

**Jackie Congedo** 30:50

Our videographers here are like, right. Keep talking. We'll see. That's important is this is actually what so many people don't understand about antisemitism, because it's conspiratorial, right? We look at the, you know, you remember a number of years ago, there was a rabbi in Texas who was taken hostage, yes, and it was because, you know, you know, the the the assailant, you know, wanted something done in Washington with a court. It was like it was complete, you know that this guy was drunk on the conspiracy theory of antisemitism, right? Which is lies that fabricates this illusion that somehow there's this network of Jewish control and levers that are being pulled. Complete bogus, obviously. And it's, I can't even believe I have to say that, but, but for the record, complete bogus. And so you've got a guy who comes holds a rabbi in Texas hostage because he thinks that somehow he's got some magic connection to a rabbi in New York who's going to talk to a court. I mean, the whole thing. And this is not far from that. This is like, to your point, trying to understand and unpack, and maybe it's a futile, you know, attempt, right? It's, it's not a worthwhile attempt to unpack the the musings or the rationale behind someone who does something that's completely crazy. But you know, when you've got somebody who says, the Jewish governor of Pennsylvania, if I do this, that impacts something that that is, that is a belief in some conspiracy network, that he thinks that that's going to affect some kind of a change. It's, it's, I just think it's important to lift that up, because that doesn't come out enough that at the core of antisemitism, at the core of Jew hate, is this idea that there's some secret network going on, or there's some conspiratorial plot that that you know Jews all over the world, you know, have so. So I just think that that's, um, it's worth noting, because sometimes people see that as like, well, it's not antisemitism. You know, he has a position on Israel, and he's a governor. No, this is a Jewish guy who, you know, had his house bombed because this guy has antisemitic beliefs, and that's that's at the core, right? Is saying, like all this is connected. So anyway, anything else you want to add on that topic before we move on to testimony?

**Jackie Congedo** 31:06

Yeah, no, no. Just other than the fact that, you know, prayers going out to you know, Governor Shapiro and his family absolutely glad that you know you can, you can rebuild homes, you can replace property, but you can't replace lives. So we're just thankful that none were lost.

**Jackie Congedo** 33:44

Yeah, thank goodness for that, absolutely. So alright, we're going to pivot to our archive story this month, which we've been trying, as I said, to tell for a few months, but this is one that was worth was worth waiting for, I can promise. So our story from the archive is one of our incredible survivors, Conrad Weiner - at just three - and Conrad is one of I should mention, a dwindling number, fewer and fewer every year of survivors who still, you know, speak about their experiences and their lives during and after the war. At just three years old, he was deported from his home in Romania, where, you know, during the war, he endured the murder of his loved ones, a forced march to a concentration camp, extreme illness, and then he had to wait years to be able to immigrate to the United States. So Conrad, when he was after he came here, he actually spent many years as a substitute teacher. He has a great sense of humor. He's an incredible man, and later, as he was working as a substitute teacher, he came to face, face to face, with the realization that young people in his classroom were not educated about the Holocaust, and here's what he had to say about that

**Conrad Weiner** 34:58

And one of the classes was World War II, and one of the students remember that I'm from Europe. So he asked me, Mr. W Weiner. And Weiner, they get confused, so I use my board of education whenever they call me Weiner. But I told him, Yes, I'm from Europe. [the student asked,] "Did you meet Hitler?" So after I collected myself, I explained to him that Europe was a rather large continent, and Hitler and my parents traveled in different social circles without batting an eye. He said, "What did you do during the war?" I said, "I was in a concentration camp." And he said, "What were you concentrating on?" The rest of the class busted out laughing, but he had no clue. And this is Walnut Hills in 1969...1996 that's when it was still one of the best schools in the country preparing our leaders, yet they are that ignorant and your former boss, Sarah called me for that. I don't know how many times. I finally decided that it's time to share my story. Compared to what other people went through, because I was so young, I didn't think it's worth doing it. But after that experience, I didn't stop sharing my experience about 15 years now.

**Trinity Johnson** 37:05

And I'm so very happy that you're so willing to share this story with again, one person up to thousands of people every year, and important in educating people on the importance of remembering the dangers of indifference. I know that's a major theme that comes through from your your presentations.

**Conrad Weiner** 37:27

Elie Wiesel, may rest in peace. Put it a nice way, the opposite of love is not hate. It's indifferent, and that's what happened during the war. There was a very popular song. One of the lines is, the village is burning and you're standing with folded arms. It's a Yiddish. It was a translation. So whenever I have an audience, I finish with that, ask them not to stand with folded arms when the world is burning. Antisemitism is raising its ugly had again. I cannot stand by.

**Jackie Congedo** 38:25

I was thinking as I was listening to this through sort of that lens of empathy, that when he said, you know, he quoted Elie Wiesel, the opposite of hate is not the opposite of love is not hate. It's indifference. And I thought to myself, actually, the opposite of empathy is indifference, right? Because empathy requires us to engage in somebody else's humanity and act and the direct opposite of that is saying, No, I'm indifferent to you. There's a screen here, and your humanity does not penetrate that screen, right? Yeah. And so I just, I think, I think that's an important sort of way to think about it, as we navigate this conversation about how useful or not empathy is,

**Kevin Aldridge** 39:18

yeah. Well, I mean, again, even if we want to take it into, you know, our current politics here, there's, there is a whole lot of indifference. Indifference leads one to not vote in an election that, you know, could potentially be one of the most important consequential of our lifetime. You know, there's, there's, there's a whole lot of indifference in terms of how a lot of people view, you know, our politics and their impact. I mean, I think you see, there's a lot of indifference to, you know, the thousands of people who've lost their jobs, you know, and you know, federal funding cuts and so the the indifference, again, I think, is all sort of a product of sort of a selfishness, that's that that is sort of "me" centered, like, if it doesn't impact me, eh, you know,

**Jackie Congedo** 40:08

keep going,

**Kevin Aldridge** 40:09

Yeah, you know. And, and I'll pay attention, you know, when it lands on my doorstep, and then, you know, maybe I'll be fired up about it, yeah? And I think that that's a an attitude that's, that's far too prevalent, you know, in our society now where, and in some cases, we don't understand people who get fired up about issues that don't have anything to do with them. Like, that's the question. Like, a lot of times people be like, what are they so mad about that didn't that doesn't impact but in a way,

**Jackie Congedo** 40:40

it's called empathy

**Kevin Aldridge** 40:41

right? You know, that's,

**Jackie Congedo** 40:42

I think that's actually what some people are so afraid of. I think some people are so afraid of that they're afraid, you know, because, because empathy penetrates indifference,

**Kevin Aldridge** 40:55

yeah,

**Jackie Congedo** 40:56

once you have sat with somebody else in their humanity, you have, you have allowed yourself to be transformed by their lived experience in their humanity. You're not the same anymore.

**Kevin Aldridge** 41:09

Yeah,

**Jackie Congedo** 41:09

and you it might not change your opinion or your action, but it changes something about how you consider them and how you consider the circumstances or their identity or their journey. And I think that that I understand why some people feel that that's not I don't understand. I don't condone it, but I can see how some people think that's threatening.

**Kevin Aldridge** 41:29

Oh yeah, absolutely. I mean, I think indifference and ignorance go hand in hand, right? So if I sit with you and your humanity, and now I know now I have to wrestle with what to do with that. So even if I walk away again, it goes back to what we were saying earlier, even if I walk away now, I have to wrestle with the fact of what my walking away means in the framework of the humanity that I've just experienced.

**Jackie Congedo** 41:51

Can't dismiss it,

**Kevin Aldridge** 41:52

and then it makes me have to evaluate, what does that what does that say about me, right? What does that have? What does that say about me that either I don't care, or that I can walk away after having heard what somebody I mean, there's, there is a certain, I mean, there's no other way around it. I mean, there's a certain coldness that's involved in that. And again, and I think sterile, right? Again, that's where I think that this, this push toward empathy, or or away from empathy, is coming from. I mean, look, we were talking about Elon Musk earlier, right? Well, I don't care whether we mentioned him in the framework of that and how he's sort of on the front lines of trying to argue against empathy, but it's not surprising you know that a billionaire businessman would have that attitude because much of businesses approach, it's pretty cold blooded, and,

**Jackie Congedo** 42:44

you know, you have any of that touchy feely stuff just is inefficiency. Yeah, you

**Kevin Aldridge** 42:49

have to be cold and detached to lay somebody off at Christmas time, right? Like, you know, at the end of the year, like, when people need their jobs and money the most, you go ahead and lay them off because, you know, you had a bad quarter or whatever. I mean, there's so so you I think in the business world, you have to have sort of that, that indifference, in that moving away from empathy, because otherwise, if you didn't, you would be, you would go out of business, or at the very least, you would be tortured by the the faces and the situations of folks that you got to look in the eye and let them go. It's never the CEO who has to look the employees that get laid off in the eye. It's probably some lower level manager who's got to tell that person that you know, sorry, we got to let you go, right? So you can, you can approach that with a coldness and a callousness, because, again, it's numbers on a on a spreadsheet, and I don't have to deal with that person's humanity. I don't have to hear their story about how they're not going to be able to buy their kids Christmas presents, even if I know in the back of my mind that's the reality. I still don't know it, because I haven't, I don't have to confront it. Yeah, and so that's the that's the dangerous. That's why I say ignorance and indifference goes hand in hand. Because once you know it's kind of hard to be indifferent, because once we know information, then we kind of formulate an opinion or a feeling about it, and then kind of once you go down that path, bear witness to it. Yeah, it's a little bit more difficult to walk away without there being some sort of self judgment or evaluation involved with that.

**Jackie Congedo** 44:23

Yeah, yeah, yeah. With with knowledge comes responsibility.

**Kevin Aldridge** 44:28

Absolutely, absolutely. You know, I got a chuckle out of the just quickly Conrad's comment about the concentration camp. I mean, it was, it was a funny moment, but it was also a poignant moment. Yeah, and again, just getting along to the lines of information that is known versus what isn't known, right? Sort of like, you know, one would would assume, like, Well, how would a kid not know, like, what a concentration camp was? But I think that's, that's kind of the danger, the assumption. That everybody knows. And that's why it's important. I think what Conrad recognizes, that's why it's important, you know, to tell these stories as often as you can, and as many times you know. It's kind of like we say at the end of every church service. You just can't assume that everybody in the building knows who God is, even, even if they're there, you know. And I think the same is true with some of this history that you just can't assume. Yeah.

**Jackie Congedo** 45:24

Well, no, yeah, yeah. I mean, we could talk all about the ritual of Passover and how you're really commanded to put yourself in the seat as if you were the one fleeing slavery in Egypt, like baked into the Jewish tradition. Is, is, is a protection against that. It's like we tell these stories as if they happen to us, and we tell them to our children as if they happen to them. And that is how you know through this oral history is how we pass down, you know, our collective memory, which is really well,

**Kevin Aldridge** 45:51

that's that's as old as time itself. That's way before the internet and all of the modern storytelling conveniences that we had now. Is oral history is what they had.

**Jackie Congedo** 45:59

And we really have no excuses. Yeah, yeah, absolutely, plenty of ways to to learn and hear and understand. So next we have our upstander testimony,

**Kevin Aldridge** 46:12

and this, this month's upstander profile is Tulane Chartock. Tulane was a social worker at Jewish Big Brothers in Cincinnati in the 1950s and she worked with families to place big brothers with children who wanted a mentor. In doing so, she witnessed firsthand the everyday lives of Holocaust survivors who immigrated to the US and settled here.

**Jackie Congedo** 46:36

She and many others in Jewish social service agencies work to help survivors with all the aspects of starting new lives, which you know, these were refugees who needed to learn the language, find work, secure a place to live, acclimate to an entirely new culture. She had great empathy, of course, in order to do the role, you know, the role play the role that she played, great empathy for the people she worked to help after watching the incredible hardships they overcame. So here's what Tulane had to say.

**Cori Silbernagel** 47:04

How many years did you work for Big Brothers?

**Tulane Chartock** 47:07

from 1950 or January of 1952 No, yeah, 1952 till July 1958 so it was just the time that a lot of the families were coming over from the relocation camps in Italy or wherever they were.

**Cori Silbernagel** 47:32

Sure

**Tulane Chartock** 47:33

before you know different relocation camps.

**Cori Silbernagel** 47:38

Do you? Do you maintain any relationships today with some of those families?

**Tulane Chartock** 47:46

Oh, absolutely from back then? Oh, absolutely. A lot of the parents have passed away because they were, I'm 95 and they were maybe five years older than I, and then different, you know, ages, but I met them at the synagogue and at the grocery store. And, you know, wherever we were, they were part of our community and we were, you know, we acted with personal lives in our everyday lives. Sure, I knew everybody. People used to kiss me and hug me and and, you know, it was, they were very grateful for the work that that the community provided for them on the whole, on the whole, they never felt it was enough. And it really wasn't, you know, but, but, but it was important. I still see some of the children. I'm in a discussion group with one of the the children, who's now 60 some years old and and he keeps telling me that I should, should speak to our discussion group, because it's, it can it's composed of Jewish and non Jewish people. But it's, you know, interesting that, and he remembers a lot. He was, you know, eight. And he was born in Germany, but, but he was, like, eight years old when I first met him. So, yeah, I knew all these people everywhere, everywhere they they were part of our community. Became, well, I must say, as I say, there was this glass wall between the Americans and the emigres. The first Holocaust ceremony, for you know, Holocaust Day ceremony was at Adath Israel Snagogue, and I was one of maybe eight or no more than 10 Americans who were there, but almost all of the and the survivors came, but it was because they just didn't realize what these people had had gone through. And I was in a position to really know what what, and it affected my whole life. Of course, it would, if any job does, you know, no matter what. But this was a very special community position, and my eyes were opened as a young person.

**Tulane Chartock** 49:14

So you know, halfway through that clip, I thought, Man 95 if I am like, half as sharp as she is at like 70, I'm gonna feel really good about where I'm at,

**Kevin Aldridge** 50:46

absolutely

**Jackie Congedo** 50:47

and interestingly, like the only, the only sort of like hiccup in her interview was when she started talking about what it was to absorb these people's stories, or to try to be proximate, you know? And you think about, she talked about the first Holocaust Remembrance program at Adath Israel Synagogue, and how she was one of, like, a handful of American Americans, right, a handful of people who were not refugees. So she was an early adopter. I mean, she was the kind of person who was on was in a position and clearly so aligned with like her own ability and value is in terms of what she had to give, but she was one of the first people to embrace the humanity of these of these refugees. Yeah, and you could tell that that even still today, that's an experience, as she said, that just shaped her whole life. And so you could, you could see that even as unflappable as she is at 95 that there's that like tenderness, because empathy, does it? You know, it creates great capacity for humanity and love. And it also is, is hard,

**Kevin Aldridge** 52:04

yeah, oh, yeah. Well. And I also think there's a certain degree of, you, know, humility, you you gather from listening to some of these stories. Look, I, I often say, like even our empathy can only go so far, because you can sit and you can listen to these stories of survivors, and you can try to put yourself in their shoes. But the reality is, is like, if that's not you, you don't know what decisions choices you would have made, and like, that's that's part of what trying to empathize and trying to put yourself there. Because, look, we always like to think of our best versions of ourselves in the worst situations, like, here's what I would have done if I'd have been there. But the reality of life is, you truly don't know how you're going to respond in a situation until you're actually in there. We know how we think we would like to respond. I never will forget my mother said this to me when she was sick, and she knew it was going, you know, going to the end. She was so disappointed in herself, because she thought she would be stronger than she was in the moment. And I know that that bothered her, that tormented her, because she always felt like, if it came to that she thought she would handle it better than she actually did. But when confronted with the reality of it, it, you know, it did things to her that she didn't anticipate that it was going to do. And so, you know, sitting through that experience with her gave me it humbled me in a way, because I'm very much one of those people, who's like, yeah, you know this is... but you don't, you don't really know. And so as you listen to these stories of these survivors, I think that's part of the marvel of their resiliency. And you know what it takes to get through that is you sit there and you listen to it, and you just got to marvel at what they've done, and you got to hope that you would be half as well, that you could handle it, half as well as many of these survivors did, but you just don't know. Yeah, no, you just don't know.

**Kevin Aldridge** 52:06

Well, and I think that's part of what's so inspiring, is that it actually, it sets it it's like the demonstration of the human capacity to withstand, to endure, to persevere, to rebuild.

**Kevin Aldridge** 54:27

Yeah,

**Jackie Congedo** 54:28

is inspiring because, you know you're right. We don't know what or how we would have fared in similar situations. We'll never hopefully, we'll never know. And yet, when we see someone who has...

**Kevin Aldridge** 54:41

 that's what gives us hope. Yes, that's what gives us hope. Those stories give us hope. It gives us hope that, that if faced with the sick, with circumstances like they had difficult circumstances, even if different, that if they can do it, maybe I can do it. Maybe I could do it too. Yeah. Or, you know, if they've got the kind of resiliency to go through this. And what I'm going through right now is, yeah, I need to suck it up, maybe a little bit. And, you know, deal a little bit,

**Jackie Congedo** 55:13

find some, yeah, find some stamina. Well. So that's, I think that's a good segue to our upstander shout out. And, you know, we try and wrap up every episode when we don't run out the clock and how we doing pretty good one minute. One minute over, we made it. We made a bet that we wouldn't go more than an hour. And so Sorry, dear listener. We lost the bet, but only by a minute so far. Wanted to give a shout out - upstander shout out to Brandon Saho, who was also a former journalist, or, you know, recovering journalist, as I like to say. And you know, Brandon has done a lot of really important work for mental health. Has set his own challenges and sort of journey with mental health, and he has done really committed his life through a podcast, also mental health awareness sort of work broadly around the country. He's hosted an event in Florence, Kentucky recently in cooperation with Boone County Schools, where five students have died by suicide in just two months time. Oh my gosh. Talk about like, you know, having to empathizing with that and having to come back out. It was just talking about as a mother, having to imagine what that's like to deal with in your children. But Brandon is an incredible upstander who you know is has taken something that was deeply is still stigmatized, and, you know, is deeply personal in a place by the way of sports reporting, which is, and this is his whole shtick, right? Is like he's out there talking about, you know, his podcast is The Mental Game, sort of creating the space and the and the and the permission in an otherwise sort of, you know, masculine culture of sports, to say, hey, like, we all have hard times. And like, let's, can we talk about that a little bit? So shout out to our friend Brandon Saho, he's, he's amazing, and he's doing great work.

**Kevin Aldridge** 57:20

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, that's and it's such an important conversation to have these days. And I think you've seen, you know, over the last few years, that people are really starting to understand and really buy into the notion of of mental health. I mean, I think you have, you know, more people today who are willing to seek treatment then maybe, you know, a few years and because of people like Brandon and and others who've shared their stories, you know, particularly in the athletic space. I mean, there have been a number of athletes. I mean, I think Joey Votto, when he was here in Cincinnati, even came out and had some conversations about some of his struggles with mental health. And there have been, there have been other, athletes who've done this in recent years. And I think that's important, because I think, you know, particularly for for men, you know, it's, it's probably why so many of us fall out from heart attacks, you know, what? At a much larger clip, yeah, holding all of that stuff in, and I won't get into it now, because we're already pressing the time limits on our bet. But, you know, I used to, I used to think that that sort of thing was a bunch of bunk about, you know, storing up emotions and stress manifesting themselves physically, until it happened to me. Thank fortunately, it wasn't a, it wasn't a heart attack, but I sure thought it was at the time. And you kind of recognize that, you know, if you don't deal with your your mental health, it'll deal with you. And so Brandon's doing some, some very important work, and I hope it's resonating with a lot of people who, yeah, you know, who might be struggling and need to

**Jackie Congedo** 58:52

Yeah, and that's the same thing we're talking about, right? When you see someone else who's met this challenge and has dealt with it in a certain way, against sort of the norm of how other people in a similar space deal with it, and it's inspiring, and says, maybe I can do that too, right? It allows us to see ourselves in and the potential we all have to meet that meet that moment for ourselves and for other people. So amazing. Thank you. Brandon, you should listen to his podcast as well. If, since you're listening, you all are podcast people - The Mental Game. Really interesting. Some interviews he's done on this topic. And with that, I think five minutes late, do we get a pro rated on the bet? Like, we only owe you, like, how much? Because we're only five minutes over. Thank you for sticking with us, for joining us for episode 12. We will be back next time with Episode 13

**Kevin Aldridge** 59:41

yes

**Jackie Congedo** 59:41

of the Upstander Ripple Effect. 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 is part of the Cynthia & Harold Guttman Family Center for Storytelling. Visit us in person at historic Union Terminal in Cincinnati, Ohio, or online anytime at holocaustandhumanity.org. Managing Producer is Anne Thompson. Consulting Producer is Joyce Kamen. Technical Producer is Robert Mills, and Technical Director is Josh Emerson. The opening sequence is by Ken Furman. Select music is by Kick Lee, and this is Recorded at Technical Consulting Partners studios in Cincinnati, Ohio.