Upstander Ripple Effect Episode 14: Upstanders Rise

**Kevin Aldridge** 00:00

So 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

Welcome everybody to the upstander ripple effect, Episode 14. I cannot believe we are at episode 14 themed Upstanders Rise. I'm Jackie Congedo

**Kevin Aldridge** 00:39

and I'm Kevin Aldridge,

**Jackie Congedo** 00:40

and we are so excited to be wrapping up the first season of the Upstander Ripple Effect, and just feeling so much gratitude today for all of the people who've made this possible, the people who've supported this effort from the beginning, the folks behind the scenes who are doing so much of the lifting on the production side, but also everybody who's taken time to be with us along this journey and listen in and share their feedback. So we will be back with another season, but this is the last of the first season, and I want to start by giving a shout out to my amazing co host Kevin for his recent award, which is nothing that surprises me, because I know you're the best, but still certainly worth celebrating the AP Cleveland Press Club first place award for best news commentary.

**Kevin Aldridge** 01:33

Yeah, thanks

**Jackie Congedo** 01:34

congratulations to you.

**Kevin Aldridge** 01:35

Thanks. Thanks. You know, I always say, you know, we don't do the work for the the awards. We do it because, you know you believe in the importance of democracy and keeping people informed, but it's, but it's always gratifying when you know your colleagues and observers of the industry recognize your good work. And so it's, it's humbling, but makes you re energized to go out every day and continue to fight the good fight for for all the readers and viewers out

**Jackie Congedo** 02:03

you are fighting the good fight. I think about that every time I read one of your pieces. It's so, so thoughtful. You're so in order to talk a lot, actually, in this episode about hypocrisy and political hypocrisy, or, you know, cognitive dissonance, if you want to say it in a, you know, more PC or nicer way. And I just think you embody the spirit of what it means to be able to really reflect critically on your own ideas. Yeah, yeah. And that's the kind of thing that people need to see modeled more often. So you're, you're teaching all of us that,

**Kevin Aldridge** 02:37

yeah, I appreciate that. You know, I try to be honest. You know, one of the hardest things that you know we do in life is learning to be honest with ourselves about ourselves and what our true and intentions are, our motivations, our fears. And that's the part of you know, the work that you kind of have to do with yourself to to where no matter what you do or what direction you go in or what you say, at least, you know that it's coming from a genuine place of who you are in that moment, right? And then, then you just deal with that. And it's, it's just kind of being more real versus,

**Jackie Congedo** 03:12

yeah, being fake authentic. Yeah, exactly, yeah. And that comes through. And I think everything you do, also, for our friend in the state house.

**Kevin Aldridge** 03:21

Yes, Dani Isaacson, who just this week, was named the Ohio House Minority Leader. And so I can't think of a better person for that position than Donnie. I mean, when you think about the work that he did here in Cincinnati with his own company, Cohear, you know, he spent a lot of time gathering perspectives and listening to people and trying to use that information to problem solve, to come up with solutions that work. And I can't think of anyone who's better equipped to try to bring about common ground consensus, you know, and what has been, I think, a bit of a dysfunctional State House over the last few years. And I'm encouraged by the fact that that Dani is going to be going to be leading things from the Democratic side. I think he's going to do a great

**Jackie Congedo** 04:12

job, yeah, and he has, I think, a unique way, like you said, of create... sort of building bridges where they don't exist. And that is the work of government. I mean, that's the work of bipartisanship and and I look forward to sort of what his tenure holds for the state, and congratulations to him. Also, just wanted to mention that I just saw Dani At our Upstander Awards, which we just wrapped up. And every year, you know, I come out of that thinking, Wow. I didn't think we could. We could do what we did last year again, and we did it. We really, we really did it. So along with many other elected friends who attended on both sides of the aisle, both parties, we were really had a great evening celebrating upstanders. And so we'll talk a little bit more about that later. And. Um, but I want to start with some current events and sort of thinking about, you know, maybe a new perspective, something different. You know, you could listen to any new show and learn about if you haven't. Might want to check your pulse if you don't know about what we're going to talk about next, but if you know for the facts and figures, we always try to see how we can unpack things in a way that maybe just takes a deeper look or exposes something that people haven't been thinking about, particularly in the you know, in light of how with the history that we teach tells us about how to think about things critically, and so obviously the world has changed substantially since we were last doing one of these. And you know, we are now in a place where there's conflict in the Middle East that has, I think, expanded in scope significantly with the involvement of the U.S. in Iran, and sort of, you know, really surprising news that happened on Saturday, and the response to it has been really interesting, and I think, has exposed some things that are worth talking about, related to how people, you know, stay within or break out of their identity politic, and what kind of pushes people to side in certain ways, on certain things and not on other things. And you know, when is breaking the rules okay, and when is it not so it's just been interesting. Your colleague, Carl Weiser, did an interesting piece in the Enquirer about the way this has just changed all kinds of party line alignment that we sort of traditionally see, which is pretty interesting.

**Kevin Aldridge** 06:51

Yeah, well, you know, I used to listen to, there was a radio host. His name was Joe Madison, and he went by the name of the Black Eagle. And he used to have a saying that says there are no permanent friends and enemies, only permanent interests. And so I think you see that at work here, as you see people crossing party lines. It's not about necessarily friends or enemies. Because, you know, I think in this case, where you see, you know, Greg Landsman, who has been probably one of the staunchest critics of the President, now sort of being on his side as it relates to the bombing of Iran being a good thing. And that is because, you know, obviously Greg is very close to, you know, being Jewish is very close to what's been happening in Israel. And there's, there's a personal interest there, there's a, there's a a vested interest in what's going on there. So he's coming at it from a particular angle of where his interest crosses over, whatever is, whatever other issues that he might have had politically with the President on this particular issue of interest, they're able to find common ground there. So I think you know. And then vice versa on the other side, you've seen some people who are normally in the President's corner, who are sort of breaking ranks in the on the GOP side to be somewhat critical of his decisions there, whether or not they're they're constitutional and what for So, yeah, it's very interesting just to see how this, this sort of thing, sort of plays out in it, and it kind of makes us do A deeper evaluation and a check of ourselves behind, sort of where do we really stand on issues, and what is it that we really believe in, and do we really believe in it, or is it situationally, things that we believe in, that that we believe in it when it's our party or it's our guy, but we don't believe in it when It's the other party and their guy. And so I, I've always got this saying that, I say that, I think that, I say that the essence of politics is hypocrisy, right? Because that's, that's, in essence, what it is. It's each party kind of vilifies the other for the same things that they do when they're in power, right? And but they don't see it as the same, because they see their cause as righteous. And so anytime we see our cause as righteous, sometimes the rules can be bent for that, yeah, and then other times they can, you know, I use the example of if you are someone who has a problem with our immigration system in the southern border, and you say, Hey, we're the rule of law, and people need to follow the law when they come over the come into this country. They need to come in the right way. If not, they need to go, well, technically, that kind of is the the rule of law for our country. But then there are people on the other side who say, ah, we ought to have compassion. And, you know, yeah, people should come in the right way, but they're fleeing injustice and things of that nature. They're already here. So we should, we should flex the rules to show compassion, because we see that as a righteous cause to welcome these people into America. So, but when we say, hey, bending the rules to keep a nuclear weapon out of the hand of an enemy that has said that death to America and Israel, maybe we maybe the the ends justify the means of bending the rules a little bit by not following, you know, going to congress first, right, and getting permission that that this is a righteous thing, to keep dangerous weapons out of the hands of an enemy that would see is destroyed. And then there are people, some of those same people, who want to bend the rules for immigration, say, at shouldn't be bending them there. Yeah, shouldn't be bending them there. So where do the rules apply, and when is it, you know, when is it okay to break the rules? And is that in the eye of the beholder?

**Jackie Congedo** 11:07

Yeah. I mean, I think so. One thing I just want to go back to related to Greg, because I think it's important that, yes, Greg is Jewish. Yes Greg is, you know, supportive, obviously, of Israel's right to defend itself and to exist as a sovereign country. And you know what I've heard from Greg is, sort of what you what you just shared, which is, of course, those things are considerations, and they're part of, inherently, part of who I am. But when I'm thinking about my political support for this policy or this military action, or, you know, whatever it may be, I'm thinking of, you know, I'm taking my role as a U.S. elected official, congressional elected official, seriously to say, you know what's How can I best represent the first district, District of Ohio in in this perspective and and what's good for us? And I think he has said, and I know he feels strongly this way. It's in Carl's piece. You know that this is an attempt to end this chaos, bring about peace and to avoid what would be a catastrophic event. So, you know, we can debate all day what was on the ground in Iran, and you know, what's the evidence we have of that? And but I think there has been, from Greg's perspective, you know, it's not just about Jewishness. It's not just about Israel. It's about threats to the U.S. It's about Iran's position in sort of the global context as potentially a nuclear power at some point or close to and the threat that that poses to sort of global security. So it's just just an important distinction that it's, it's, yes, he has maybe a special interest in thinking more carefully about some of these things because of his awareness and identity. But I think his positioning on this has more to do with his feelings about what this could the implications of a nuclear Iran for the United States and for sort of global security. But I also want to pick up on where you left off, which is this idea of breaking the rules. And it's interesting, when you think about the history, you know, some of the perpetrators during, you know, as they were on trial in the aftermath of the war. You know their defense, what they tried to say in defense of themselves was, well, those were the laws. We were following the laws, right? Yeah, there. This was legalized exclusion, right? I mean, you could say the same about our own history in this country, right? So, you know, the law is important, and process and policy is really important, but it doesn't always dictate morality and how we navigate that is really a challenge, right? Like in search of a more perfect union in our context, but in the context of the history, you know, that's, that's a pretty bad excuse, right? That I, I participated in this because it, it was what the law told me to do when it was so, contrary to what we all know from a human standpoint, from a value standpoint, is the right thing, right? The the mass killing of millions of innocent people is unjustifiable. So, yeah, it's just, it's, it's interesting to think about, because you want to say, well, the solution to that is, let's all agree to a set of laws, and let's follow those, and let's never, but sometimes laws are, aren't, right?

**Kevin Aldridge** 14:52

We don't, yeah, we don't. We don't always agree on the laws, right? I mean, that's, that's part of this. You. Democracy that we, that we live in. And again, you know, even King himself said that, you know you're not obligated to follow any laws that are that are unjust. Wherever they're unjust laws or injustice, you're not under any kind of moral obligations to follow those laws. And so then that's where you sort of get into this murky area about what people then what? Yeah, people's values and moralities are not all the same, as much as we like to think that they are. You know, I remember, you know, Barack Obama and various politicians have said this, where they talk about American values, right? Do any of us know what that like really means anymore. I think there's kind of like a vague generality about what we think about what we think American values ought to be, the ethos of what it is to be American, yeah. But when we see some of the actions and the things that we're taking and some of the laws that are being passed, I think one would reasonably question, depending, depending on where you are, like, what are, what is America's values these days? I mean, I think that's one of the overarching questions, I think that we're all wrestling with, and it's one of the things that many folks are challenged by with this administration, because you feel like that there are things that are being done that are not representative of what American values are, but those things are being couched under the American American values, right? So it's like, so that's the the tension of where we are in this moment, yeah.

**Jackie Congedo** 16:33

And part, part of that, I think, just has to do with, like, shared we talked a lot about this, the shared set of facts or lack thereof. You know, how can we all have a common narrative and a common sort of expression of values when we're not drinking from the same information source, or we don't have a shared understanding for what's real and what's not? So interestingly, our amazing producer, Anne Thompson, found a piece about this, this sort of, we want to put hypocrisy nicely. We would say cognitive dissonance, right? More scientific, that's the like, academic way, non judgmental way to say you're a hypocrite is you have some cognitive dissonance issues. And so she found this really interesting piece out of it's on neuro launch. Actually, it's out of the space of sort of political psychology around the phenomenon of cognitive dissonance. And I think there's just It cites a couple of really helpful strategies for breaking free from the mental maze, strategies for reducing cognitive dissonance in politics. And so I just think these are worth looking at. A lot of them hit on some of the same themes that we've I'm bumping the microphone that we talked about, we've talked about all along over the course of the season. You know, first the you know, how do we encourage more critical thinking and self reflection? You know, start by asking yourself some tough questions. Why do you believe what you believe? So instead of being so entrenched in what you always thought you knew, maybe just be a little bit more curious about your own assumptions and ideas.

**Kevin Aldridge** 18:10

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, that goes back to what I was saying earlier about being honest with yourself and doing, you know, doing your honest assessment of why you are where you are in the moment, and why are you feeling the way that you feel? I mean, I think for many people, when we just using the Iran situation as an example, I think if you're one of those people who are in favor of the bombing, and I think we all sort of agree that a nuclear Iran is a bad thing, but what really propels people, I think, in this moment, is this sense of urgency, the threat, the fear, maybe that's associated with that. And we know that when we when we have moments of fear, particularly when there's past trauma related to that, that that doesn't always produce in us the most clear, clear eyed and clear headed thinking in situations, because we're acting in a very primal part of ourselves that says, safety first, defend ourselves first. Sometimes, no matter what that no matter what that takes, or at whatever cost that is and it can lead us to sometimes making bad decisions or even going too far. So I think we've got to ask ourselves, like, what are we feeling in these moments, and what is going through us that's causing us to say either I agree or disagree with this in this moment, and why do I feel so

**Jackie Congedo** 19:38

strongly? Yeah, and that leads into this sort of second tip about promoting exposure to diverse political viewpoints, which you know a thing or two about. Clearly, the Cleveland Press (club) agrees with you, agrees with me, that you know a thing or two about that, because they've recognized you as someone who does a good job with this, which is serving up, you know, a full buffet of thoughts and. Opinions and justifications for those thoughts and opinions. I think it's really important that people, as we've talked about, confront those things. And I love that this says that might feel like entering enemy territory, but you might be surprised at what you learn, and you might make a friend or two. Seems like a little I get pollyannish in this moment. Might feel that way, but I actually think that if we get more curious, not just about our own assumptions, but about other people's perspectives and ideas political viewpoints, are we what are we so afraid of? Are we afraid of being wrong? Are we afraid of learning something that we didn't consider? You know, yeah,

**Kevin Aldridge** 20:35

I think yes. And then I also think there's like we're sort of in this moment. And I've heard people say this, that if somebody particularly now disagrees with you politically, that you can't be friends with them, like you can't have a conversation with somebody who sees things different. And people have bought into this notion that you know, if you're liberal versus conservative, then whichever side you're on the opposite side is evil, and you can't have a conversation like there's not, not saying that's the case with everybody, but, but in far too many cases, that's the case. And we sort of have bunkered in, in this, in this moment that now says, I can agree or concede anything to the other side, because that will normalize it. Right? I heard a lot of this with people who, maybe even if you agree with the strike, but you don't want to give donald trump any credit, yep, you can't say, right, oh, it was a good strike, or this, that or the other, because I don't want to normalize Trump in any way, because there's a whole lot of other things that I come along that I don't Yeah, agree with. Yeah, yep. And so a lot of people feel that way, yeah. And so I think it's hard to it's hard to do the second point when you take that attitude of saying, I can't fraternize with the enemy in any way, and there's no merit to anything that they that they have to say, nor will I believe it, because I don't think they're operating from

**Jackie Congedo** 22:05

Yeah. They're not honest brokers,

**Kevin Aldridge** 22:07

yeah or not, yeah. And so it's very hard for people to be willing to sort of cross that line. But you got to ask yourself, How do you ever bring those people into knowledge of anything different if you're not willing to engage in those and they're tough. I mean, I don't look these are going to be hard, frustrating conversations, yep. And I ge

**Jackie Congedo** 22:29

Not something to do, like, on an empty stomach, been up all night, right? And I get fill up our tank and then take a crack at it, and

**Kevin Aldridge** 22:37

I get everybody's not built to do that. I'm not suggesting that when you're in the height of your emotions, that you try to have these conversations, pick your spots and pick your places, where you are in a space to be able to receive and have that conversation. Probably the best time is not right. When something happens and you're you're super fired up about it, that's probably not the best time to have that conversation. Sit with it, with yourself for a while, and then figure out, how do you engage somebody else? And be willing to be you said it, one of the things that we're not willing to do enough is to be willing to admit to ourselves that there's a good chance that we're wrong, that we there's information we don't have, and be willing to accept information that's correct, but it runs counter to our narrative like this. Like right now they're having this conversation about how much damage did the strikes actually do, right? And there are some reports that are out there that are saying, well, it didn't do as much damage as the Trump administration says. And you know, of course, the President comes out and he says, ah, that's garbage. You know, they got it wrong. Now, we don't know, like right now, because there's a lot of information out there, but let's just say, for the sake of argument, those reports are correct. You got to be able to move to a place where you say, just because accurate information that doesn't back up my narrative. That's not a reason for me to reject it.

**Jackie Congedo** 24:04

Inconvenient truth.

**Kevin Aldridge** 24:05

Yeah, absolutely. We got to be willing to accept inconvenient truths when they when we were, when we're confronted with it, and say, You know what I was I was wrong about I had bad information. It's okay to be wrong. The reality is is most of us are way wrong. We're wrong way more than we're right.

**Jackie Congedo** 24:22

And it would be great if we had a political culture that incentivized, that, that rewarded that, you know, that didn't, at the very least, didn't like, you know, penalize that. I feel like we're in a place in our politics where it's like, Well, you shouldn't waver, you know. I mean, we're seeing that in the critique right now of of people, you know, like Greg, or the critique of just, you know, related to, like, folks in the Maga wing talking about, you know, well, this wasn't what he ran on. And now I'm so it's like just, just having the ability to, yeah. Live in that space where you're open to facts that might run contrary to what you have stood firm on or what you believe. I mean, that's and that's the third piece. Embrace fact checking and media literacy like. So I see this as like, be critical about your own thoughts. Be, you know, encourage critical consumption of other people's thoughts and ideas and other viewpoints, and then critical consumption of the actual facts. That's an important part, absolutely. And lastly, this idea of fostering open mindedness and intellectual humility, okay to admit, as you said, when you're wrong that you don't have all the answers, and instead of it being, again, a weakness, or treated as a weakness in sort of our body politic. Embrace it as a sign of intellectual maturity when we see somebody who says, You know what, those are new facts. And so as a responsible human being who's in this case, elected to do a complicated job on behalf of a lot of people with high stakes, I'm going to take that into account, and I might change my position about this, absolutely, and it would be great if we had an electorate that said, good for you.

**Kevin Aldridge** 26:05

Yeah because we get, we get stuck on what in it, particularly in politics. And it's a, it's a gotcha kind of thing, right? It's like you said this, but here's what, here's what you did, and politicians use it because it's the way to get elected. I've got to in order for me to win, right? Like politics at its heart is like, in order for me to win, I've got to point to how the other guy failed, right? And so failure is the measure by which we use to turn over our politics, right? So, you know, if a president in his first couple years isn't doing, you know, what we thought he would do, or the results haven't been exactly what we thought, then the House and Senate may change hands, and now you've got different leadership, and then we elect a new president in a couple years after that. So, so there, so you're right. There is no reward for somebody saying, you know, I thought this conditions change. I came into some new information, and we're gonna go in this direction now, regardless of what I said before, in in any other area, we would admire someone who had the ability to recognize new information, and say, yeah, and say, You know what, I might have been wrong about that right? But in politics, it's a death sentence. It's a death sentence, and that's why you get so many of these politicians. Now, no matter where they are, they will double down, even if they're they know it's even if they're terribly wrong and they know it's a mistake, but admitting that you're wrong in politics is, is political suicide. There is no reward for it. You you lose your seat, you lose you know, you lose the house, you lose the Senate, you there. There is no incentive for backing down.

**Jackie Congedo** 27:58

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, I think that's something you want to talk about. What we can all do, we should try and be part of a culture that actually rewards and incentivizes that, and at the very least doesn't, doesn't punish people who learn new facts and take that into account and shift and make new assessments. I mean, I think I've, I'm thinking about many different political, you know, actors or elected leaders who along the way, have done that. And, you know, on both sides of the aisle, I feel like Hillary was criticized for that. Many have criticized folks like Rob Portman, you know, when he sort of changed his position on gay marriage and gay rights because of his own family. Yeah, it's like, well, I have new facts. I have a upfront look at what this is, and I've just decided that I was wrong about that. So I just think it would be something that would be great for as a society, for us to kind of shift the incentive structure there.

**Kevin Aldridge** 28:55

But the key thing there is in this, it talks about intellectual humility and you and one has because if there's nothing that humbles you, it's life experience. To use the Rob Portman example, right? Everything sounds good until it lands on your doorstep, and now you have to deal with it, and suddenly these ideologies that you had are very different when you now have to experience this for yourself or someone close to you, does it changes your perspective? And so many times we speak out of school about things that we haven't experienced and that we have no real frame of reference for. And so what I always try to consider is this, is that what I - no matter how smart I am, or how smart I think I am, what I know is vastly outstripped by what I don't know, right? I know there's way more that I don't know than what I do know. And it takes a certain amount of humility to be able to say I don't know right, like that's and I fight against. Because particularly when people expect you to know, right, like my wife, as she thinks I know everything in the world about football, right in the NFL. So and most of the time I do. I know a lot, but I don't know everything. So every now and again, she'll ask me a question that I genuinely don't know what I have, but I have the expectation of yourself, of myself, of giving her the answer, because I don't want to say to her I don't know, because I'm supposed to know everything, right? I'm the football expert, so now she's asked me something that I don't know, and I have to sit there in that moment and say, am I gonna make something up to She'll never know, even if I be like, I could tell her anything, cuz she doesn't know she's asking me. So can I make something up? Just so I don't have to admit that I'm wrong? Or do I say, You know what, I don't know that? I'll have to look that up. Yeah. And so admittedly, I've gotten better over the years of doing that, of being able to say, You know what, I don't know that. And then she always gives me a hard time, like, I can't believe you don't know that I thought she's

**Jackie Congedo** 30:57

not creating the kind of social, political culture that incentivizes that kind of humility makes you all the more resistant, probably the next time. Yeah, so, you know, we think about hypocrisy. It's there's been some, some pieces written recently related to resistance and some of the hypocrisy baked into how we think about resisting, which I think is also a worthwhile sort of exploration for our conversation about current events. And there's, there's two pieces here I think that kind of lend themselves to this this topic. One is by a colleague in the field of Holocaust, memory and history. Luke Berryman, the title is, "I Study the Resistance Against the Nazis. Here's What the U.S. left Can Learn from It." So you know, this is, this is for the sake of sort of thinking about, in this case, we're talking about what this scholar has to say about resistance to the Nazis. And he's positioning that as as sort of a, you know, something we can we can learn. And in this case, he's saying the American left should learn. Now you could argue that, you know, the American right has its own lessons to learn about resistance in other historical contexts, or in this historical context. So I'm not making a political statement to compare the two, but for the sake of this scholarship and this author, that's his, that's his, and that's, that's sort of the thesis he's he's posing. And I think that this piece is so interesting in how it talks about, it talks about, you know, he studied this. He studied resistors in this period of history, and sort of pulled out the nuggets of, like, what, what was the distinguishing characteristics of resistance during this period? And he talks about how, how they didn't have a slogan or an outfit or a flag, they didn't even bother to give their group a name. Their first and only concern was a clear path toward justice for at least some of the Nazis victims. He's talking particularly about a German activist. In this case, it's it's really about this idea that that well, he says it here, sought to improve life for themselves and others in the here and now in any way they could, no matter how small the resistors I researched. By contrast, he's talking, you know, by contrast to some of the movement on the left today were laser focused on creating change, not just, you know, trying to say we don't like what is right, or we're sort of bashing what exists. But instead saying, what are we fighting for? What do we want to see different or better, and how do we engage in positive action that brings brings that about. So I just found this article fascinating to see that there was, you know, there's there's history, there's research in the history around this, and that not only were these people, turns out, you know, this is a helpful way to think about resistance, but also it was effective. Yeah, you know, they were more effective than people who just wanted to stand on the sidelines and throw stones and say, well, not that

**Kevin Aldridge** 34:24

for sure, I mean, and this will, you know, this kind of leads to and into the Eric Ward's piece that we'll talk about here in a minute. But, but it's about the work, not the talk, right? So it even goes back to, I think, was it Gandhi who said, you know, be the change that you want to that you want to see, and so when you're focused on the work, when you're focused on the change, when you're focused on what you're for instead of just what you're against, you get things done when you think about people who are the most effective, right? They're not necessarily the loudest people or the people who talk. They're. Ones who get down and they do the work, and while everybody else is is talking and debating, they're getting moaning, yeah, they're getting things done. And so I think that this is what it talks about, in terms of the resistance, no matter how small the effort, focus on the work and and again, I think this comes down to leadership, because I think people are reflective, reflections of the leadership that that they see. And again, going back to our politics, our politics is so much on focused about, what are you against? Right? Like we in the last few elections, it's been, maybe not since Barack Obama, right? Have we? Have we had an election where the election has been about people, someone having a vision of what you're voting for versus voting against. I'd say the last three or three election cycles, you know, going back to 2016 have all been about what we're against, not what we are not necessarily what we are for. And we need to figure out some kind of way to to get back to that. And it's difficult when all of the voices from the leadership are playing that same tune, and folks are on social media, you know, talking and arguing and chattering and going back and forth. What we need is more workers. We need more people who are interested in working for the change and doing less talk, because the talk isn't doing anything other than dividing us further.

**Jackie Congedo** 36:30

Yeah, and particularly negative talk, particularly like What's bad about, what's bad about, and that's not to say that we shouldn't be vigilant. We shouldn't call things out, or, you know, make sure that we're watching for that. But instead of just speaking out against, what are we speaking for? I just think it's so interesting listening to this author's characterization of effective resistance he's talking about, you know what? What are the hallmarks of resistance that's grounded in that are effective, that were effective during that time. And he says, by contrast, I was always struck by the sense of shared humanity among the resisters that I discovered like the lower level British intelligence officials who persuaded members of the German public to help them smoke out Nazi war criminals after 1945 or Leon Bass, the Black American soldier, who drew on his own experiences of segregation to deepen his understanding of the suffering of the Jews. Suffering of the Jewish people he liberated from Buchenwald. So this idea, I think, of shared humanity, centering shared humanity, is one key defining characteristic of what really, actually is not just, I think, morally righteous resistance, but grounded, effective resistance, absolutely. And then the other one is, yeah, I mean, whatever their case, the case, when their moment of realization comes, we must be ready to embrace them. He's talking about, you know, the degradation too often that happens on both sides of the aisle, about the, you know,

**Kevin Aldridge** 37:57

you talked about shared humanity, right? It's, it's, I think the thing that we've got to recognize in this country is, is what, first of all, is that we're all Americans, right? That we, we all should be playing for the same team, right? There, there this notion of, you know, two different Americas, right? Like, that's that, and civil war and all this stuff. We got to put that on the deck, and recognize that we're all Americans, that we have a shared humanity, and part of that is, is not participating in the dehumanization of the other side. It's hard, you know, it's hard to bring somebody back into fellowship and allyship that basically you've raked over the coals. I mean, if anybody thought about it personally? If you had somebody who just talked about you like an absolute dog, right? It's hard for you to come to the table with that person at some point and say, let's work together. Let's be friends. So I think if our goal is to try to be a more perfect union and heal this country, we're not going to get there by degradating, you know, are the other side to the point where we can't possibly come back together, because there's the feelings are too hard, and I think that we've got to keep that in the front of the mind and learn how to respect each other's experiences and points of view, even if we disagree to the point of where, at some point we got to be able to come, you know, we've got to be able to come back together as a country.

**Jackie Congedo** 39:28

Yeah. Yeah. He says, "If there's one thing I learned while writing this book about effective resistance, " (you know, in the 1930s and 40s,) "it's that effective resistance," (to the far right, or in any case, to anything that you resist right, if you know you're on the right, you're resisting the left or the far left,) "is never just about defeating the enemy. It's about creating a better future for everyone." And that locks into what you're saying. We're, you know, we are one nation. So unless we just plan on changing that, we. Have to figure out how to, you know, do this in a way that gets us there together. How does that? How does that happen?

**Kevin Aldridge** 40:06

It happens with creative thinking. You know, speaking of people who are smart and far smarter than than me, you know, I was listening to Neil deGrasse Tyson the other day. I was watching a video with him, and, I mean, he just got this guy just makes me feel like a first grade student every time I hear him talk. But he essentially talked about, like, part of our problem is we don't think creatively enough about how to create new things. Like part of what we're seeing now is culturally and how things are changing, and we're trying to take a changing cultural environment, and continue to fit it into the same old box that's always, boxes that we've always had. Instead of thinking like, you know, just using the transgender sports thing as a as an as an issue, you know, he said, why aren't we thinking about new ways to, you know, engage in sports, versus instead of just thinking like, you know, the old boxes that we always, yeah, he talked about it like, even in boxing, they have different weight classes because, you know, somebody who's 250 pounds is not gonna fight somebody who's like 145 you know, it's like, we're capable of coming up with new ways of Doing things, but we're sort of locked in this, this mentality. And it goes back to the the kind of make America great again, philosophy, not just picking on that, but that is a philosophy that's that's endemic of an idea that there was this once perfect way of doing things, and that's the only way of doing things. And we got to get back to that instead of recognizing that we are different. You know, we're a different country, and we're going to be a different country in 20 years than we are today. And if we still keep trying to do things back in the way we did in the 1930s 40s and 50s, that's just not good, because people are different, times are different, and we've got to be able to think creatively about, how do we move forward and again, create something that works for everybody? Yeah?

**Jackie Congedo** 42:04

Yeah. So this piece also mentions, just to give a shameless plug for some of our work, you know, what's giving him hope, right? This is a guy, again, who studies resistance was giving him hope. He says, "Teachers and librarians are championing, the written word as a tool of resistance. Colleagues in the field of Holocaust education are collaborating on free and innovative events to inform the public about the collapse of democracy in the 20th century, early 20th century Europe, and to establish what we can learn from it today." So we actually just hosted our first one of these sort of exploring, you know, let's, let's actually talk about what it did look like. You know, we don't have to hyperbolize. Like, let's, let's talk to scholars who have studied and researched this history. What did the Nazi rise to power - what were the hallmarks of the Nazi rise to power, and what were they not? Right? Let's not overreach. Let's just take a critical examination of the facts of history and understand them for what they were. So we're working on that series now. We have more information about that in the show notes. And I just think, I think this whole idea of, you know, how do we how do we build? How do we not just tear down, but how do we build? How do we think about effective, effective resistance. Resistance, it's not grounded in cognitive dissonance or hypocrisy, but that's that's that's grounded in shared humanity, that's grounded in thinking about, what does good look like, not just what is not bad. I say that all the time, but that's how we think about, you know, in the museum, right? We have the Holocaust Gallery, which talks about the, you know, what is, what does it look like when the worst of humanity has a, you know, prevails, or has a way to, uh, takes hold, despite, of course, the many upstanders who were who were doing the right thing. But you know, we didn't build a humanity gallery, and we're, by the way, now working on a new humanity gallery. That's going to say, here's what it looks like to go against what we're doing in the humanity space is saying, Here's tools for how to be the best. And to your point about what doesn't exist, we have to envision that. We have to say, like, oh, okay, well, it's not enough just to not be that that thing. The question is, what can we be? Yeah, what does good look like? And how do we use these, in our case, character strengths as a toolkit to unpack our own potential in that way.

**Kevin Aldridge** 44:22

One of the things that made America great and the country that it, that it is, is we used to aspire to big things, right? Like the - we, we dream big. We thought big. We came up with big things. Now I think we think too small. I think we've become small minded in many ways. And I think that's a symptom of what you talk about about, it's more of, how do we not be this, versus what do we what do we aspire right? You know, what is? What is the best version of ourselves? The potential looks like, and we can't shrink from the size of. That. Because I think what sometimes happens is we get discouraged, because big dreams can seem overwhelming or unattainable, and no, you're not going to get there overnight. None of the great accomplishments that that we we, we've ever had, happen overnight, but it was sustained work toward it. Yeah, right. And you take the you take the small victories. You celebrate the small successes, but you keep chopping wood.

**Jackie Congedo** 45:27

You know well, and fear and scarcity are the enemy of creativity, right? Like, you can't operate out of a creative space mentally, like, in terms of, you know, the physiology of the brain, like, if you're stuck living in a place of, like, fight or flight, you're not thinking in an expansive way. There's no potential sort of dreaming, potential work happening there. So I think being more interested in what we are building than what we are tearing down is is, is an interesting way to think about this. Our friend and visionary. Talk about somebody who makes me feel like a first grader every time I read. Every time I read what he writes. Eric Ward just wrote a piece, and for Newsone, "You Don't Get to Burn It Down if You've Never Built a Damn Thing." And I'm just using that because those are his words, yeah. And he says, you know, it's a beautiful piece. It's so powerful. And I guarantee you, it doesn't matter who you are or what side of anything you're on, it will challenge you. It says, you know, so at the very end, he says, "If you came here looking for a manifesto, this is it. We will not escape the fire just to fan its flames elsewhere. We will not carry the master's tools and call them liberation. We will not build new systems that mirror the violence we claim to oppose." I mean, if that's not a mic drop and that challenges everybody, right? He says, "We need warriors of repair." And then he finishes with, "I'm not asking permission, I'm calling for courage. I'm invoking grief as resistance. I'm part of building something that doesn't yet have a name, but you'll know it when you see it. It will look like life." Yeah, that's not about killing in the name of killing. It's not about violence in the name of violence. It's not an eye for an eye. It's about what does good look like, and how do we build that, build towards that.

**Kevin Aldridge** 47:09

I mean, you know, I'm a fan of Eric. I'm probably, you know,

**Jackie Congedo** 47:14

we were like the co-chairs of the Eric Ward fan club.

**Kevin Aldridge** 47:16

Groupie - is that a derogative term? I mean, I would, you could characterize me as that when it comes to Eric, it's, it's because he has, he has such knowledge and such a heart and such a perspective, and then he has the ability to be able to weave that into words that don't just hit you mentally, they hit you emotionally as well, and really, really challenge you. And it's, I would encourage people to go find this piece. It's great. I wish we published this in the Enquirer right, to be

**Jackie Congedo** 47:44

Right? It's really good.

**Kevin Aldridge** 47:46

Yeah, it's, it's, it's really, really, really good.

**Jackie Congedo** 47:50

But yeah, time to call him probably, and ask if you could, yeah.

**Kevin Aldridge** 47:53

I mean,

**Jackie Congedo** 47:56

it's a great piece. Yeah. I mean, he raises

**Kevin Aldridge** 47:58

a good point about and I think the ending that he had was, was very good there, when he talked about life, right? Like that is the choice that we face every day. We can give life or we can take life like that's, that's the reality of every single day, every choice that we make. And this is, this is a very like a spiritual concept for me, when I think about this, is that, are we life givers, or are we life takers? And I try to live my life, not perfectly, but every day, thinking about, how do I give life versus taking away, even in my criticism, how do I how do I give life? How can I be critical of somebody without taking their life, leaving them, leaving them something that says, appealing to your bet, the best part of yourself, even in the criticism. And I think, you know, Eric does a great job of reminding us of that and his challenge, I think about sort of what we hear about, you know peace through strength, or will get peace through war, like it's it's almost like these, these are notions that run counter to each other. It's like, you know, peace is life, war is death. So how do you get life from death? Is sort of the the question that we have to ask ourselves, which is, why a lot of people who you know, whether it's Martin Luther King or Gandhi or people who were, you know, against this notion of war, you know, consistently against this notion of war, it's because they understood that, you know, you don't get you don't get life from killing, and that is something that we have to reckon - reconcile is, is, how do we when we all have these differing agendas, these different challenges that we have, how do we create life and avoid the choices that lead, you, know, to burning? Things out,

**Jackie Congedo** 50:00

yeah, yeah, yeah. And I would say that, you know, no one's naive over here, right? There's, there's a pragmatism to all this, and there are real threats. And, you know, all of that is true, and I love his, you know, thinking about, we need warriors of repair. You know, it's like the oxymoron of that is, is really powerful, but it's so true, like, if we're going to be fierce about something, let's be fierce in a way that centers our shared humanity. Let's be fierce in a way that is sort of like radically inclusive and grounded in in in that. And I think, you know, we got a chance to celebrate that. We got a chance to celebrate that on Sunday. Well, by the time you're listening, it's probably not last Sunday, but it's maybe a few Sundays ago this month in June, with our Upstander Awards, celebrating just an outstanding slate of amazing everyday people. These are not like the folks who get the accolades. These are people who are just something moved them. They found their moment. They harnessed their character strengths, and they said, you know, as we've talked about, there's something that I can do about this, and I'm I see a better future for this, and I'm going to activate to get that done. And so, yeah, I mean, it was amazing. And of course, we named the awards after our survivors and other upstanders, and we have their family members come and help present the awards. I mean, it's just, it is the most high-vibes, recharging event. And I'm not just saying that because I'm a little, obviously a little biased. I have heard that.

**Kevin Aldridge** 51:37

With good reason, though

**Jackie Congedo** 51:38

Thank you. I appreciate that - from every corner of all of our constituents that you know this, this is like a total recharge in a moment that has continues to be a challenge. So it was great. And just to see also, like some of the Upstander Award winners from last year coming back, and not just coming back, but wanting to reconnect with the families that the awards they got were named after like is so and so going to be here. I want to take a picture and then sharing that stuff. I mean, some of the things that people have said about what this has meant to them, folks who've won the awards is really will bring tears to your eyes. It was so moving.

**Kevin Aldridge** 52:14

You know what's great about and this has just been a great transition, how all of this is run together, you know, what's great about the Upstander Awards, and I get this a lot to being in the news industry, is that the people you're honoring are the people that we talk about who've kept their heads down and are doing who are doing the work for change. So chances are you probably haven't heard of any of these folks or their stories, because they're not blowing their own horn. I always tell people, they're like, Well, why aren't? Why are you because people who do good things, like they aren't seeking the press, they aren't calling the Enquirer or the TV station and saying, Hey, look at me. Why? Because they're busy doing the work.

**Jackie Congedo** 52:52

Yeah.

**Kevin Aldridge** 52:52

And so it's not that they don't want to be recognized because, as you said, they appreciate it when people take time to recognize them, but it's because they're busy doing the work. They're not talking about it to anyone other than those who are helping in the mission and who are going to be beneficial of it. So the upstander awards are a great thing, and even when we get an opportunity to highlight folks in the in the paper, because what it does is it lets other people out there know that there's work being done, and that they're good people doing good things, because the bad stuff has no problem, right? Getting out there, right? And you can be fooled into thinking like, oh man, they're only bad people and bad things happening, yep. But nothing could be farther from the truth. And so somehow or another, not the individuals themselves, but those of us who are in this space of communicating and getting the information out, have to be able to find ways, like, whether it's the upstander awards or things of that nature, to be able to highlight, elevate that stuff, so that people say it's not all bad.

**Jackie Congedo** 53:54

It's not all bad. And also, that's person's just like me. They have the same character strength I do like, you know, what's to stop me from saying, How do I activate my own sort of engine to bring about positive humanity? Yeah, and so that's, that's what we did. We want to highlight one. I wish we had more time, but we're just going to highlight one of the awards that we gave out on at the Upstander Awards about so it's named after a couple by the name of Mark and Margaret Merin, who had this incredible story of survival and and had a young son right when the war broke out and they they had to make a very tough decision to put their son into hiding. And this child in, I mean, baby, right, less than a year old, survived, I think, three different camps,

**Kevin Aldridge** 54:54

wow

**Jackie Congedo** 54:56

And his parents just never gave up hope. And after the war that they would find him. And they looked and they looked and they looked. And then when they couldn't think they could look anymore, they looked and they found him. And he didn't even know his own name. He was two years old, and we were able to actually talk to Harry in Indiana, who still- their son, who's still with us. And he came back on for the awards and presented this award. So I'm standing here on the stage, looking at Harry coming up the ramp, thinking you are a miracle. The fact that you're here is nothing short of miraculous. When you think about what happened to children who were five months old, yeah, Jewish children in Europe who were five months old, who were caught in the camp system. I mean, it's, it's nothing short of miraculous that he survived this and then we were able to recognize this award for hope because his parents, that's what saved Harry's life. In many ways. That's what brought him back to his family. Is this undying hope that his parents had, that he would be found, that they could find him against all odds. So we gave the award the Mark and Margaret Merin Award for Hope to a friend of friend of mine, not because he's a friend of mine. He happens to be a friend of mine. Mitch Morris, who is doing amazing work around empowering young people and addressing some challenges around gun violence and walking with people through struggle in that way, just such an unsung hero in my eyes. And so it was special to have Harry there to present the award directly to Mitch and just passing of that torch of character strength, you know, like who's taking the strength and who's carrying that legacy today? So we want to show you the little video we put together, sharing that story, and then we come back and talk about

**Voiceover Lea Lachey** 56:54

Marc Merin was born in Germany. Margaret Friedman Merin in the Netherlands. They married in Amsterdam in 1939 and had a son, Harry, just as the Nazi grip tightened across Europe. Forced into hiding in 1942 they made the painful decision to hide Harry separately. In 1944 he was captured, but survived Bergen-Belsen and Theresienstadt. Every day, Margaret searched for his name among survivor lists. One day she saw "Janneman Israel" and said, that is our Harry. Against all odds, she was right. Hope brought them back together.

**Voiceover Drew Lachey** 57:34

Today, Mitch Morris brings that same hope into Cincinnati's inner city communities.

**Mitch Morris** 57:39

I've seen a lot of pain in our city and our community, and I just feel that we need to better do something about it.

**Voiceover Drew Lachey** 57:43

Through the Phoenix program, he helps adults leave street life behind through save our youth. He mentors teens, creates jobs and builds safer futures, offering structure, purpose and pride. Mitch meets people where they are in crisis, in conflict, and walks with them towards something better.

**Mitch Morris** 58:05

The parents will have lost family members to gun violence over the years, and... how simple it is for somebody to make a bad decision, to cause somebody's families in that ripple effect. And so I just feel I have to be able to try to do something to turn that thing around.

**Voiceover Drew Lachey** 58:20

Because for Mitch Morris, hope is a daily practice, and it always shows up.

**Jackie Congedo** 58:28

So yeah, I mean, an incredible story, right, with the miracle of survival, the miracle of finding your child who you know you had to separate from at five months old, and then and then, recognizing that through mitches amazing work today, all through that sort of shared sense of hope, it was really special. It was one of many amazing stories and moments at the awards this year. So shout out to to Mitch. And also, it was great to sort of re-engage with Harry, who was there to help give the award this year. It was so special.

**Kevin Aldridge** 59:03

Yeah, it's, I mean, just, you know, honing in on that theme of hope. I think the work that Mitch does is exactly that, you know, just in terms of trying to bring hope and and, you know, sort of recovery and healing for folks here in the city who suffer from from gun violence and the trauma associated with that, and it's one of the bigger issues that we have going on in Cincinnati right now with the violence that we see in so many families being affected by it, you need more folks like Mitch who are out there, you know, doing the hard work of helping people put their lives back together, you know, after tragedy.

**Jackie Congedo** 59:46

And if you've ever met Mitch like, you just get this overwhelming feeling like he is not in it for the like, this is not about awards. This isn't about recognition or spotlight. It's really because he believes in what he's doing. And he cares a lot about our city, cares a lot about. The people he helps. And, yeah, it's just really inspiring to to see him recognized in this way, and to hear from him, I mean, to hear what it means to him to be, to be an upstander. So before we close out for our first season, we want to end on our upstander shout out. We were thinking about, you know, who we should recognize, and we wanted to put the spotlight on our friend Jesse Eisenberg, who came to basically be the celebrity host of this year's Upstander Awards. He threw out the first pitch at the Reds game, and he recently, you know, the reason we we asked him to join us this year is because of his most recent work in the space of Holocaust memory. He, you know, wrote, directed and and actually starred in "A Real Pain," which was the Oscar award winning - Kieran Culkin won, won the award for Supporting Actor in that film about two cousins who are coming together in their own sort of dysfunction. It's actually really a funny movie to retrace their late grandmother's sort of journey through World War II, through that time and through the Holocaust. And it's, it's, it's all of the things you can imagine. You know, the awkward moments and the poignancy and this severity of the history sort of as the backdrop to a very human story about two cousins trying to navigate their own pain. Yeah, it's really so beautiful. So he talked a lot about that. I got to interview him. That was pretty fun, yes, and yeah. And then he was just, he just was a really great guy, just a normal dude, you know,

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:01:45

yeah. Well, you know, a lot of times when we think about people who achieve that level of celebrity or fame, that, you know, we think they're so far removed from the rest of us. And it's always refreshing when you meet someone like Jesse, who shows you that, you know, just because you're in Hollywood, just because you've been on the big screen, that they're still as relatable as anybody else, and those are the types of folks, when you meet them like that, that you become fans of like even if you even if you may not have been a fan of him. Prior to that, I've found so many other people who I really like or have become fans of, it's because you you see them in, yep, in real life, or you see them in real situations, and they're actually like real human beings, not sort of like the pretentious, you know, elite sort of Hollywood types is sometimes, you know, sometimes some are or as they're portrayed. And so it's, it's it's good to know that that he's, he's one of the down-to-earth

**Kevin Aldridge** 1:02:44

You guys are doing a great job of landing some big names for this event to come in and lend their voices and their platforms to it.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:02:44

It's actually interesting. We should, we would give him a shout out on this episode, because we've talked a lot about intellectual, you know, humility, about curiosity, and Jesse really, like I was with him for 48 hours, not obviously, continuously, but, you know, over the course of two days, and that shines through, like, over and over again, and how he is with everyday people. Just, you know, in his in his conversations, he's so curious, he's actually very hard to move through a crowd, because he's wants to really understand, and he's like, follow up questions. And this is not just for you know me or our board chair. Is this was everybody he met. He wanted to really learn more, and he was so curious. And and curiosity, I think, is like the part of one of the keys to unlocking that intellectual humility, right? It's like, or maybe it's the other way around. I think they probably feed each other. So he's, he's really an upstanding guy, and we hope he'll come back maybe next year to join us for the Upstander Awards as a guest, and appreciate him taking the time out of his busy, very busy life - He's working on another film right now - to join us. So thank you, Jesse.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:03:11

Well, maybe our folks who are listening and watching can help source like, who should we bring next year? That's a good idea. I'd love to hear people's suggestions. Who's using their character strengths to stand up for positive humanity and, you know, justice and change, and who's thinking about the lessons of history in a way that can maybe help us wrestle with some things today? So please let us know if you have any good ideas, and we will see you on the next season of the Upstander Ripple Effect podcast coming soon to a car, iPad, computer, audio device near you. Thanks for joining us.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:04:31

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 holocaustinhumanity.org/podcast you can also connect with us on Instagram and Tiktok @holocaustandhumanity and X and Facebook @cincyhh., 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 holocaustandhumanity.org.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:05:23

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