

Seth: You may have heard of a Hanukkah menorah, but have you heard of a Christmas menorah? It's been several decades now, but during one fateful holiday season, there were both Hanukkah menorahs and Christmas menorahs as a united community joined together to fight hate.

Their light outshone the darkness by an immeasurable degree, creating their own holiday miracle.

We'll discover the power of that light as our journey into the Christmas spirit continues today. Karolyn and Chris, we have a number of guests joining us today. We welcome them all, and I'll hand it over to you for introductions.

Host: This is a very interesting show, and I am excited to talk to you lovely folks and learn more about the situation that happened in Billings, Montana. We have a lot to cover. I would like for each one of you to introduce yourselves and tell us how you are connected to the happenings in Billings. So we'll start with Janice.

Guest: I am the author of The Christmas Menorah's How a Town Fought Hate, which tells the story of what happened in Billings, Montana in 1993. So it's a wonderful, inspiring story, and it's based on the truth, and Patrice did a wonderful documentary about that, which I'm sure she'll tell you about.

Host: Okay, Margaret, can you tell us exactly what happened in Billings, Montana?

Guest: I was a statewide ecumenical director of an association of churches, and we had both Protestant and Roman Catholic, and we had gathered a few months before that time to celebrate Montana's first Martin Luther King Day. And at that event, there were leaflets left by the Ku Klux Klan targeting both Jewish and African American citizens in Billings and gay and lesbian people, and we were very disturbed by that. And we had begun working on it for some time, which brought me into the circle of Tammy and Brian Schnitzer, who were leaders in the Jewish community and had been kind of articulating what was happening with this kind of vandalism at that point, but hate speech directed towards Jewish families.

And so I had met them and come to pass a number of months, and Tammy and her family had the experience of having a rock come through the window of their little Isaac, who was a classmate of Teresa's at that time. And they decided to tell their story to the community, and it was published in the Billings Gazette. And I had heard of it more informally directly from them, but when I read the story in the paper and I realized that they had been advised to remove symbols of Hanukkah from their home, which had been decorated like anyone would during holiday season, it just really struck me that that is wrong, just profoundly wrong.

And that's kind of where this story begins, of the Christmas menorahs. And I'll stop there because I know you have many, many more questions to ask of all of us.

Host: Thank you very much. Margaret, you were a Montana State Senator. Is that right?

Guest: From 2017 through 2022? Eight years prior to that. So 12 years in the legislature, yeah.

Host: So Teresa and Marilyn Hanley, you're members of the Billings Montana, who after hearing what happened, got involved in the community outreach.

Guest: Hi, I'm Marilyn Hanley. My husband and I have five children. And when the incident happened in Billings, Teresa was six and her sister and brother, they're all close in ages.

And both Teresa and her brother were students at Rimrock School where Isaac was also. And Teresa, when I picked her up from kindergarten, was very upset and crying because Isaac had come to school and told about the incident. We had also read it in the paper.

But when Teresa came home from school, her brother Michael, who was in second grade, was home sick. And we have child craft encyclopedias that I paid for monthly because they were so expensive. And I said, we don't know anything about it.

Why don't you go to the encyclopedias? They immediately went down. They read about menorahs. They read about Jewish people. And they decided to draw a menorah for our window. And then they decided to make, draw menorahs for our neighborhood as a very close neighborhood and to draw menorahs for them too.

Host: Can someone volunteer to tell us exactly what happened in Billings, Montana?

Guest: I think each person has a different part of the story of what happened. Janice?

Guest: Well, I think one of the incidences, and Margaret, Margie is what we call her, can do that.

Guest: Thank you, Marilyn. We had been working since that Martin Luther King Day service. And I know there were people before.

It kind of touched us personally with that. But there was a small group of people who were being coordinated with the Ku Klux Klan. And they were trying to establish a foothold in our community.

And they were trying to do that by targeting and isolating groups who were very small minorities within the community. We have had a long and honored Jewish community in Billings, but it's pretty tiny out of a city of about 100,000. It was a very small group and wonderful community.

And they were very much at the top of the list of targets of this Ku Klux Klan really hate speech. And we had reached out to many of the churches and also to law enforcement. And we had a new police chief in Billings who had just come a few months earlier and had come from Portland where there had been a very terrible incident of what you would call racist skinheads at that time had attacked and killed an African student who was in Portland.

They had murdered him on the streets just because he was black and because they drove by in their van and saw him. So our police chief was really well, if you will, well aware of the nature of the threat when you see this kind of bullying and intimidation and hate speech.

And his thought was, it's important for the rest of the community to stand up and stand together.

And we had that same reaction within our faith communities. And then we had a Montana Human Rights Network, which was also coordinating with groups like the Southern Poverty Law Center to understand how communities can come together and unite so that when these things happen,

it's not just the folks who are being targeted who are kind of left looking around over their shoulders saying, does anyone see what's happening here? And so we mobilized and worked starting in probably January, February of that year.

And then as the situation escalated, the vandalism in the cemetery, hate speech on the home of a Native American woman with three children who lived in a very low income poverty situation. One of the interesting things was that the community had already begun learning tools to come together.

So what got Patrice hooked into this was that the Carpenters Union, when that Native American woman's home was spray painted with swastikas and hate speech, and this is like a month or two before what happened to Isaac, the Carpenters Union and the Painters Union came together and painted that house within, literally within 48 hours, they mobilized.

And that's because we were organizing and learning that you cannot let that kind of bullying and harassment just go without a response. You need to stand up to it. But still it was shocking to see what happened to the Schnitzer family with Isaac's bedroom was literally in the front of the house and that's where the window decorations were.

And to see that cinder block had literally landed on his floor right next to his bed, close to bedtime. And then another Jewish family, the Barnea's also had their home vandalized right around that time. And they had children at home as well when it happened.

And in both cases, parents were occupied with their work or with other things that the homes were attacked. And so when that happened, we as a community looked for ways

to try and stand with the Schnitzer family, the Barnea family, the entire Jewish community.

And it's amazing how it sprang up so spontaneously, how well received and well prepared the community was to stand together.

And I think in part that was because so many people had heard about it in their church or faith communities. So many people had heard about it through some of the events that had been put together earlier in the year. And law enforcement was united and was very strong in saying, this is not something that it's really safe to ignore this kind of hate speech. It will escalate. And when it did, the community was prepared to take some personal risks to try and make everyone more secure.

And I think to go along with what Margie said, and I'll let Theresa want to say something. What totally amazed me, we are a town of 80,000 at that time. We have many, many businesses.

Every business in Billings put up on their marquee, not in our town. And that still brings tears to my eyes and emotion of how we banded together.

What happened to myself and my family was more grassroots, right? Where I went to kindergarten. Isaac told me what happened. It really impacted me. I went to my mother, a safe place. I explained to her how upset I was.

And she used the tools in her toolbox to help situate my own emotional content for it and my own bandwidth. And then we used things at our disposal. So the ability to draw a picture.

We had a family meeting where we decided if we were going to put the menorahs up in our window or not. And we had a democratic vote for that. And we decided it was worth it to stand up, not only for Isaac, for the Jewish community, for the vulnerable in general, to stand up and say that's not correct and participate that way.

We were out volunteering at a soup kitchen. And my mother was telling me that we had to hurry because we had to go meet an author at our home. And I remember meeting Janice Cone at the house and just sitting down formally.

We were always expected as children to speak eloquently and well and behave. So I did the best of my ability at six years old to explain to her what was happening. All my other siblings are pretty much like me. All my sisters, they look and talk and act like me as well. And then we have my brother and Janice. You'll probably remember more of that than I do.

But I just remember we spoke, we talked. And then what I also really remember are the two book tours that I went on in I think second and fourth grade and speaking at events with my mother, with Janice. And Maggie.

And Maggie. And her family. And yeah.

Guest: Well, if I can jump in here for a moment to talk about how I actually found out about the Hanley family. First of all, I should explain, since I live in New Jersey and had never heard of Billings, Montana, how I happened to write the book. A number of incidents, hate speech, anti-Semitic speech in my community.

And because of their free speech, there was nothing that could be done. And this is a speaker that was going on different college campuses talking about virulently anti-Semitic tropes and various other things. And there was nothing that could be done.

And I was feeling really in despair about what could happen. And that was in early 1994. And then in February of 1994, there appeared in the New York Times an article about this extraordinary town that I had never heard of that had found a way to successfully come together and fight hate, which Patrice so beautifully shows in her documentary.

And I knew immediately that I wanted to write about it, but I was sure that there were other people that read the article that also had the same idea, people much more well-known than I was. I almost didn't call the Billings police station, which I wanted to call because the article was really about Wayne Inman.

It focused on Wayne Inman, who was the wonderful police chief at the time.

I finally decided to call to seize the moment. And somehow I got through. And Wayne Inman said it was a miracle that I had gotten through because the switch so many people had called was so inspired by this tiny little article.

And no one had been able to get through for hours, but for some reason, whether it was luck or fate or destiny, my call got through. He put me in touch with Tammy Schnitzer and I was invited down to go to Billings. So I interviewed all of the characters in my book.

And I also went to Isaac Schnitzer's school to talk to the children because I knew I wanted to do a book for children. I wanted to see how all the events of their town, seeing people stand up to hate, even when there was great risk, there was potential danger, which Margie can talk about. I wanted to see how it affected them to see their parents become upstanders, to see their teachers, their ministers become upstanders.

So I went to various classrooms and there I met Michael, who came up to me after I spoke to the class and listened to what they had to say. And he told me about his family, what his family had done. And he told me, he said, you know, we weren't sure that we were going to put a menorah in our window, a picture of a menorah in our window because it was pretty dangerous.

But then my mother said, you know, we never liked our living room windows much anyway. And so they put it up. And I thought, I have to meet this family.

And so I called them up and fell in love with them. The discussion in the book, the family discussion is absolutely true. Other parts of, there wasn't really a friendship between Isaac and Teresa, but they were classmates.

So I, you know, it was fictional to a certain extent, but everything that happened with the Schnitzers and with the Hanleys was true. That's how Teresa happened to be in my book. I knew I wanted to have one character that was Christian and Isaac, of course, who was Jewish.

That would really represent how kids themselves can be upstanders. But Patrice, her documentary really goes into the events in great depth and inspired a whole movement.

Host: Now that your book is being re-released after 30 years later, what message would you like to share with people and where can they get it?

Guest: I think the message is really so relevant today, and that's the importance of upstanders, the importance of not, of taking some action when one sees evil or unkindness. And it's interesting, there's a movie that recently came out, it's called One Life.

And it tells the true story of someone that has been called the British Schindler. He saved hundreds of Jewish children from the Nazis in Czechoslovakia. And one of the actresses in that movie was Helene Bonheim Carter. She's a British actress.

And it turned out that in her family, her grandfather was a Spanish diplomat who during World War II had saved thousands of Jews from the Nazis. And she spoke about the concept of active goodness as opposed to passive goodness. And she says it's a good thing for someone to be a good person.

But there are times that being a good person is not enough. There are times that we have to have active goodness for standing up when there's a wrong, standing up to hate, standing up to evil. And I hope that what this book will do, and that's why I wrote it, and I think the need is just as great 30 years later.

It's really a blueprint for how a town can come together of ordinary people. Nobody was a star and yet a whole town found a way to come together. And that included the children like Teresa.

You know, one of the things that I find fascinating about this story is that we have a lot of different factions of minorities, Native Americans and the Jewish and- Even the Black community. They were ostracized.

And the gay and lesbian community. So what I'm interested in is how were all these communities brought in together under the wings of the community and protected? How did that happen?

Margie remembered a story that was true. I love how this happened because it really shows how history can reverberate. How something that happened that Margie remembered in the recesses of her mind that happened in Denmark in 1943, almost exactly 50 years earlier, how it could reverberate and inspire an American town across the ocean. Margie, I would love it if you could tell the story.

Guest: I did not remember exactly where it had happened in. I knew it was in Europe, obviously during the occupation of Germany, of other European nations. And I had heard about the one place where people I thought very kind of inspired.

It was Denmark and it was a little bit apocryphal, but in essence true. And that is the King of Denmark let it be known that if the Jewish people of Denmark were gonna wear a Yellow Star of David by ruling of the Nazi occupiers, that he too would wear one. And the occupiers knew that the citizenry would join him in that.

And they gave up on that very scary idea. But your question about how did we bring together different groups who were united around this? And ironically, one of the ways that they were brought together is that so many of them were the target of this hate speech and hate flyers that would be posted around town.

So one week it could be the African-American Methodist Episcopal Church on the South side of Billings and Pastor Freeman and his congregation. Another week it could be the leaders in our gay and lesbian community who were beginning to have a voice and become public.

And in Montana in Billings in 1993, the voices of gay and lesbian people was very much still very polarized and controversial.

And at the same time that Billings was standing in solidarity with them as targets of Ku Klux Klan, the legislature was looking for ways in its own kind of legislative targeting to make them less safe and secure. So that was kind of interesting. And then the young woman who had her home vandalized was Native American.

And so it was clear that the words of Martin Niemöller, the Lutheran pastor in Germany, who said, first they came for the Jews and then they came for the unions and then they came for the communists. And then they came for me. That was very much an understanding that we were teaching ourselves lessons that led up to this.

And in part, it was, in fact, the fact of being so many different groups being targeted, but also history taught us that lesson as well.

Host: I wanted to ask you about the law enforcement during that episode. You did have support, did you not, in the community?

We had this chief of police who said, this is real, this is serious. It's not, ignore them and they'll go away. And he enlisted and had a lot of support from the sheriff and from the county attorney.

And after the people who had put up menorahs started to have their homes vandalized, they held a press conference and it was the chief of police, the sheriff, the county attorney, and a Lutheran pastor who, when he was right out of seminary, had then had done an internship in Germany, which was pretty, you know, just maybe five to 10 years following the second world war and the Holocaust. His statement at that press

conference was profoundly impactful, but he said everyone he talked to was just mortified by what had happened in Germany.

And they didn't necessarily claim responsibility, but they understood what a horrifying, horrible thing had happened in their community.

And to have that unified support from law enforcement was really validating and really helped our community, you know, just dig in, if you will, and stand up stronger.

And you have to remember, the Billings Gazette put that menorah in the Gazette and everyone cut it out and put it on their window.

I think you have a combination of the individuals, someone like myself, to the communities and the culturals within it and the other religious groups. And then you have that larger, broader audience of like the town as a whole, right? So you've got all these different ripple effects.

I just want to make it clear that what happened and why the New York Times wrote an article about it was the Jewish community had been told that it was, some people had advised them, meaning well, and Margie, if I'm wrong about this, correct me, they had been advised to take down their menorahs and their Christmas decoration and their Hanukkah decoration because it was too dangerous to display them.

And the Jewish community had refused, the schnitzers had refused particularly. And they said, how would you feel if you were told that it would be too dangerous for you to put up your Christmas tree or Christmas decorations? So as I understand it, Margie had read about that, how they were advised to do that in the Billings Gazette and she was outraged and she said, no, no, no, they shouldn't have to take theirs down.

We have to do some solidarity, even though it was a kind of a apocryphal story, remembering that the Danes were ordered to wear the Star of David. As I understand it, that gave Margie the idea, we should all show solidarity by putting up menorahs. And there's a really interesting story,

Guest: Margie, about how that happened in your church.

Guest: It was kind of a coincidence. It was a Saturday morning that the story was published in the Gazette. And I called up our pastor and he was on his way down to church because we were gonna have our big Christmas pageant that following day and they were getting all the costumes out, the wise men and the shepherds and all of that.

There was gonna be a lot of, big rehearsal down at the church, but I figured it was maybe something he wouldn't wanna deal with just because of, all the things that were happening with Advent and the Christmas pageant. And I said, pastor Torney, what would you think if we were to pass out pictures of menorahs during children's sermon and invite families to put them in their windows so that our friends who are Jewish can celebrate their Hanukkah.

And he was immediately supportive.

I was so grateful. He just didn't stop a beat. And he said, I will look when I get to church and try and see if we have a book with a nice big page size menorah that we could copy and print and hand out.

And he walked into the church and on his desk or on the desk in the front office where we had a really large Sunday school, there were about 200 pictures of the Sunday school lesson for the elementary, which was a menorah that you were gonna color and cut out because it was instructing our youth about the Jewish faith and what Hanukkah is all about.

And so they were supposed to color and then put in the candle, cut out the paper flame and put it in each night and put it up. So he literally walked into the church and there were 200 menorahs on the desk.

But that being the case, it was, I call it a cosmic wink, but it was very special. But he then received a call from a very good friend who is also a leader in the Jewish community who said, just be careful of whether you want children putting these in the windows.

Make sure families understand that there is risk involved.

We don't want anyone to be harmed. And so they were very mindful at the very outset as the Hanley family also discussed and thought about carefully that there was risk involved and that parents needed to be engaged in that discernment and decision. So it was quite,

but he then copied those and the First Baptist Church and the First United Methodist Church and the American Lutheran Church and all these other churches, First Christian Church were all getting, coming over or getting copies of that same menorah that very next day to give out in their churches.

And we were trying to have an impact and make a splash and get that going. And then the Billings Coalition for Human Rights printed them up by the thousands and a local dry cleaners company or laundry started putting them on their counters. And we could just tell people, go to the quick way.

I think it was one hour of a lay or whatever. You know, pick up a menorah that you can put in your window. And so, as Marilyn said, businesses were very much on board and it was impressive.

It was amazing. And even it got even bigger after some people's homes were further vandalized in churches and schools. So the Hanley family, their school was, I think, shot at.

Host: What can we all learn from what happened in Billings during that particular holiday season during these troubling times?

Guest: You know, the first thing that I would say that to me this story exemplifies is the true meaning of both Christmas and Hanukkah. Hanukkah is about religious freedom. And I think one of the major teachings of Christ is loving thy neighbor as thyself.

And those two things really converge with this story, which is why I think it resonated with so many people, so many people that had seen that tiny little, wasn't a very big article in the New York Times, why it resonated with them in an extraordinary way.

And I think that, again, to me, the important thing, Patrice Wood would know more about that because her, the Not In Our Town movement that her documentaries had caused to happen. But to me, the other thing, particularly for children, this really has to do with friendship, with being a good friend.

It really has to do with not standing by and when there is evil or injustice. And the children that I spoke to 30 years ago that had seen this happen, I think they got the message from their parents. Every child that I spoke to had a discussion in their family, just like the Hanleys, about whether to put up a menorah or not.

And to not stand by when evil happens, when injustice happens, to take a stand. And to me, the extraordinary thing about this was that this town, you know, put up thousands and thousands of pictures of menorahs when there were threats. Nobody knew how far these people would go.

The Catholic high school had a picture of a menorah and there was a shotgun that fired a shot and shattered the window. Luckily, nobody was hurt. No one knew how far these people would go. They were making terrible threats. They were smashing windows. They were cutting tires.

They were making threats. And yet they did it anyway because it was the right thing to do. And I think that displaying courage is something that children need to understand and see in this world where there's so much violence and there's so much hatred and incivility that there are people that have the courage to do the right thing despite the risks,

I think is very, very powerful and sends a message to them what they can do in the future.

I'll just finish by saying that there is a well-known study about the rescuers during the Holocaust. It's called the altruistic personality. And the authors were trying to figure out why some people would become rescuers and others would not.

What was it that made some people stand up to the Nazis despite the risks? A major thing that they discovered was the example of parents, of teachers, of other people around them. If they had seen the example of courage and civility and kindness from the adults around them, they were much more likely to act in the same way.

Host: Patrice O'Neill, you're a documentarian, a filmmaker of the Not In Our Town story. You're also the founder, CEO of the Not In Our Town movement across America. Can you tell us a little bit about what the town paper in Billings, the Billings Gazette, was instrumental in the town's response and why?

What does this tell us about how the press can be a moral compass for communities?

Guest: First of all, I think what drew us to the story as filmmakers was the role of ordinary people. That it was dispersed, that there was both the leadership, this incredible leadership, people like Margie, people like Wayne Inman, the police chief. This was a real breakthrough.

I think for those of us who were watching the rise of hate back in the 90s and seeing the threats across the country, to hear a police chief speak about community safety in this way and to speak about the idea that law enforcement alone could not keep us safe, this is something that a community would have to do. But then seeing the role of local business, we were drawn, of course, to the role of unions like the carpenters, the laborers, the painters union who became involved. And people like Teresa and her family, so many examples of the force of goodness that was required to create this extraordinary story.

And certainly the newspaper was part of that. And it wasn't, I don't think any of this was easy. And Margie can speak about this.

We hear it now. It's in this half hour film that we told and we're retelling the story in a short period of time. But this was hard. And Jana spoke about the courage that was required. There are a lot of people who became afraid and withdrew. I mean, that's just the reality.

We've heard those stories as well. We know that that happens. But when you have this growing sense and that's what I hope that we captured in our film and that was aired on PBS in 1995, when you have this growing force, people find strength in each other and they find that moral core, that center of goodness.

And I feel like there were so many forces for good that came together in this town. And it was sort of this flexing of civic muscle in a way that we have this power in our own community body. We just don't use it enough.

And Billings told the story of what it takes to really resist this kind of hate and a persistent threat. And I think it's why so many people were drawn to it when we aired the story in 1995 and why not just the Billings Gazette, but newspapers, small independent newspapers became partners in spreading the story of Billings and Not In Our Town and helping to support and promote the film.

So it was, when you talk about journalism and the role of journalists and journalism, we were obviously journalists wanting to cover the story.

The Billings Gazette absolutely played a pivotal role. It was so needed in the community. I think as the story grew and spread, there were newspapers around the country.

And at that time, there were many smaller independent newspapers that became active. And I think about Pittsburgh, where I'm very active now and working, particularly after the attack at the synagogue where 11 people were killed in 2018. I've been working on that story and it's the story of our new film, Repairing the World.

But back in the day, a couple of years after this happened, the Pittsburgh City Paper published something and it was picked up by the other local newspapers. And when the Klan came to Pittsburgh, there was a massive march and all of the newspapers became involved in that response.

So yes, absolutely. I think journalists play a role. Our film and our story played a role in spreading this and giving people not just the idea, but I think what films and stories do is they make it real. They see other people are doing it.

I can do it too. And I think the power of the Not In Our Town movement is that it started with Billings and this remarkable story of goodness and civic power. But then it spread.

And I think what's happened with Not In Our Town in these intervening 30 years is that it has been built upon so that it is not just about what happened in one town. It's what is happening in your town and how you can respond. And I think I'll just tell you very briefly how the movement really began.

Of course, the impetus is the story of Billings, but we shared the story. We thought we'd do 10 town hall meetings to see if people would engage. And there were over 100 cities that participated in this movement around the broadcast, which was the film was broadcast between Christmas and Hanukkah in 1995.

And it was the most meaningful holiday period of my life. I'll never, ever forget it. Really the movement began the following year when churches were burning across the South and there's a town that had done a whole series of events with Not In Our Town. They did something at the high school, they did something at Union Hall, they did something at City Hall.

And we got a call from the Community Relations of the Police Department of Bloomington, Illinois.

And she said, hello, we need 3000 Not In Our Town buttons. And we said, we're a film company and we don't really have any more buttons. And they said, you don't understand, there are black churches being burned across the South and we are gonna have a march from the courthouse to one of our black churches and we need our buttons.

Well, we didn't just send the buttons, we went with our cameras and that became part of Not In Our Town 2, one of the subsequent documentaries. And they built on that story.

For them, acting like Billings, saying Not In Our Town was protecting black churches and making sure that the black community felt safe to worship in their town.

And it spread and it spread and it developed over time. We gathered people and Margie was there 10 years after with a 10 year anniversary of the broadcast. And we came together and asked the 150 people who were gathered, what do you need from us?

What do you need next? And they said, immigrants are being targeted across our communities and we need a new story. And it's like, we couldn't invent it.

We didn't invent the story of Billings, that was created by the people of Billings, right? So this needs to emerge. We will go seek it out.

We will seek out those stories of communities doing positive things. If we were gonna do stories about hate crimes, we could be doing a story once every hour. That's how often it happens.

We do stories about people standing up. And so we looked and we looked and we looked and we finally found another story in Patchogue, New York. That's how we find our films.

We went to Pittsburgh in 2018, not because it was the deadliest anti-Semitic attack in US history, but because the entire community of Pittsburgh stood up. And that was the story we told. That was the story about this broad civic force, which I think is another iteration, an example of what we learned from Billings.

So it was the biggest gift of my life to go to Billings the first time and to know and learn from people like Margie over these years, who is a national treasure. She is a national treasure, what she knows and what she's understood and what she did. And Janice's book, to have this book at our disposal for children, to have it distilled in that way.

This is the first time I'm meeting Teresa and Marilyn and you've made me cry so many times. I think about how your story is needed now and how I can't wait to share it with the communities that we serve. Just this idea that you had a family meeting and a discussion about what it takes and what's needed for a family to stand together, right?

We need to be having those discussions with our families and in our schools. Today we found out, we run a program called United Against Hate Week and it is a sort of entry level. How do you really like, not everybody is Billings, Montana or Pittsburgh necessarily, or any of this, but you can start, right?

And it starts with saying in a city, I'm gonna pass out posters. I'm gonna do my United Against Hate posters. So we just got a call today from the federal government, the Office of Juvenile Justice Programs.

They wanna spread activities for young people to do across the country during United Against Hate Week. So it moves on, this story lives on and the idea that each of us can do something. And I just wanna say something about Keith Turney, who is in our film.

He was your pastor at the time, I think Margie and he's inspired me so much. There's a story in the film where he talks about his reflection about Billings and he says, there's an Iroquois term that speaks about the benevolent desires of the soul and that there is great goodness inside of us. And if we don't let it come out, we get sick.

And I think we're in this moment now where our goodness needs to come out, active goodness, as Helena Bonham Carter said, active goodness needs to come out. And so it's a call upon the Billings story and I think for all of us to revisit it. And I'm so grateful to you all for surfacing the story again at a time when it's most needed.

You know, there is a quote on the cover of the new edition of my book, of the Christmas Menorah, that comes from Patrice's documentary. And it's Gary Svee, who was one of the editors of the Billings Gazette in one of the interviews has a quote and he says, just a tiny candle we lit. It wasn't much, but it was something.

And you know, and I ask people when I talk, think what our country would be like if every town lit just a tiny candle. And then I ask people to think how they can light that tiny candle. Because I think that's very important. And I think that's how goodness spreads.

I don't think it's any coincidence that Not In Our Town became a movement when the World Wide Web came into being. And, you know, there were these forces that allowed this movement to spread. Part of it was that people could find the resources on the web.

And we now have a website called niot.org. And, you know, it's been fed and evolved over years as resources for schools, Not In Our School developed from Not In Our Town. And that's a really interesting story because there was a teacher in Maine who had his middle school students watch the film and they got so excited about it.

They wanted to go train the elementary students about the Billings story. And so he called it Not In Our School and Not In Our School was born. And we have a whole variety of resources and films.

There are about 100 short films on the site for young people about standing up, about this idea of being upstanders for Not In Our School. We worked with Department of Justice, Community Oriented Policing Service to create resources for law enforcement about how they could work with their communities to stop hate.

And there have been about seven major documentaries that we've done about communities. And we don't really separate the storytelling, the media from the community engagement because it's so much a part of what we do as the stories have evolved. And instead of it have happened, we followed that story of community action and response. So we're both, we continue to be a filmmaking company, but I guess you would say that NIOT serves the movement of communities everywhere that wanna stand together and stand for their neighbors.

That's what we do. And we're a small team based in different parts of the country that work together. And one of our key leaders now is Pardeep Kalika, whose father was killed at the Sikh Temple of Wisconsin in 2012.

And Pardeep and young members of the temple decided that the only way they could be safe is if they reached out to their community. We told that story in a film called Waking in Oak Creek that had over 3,500 screenings across the country. And being able to be a channel for deepening understanding about the Sikh community, but also showing the power of a community that was saying, we wanna understand who the Sikhs are and what can we do together.

And I remember I was particularly moved by the veterans that got involved and who honored the members of the temple, the mayor. I think that reminder of the Billings story is ever present almost all of the subsequent films that we've made. I hope people get to see the new one, Repairing the World, Stories from the Tree of Life.

If you get a chance to see it. We haven't screened it in Billings yet. Maybe we should do that.

Yes, we have a wonderful theater. We should show it in. That I did see that the latest documentary, Repairing the World.

And you have something in it that was resonated so much with me. Someone, one of the people that was being interviewed was saying that we now have a new definition of what a neighbor is. Do you remember that?

Can you talk a little bit about that? He was talking about how a neighbor in our community now is no longer someone that just lives next door to you. It's someone that we have an obligation.

To me, I think one of the things that's so important about the story of Billings and the documentaries that you do. And I'm curious what you think, Patrice, if you agree with me. I think when a community stands up together for something like this, it makes the community better.

It makes them stronger. And it just makes them more aware of that they are a community as opposed to a town or a city. With a lot of people living together, but not necessarily knowing each other or caring about each other or interacting or standing up for each other.

And Brian Schnitzer, who was Isaac Schnitzer's father, tells this story that I love. And he relates that after the incidents with the rock throwing, the menorahs, all the pictures of menorahs being displayed in town, he went to a coffee shop with the student rabbi that was in his synagogue with his son Isaac and with a couple of other congregants from the synagogue.

And they just ordered breakfast.

And after breakfast was done, the waitress came up to them and she said, don't worry about the bill. Someone has taken care of the check for you. And she said, because they want you to know that they're really grateful for what your people have done for our town.

That when Margie was speaking, when Tammy Schnitzer was speaking out, when, who else? It was Sarah, Sarah Anthony, who was a very big part of that. She wasn't in my book.

I wasn't able to put her in my book, but she was pivotal, I think. Wayne Inman, all these people were standing up and she said, thank you. We want to thank you for what you've done for our town.

And Brian said, you know, our student rabbi, the rabbi that was there, he said, you know, this is an incredible community. Where I come from, you might be harassed in the streets as a Jew. Here they buy you breakfast.

I thought it was just a wonderful example of how a town can be affected, the whole town for the better, by taking this down. Do you find that with the communities that you have worked with, Patrice?

I think when you ask people to step up, it's almost like, I think one of the things that Not In Our Town does, and I do want to say something about the title, because Marilyn referred to it. Sometimes, you know, in our work over these years, people say, well, we don't really want to use the name Not In Our Town because it's too negative. And it's like, well, we didn't know when we made the movie Not In Our Town that it was going to be a movement that we'd, you know, carry for 30 years.

But it came from a sporting goods store that had the sign up that said, no hate, no fear, no violence, Not In Our Town. And we thought, that's a great name for a movie, right? And so, but it stuck, right?

And we don't really do it, but we trademarked it because we didn't want people to use it for other purposes, right? You know, to use Not In My Neighborhood or whatever. But I do think part of the challenge of standing up and flexing your goodness is that there aren't ways to do it.

And I think the people of Billings, people like Margie and Sarah and others, the Schnitzer family created that scenario, as did, you know, your family, Marilyn, when you stepped out of your everyday life and said, we have to do something else. But there's a moment in the film where you see these painters who are members of the painters union who painted over Don Fast Horse's home that had horrible racist graffiti on it.

And one of the painters said, I always wanted to do something about racism, but I didn't know what to do.

And this gave us the opportunity to do something. And I think that's what we're trying to do with United Against Hate Week is, and with the Not In Our Town movement, is to give people the opportunity to stand up and to give it a frame. Because I do think people are ready and they do wanna do something to stand with their neighbors, but they're not given the opportunity.

And it could be as simple as, we're all gonna go down and we're gonna pass out some posters, you know, and we're gonna go stand on the street or I'm gonna be at the firehouse and we're gonna pass them out. And, or we're gonna have a screening. We're just gonna take this movie.

And by the way, our movies for United Against Hate Week are all free and people can use them, right? During United Against Hate Week. And we're just gonna show this movie at our church or at our Girl Scout meeting or at our, in our town hall, or we're gonna get people to have a conversation.

So I think what we're trying to do is provide a frame and a way for people to step up and to have the regular person who is not always, you know, a hero who can't be the kind of organizer that Margie McDonald is to do something, right? Give it a frame and give it, give people the opportunity to be, to be part of the larger force for good that can help change.

Host: How did you also decide you're not in our town movement become so active across the country, dealing not only with hate, but also coming up with solutions to make communities safer?

Guest: Well, I think that was the lesson of the film and the story is that the power of the story was in its solutions. It was that this isn't just, we're not gonna tell the story about these Klan guys or name them or try to, you know, care about who they are, right? It's like, that doesn't matter.

That is not the story. The story is about the rest of us and what we can do. We are the central characters in this, right?

You know, those of us who can do something about it. And I think, you know, I think one of my frustrations with media, particularly media that is driven by like, we gotta get the headlines out. We've got to draw viewers is that it focuses on the horrible nature of hate crimes and we're glad that they cover them.

But then the story goes away and where's the victim left and what is happening with them? And, you know, where's the community in the story? So our stories are focused on what we can do.

And there is incredible drama in that. There is incredible drama, much more dramatic, much more meaningful. And I think what people are yearning for really in the world is to see where am I in the story and what can I do?

Yeah, too often we become victims and we don't feel empowered. And this is very exciting to hear that there's, you know, some things are being done as a community, you know, collectively and to fight against hatred and hate crimes really.

Guest: I'd just like to follow up on something that Patrice said because I think it's so true. And Keith Torney, we all were impressed with. He was really a wonderful man.

And he said what we did in Billings and why it was so effective. And I'd love to know what Margie thinks about this is we gave them a way to show it. They could put up a picture of a menorah.

You know, that's something that they could do. So often people don't know what to do. As you were saying, Patrice, if they have a way, if they're shown a way, if there's something that is concrete that they can do.

Very often they will do that. But sometimes they just need to find a way to do it.

Patrice, when you talked about about the victims and we talk about them, the first trip that Janice set up for us to go to New Jersey and to talk at synagogues, our whole family, and to talk at Jewish schools when she first called and said, I'm putting this together.

And I said, no, you don't want us. You want the schnitzers.

It's their story. Our family of seven and all of our children were able to speak at all these Jewish schools talking about what happened and how important it was to be an upstander. The first time we went, that's what Janice wanted.

Not the victim, but the people who were the upstanders.

Love it. Great.

Host: Patrice, your work has encouraged people to act upon their better angels. That appeals to me. Upstanders and making a difference. What message would you like to share about where you go from here with your community outreach programs?

Guest: Well, I think, you know, the message that everyone here has is that each of us can be an upstander and it can start very simply. You can go on the website and pick up anything. There's directions like, how do you start a Not In Our Town group? How do you get more people involved? Can I do a screening in my town? Can I just put up a poster?

So you can find all of that on niot.org. For United Against Hate Week, it's a perfect example of, you know, it comes from the menorahs. And, you know, United Against Hate Week started in our communities here in Northern California when white supremacists were marching in the streets of our towns.

It was a very scary time. It was 2017, and there were hate groups marching through the towns. The mayor of Berkeley, California, and his chief of staff were standing on the steps of City Hall and saying, well, what is the average person going to want to do?

They're not going to want to be out there mixing it up with these guys. What are they going to do? And so they got an artist to create this poster.

It said, Berkeley stands united against hate. And then it spread all throughout the Bay Area. And we got 13 cities together and the following, about six months later and said, we see these posters.

And I think you were speaking about this, Marilyn. It's like, when you have Nazis marching in your street, it's like people were scared. They were really scared.

This is about the time that you had those attacks in Whitefish and there were the threats in Whitefish, Montana, of people threatening the Jewish community and threatening to have an armed march in the city of Whitefish. And so the city said, OK, what if we did a week of action against hate?

And this is coming from cities.

Which I think we really love is that, you know, it gives an opening, just like Wayne Inman, the police chief, gave an opening to the city and that meeting of the key leaders saying, yes, we can do this together. This is who we are.

We really appreciate the, you know, the posters and I can go all over California and see these posters standing up. I was just in one of the towns and saw it in a firehouse and it's just, it just makes you feel like you're part of something larger and that your community stands for something quite basic. We stand united against hate.

And so people can, if they want a poster for your town, just name your town, we'll send you a poster and you can just have it printed in your town. So you could start by doing that.

Host: So Patrice, what other documentaries have you produced and what impact have they had on the lives of those that you've been focusing on?

Guest: Well, in addition to Waking Oak Creek, which I spoke about, and I think I spoke a little bit about Light in the Darkness, the one that really emerged from the 10th anniversary event of the Not in Our Town movement. It's a story about the murder of an Ecuadorian immigrant in Patchogue, New York. And he was killed in an attack by high school students who had been roaming the streets of this town for months, looking for so-called Mexicans to beat up.

It's a really anti-immigrant atmosphere in not just in the town, but in the surrounding area and in the country. And it's a story about what happens next and how the people in this town said, how could we have let our kids think this was okay? And what do we do next?

So we spent a couple of years following that story. That's called Light in the Darkness. It's another one where you see both young people as the perpetrators, obviously one person stabbed Marcelo, but the others were involved in the attack.

And, but young people became, you know, leaders in standing up. I think that's a really important story, obviously repairing the world. We did another one called When Hate Happens Here.

It's five stories of Northern California of stories that happened in Northern California. All of them are about what people can do to stand up to hate. You can find them all on our website and on the United Against Hate Week site, you can find the film guide to show those films in your community.

Host: So Teresa, Marilyn and Margaret, many years later, how do you see the community now?

Guest: I finished high school in Australia, moved to Santiago, Chile. So since around 15, I haven't really been in Billings, Montana. Then I got my undergrad and then my master's and then I've been setting up my professional career, but actually just moved back to Montana a couple months ago.

So I'm not too sure how much the community's been fully impacted to be fully transparent. But I know that I carry like my own individual beliefs with me everywhere I go, every country I've lived in. We've been back in Billings for three years.

They continue that on. You hear about it every year. So I think people remember it.

And I think they're still involved in it.

I feel like it's now more than ever that we need to tell this story again, that it does come up, especially on the anniversaries, let's say 20 years, 25 years, and now we're 30 years out, 30 plus. But I worry a great deal about some of the things that Patrice has talked about.

I am reminded of the story that every generation has to learn anew these lessons and these stories.

And I do think the story is so profound, so powerful. The work that Janice and Patrice do in retelling the story and sharing the story and keeping it alive is so critically important because I truly believe that the vast majority of people in our community and your community and around this country are with us.

But that we tend to be, fall back into fear.

And that's what happened, I think, in Europe in the 30s. It became too scary to speak up. And that happened in a sort of a whiplash sort of a way overnight, for instance, in Germany in 1933.

And I worry very much about where we are in that spectrum. Even though this story happened, we have incredible, strong, courageous people. We have to find ways for us to express that courage and stand together again with those who are being targeted.

And it's so easy to paint these people, paint somebody as scary and dangerous. And, you know, I truly worry. And I think it's now more than ever, these stories have to be told.

Yeah, when we as a society start thinking that this is okay to dehumanize and to see others as the problem, they become targets, easy targets. And you would think that we've learned from history. And so it's so important to have films, books that share, books that it can have on us if we don't keep things in check.

So thank you very much for your part in this.

Host: So this is for anyone. What does this true story about Billings tell us about the power of goodness and courage and the importance of upstanders?

Guest: Being involved in something greater than ourselves, helping others, essentially helps ourselves most of all, because the studies show that people that are involved in helping others, in standing up for a cause, the children and adults, they are happier.

They are less stressed. They are less prone to depression.

They have higher self-esteem. And for kids, believe it or not, they have a higher academic performance. So really, goodness and courage when we engage in that, even though that can be hard and there are risks, it helps us more than anybody else, or at least as much as the people that we are helping.

Host: Upstanders, what are they?

Guest: For me, upstanders is someone that instead of being a bystander, when there's injustice or evil, stands up, takes action, doesn't accept it as the way of the world. But knows that there's something that they can do. Actually, that phrase, upstanders, was actually coined by Samantha Powers in her book, *The Problem from Hell*, which was about Rwanda.

I think she's the first one that used that rather than to be a bystander and stand by to be an upstander and take action.

I volunteered at the Holocaust Center for Humanity in Seattle for five years when we lived there. And I would give tours to students. And at the end of the tour, I would bring up upstander and I would say, you can be an upstander in the hallway by when you see something happening. You can be an upstander at home having a disagreement with a sibling. An upstander says, you take the courage to step forward. That was one of my interpretations.

Host: So during these troubling times, what do we all learn from what happened in Billings during that particular holiday season?

Guest: If you reach out to people who are being subjected to bullying and harassment and hate speech and intimidation, if you reach out to them, you will discover that there is real connectivity. There is real kinship and that you build strong communities that way. So it's very, as someone said, it's very life-giving.

And it is critical that people understand that if something like this happens, it's not the problem of the Jewish community, it's the problem of the whole community. So it's not like if this is happening to school librarians, for instance, it's not just about school librarians, it's about the whole community standing with them to come together. Or if it's happening to the little tiny parish of African-Americans who worship in Billings on the South side, it's happening to our whole community.

And once you start to connect the dots and help people get that, your community really warms up and people feel a lot better about each other. And it strengthens communities. So I would just say it's a real community builder and it's so important to tell that story and remind people we will, if we stick our neck out, more likely than not, we won't be alone.

We will find, give courage to other people. And if we do it together and hold hands and do it, three of us instead of just one of us, it gets easier the more there are. And people really begin to feel much better about their neighborhood and their community. And that's just my two cents. I think others can add to that.

Guest: Yeah, just in general, I think that like Montana itself, people probably have a very specific perception of us. But I think what's very valuable and cool about this story, thinking about it organically, is that we have diversity in Montana. We have other items.

And I'm so blessed to be from Montana and have my parents and be from this part of the world because we really don't take kindly to unkindness. So I think with the story in general, as the holiday season comes around, look at things in totality and with unity and not with such segregation.

And I really like what Patrice said about stories and making it more applicable to yourself, whether it's through documentary or Janice Cones, what Margie goes around and speaks about.

The more you talk about it, the more you normalize it, the more everyone can be cohesive.

Host: So what can people do in their communities to support each other and work together towards tolerance and acceptance?

Guest: Bring people in to talk. Start organizations or start... What I think is interesting to me about the Hanley family, there's a profile of the Hanley family in the new edition of the Christmas Menorah, is that standing up for others is a generational thing. It's gone through various generations of that family.

And I think that explains how Teresa became who she is. And Marilyn, and Marilyn, you know, I really love the story of your parents and what they did when the Japanese were interned in their camps. I think that the listeners of this podcast would really be interested in that.

We could talk a little about that.

So the internment center, which is called the Heart Mountain Relocation Center. This is in Wyoming. It's between Cody and Powell, Wyoming.

It's 41 miles from the community that I grew up in. I grew up in an all Mormon community. The Bighorn Basin in Wyoming is all Mormon.

But my parents felt that that was such a wrong thing to do to incarcerate them, that they would take... We didn't have much, but we had our own canned goods. We had our own beef.

And they would take clothes. They would take newspaper because the chinking in between the barracks they made, the wind. Why they put the internment centers in horrible places is beyond me.

You do not want to be in Wyoming in the winter or in the summer. And so they would take food. They would take clothing.

And they would go to the center itself and talk to the people. And Janice asked me, do you think anyone else in your community did that? And I can honestly tell you, no, no one did it. Only my parents.

So Marilyn witnessed this as a child and that affected the adult that she became. And then Teresa and her siblings witnessed the same things that you did.

Janice asked me, what was it like in that whole community? We're talking Pal, which was probably 2,500 people. And Cody, Wyoming, which was probably 3,200.

The Pal people, and they felt pride, not pride, but they were very helpful towards internment camp. They hired the Japanese people to come and work on the farms. They encouraged them to come and shop.

They could actually come and shop in Pal. And they were helpful and happy they came. Cody was only 10 miles away. Cody was a whole different atmosphere. They had signs up saying, no jabs allowed. So it's interesting the different communities, only miles apart, and how they reacted to the internment camp.

A variable could be economic influence in these different units or whatnot, but yeah. That's something. Well, thank you so much for joining us today. This has been so interesting.

And I think it's a positive outlook on a situation that we're going to have to continue to deal with. All of us. So at least we can concentrate on this positiveness that comes from the efforts of your community and the people that have joined in to help you fight bigotry and the things that are not pleasant to be in our lives.

So for more information about our story, go to Not In Our Town, niot.org, Dr. Cohn's book, The Christmas Menorahs on Amazon. That's

I think the important thing is that people, if they're interested, they can go on the website, which has a ton of information apart from the book. And that's But if they're interested in purchasing the book, they need to make sure that they go to the new edition, which has a lot of this additional material that I was talking about.

There is a link specifically for the new edition. I'm not exactly sure what it is. I'm afraid it will say new edition.

Host: Chris and I enjoyed speaking with you and certainly learning a lot of new information. Thank you so much for the focus that you have put on this amazing story. I think it needs to be told. I believe in the power of stories, especially true stories. So thank you for that.

Seth: Thank you to our esteemed guests, each and every one of you has inspired us as we learn about the power of a community coming together during the holidays, stopping hate, spreading love, and the lasting impact it has some 30 years later. Merry Christmas and Happy Hanukkah to everyone listening.

A great miracle happened there. That is one the Hebrew letters on each side of the Hanukkah dreidel stand for. A miracle once happened with a tiny flask of oil and a light stayed lit for eight days instead of the one day they anticipated.

Thousands of years later, another great miracle happened and the light of the human soul lit up the darkness, much more than anyone might have anticipated. You have tremendous light in you and together we can dispel so much darkness, not just right now,

but far into the future. Thanks for joining us today on Zuzu: All Grown Up.

Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, and a blessed best ever New Year to each and every one of you.