

Gaslit Nation Transcript

03 January 2024

“What Do We Do if Trump Wins?”

<https://www.patreon.com/posts/what-do-we-do-if-95135410>

[instrumental Auld Lang Syne]

Andrea Chalupa (00:00:06):

Welcome to *Gaslit Nation*. I am your host, Andrea Chalupa, a journalist and filmmaker and the writer and producer of the journalistic thriller, *Mr. Jones*, the story of Stalin's Genocide famine in Ukraine; the film the Kremlin does not want you to see, so be sure to watch it. This week, we are running part two of the August 5th live taping of *Gaslit Nation* at Caveat in New York City with the *Risk!* storytelling podcast by comedian Kevin Allison of the iconic comedy group, The State, which launched the geniuses Michael Showalter, Michael Ian Black, David Wayne, Kevin Allison, and many more. Thank you to everyone who came out to this event. Unfortunately, the conversation is still very current. The topics you're going to hear in this discussion, like “What happens if Trump wins? What do we do then?”, it's still relevant, this conversation you're about to hear. We are going to be back with all new episodes of *Gaslit Nation*, including a lot of fun in the family, regular guests. 2024 is going to be *Gaslit Nation* and Friends. It's a year we're going to link arms and get through together, and emerge victorious. 2024 is our year and don't forget to join us.

Andrea Chalupa (00:01:24):

If you are in our Patreon family—our walled garden as I like to think of it, where we all hang out in the Patreon community—don't forget to join our social media workshop with the wonderful Rachel Brody who's leading the charge to hopefully soon replace Jay Jacobs, the impotent waste of space who's just destroying the Democratic Party in New York City. She's leading the charge there. As we're always saying, we have to focus on our own communities, clean up her own backyards. That's what Rachel's trying to do. She's also very involved with a lot of human rights groups, get out the vote groups on social media. So she's going to be joining me for the *Gaslit Nation* Social Media Workshop on the evening of January 18 at 8:00 PM Eastern, where we're going to talk through our social media; how to beef up our presence there, how to deal with the toxic nonsense online, how to put on your spiritual shield to be a woman with strong opinions, a strong voice... Or a man, however you identify.

Andrea Chalupa (00:02:25):

Basically, how to get out there online, especially when you don't feel like it. But you are needed more than ever now to raise your voice, to fact check, to push back against the nonsense we need you. And so let's all get our social media game ready for this critical make-it-or-break-it election yet again that we're facing in the fight for civilization. Thank you to all who will attend. That's, again, January 18 at 8:00 PM Eastern. And now, without further ado, here is Part Two of the live taping of *Gaslit Nation* at Caveat in New York City with Kevin Allison of the *Risk!* storytelling podcast. We look forward to doing more live events this year.

[transition music, fun Auld Lang Syne]

Kevin Allison (00:03:19):

The two of us have been talking behind the scenes about another student who was in the class that you were in, who I stayed friends with right away after the class, Jan Warner. She came into class to tell the story of her beloved husband's passing because she was dealing with grief at the time. Then she went on

to create a community online called Grief Speaks Out, where she started gathering other people's stories about coping with their grief, and she wrote a book called *Grief Day by Day*. And she's 73 years old now. But when the Ukraine invasion happened, she decided to switch her focus for a little bit and she was able to fly over there to help some of the activists on the ground build centers, little community centers for people to be able to take showers and refresh and stuff like that, pay for ambulances over there. It really is remarkable. And now she's sharing those people's stories on Facebook as well. So examples from my very first storytelling class of people using this to make a remarkable difference in communities. Yeah.

Andrea Chalupa (00:04:43):

You probably had no idea going into it.

Kevin Allison (00:04:45):

No, no, no.

Andrea Chalupa (00:04:47):

And that's why you should just be humbled by the fact that you've no idea how powerful that first step is, that first thing that you do to launch, whatever that is that you feel you need to launch. You never know where it's going to lead.

Kevin Allison (00:04:59):

Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's so funny. When I started *Risk!*, I knew—because I knew I was gay from the beginning of consciousness in the early '70s in a very Republican town in Ohio and was raised devoutly Catholic—I knew that coming out about secrets was like an obsession of mine my entire life. So I knew I wanted to create this podcast where people would do precisely that. But in the beginning of the show, I decided to just tell funny, kinky stories of my own as a way of showing people you can talk about anything here. And I was so moved by storytellers who came around to the show to be like, “Oh, well, if he can talk about that, then I can talk about...”, you know, much more serious sort of traumatic things that had happened to them. And when people started emailing me saying, “This show saved my life, this show changed my way of thinking.”

Kevin Allison (00:05:58):

We've had people email in and say, “I used to be MAGA. I used to be in a neofascist group and I started listening to the show and the show changed me.” So yeah, when I started all this, I really did not know quite how profound it could be and quite how profound podcast communities around shows like ours can be. So yeah, it's just great to know that we are friends and that we've got each other's backs as communities.

Andrea Chalupa:

100%

Kevin Allison:

Yeah, I wanted to... Is it okay if we share some clips?

Andrea Chalupa:

Yes, yes, please.

Kevin Allison:

I wanted to share a few clips from risk to give you guys a feel for what I was talking about before. My business director, JC Cassis, just like you two, we have a relationship where my strength is on the creative side. JC's strength is on the business side, so she's a much calmer head than I am a lot of the time.

Kevin Allison (00:07:09):

And there was a day that I spoke out on the podcast about how outraged I was over the kids in cages situation during the Trump administration. Someone emailed me and said, you know, how dare I be speaking like that and just blah, blah, blah bullshit. And I had had no food that day, but a few cups of coffee and just rattled off an email back to this *Risk!* listener that ended with "God have mercy on your soul!" And JC said to me that day, "Why don't you let me handle the God have mercy on your soul stuff from now on?" So we have that agreement between us. She has my email, she sees everything that comes into me, so she handles those from now on. But over the years, I've realized, no, we run plenty of stories that show just how precisely people's lives are affected very immediately by politics in ways that they might not even have anticipated.

Kevin Allison (00:08:18):

I want to run this first clip from the show. This is from a story called "Reunion" by Britt Adams. And it's on an episode called "Asian-American Lives Number One". Britt was one of... There was sort of a boom in Korean babies being adopted into America in the late '90s/early 2000s, and he was adopted into a very large, very wealthy Republican family down in Tennessee. And he grew up not knowing any liberals and not knowing any other Asian people, and just kind of grew up in this family not really even knowing he was constantly being subjected to microaggressions about "the different-looking one in the family." Then he went off to college and he woke up and he returned home for a big extended family reunion right during the election of 2016. So it's in this big hall where the whole family's there, and he's becoming uncomfortable because he starts feeling all these jokes coming at him about looking different like they always had, and now he's feeling like, "This is exhausting to me, I just want to leave this reunion," when his father calls him over and says, "No, no, no, don't leave. Don't leave. We want you to stay." And then the subject of who he's voting for in the election, his father brings this issue up. So can we play clip number one?

[begin audio clip]

Britt Adams (00:10:01):

And he's sitting in his chair, holding his glass, and he leans back a little bit and says, "Son!" And I said, "Yeah, dad, I'm just really tired. My head's killing me. I'm just going to go lie down for a bit. And I mean, I didn't even vote for Trump." And immediately, I knew I had fucked up because my entire red-minded family stopped talking and all eyes were just on me and him. My father puts down his drink, leans forward in his chair and says, "Oh, what was that son? Sorry, I couldn't quite hear you." And I knew I had fucked up, so I was trying to just revert the conversation as fast as I could. And I said, "Sorry, dad. Yeah, yeah, yeah. My head just hurts. I just want to go lie down." "What the fuck did you just say?!" My father had gotten up and he was toe to toe, nose to nose with me. I could smell the whiskey breath on him. And I looked around to see if this was really happening, and my entire family had the exact same expression on their face.

[end audio clip]

Kevin Allison (00:11:06):

Uhh, so yeah, this was extraordinarily courageous for Britt to share. It's not his real name. He shared it at a big *Risk!* live show in Denver. The story goes on. His father and his brother beat him so badly that he was unconscious for days in the hospital and became estranged from his family and moved to Denver. And this was his way of coming out about his situation. And it's very rare, but we will sometimes get people who start to try to make a case, even like, "Oh, I'm going to write this up in the paper, that that story you ran was fake." This was one of those cases where some people were just insistent: "Oh, that can't be a real story." And it's interesting because those stories almost always have to do with race when people start insisting, "Oh, that's not true." But he's doing much better now. I think he might even be reconciled with some members of his family. But just a perfect example of what you were talking about before; disinformation tearing families apart and finding ways to find your real community. So that story has always been such a... We've always been so bowled over by it. We reran it in our Asian-American Lives series when there was that spate of hate crimes against Asian-Americans that really spiked during all the "China virus stuff".

Andrea Chalupa (00:12:53):

My husband lost a friend from his business school who was pushed off the tracks in Times Square.

Kevin Allison (00:12:57):

Oh my God. Yeah. Ugh, goodness gracious me. I'm so sorry. So, yeah. Yeah, it was a real honor to have Britt share that with us, and we're so happy that he's doing better. Now, this next story, it came from one of those people who wrote in, "This show saved my life." Maya James was an African-American girl who was growing up in the Midwest, and she was only 17 years old when she wrote to me. She said she had started listening to risk when she was 11 [laughs], which was a little concerning because it's an incredibly uncensored show. But it was great to hear her say that she found so much resilience and transcendence that she heard on the show that it got her through some stuff. And when I heard I encouraged her, well, even though you're only 17, we've never had someone that young share on the show before, but why don't you pitch us a story?

Kevin Allison (00:14:08):

And what she came back with just... This was 2016 when she—or was it? No, no, I'm sorry. It was 2015 because I later looked back and realized the day I recorded this story with her was the day that Trump rode the elevator down in Trump Tower and made his announcement that he was running. So I was one of those white people who needed the wool removed from his eyes at that point in time. And I was stunned by this story by this 17-year-old Black girl from Michigan about what she had grown up with. She shares several anecdotes throughout the course of her life of... We're not talking about microaggressions, we're talking about major aggressions here. The first one, I think, is when she's in kindergarten, and this second one that she talks about is when she was in the fourth grade when her history teacher played the "I Have a Dream" speech on television for the class. And she was so caught up being the only Black girl in the class, she was so inspired by it, but then started to look around and notice that kids weren't really paying attention, and one girl in particular was downright angry that it was being shown. So here's clip number two. Trigger warning.

[begin audio clip]

Maya James (00:15:41):

There was a girl I know. Her name is Katie. And she was in the corner of the room in what I can only describe as a fuming pile of anger. Something about this had really, really pissed her off. She was scrunch-faced, sad and fiercely angry. She was pulled aside because she was being rude and having a hissy fit in front of the whole class. She said, "Mr. Mitta, my dad told me not to believe anything that you say because you're just trying to give us a liberal agenda and Maya's a [N-word]."

[end audio clip]

Kevin Allison (00:16:29):

Pause. So yeah, these instances are traumatic. I mean to imagine what both of our first storytellers lived through in their own communities; in her school, in his family. And she is extraordinary. She is an artist who is now doing all sorts of activism today too. The way that these young folks are so inspiring for bouncing back and not being cowed by these sorts of experiences—

Andrea Chalupa:

Telling their own story, which is powerful.

Kevin Allison:

Very, very, very. And so that was really... In 2015, when we ran that story, it really was in so many ways, the beginning of—like your sister—the beginning of us being so much more aware of, Oh my gosh, how important it is to be telling such stories. This next story is on an episode that is a little bit sadly and ironically called "Protect Roe". It's called "All Knocked Up and No Place to Go" by Lizz Winstead—

Andrea Chalupa;

Who was the founder of *The Daily Show*.

Kevin Allison (00:17:57):

Yes, yes, yes. Lizz is a comedian and also an activist and just a remarkable person. And this was so fascinating. So often you don't know people's backstories, even though, Oh my gosh, you co-created *The Daily Show* and you're a fabulous comedian and you do all this activism around abortion rights. And so when she actually shared her story with me, I was just like, holy cow. This story takes place in 1979 when Lizz was 16 years old and she became pregnant by her boyfriend, who then promptly disappeared, and she was just terrified. She didn't know who she could tell and who would support her. She knew she couldn't become a mother. And one day she was riding the bus and saw an advertisement—just on a public bus—that showed us terrified young teen girl and it said something like, "Pregnant? You have options." So she went to what she thought was a clinic, and in fact, it was a trick. It was a setup designed to look like a clinic where it was really just a woman's house who had these pamphlets to share with her to present to her that she had two options; to become a mother of the child or to get the child adopted. And this is the moment in the story where Lizz, who was confused and only 16 and not really knowing much about the law, asked, "Wait, but what about abortion?" So if you could play the clip.

[begin audio clip]

Lizz Winstead (00:19:48):

She's not saying it, so I have to say it. And I was like, "What about abortion?" And she stared at me with these steely eyes and she said, "Don't you know? Abortion's against our law." Okay. This is 1979. She said, "Abortion's against *our* law." What do I hear? *The* law, right? So now I'm totally freaked out because I think that I am asking her to commit murder with me. I'm feeling completely freaked out. I don't know what to do, but I feel really scared. And so I said, "I think that I don't know what I want to do, so can you give me time? Do I have time?" She goes, "You have all the time you need." And I said, "Okay, I think I need time because my boyfriend isn't going out with me anymore and I am just not ready to be a mother." And she says, "Those are things you should have thought about before."

[end audio clip]

Kevin Allison (00:21:00):

Yeah, you were talking before about how Trump has always been there [laughs], very illuminating to hear... for a lot of us, to revisit stories from our own childhoods where we might have blanked out or just not been fully conscious of what was going on. And the Right is constantly talking about indoctrination and grooming and all that sort of thing. And we can hear in this story their own version of that, the way there's so much projection in them making those cases. But thankfully, Lizz did find out about an actual clinic and made it through that period just fine. And in the story she talks about how, you know, Oh my gosh, it was no big deal; that she was so profoundly struck the day that she got her abortion that she felt like, Oh wait, this is no big deal, the way it's being handled at this clinic. So, a remarkable story there. And again, so inspiring to think that that happened when she was 16. And at first, she kind of downplayed it in the story of, you know, herself not thinking this was all that big of a deal in her life, but then it leading to her becoming an activist for the cause.

Andrea Chalupa (00:22:38):

Starting a really important movement, which is comedy news. A lot of people are checking out, but they're watching John Oliver, they're watching Trevor Noah, Sam Bee, all of those folks are the ones that people are getting their news from now more and more, and Lizz started that.

Kevin Allison (00:22:54):

Yeah. Yeah, true, true, true. Now the final clip I want to run here is from TS Madison, who is hilarious. There is only one TS Madison. Such a character. She is very well known now from *RuPaul's Drag Race*. She's often a guest judge on *Drag Race*. And oh my gosh, we love Maddie so much. We met her when she was just kind of becoming a YouTube sensation of just sharing her stories online. And her story was that many years ago—I think this is in the '90s—she was a sex worker on the streets of Miami. And she was one of many trans sex workers that she knew on the streets of Miami that she refers to in the story as Queens. And it's just kind of amazing to hear her tell this story because she has so much light and so much love and is able to make even this horrifying story funny because of her indomitable spirit.

Kevin Allison (00:24:12):

But the story is about how she was held up at gunpoint and raped in a situation one night on the street doing her work. And how the cops just did not help her out; how the cops showed up but were not serious about bringing the guy in. Finally, the guy was brought in, but then they didn't take it very seriously that he be kept in and that she be protected in any way. He was out on a cheap bail very shortly thereafter, and she came down to speak to one of the police inspectors at one point and was just struck that, "Oh, did she want to press charges or anything?" And she was thinking, "Where's my protection? I

mean, this guy is out there again. Do I want to press charges? I mean, I'll be... This guy will kill me." If you could play the clip of TS Madison.

[begin audio clip]

TJ Madison (00:25:19):

But that was my last night working the street. Right after that, I vowed to myself, I said, "Madison, bitch, you have so many things to look forward to in life. This could have been a moment of—boom. And all people would have said was, "She deserved it because she was a whore." And I know this to be true because I walked the streets of Miami, and I know girls that have been murdered. And the police, they didn't give a fuck about that stuff. They didn't care about that type of stuff. They didn't care. You know what I'm saying? It was just another statistic like, "Oh, well, girl, they killed another queen. Okay, well, she's dead. One less queen to worry about on the sidewalk."

[end audio clip]

Kevin Allison (00:26:00):

That was another story that felt like, for me, middle class white guy from Ohio, was really illuminating; to hear the perspective of someone who so viscerally felt that cooperating with the police was even more dangerous than not. So extraordinary stories and kind of the reason that I insist that, yeah, it's okay to talk about politics on a storytelling show because as Andrea has been pointing out, it is our lives and our communities where, you know, not being shy about sharing such stories ends up making a difference. Yeah. Especially those folks who have written in to say, "I used to be MAGA, but this show kind of changed me." It was funny. We did the *Risk!* live show in Detroit, and I was looking at this guy who was approaching the table after the show where I was signing the *Risk!* book, and I looked at him and I thought, Oh my God, this looks like a Proud Boy or something.

Kevin Allison (00:27:20):

You know what I mean? You get a little nervous sometimes when you appear in public and who's coming at me here? The guy came up to me and he said, "I'm the guy who emailed you that this show changed my life, that I used to be MAGA and all." And I was like, oh my God! Giving him a big hug. So, very interesting the way that our own prejudices or can blind us from the community that we might even be creating. So yeah, that's all I have to share from *Risk!*. And let's see.... Should we take some questions?

Andrea Chalupa:

Yeah!

Kevin Allison:

That would be really fun to hear what you guys have to ask.

Andrea Chalupa:

Oh, there's a question back there.

Audience Member ! (00:28:04):

Hi. Thank you. This has been so fun. Andrea. I'm a huge fan. *Mr. Jones, Gaslit Nation*. It's life-changing. Everyone should check that out. It's amazing.

Andrea Chalupa:

See that, Dad!?

[audience laughs]

Audience Member 1 (00:28:18):

[laughs] I can't wait to dive into *Dictatorship*, the new book. I mean, it's amazing. Kevin, I've been a huge fan. I'm sure there are people here who are huge fans of *The State* from like 30 years ago. Amazing show. Just going back to *The State*, I have to say one of my favorite sketches is the Lincoln Logs: The unauthorized biography of Abraham Lincoln, which is so silly and ridiculous, but it shows Lincoln as a drug-addled, womanizing, abusive president. Right now, I feel like we're there. We had a president. We actually went through that for four years. I don't know if either of you want to comment on that, just what we've gone through. And we went from, "Oh yeah, presidents should be normal and not be ridiculous lunatics." I don't know if you want to comment.

Kevin Allison (00:29:09):

Yeah, that is fascinating. *The State*, in looking back at some of our old sketches, have been really struck by how some of the things that we presented as, "Wouldn't it be crazy if this sort of thing happened?" And it hadn't even occurred to me the Lincoln Logs one, yeah, to have this, you know, he's snorting drugs, he's attacking women, he's pissed off that there's any rules at all, and fuck everyone in this country. You're absolutely right. It's like, that was a joke at the time. "Can you imagine if a president was like this?" And holy shit [laughs]. That's incredible. My goodness. Lord. Yeah, and I think that was part of it. That's part of why *Gaslit Nation* was so important to me was because it was always this clarion call of, "Now, hold on a second. This might be hard to believe what's really happening right now, but let's face what's really happening right now." So yeah. That's amazing.

Audience Member 2 (00:30:22):

So here's my question. So this is such an interesting choice you made, and I imagine there's a lot... It's packed with info. How did you come about making the choice to do a graphic novel? I mean, you talked a little bit about who your narrator was going to be, but how... If you want to talk a little bit about what story, what format is the best for this particular story, because it also, part two, seems like the audience is those of us who want to be dictators. So we'd love to hear you talk a little bit more about that.

Andrea Chalupa (00:30:53):

Yeah, so it's like *The Colbert Report* on being a dictator. And so we were approached to do the book by First Second Books, the publisher, Mark Siegel. Olga Lautman, who's one of the world's foremost mafia experts who's in the audience tonight... [audience applauds] Ah! Olga, you're getting applause, as you should. She's right over there. So, Olga has a graphic novel coming out with the same publisher. She was approached. So Ben, if we could do this again with Olga, talk about the Russian mafia and how to fight them. So we'll do a reunion. And so they approached us and Sarah did the outline, and then I did the first

couple script pages, and then we split up the book. And what needs to be pointed out by now in this talk is that the illustrator is an extraordinary young woman, a feminist organizer based in Poland who was roughed up by the riot police in Poland protesting the abortion ban there.

Andrea Chalupa (00:31:46):

And she did a lot of work with trying to protect the weaponized refugees who were taken by Russia, Belarus from the Middle East and Northern Africa, and dumped on the border of the EU. And Poland, which is trapped under a Trumpian government right now. They've captured the courts like Trump did with the Supreme Court. They've captured the state media. It's very hard to dislodge them now. And you have the same dynamics that we're dealing with in Poland. And so she was part of a movement to try to get food, water, whatever was needed to those refugees that were dumped on the border by the Russians to try to stress the EU out, punish the EU for standing up to them.

Kevin Allison (00:32:23):

Wow, that's extraordinary.

Andrea Chalupa (00:32:24):

She's an extraordinary badass lady in her own right. Anybody that does creative projects, it could be a nightmare to collaborate. It could be like hair pulling. Easy breezy, easy breezy. She took our dumb jokes and brought such life to it. For Persians in the audience, Freddie Mercury makes an appearance in the book.

Kevin Allison:

Right [laughs]

Andrea Chalupa:

That was for you. Nani, that's the godmother of my second born. She's so proud of that. [laughs]

Kevin Allison (00:32:52):

That's fabulous.

Audience Member 3 (00:32:54):

First, great to see you. As you know, I'm big supporter.

Andrea Chalupa:

Thank you so much.

Audience Member 3:

Yeah, last time, by the way, we saw her in person, she was expecting her first, and she was in the live Mueller She Wrote show in the Bellhouse in Brooklyn. I don't know if any of you were there, but yeah, we were there. It was awesome.

Andrea Chalupa (00:33:08):

And that was right after Bill Barr unleashed his four page memo, the coverup memo.

Kevin Allison:

Oh boy.

Andrea Chalupa:

And I had to go on stage and be like, "It's not true!"

Kevin Allison:

Wow.

Andrea Chalupa;

Yeah, and like Michael Tracy and everyone after me during that time.

Kevin Allison:

Oh my God.

Audience Member 3 (00:33:21):

I've been thinking about through this program about who gets to tell a story and the privilege of that, right? So thank heavens, the people you've featured, Kevin, they've found the strength, the means opportunity to tell their story, but there's so many who aren't telling their story. So what can we do as a community to enable more people to tell stories from even more diverse perspectives?

Andrea Chalupa (00:33:42):

Gosh, I mean, I think anyone in a position, in corporate media, in mainstream media, has an obligation to really highlight those stories and really shine a light on those stories. And I know when I worked in media, I would try to do that; in big mainstream, big corporate media, I'd try to find those untold stories. And not all mainstream media... *Reuters* just did a deep dive on which people in Congress today are descended from slave owners. We need to know.

Kevin Allison:

Wow, yeah.

Andrea Chalupa:

We need to know because it matters today. And shocker, a lot of Republicans. Obviously you can see it how they legislate. But I will say there's a wonderful group, a New York writers workshop that you should team up with. Aaron Zimmerman just won the community service award for Fort Greene Brooklyn.

Andrea Chalupa (00:34:28):

They teach writing workshops where you can become a workshop leader for any type of group. So they trained me, a one day training, and I taught a workshop in a homeless shelter. And I witnessed the first

ever perfect first draft written by a veteran, homeless veteran crack dealer. And it was a stunning story of an old Han Solo-type who fixes up an old ship; an old ship that thought it had seen its last days. But the whole story was a metaphor of making love to an older woman. And it was just like... It was stunning, stunning, stunning. Hemingway would've been jealous. It was just brilliant. And we did a book. We did a chap book called *Hidden Chorus* because one thing that we have to be reminded of today, we're dealing with economic shock right now. A lot of people are falling through the cracks, what Fox News and others are trying to milk as like, "Oh, look at those leftists that can't keep New York together."

Andrea Chalupa (00:35:20):

It's a mental health crisis. New York City was ground zero of this once in a century pandemic. We're still reeling from that. Our teachers are still reeling from that. Our children are still reeling from that. And a lot of people that never imagined they'd be home-insecure are suddenly facing that. A lot of us. It's very scary. And one thing I learned from volunteering in those communities is that the homeless look like you and me walking around the streets. They blend in for their own safety and security. A lot of them do. And I remember trying to sign up people to vote in one election and how many people would say, "Oh, I don't have an address." You know? So just remember that; how many of them, as you go about your business... Just be sensitive, all of us. And in terms of highlighting our story and combating the consolidation of far-right media, it's a nightmare.

Andrea Chalupa (00:36:08):

And I think we just put pressure. We raise our voices, we make a stink. We write letters. There's a wonderful group called the Media and Democracy Project that will teach you to write op-eds. Razom for Ukraine will teach you to write op-eds. Just be a writer yourself. Be a storyteller yourself. If you want to email me after this, I could tell you about Aaron Zimmerman's group where you could lead a writing workshop. Unless you're an oligarch in Ukraine or America, like a Jeff Bezos, you don't have money to throw at these things, but you can yell at those guys in social media, write emails, write letters, write op-eds demanding that they invest more in local media, bring local media back. That's really the frontline of tackling corruption.

Kevin Allison (00:36:47):

Yeah, and I think that for independent media creators like myself—people who do media for YouTube or for podcasting or anything like that—I think for us to be as conscious as we can of reaching out, looking for opportunities like you were saying to nonprofit organizations or folks in situations who you feel like you would not normally hear from. We had our first story on *Risk!* last week from someone who is incarcerated, and I still don't understand exactly how we made it through the loopholes to have that. But yeah, I mean, in my opinion, stories from people that you don't ordinarily hear from so much in the mass media are all that much more fascinating. It makes for more riveting content to be hearing from... Maddie was doing fine at the time she recorded that story for *Risk!*, but she had this background of being a sex worker on the streets of Miami. And you can hear how she's such a vital and vibrant voice that you are just not hearing out there. And so for organizations like *Risk!* or *The Moth* or *Story Collider* or whatnot, storytelling organizations or any sorts of independent podcasts or YouTube shows, to be a little bit more mindful about looking for ways to reach out to find folks who might not be the people you're used to hearing from quite so much.

Andrea Chalupa (00:38:35):

And you have to also teach yourself how to tell your own story. No one wanted the script for *Mr. Jones*. No one. I had to learn how to produce it myself, which was terrifying at first. And I had to learn how to ask people for money. I needed millions of dollars. And I think it's very important that people not say,

“Oh, this is the screenwriter of *Mr. Jones*.” No, I was the producer. And that's very important because that tells you if I can do it, you can do it. If there's a story inside you that you want to tell, you can learn how to raise the money needed, you can learn how to find the team and build the coalition. So it's not just the storytelling skills, like I'm going to stand up in front of you and find my voice. There's also a business side to it. And if you want to know the secret to producing a \$10 million budget film with several different countries and an international team of actors and crew, this is the secret of putting a film together.

Andrea Chalupa (00:39:29):

If you can throw a dinner party, if you can decide who you want to have over for that night, what kind of energy, what kind of vibe you want in the room, you can make a movie. That's exactly how it's done. So think of yourself as the host of your own story. "I'm going to throw a party. Are you in or out?" We had people throwing money at us and we were like, "We don't want to spend time with you." And the money that we held out for when those investors visited set, it was like a girl's trip weekend. That's how you have to think of it. So hold out. As hard as it may be, hold out and just treat whatever you're building as the best dinner party ever. Take that attitude, take that energy that takes all the fear out. That's what I had to learn to adapt to that situation.

Kevin Allison (00:40:11):

That's amazing.

Audience (00:40:18):

[applauds]

Kevin Allison (00:40:18):

If you reach out to us at *Risk!*, we teach through our sister school, The Story Studio at thestorystudio.org, and then I do one-on-one coaching with people. But we're also starting these events that are... It's called "What's Your Story?" where we bring people together and guide people into, you know... There's a little bit of teaching that's involved of "try this, try that" but it's mostly about helping people to connect and just via prompts and whatnot, to try sharing stories with one another on this or that. And we've thought of doing exactly what you were just talking about; also doing that in the context of dinner parties or for specific causes or specific communities. So look us up as well. You can always reach me at kevin@riskshow.com. Another question. Yeah?

Audience Member 4 (00:41:20):

We were talking about UX, and one of the things I wanted to mention was system error, which is basically if you replace the user and the error still happens, it wasn't the user at fault, so fix the system. And I see that pretty much everywhere. People follow the path of least resistance and it's like a game of telephone where you no longer know why things were done in the first place. It happens everywhere, from business buzzwords—"big picture," this, that, or whatever—text self-fulfilling prophecies of "this is the way it is" so they built it that way. And then even in storytelling, the three act structure. It becomes so cemented that people forget how to do anything else. And then the audience thinks that's the only way to tell a story.

Andrea Chalupa and Kevin Allison:

Mmmhmm <affirmative>

Audience Member 4:

And government. We see corruption and just assume it has to be that way.

Andrea Chalupa and Kevin Allison:

Mmmhmm <affirmative>

Audience Member 4:

So the question: how do we get people to learn to reevaluate things they're just accepting as normal so the original solution is not the final one?

Andrea Chalupa (00:42:05):

Brilliant question. Absolutely brilliant question. And that's why I love the work that *ProPublica* is doing now in going after the Supreme Court instead of just accepting that of corruption. It's like, we all know it is by their rulings, but they're actually going to lift the veil and be like, "Well, here's how the corruption gets made. Here's how it works." It doesn't have to be like this. And I think what we need to highlight as Americans in our discussion groups, in our book clubs, in whatever little communities that we have—at our dinner parties—really educate ourselves on what are the countries doing that have low rates of corruption? So Olga Lautman, who I pointed to earlier, she and a group of people, a group of investigators, founded an organization combating corruption and how it's being weaponized by the Kremlin through all these useful idiots across the West.

Andrea Chalupa (00:42:58):

And they're really getting into the weeds on this. And I remember talking to Olga when she's trying to figure out where to set up that organization, where would be the best? You want to know what country she chose? Denmark, one of the least corrupt countries on the planet, and also one of the happiest. So what's possible already exists. We have models of it. I spent a lot of time in Copenhagen because Zentropa, Lars von Trier's company, took a script of mine back in the day, did nothing with it, but I had a great time getting to know Copenhagen. And I got to know a very wealthy Dane, extremely wealthy Dane, and he was so proud of paying taxes because he saw that his taxes were developing the minds of the people and the minds of the people are a natural resource, and we need to milk those minds for all their worth.

Andrea Chalupa (00:43:40):

And that's absolutely the right attitude. Russia is dying. And America, parts of America, the red states are dying because they have the opposite position. We're not going to invest anything, not a penny. We're going to hoard it all. I really believe we need to start treating greed like we treat sex addiction and it doesn't make sense. So yeah, we need to keep reminding ourselves of what is possible. And I would love maybe on *Gaslit Nation*, have a Sister City project with some amazing cities in the Scandinavian countries that are not only becoming more environmentally sustainable and not only investing in education up and down and all the benefits, all the reward, they're reaping from that. But these Scandinavian countries, I want to tell you, especially the people on the far left, these Scandinavian countries are tooth and nail fighting alongside Ukraine with how much money they're giving them; massive amounts of their GDP compared to a lot of other Ukraine's allies. Denmark, Norway, Finland, Sweden.

Andrea Chalupa (00:44:39):

They are some of Ukraine's staunchest allies right now. It's all related. If you have a country that's anti corruption, that's pro human being, that's pro quality of life, they're going to look at Putin's fascism and be like, Ooh, this is black and white. You don't have to sell us on this. We understand where we stand on this issue. Instead, you have these Republicans, these libertarians, that want to steal from us, that want to steal from our future, that want to make an uninhabitable planet who are writing the most godawful ugly stuff about Ukraine, cheerleading a genocide, trash-talking, anyone who dares stand up for human rights there and stand up against systemic rape and so on. So it's very vile. So we just hold up what's possible. We keep cheerleading for what's possible, and we keep showing up the models where this is working. We have to imagine a new future because it's absolutely possible. We are up against enemies our ancestors in America—not mine because my parents got here—your ancestors have fought against, and we're going to overcome them. Again, it's not going to be pretty, there's going to be moments of terror, but we're ultimately going to have to build the stories we want, the films we want, the books we want, the communities that we want. It's on us now. It's self-reliance time, as they would say in Ukraine. Olga is shaking her head. That's how Ukraine still exists, is self-reliance.

Kevin Allison (00:45:52):

That's incredible. And this book is such a perfect example of that, of the fact that, for example, one of the reasons there's such an attack on education right now coming from the right (well, it's been going on for decades, but...) is because they don't want people to know their history. I always think of FDR talking about if capitalism is not strictly regulated, then you're going to end up with these massively, massively wealthy people who are just going to run roughshod over democracy. And it's time we look back at some of the lessons we've already learned and forgotten.

Andrea Chalupa (00:46:34):

My next script is on Dorothy Thompson who was—and a *Gaslit Nation* listener approached me with this, a wonderful producer in Wales, and it's on Dorothy Thompson—the woman that won the war against the Nazis on the home front. She was kicked out of Berlin for writing an article in *Cosmo Magazine*, making fun of Hitler, laughing at him, which is every fascist worst nightmare. A woman laughing at him. He never forgot it. One of the first things he did was kick her out. And she regrouped and went to New York and gave lecture tours, got her own column in the *Herald Tribune*, got her own radio show. She lived on the air reporting day by day Hitler and Stalin invading Poland. She took on an isolationist Congress (the Republicans), she took on Lindbergh, Henry Ford, and she ended up writing speeches for FDR, meeting with Churchill, meeting with the Queen, and getting kicked out of a Nazi rally in Madison Square Garden because she was laughing at the top of her lungs at their faces.

Andrea Chalupa (00:47:30):

And so I'm bringing her back because we need to know how to, you know... We need to remind ourselves these people are idiots. This is the comedy for a reason. And so we're going to go in through this next year, the next few years ahead, laughing at these Nazis in their faces. We're bringing back Dorothy Thompson, who's going to show us how it's done. And in researching her story I was reminded that FDR was extremely radical. He was up against so many forces when he was making all those bold moves. People really feared that he was a dictator. And she even called him out saying, "Ooh, that's an overreach. You're trying to expand the Supreme Court," and stuff. He really stuck his neck out to give us all of these services/rights that we now take for granted, that are now being threatened.

Audience Member 5 (00:48:13):

Yes, thanks for putting this on. This has been an amazing conversation so far. So we're in this extraordinary, unprecedented moment where a former president has been indicted three times, and there could be a trial soon. And Trump's attorneys have been on Fox advocating for the trial to be televised, which I thought was really interesting. I'm wondering what your perspective is. Should we televise the trial for the sake of transparency, or should we not give Trump—who is this consummate entertainer—that kind of platform? How should we be telling this story to the American people?

Andrea Chalupa:

That's a great question because Hitler's trial for the beer hall putsch, which was a violent attempt to overthrow German democracy, that became a big spectacle. You had journalists morbidly hanging all over that, and it was almost like Hitler's way to then regroup because he spent, I think, around a year in prison where he had an assistant, got to wear regular clothes, and what did he do? He wrote *Mein Kampf* and then came out and within a decade he was chancellor. It happened very quickly. And I want people to know—this gets lost sometimes—one of the very first things Hitler did as chancellor of Germany was he started building his first concentration camp and within six months Germany was turned into a dictatorship, and he did it by taking over the legal system. So even the brave journalists, even the Jack Smiths of Germany couldn't get rid of him. They tried to go through the legal system. People don't understand, the normies don't understand how quickly it happens. And so I think in this case, the whole debate: Do we televise or not? The January 6th committee, what they did was very effective. They had damning witnesses, they had these stunning viral clips. You had Americans glued to this. The ratings were very high, and it was perfectly done.

Andrea Chalupa (00:49:56):

It was just like a really good... It was what Sarah and I had been calling for for so long. We kept telling the Democrats, "Have hearings, go after Ivanka and Jared, this is must-watch TV. Americans love true crime. Get it all out there through your hearings. You control the House. Why aren't you doing it?" There were so many missed opportunities there. They finally did it with the January 6th committee hearings, validating, vindicating everything we were saying. But the problem with Jack Smith, he's not that. The DOJ is not that. The DOJ, they're very dry. They are not in the business of creating viral videos. They're cut and dry people. They're some of the boringest people you'd ever imagine. I've talked to people in the DOJ and FBI. They're boring as hell, okay?

Kevin Allison:

[laughs]

Andrea Chalupa:

And so Trump versus them, Trump and his goon squad lawyer versus these cut and dry, dry, dry, dry, proudly dry and conservative prosecutors, I don't think it's going to have the same effect of trained seasoned politicians with their social media teams, you know?

Andrea Chalupa (00:50:55):

And so I think Trump does want to be televised. He does want to suck the oxygen out of the room. Do you remember what the Trump years felt like? How it was this narcissist who kept wanting to get inside of you so you couldn't escape him? That's what he's feeding off of, that attention. And so I think he would have the upper hand there. Do you remember in 2016, as we write in the book, Jeff Zucker would show just an empty podium at a Trump rally in a countdown. That's what this is going to be. It's going to be a

version of that if it is televised. And there's not going to be much that Jack Smith's going to bring to that because that's not his wheelhouse. He's got that square jaw and that mystique, but that can only take you so far, you know? Whatever we're in for over the next year—

Andrea Chalupa (00:51:42):

Because remember, Russia really needs Trump to win, as we all know, and Putin's never been weaker. It's still early days yet. So much is going to happen between now and next November. I don't know if Putin's going to live to see it, given the way things are going for him and what that's going to mean for Russia and Ukraine and so on. The Russians are desperate to end this war—not Putin, but the Russians who are trying to get rid of Putin are desperate to end this war because they want to go back to winning the war the way they know how, which is through corruption, which is through the oligarchs, which is through buying off respectability, slapping their names on university programs in the West, and museums and events. We were approached in the early days by one of Blavatnik's people. Blavatnik. The Russian oligarch Blavatnik. One of his folks reached out to us to try to dangle money at us, and we were like, “Do you not listen to the show? [laughs]

Kevin Allison:

Wow!

Andrea Chalupa:

“I mean, do you want to come on?” You know, that guy threatens to sue people for being a Russian oligarch.

Kevin Allison”

[laughs]

Andrea Chalupa:

Any other questions?

Audience Member 6 (00:52:42):

If you don't broadcast this trial, like the Justice Department is not allowed to give their commentary at the end of the night like Trump and his cronies will be doing, I don't see how you can't broadcast it because... I mean, the Justice Department, they're not allowed to make comments. Just maybe if one person comes out and listens and maybe one mind has changed, maybe that helps.

Andrea Chalupa (00:53:07):

Well, America loves trials. We love true crime. We love trials. We love murdered women.

Kevin Allison:

[laughs] My God.

Andrea Chalupa:

And so I think Trump really checks all those boxes. And so seeing this man on trial, I'm cautiously optimistic that enough of the normies in Michigan, Wisconsin, Arizona, Virginia, Georgia... Florida's lost. The Democratic party ceded Florida a long time ago. Florida's lost. I think enough of the independent voters needed will hold their nose and vote for Biden, even knowing that Black woman Kamala, young and sprightly as she is compared, is next. Ultimately, I will just say my piece: I'm in favor of it being broadcast. I do think that it will tip the needle towards the voters needed, the independents that keep us all up at night; those independent voters. And I think ultimately it'll be a good thing because it'll keep reminding the people that this guy is a criminal. Do you really want this guy as your president? And I think people want boring. People want stability. People want a future. And ultimately seeing one of the main contenders facing trial against swoony, sexy Jack Smith, who I think will poll well with suburban women in white America, I think that's what we have going for us. So sure, yes, I am in favor of it.

Kevin Allison (00:54:28):

I think we have time for just one more.

Audience Member 7 (00:54:30):

Given that we're going to have to do everything to resist this. What do we do if he wins?

Andrea Chalupa (00:54:36):

That is an excellent, excellent question. I think about that. I do think about that because I don't think we've seen the start of... What they're going to really drive out the base with, is Kamala. "Do you really want a Black?" Because Biden is... They're playing the age thing to try to scare white America into stopping a Black woman from becoming president. That's what they're going to play. And it's going to be effective, unfortunately, just like it was against Hillary. And they're going to try to suppress the Black vote and the non-white vote because things are really hard right now economically. And Biden and his team can call off emergency covid, whatever they want, but it's not going to be enough given what is going on with this economy. And Russia is going to continue to disrupt grain. And what Russia is doing with disrupting grain shipments to other parts of the world is to set off/worsen the inflation crisis (the global inflation crisis) and worsen the unrest in all of these already powder keg parts of the world to spread Biden's foreign policy team thin, to worsen the crisis.

Andrea Chalupa (00:55:41):

We are up against something that the greatest generation had a see through. And what do we do if he gets in now that he knows where to purge first, right? I don't know how we survive that. I really don't. And what I mostly fear as well is that it gets so bad... And one wonderful thing that America has going for it is how decentralized we are. And okay, let's say we have two years of hell, right? The first two years. So Trump wins. So what's going to happen is it's going to be two years of the worst horror we've seen yet. It's awful. Americans. The moderate white America is going to be radicalized. We're going to have people doing things they never thought they could do before. You're going to have a lot more people forced to wake up. It's going to be like the resistance to Trump, but even greater.

Andrea Chalupa (00:56:30):

I really do believe that. We saw, for instance, with the Muslim ban, Americans rushing to the airports. Who in their right mind actually wants to go to an airport? You come to visit me, you take an Uber when you land, right? But Americans flooded the airports. We're going to see that constantly and more in those first two years. There's going to be a lot of mutual aid. It's going to be underground railroad time. It's going to be very intense. And we're going to get through it. And then you're going to have the midterms. You're going to have a really strong backlash against him in the midterms, even by

Republicans. Even by independents, because that's going to be their only way to check this guy. And I know that doesn't sound like consolation, but that's going to happen. So you'll have a Congress to fight back and check him, and then you're going to have the rest of us radicalized in the streets and so on.

Andrea Chalupa (00:57:18):

And then what happens when it's time for him to run again, when he's put all this stuff in place? Well, you're going to have a new generation of voters who keep coming because Gen Z's coming and they're pissed. And these are people that are running for office, who made a huge difference in the midterms, and more and more and more are of them are coming. So basically what we have going for us, if the worst should happen, just remember what America has going for us—and this is not a small thing, not all countries have this—we are decentralized. We are decentralized, and that matters. And the decentralization, like all these state powers, all of these state local communities, they're a check on the power. And they're mutual aid. They're underground railroad. They're there. What I worry about is frustration and demoralization on such a large scale that you have the Russians, the Kremlin, taking advantage of secession movements in California.

Andrea Chalupa (00:58:08):

I could see it starting with the idiots in California. I'm Californian. I can say that. I'm from Northern California. And so I could see some of the more very liberal states being like, "F this. We're out. We don't need this anymore. You put us into this. We're out." And you could see the Russian bots fanning the flames as they've done already in the past of secession movements. Secession movements have typically come from the Right, but I could see it coming from the Left. And there's no point in seceding. Even though we have these welfare states in Mitch McConnell's Kentucky that live off of our dole, right? There's no point in breaking away from them. I mean, look at the EU. We're stronger together. Why would you want to break away from these states? Would you want them to get into their own foreign treaties, their own nuclear treaties? Ask Ukraine how it likes being neighbors with Russia, you know? And so we have to stay united as a country. We cannot allow the Kremlin to get its dreams of us breaking apart as a union, and we have to just... It's underground railroad time for not just non-white Americans, but for all Americans should that happen. And we're going to have no choice but to get through it.

[outro theme, roll credits]

Andrea Chalupa (00:59:17):

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