

Gaslit Nation Transcript

27 September 2023

“HyperNormalisation”

<https://www.patreon.com/posts/hypernormalisati-89888030>

Andrea Chalupa (00:00):

Meet Tim Gurner, one of Australia's richest people, saying the quiet part out loud.

[start audio clip]

Tim Gurner (00:06):

I think the problem that we've had is that we've... People decided that they didn't really want to work so much anymore through Covid, and that has had a massive issue on productivity. Tradies have definitely pulled back on productivity activity. They have been paid a lot to do not too much in the last few years, and we need to see that change. We need to see unemployment rise. Unemployment has to jump 40-50% in my view. We need to see pain in the economy. We need to remind people that they work for the employer, not the other way around. I mean, there's been a systematic change where employees feel the employer is extremely lucky to have them as opposed to the other way around. So it's a dynamic that has to change. We've got to kill that attitude and that has to come through hurting the economy, which is what the whole global... You know, the world is trying, the governments around the world are trying to increase unemployment to get that to some sort of normality, and we're seeing it. I think every employer now is seeing it. I mean, there's definitely massive layoffs going off. People might not be talking about it, but people are definitely laying people off and we're starting to see less arrogance in the employment market, and that has to continue because that will cascade across the cost balance.

[end audio clip]

[clip of September 2023 Gaslit Nation Song Feature plays - [The Cost of Living by PrisonPenPal](#)]

Andrea Chalupa (02:13):

Hey, it's Andrea Chalupa. I'm a journalist and filmmaker and the writer and producer of the journalistic thriller, *Mr. Jones*, about Stalin's genocide famine in Ukraine; the film the Kremlin doesn't want you to see—as well as its disinformation agents on the far left and the far right—so be sure to go see it. And this is *Gaslit Nation*, a show about corruption in America and rising autocracy worldwide. Now, for our opening clip: Gurner, one of Australia's richest men, has since apologized since the internet beat him over the head for that. But in terms of how the business elite, of course, see us, it's that old saying I heard back when I lived in Ukraine in 2005, that the oligarchs see the people as “the shit they grow their money in.” That's how they see us, no matter whether they're from Australia, Ukraine, Russia, or Kentucky or New York State or Florida. That's how they see us.

Andrea Chalupa (03:09):

And to fight back against that, go to the Gaslit Nation Action Guide on [gaslitnationpod.com](http://gaslitnationpod.com). That's [gaslitnationpod.com](http://gaslitnationpod.com). There's so many ways to contribute. We need you now. We're all so much more powerful than we think, and together we're even more powerful. That is what all these unions are

showing us right now. So we have to fight with linked arms and take these assholes on together. That is how we win: we chip away, chip away, chip away, and we make the work easier for the generations that come after us. The song you just heard at the top of the show was “The Cost of Living” by PrisonPenPal. The song was sent to us by frontman Jerry Mandarin, a Birmingham, UK-based musician self-described as “an unpopular political songwriter working on diary entries set to music and released into the digital universe as soon as they have served their purpose in restoring mental health at the time of need.”

Andrea Chalupa (04:05):

That is beautiful, Jerry. Thank you so much. Jerry provided this statement about the song: “I originally wrote “The Cost of Living” last year as a mechanism to cope with the extreme cruelty and policies of the UK government and its effects that I could see with my own eyes in the city I live in. It's truly heartbreaking to feel this powerless, knowing it doesn't and shouldn't be this way. The lyrics are personal, but I hope universal if you walk around with your eyes open. I definitely remember Andrea saying ‘walking wallets’ more than once on Gaslit Nation episodes, so I had to pay homage/steal and pair it with pedal poverty for alliterative purposes. Here in the UK, there is a mindset that no matter how bad it gets for you, you can always rest assured it's worse for someone else; someone somewhere else is suffering. This lack of compassion is a sickness that drives inequality and manifests itself with people turning on each other rather than looking up and holding power to account.”

Andrea Chalupa (05:10):

“I'm really pleased that you like the song and feel honored to have it on one of my favorite podcasts. I don't perform in clubs or bars, although I might give it a go after receiving the self-esteem boost from Gaslit Nation.” Absolutely give it a go! Your work's fantastic. Everyone, we'll post a link to “The Cost of Living” on our social media pages and in the show notes for this episode on our Patreon page. You can find more of PrisonPenPal's music on SoundCloud. Thank you so much for sharing your work with us, Jerry. Now, I have a confession to make. Understand I have two little babies, one is home sick, so my mind is reeling. I have a terminally ill loved one in my immediate family, so I'm in therapy. I'm reading all the self-help books I can get my hands on right now. I am struggling right now, but I'm doing this show because it's my creative outlet and I love it. This community is real and this community has sustained nights of horror over the years.

Andrea Chalupa (06:00):

I've needed you. We've needed each other. But Jerry, I forgot we had a song feature this month. I almost ran the episode this month without it, and I quickly went back to include your song in this episode because we made a promise to you we would do that. And amazingly, I recorded this episode already—the bulk of it that you'll hear in the introduction audio, the introduction news roundup. I recorded the bulk of that before I really read your song statement. And what I recorded and what you sent to us is completely aligned. We were meant to be, especially for this episode. You're completely right on-theme for what's going to be discussed in this opening news roundup. Thank you so much for your music. I hope to see you perform one day. Alright, so this week's show we're going to do a quick opening on some highlights in the news that we shall pay attention to and stay vigilant of.

Andrea Chalupa (06:47):

And then the rest of the episode will be an excerpt of the August 5th live taping of Gaslit Nation at Caveat in New York City with the wonderful *Risk* storytelling podcast by comedian Kevin Allison of the iconic comedy group, The State, which launched the comedic careers of the geniuses Michael Showalter, Michael Ian Black, David Wayne, and so many more. Thank you to everyone who came out to that on an afternoon in the middle of summer to the Lower East Side with its rotting cabbage smell in the heat. We came together. I was extremely amazed that it wasn't just me on a stage or the microphone. There was

nearly a full house. It was hard to get a seat if you came late. And it was a thrill to meet you guys and sign *Mr. Jones* posters and sign books and things. And a big hug to all of you who came out.

Andrea Chalupa (07:39):

That was really a thrilling, soul-hugging experience. Thank you, thank you. And we hope to do more events like that as we get closer to, yet again, another critical, most important election in our lives. We're all in this together. We're going to get through it together and ultimately we are absolutely going to win. So have confidence in yourself, have confidence in each other. We are going to win. If you're scared, if you're having a hard time sleeping at night, you are not alone. And a lot of people are channeling that rage, channeling that fear into building political power because there is no get rich quick scheme. There is no pill we can take. It is only rolling up our sleeves, doing the smart organizing work of bringing scientifically-driven, empathetic people to power. That is how we flush out the system and bring in new talent to protect us, to safeguard our democracy, on levels from dogcatcher all the way up to who's running your state at all levels.

Andrea Chalupa (08:32):

So it's building that state power. And you can join me and my friends. We have our own little group working on that. It's called State Fair. Look out for the link in the show notes on how you can sign up with us at State Fair. I'm doing that damn work with so many brilliant activists across the country, including Geri from *Succession*, J. Smith-Cameron; an extraordinary talent, extraordinary actor, and she's sending texts and emails at all hours of the night fighting for our democracy through our group, State Fair. So come join us at that. Look for the link in the show notes for this episode, okay? None of us are going to get through this alone. We all need each other more than ever now. We're going to fight like hell for each other. That is how we win and we are going to win. Now, I want to do a quick news look, going into dark places together, shining our light.

Andrea Chalupa (09:18):

Let's start off with Biden joining the picket line. Let's be very clear about what's happening: only President Biden is joining the UAW picket line. Trump will not be there. Trump was not wanted. Trump was not invited to that cookout, okay? They were very clear that they do not want him there. So only Biden—only Biden—will be at the UAW picket line. He was invited, he will be attending and that is wonderful news. Trump, as a consolation prize for his ego, will be holding a Nazi rally nearby. But let's be clear because there is misinformation/disinformation out there: only Biden was invited and will be intending the UAW picket line. So next up, the next Republican debate is set for Wednesday. Keep your eye on Nikki Haley if you can stomach watching it or reading about it. Haley is Jared and Ivanka's chance for a political comeback.

Andrea Chalupa (10:06):

That's who the Kushners are reportedly backing in this race. Look out also for the show notes in this week's episode on how Wall Street is rallying around the Republican candidates because dictatorships, from Hitler to Pinochet, come to power with the help of the business elite. [As Cory Doctorow pointed out in our recent interview with him](#), Biden appointed Lina Khan, an Elizabeth Warren protege, as Chairwoman of the Federal Trade Commission, and she is a well-known critic of Big Tech who is actually working to apply our nation's antitrust laws. And Wall Street and Silicon Valley hate her. And yes, as our opening clip showed, they will absolutely sell us out for tax dodging, to pay less in taxes, to hoard their wealth, to bask in their greed, even if it means ushering in an age of fascism, which will produce and further amassed death, which will be a black hole that will be nearly impossible to crawl out of for future generations to come.

Andrea Chalupa (11:12):

Yes, they will do that and they have done that before. And so Biden does have good people in positions of power. There is a group of reformers in his administration that are fighting the good fight, okay? They do exist. On top of this, I want to point out some breaking news today, September, 26th from the *New York Times*: "US accuses Amazon of illegally protecting monopoly in online retail." The Federal Trade Commission—again, run by Lina Khan, the Elizabeth Warren protege—the Federal Trade Commission and 17 states filed a lawsuit against Amazon for "illegal conduct in its online store and services to merchants which stifled competition." That is big. So all of you that fought for Warren, understand what I've always said on the show: so-called failed movements just fertilize the ground for future successful movements. So all of us that made phone calls for Elizabeth Warren, that fought our hearts out for her, this is part of our legacy.

Andrea Chalupa (12:15):

Warren is somebody that was a mentor of Lina Khan and now Lina Khan is taking on Amazon and she's taking on Big Tech. And Wall Street hates her. And the disinformation echo chamber of the Republican party hates her. And that's why they—along with the far right and the far left—are going to try to convince you that Biden and Trump are the same and elections don't matter. Do not listen to them. Do not listen to anyone out there who's trying to Edward Snowden us. Do you remember, in the days before the 26th election from his perch in Moscow, Edward Snowden sent that infamous tweet saying, "The election of 2016 is basically the same choice." Ask a woman who has to suffer a painful miscarriage, a painful dead birth inside of her because her state has banned reproductive healthcare, and how that excruciating pain could put her own life at risk and orphan her children.

Andrea Chalupa (13:09):

So don't listen to anyone who's trying to Edward Snowden you now. Yes, we know. We know very well that there's a Democratic establishment and they suck, but there is a movement of reformers driven from the grassroots up that is fighting like hell, so pay attention to those folks, know their names and join us in doing our own work and do not abandon them, because they exist. And no, both parties are not the same. Who would you rather negotiate with? Some asshole centrist Democrat or full-on, full-blown Kremlin disinformation agent, mobbed up with the Kremlin dark money, dumb as fuck Republican? Who would you rather negotiate with? I'd rather negotiate with the Democratic Party establishment and work arm in arm with the reformers in the party, okay? That's the two fundamentally different choices on the ballot going into 2024. And anyone who's trying to sell you otherwise, they're manipulating you.

Andrea Chalupa (13:57):

They've got their own financial incentive of carving out that niche for them to sell their books, to make a name for themselves, to get notoriety, to create drama because they're miserable inside. Whatever their motivation will be, they're lying to you. Okay? So don't trust that Edward Snowden nonsense going into 2024. Meanwhile, according to a morning consult poll, 9% of voters see the Democratic Party as "more ideologically extreme" than the Republican Party, which famously tried to violently overthrow our democracy on January 6th and right now is holding our government hostage with a shutdown over funding for Ukraine, which is ground zero in the global fight of democracy against fascism. Why is that? Because the Left and democracy generally is losing the information war. We are now entering what I think we could call a phase of hypernormalization. And it is very important that people understand this. Hypernormalization. In 2016 we had the shock and awe of the Kremlin helping Trump come to power.

Andrea Chalupa (15:07):

People woke up to the fact that, oh, actually Ukraine does matter to the average voter in America because that has been the laboratory of the Kremlin's aggression and the same bag of tricks they used to try to entrench and further Kremlin power and corruption in Ukraine, they used on us: the American

voter who famously doesn't care about foreign policies in big elections. It's all about those pocketbook issues! And in creeps this extremely well-funded and extremely wide reaching Kremlin attack on our democracy that brought Ivanka, Jared and Trump and Bannon, the white supremacist leader, into the White House. And we've all lived with that trauma and that mass death ever since then. And so that was the shock in a moment. It woke up a lot of people. It radicalized a lot of people. A lot of people that never saw themselves as congressional material suddenly started running for office.

Andrea Chalupa (16:01):

2018 was that extraordinary turning point in our nation's history where people fought back in a meaningful way and that blue wave of 2018 continues to this day. People are still entering politics, people are still becoming leading organizers. It changed people's lives. And unfortunately it should have never gotten to that point, but here we are. As that time went on, we raged against normalization, demanding impeachment, even when Pelosi was shrugging it off. We had that episode called ['Impeach Normalization.'](#) But now, with hypernormalisation, the Kremlin-aligned party is increasing its influence and the media isn't covering it. The mainstream media continues to get Trump on their channels, normalize Trump, call him "Mr. President," and the mainstream media isn't explaining to its listeners how *deeply critical* this moment is where Russia has furthered its influence to such a point that no one even bothers to talk about it anymore. It's hypernormalisation now.

Andrea Chalupa (17:07):

What does that mean? What is hypernormalisation? Well, that term was coined by a Russian-born anthropologist named Alexei Yurchak, who is at the University of California, Berkeley. He coined it in his book, *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More*, which looks at the Soviet generation as it was crumbling to an inevitable collapse. And it described how people continued on as normal even though the Soviet system was collapsing all around them because no one could imagine an alternative. And that behavior of going through the motions created this self-fulfilling prophecy. That's where I feel we are now in America, where the Russian-captured party can threaten to shut down our entire government, which has real-world implications on countless government employees' paying their bills, putting food on the table, to national security issues—urgent national security issues—and no one's really talking about that Kremlin connection and how successful the Kremlin has been in entrenching their influence.

Andrea Chalupa (18:16):

Kevin McCarthy is part of that operation. He's not held captured by the Matt Gaetz and the Large Marges (the QAnon Lady of Georgia). He is an extension of them. That's why he didn't make a deal with the devil: he is the devil. He's part of that. Zelensky, for instance, in his North American tour wanted to address Congress because with this shutdown, what are they holding us hostage over? Funding for Ukraine. What are they beating on about all the time on Fox News and the whole rightwing echo chamber? How Ukraine is all one big grift and it's all a corruption racket, and "Why are we giving money to Ukraine when Joe in Wisconsin is hurting?" and so on. The reality is there's enough to go around and there's going to be even more to go around if the corporate class, the business elite that are backing especially the Republican Party fucking pay their taxes.

Andrea Chalupa (19:08):

And not only that, but pay that wealth tax instead of funneling all their dark money operations and trying to chip away at our democracy so they'll pay even less tax. Okay? So there's plenty of money to go around. Victims of fascism should not be pitted against each other right now, but that is what the disinformation operation on the far right is doing very successfully and it's now hijacked our government with the shutdown in Congress. And on the far left it's happening too. I promise you, it's happening on the far left. So I was listening to a left progressive radio channel. I was listening to *Democracy Now*,

which practices journalism. Sure, they've had some guests that have spouted nonsense, but then Tim Snyder, the great historian, will go on and provide facts and much-needed historical context. Okay? *Democracy Now* practices journalism. So you listen to a great program like *Democracy Now* and then shortly after it, you listen to that guy with daddy issues, Max Blumenthal (Sidney Blumenthal's kid) who is just spouting all this disinformation nonsense.

Andrea Chalupa (20:07):

You're listening to it and it's just... Anybody who would hear it would just think that Ukraine is just one giant Ponzi scheme and not an actual genocide where children are being brutally raped in front of their parents and where people are being full-on kidnapped and forced into Russia and never seen again. It is a genocide by every definition of genocide and it's something that has larger implications for not just Ukraine and the region but the world if Russia is successful there. But you listen to this far-left radio and it's completely manipulative. It's completely one-sided. Yes, criticize Ukraine where it comes to corruption. I have done that to the face of officials, government officials of some of Ukraine's largest donors. I have called out corruption, I have put pressure, I've even screamed, okay? So it's not about having some perfect victim, right? No victim of any crime will ever be perfect.

Andrea Chalupa (21:02):

It's about our shared humanity and fighting for our shared humanity. And anybody who just manipulates you by focusing and inventing and hyperventilating over all the extremes, cherry picking and twisting the facts and leaving out all important context, that is a crime of dehumanization, right? It's dividing victims against each other when we should be all united in this shared fight. So I'm telling you right now, the disinformation war against the frontline of global democracy is winning. Elon Musk succeeded in this. He further accelerated this. You're going to see some so-called resistance accounts that used to be really reliable in terms of their own moral standing, that used to be early on ringing the alarm of the authoritarian threat, and now they can't even bring themselves to explain to their massive following why LGBTQ rights matter because they know it's not going to work well with Elon Musk's algorithm.

Andrea Chalupa (22:01):

They can't even bring themselves to explain why the fight in Ukraine matters to you because they don't want to end up on the wrong side of Elon Musk's algorithm. So the way you tell who to trust right now in this moment that we're entering into of Hypernormalisation is go to your favorite so-called resistance account, a person that has helped you get through the horrors of the Trump years, go to their account and see how much they are centering the shared fight for all of us when it comes to Ukraine and LGBTQ rights and just the most vulnerable communities generally. Go to those accounts, whether they're even talking about those issues. If they are not, they care more about making money in this moment than they care about our democracy and fighting for the most vulnerable, and they're succumbing to this moment of hypernormalisation—whether they realize it or not.

Andrea Chalupa (22:54):

That's why they call it hypernormalisation. It's insidious. It seeps inside of you. And a lot of people make morally compromised decisions in order to just take care of themselves. That's a hard truth in reality that we're facing right now where, when things feel very dire, people just look out for number one and fuck the vulnerable. "Fuck the communities out there. I'm looking out for myself. I don't have time for you." It's going to be demoralizing at first when you realize this, but we all have to have open and clear eyes now for a reason. If we're going to get through—it's going to be a hellfire year for all of us—and actually protect our democracy. We have to know now who to trust, who is a real authoritarian expert and who's not, because the real authoritarian experts right now are focusing on the number one frontline for the

global fight between democracy and fascism, which is human rights in Ukraine and ending that genocide now, and the icky sticky issue that a lot on the left don't even want to touch, which is trans rights.

Andrea Chalupa (23:48):

And we're going to cover this issue as we go on because a lot of people have to be called out there, okay? Liberation for anyone out there is liberation for all of us giving is receiving. So I don't care if some of these issues may make people uncomfortable. If it makes you uncomfortable, you may have to accept the fact that the disinformation war being waged by the right may be getting to you because it's everywhere. They have the more powerful well-funded echo chambers. And that is why we need to force these conversations to fight back with the scrappy little independent media that we have. And that's what we're going to do heading into 2024. Now, I want to finally wrap up this news summary with the wonderful John Fetterman. And thank you to the *Gaslit Nation* community that came together. We made 15,000 phone calls to Pennsylvania voters to get Fetterman elected and now he's fighting to feed all children across America, to wipe out the vicious vileness of lunch money debt and get all kids fed out there. Biden and the progressives tried to pass real structural change with universal pre-K and their big, big Build Back Better plan—which they could still fight for and we could all fight for in our states where we live.

Andrea Chalupa (25:01):

Of course Manchin and Sinema, who are mobbed up with the genocidal corporate class, killed that. But that should be a promise and that should be a big leading part of the conversation by Biden's team heading into 2024 because child poverty rates are spiking now. And John Fetterman has a solution for that. He's pushing for feeding children across America and wiping out lunch money debt. That is just one important thing that we need to build this social safety net that we need in America because it's just a human right: having food on the table. When a child is hungry, how can they learn? How can they focus on school? How can they sleep? Are we the fucking Soviet Union (if we can't feed our children)? No. So thank God for Fetterman and thank God for all of you *Gaslit Nation* listeners who showed up and made phone calls for him with me.

Andrea Chalupa (25:48):

And the reason I'm talking about Fetterman a lot is because he's the best and also he's showing Democrats how it's done. They're going after him. The Republicans and Republican mascot Joe Manchin are going after Fetterman for how he dresses in Congress, right? All these corporate coal lobbyists, how they dress, I don't give a fuck about how they dress, okay? They're killing us. They're stabbing us in the face. I don't care if you're wearing a goddamn prom dress while doing that, Fetterman could wear a freaking Budweiser foam hat as long as he shows up and he fights for my children and fights for democracy. I love him. And Fetterman is pushing back by writing on Twitter, "If those jagoffs in the house stop trying to shut down our government and fully support Ukraine, then I'll save democracy by wearing a suit on the Senate floor next week." That's how you do it. That is what you say. That is what we need from Democrats in all offices across this land. Thank you, John Fetterman.

[Baby Soft advertisement]

[Cozy Earth advertisement].

And now, without further ado, here's an excerpt of our August 5th live taping with the *Risk* storytelling podcast.

[audience cheers]

Andrea Chalupa:

Hello?

Kevin Allison (28:14):

Hello, hello, hello! Oh my gosh, welcome. This is so exciting. This is so different for both of us.

Andrea Chalupa (28:20):

Yes, I never leave the house.

Kevin Allison:

[laughs]

Andrea Chalupa:

I want to thank you all for being here on a Saturday afternoon in the middle of August. I'm so humbled and honored. I want to cry and hug you all. I am a toucher. I'm going to keep my hands to myself with my affection, but just know that I love you and I'm so tremendously grateful that you're here. You have no idea. You have no idea.

[crowd cheers]

Kevin Allison (28:46):

Oh my gosh. I know! August. So many people just check out of New York City, period in August.

Andrea Chalupa (28:55):

But we're here and we're going to fight and we're going to win, and we're going to do amazing big things together. That's the plan.

Kevin Allison (29:00):

We are.

Andrea Chalupa:

And this is the kickoff event.

Kevin Allison:

We're the wave.

Andrea Chalupa (29:02):

Yes.

Kevin Allison (29:04):

We're saving this place, God dammit! You know, it's really funny. We were talking about how our two podcasts—*Risk* and *Gaslit Nation*—seem initially like a bit of an odd couple, but in fact, we are really great sister podcasts in so many ways. I was telling Andrea that. So, *Risk* is the show where people tell true stories they never thought they'd dare to share in public. And the stories are very uncensored. Some are hilarious, some are terrifying, some are kinky. They're just all over the spectrum. But around about 2016, for some reason I felt the need to start being frank with the audience about being concerned about our democracy. And I started getting emails on a regular basis from people saying, "This is uncomfortable. Why are you talking about politics now on the show? Your show is supposed to be about people's lives." And that just made me double down, actually.

Andrea Chalupa (30:13):

It was all white people saying that.

Kevin Allison (30:14):

Yeah. Oh my gosh. Yeah. Yeah. We're going to play some clips from *Risk* later to show why I feel so much that the political is personal and the personal is political. But the weird thing is also around about that time, I started listening to *Gaslit Nation* and was just riveted by this podcast and had no recollection that... You know that thing that happens when you're on Twitter or whatever and think, "Wait, how do I know this person?" I heard Andrea on *Gaslit Nation* and thought, "Oh, that's someone I know from Twitter." But that is not the case. How did we actually meet?

Andrea Chalupa (30:59):

I took Kevin's very first storytelling class and then quit my corporate media job, completely downgraded my lifestyle. I moved with my husband right around the corner. We're on Clinton. We moved to the next street over on Attorney in one box of an apartment where we fit the couch. And I was going to make a big go for it to finally make *Mr. Jones*. And your class was one that helped me get in front of a room of people and just say, "Here I am, and I have a story to tell, and I'm going to tell it. I don't care what you think of me." And it was your class that helped me get my voice. I didn't make much money after taking your class. [laughs] I had to hustle a lot of jobs and beg people for jobs for a very long time. And I saw a lot of friends in media just skyrocket past me. And my Ukrainian immigrant parents were deeply ashamed for a stretch. It was quite tough to deal with. And I'll give a talk about the making of *Mr. Jones* and my dad will be there and be like, "Oh, it's true." He'll say that. But yeah, your class was really life-changing.

Kevin Allison (32:00):

Oh my gosh, this is incredible.

Andrea Chalupa:

And now here we are.

Kevin Allison:

It was life-changing for me too because I started *Risk* not really knowing how to tell stories. I have this philosophy that one should learn by doing and then as quickly as possible learn by teaching. So I started

*Risk* and then a couple months later I was like, “Okay, I got this well enough, now let's start teaching it,” which really helped me learn even more about storytelling. And I'm so honored to realize you were in my very, very first class and here we are now!.

Andrea Chalupa (32:35):

Fighting fascists, leading the resistance. [laughs]

Kevin Allison (32:41):

[laughs] But, you know, the main reason we're here is because of this incredible new book, *Dictatorship. It's Easier Than You Think!* Oh my gosh, I am so excited about this. Is the book out yet?

Andrea Chalupa (32:56):

It's out. It came out in June. It was a bestseller before it even launched. It was announced and it became an instant bestseller.

Kevin Allison:

Amazing.

Andrea Chalupa:

And that's because of *Gaslit Nation*. That's because of the community. There was no marketing done. It was just us on the show going, “It's coming. It's coming.” And we're really thrilled. It was something that we wrote during the hellfire year of 2020, and I cannot believe we got through it. And to give back, one point I want to make about the book, to sort of share the secrets of storytelling that I learned from you, I learned from life: when people approach me that they want to write a screenplay, they want to write a novel, they start with like, “Well, what's your subject matter?” And sometimes people will say, “Well, I want to write... I want to get into the head of a psychopath.”

Andrea Chalupa (33:39):

I'm like, “Do you really?” Because the number one rule when you write a book like this or any project—and again, because, you know, storytelling podcast, storytelling teacher, and then the student is becoming the teacher—but the number one rule is you want to choose a subject matter that you want to spend time with. So all the years when I was in the romantic wasteland in New York City before I met my husband, Gareth Jones was my imaginary boyfriend. He was nerdy, he was super hot, he was heroic. He had this extraordinarily strong moral streak that I wanted to cling to to make my own way through life. And so he was hanging out with me in my apartment in the far flung corners of Bushwick. It was Gareth and I against the world. And so with making this book. *Dictatorship: It's Easier Than You Think!*, who would I want to hang out with during the hellfire of 2020 when Trump is so obviously trying to do more than that 45-page indictment laid out, which is to overthrow our democracy in real time?

Andrea Chalupa (34:37):

We all lived through that. We all watched it happening. And so I wanted to hang out with Cary Grant. I love Cary Grant. I watch *Arsenic and Old Lace* every Halloween. It takes place in Brooklyn. And so I wanted to cozy up with my boyfriend, Cary Grant. So Cary Grant is the wiley narrator who takes you on all the adventures of becoming and trying to stay a dictator. Well, who else do I really love and admire? And that's Stephen Colbert. And remember when he had *The Colbert Report*, which is where he played that guy that got... One of the sexual harassers at Fox News. Bill O'Reilly.

Kevin Allison (35:10):

Bill O'Reilly, right.

Andrea Chalupa (35:11):

It was a funnier show than what he's doing now. And so I wanted to hang out with *The Colbert Report*, so that's what this book is. It's Cary Grant meets *The Colbert Report*.

Kevin Allison:

[laughs]

Andrea Chalupa:

And so that's my storytelling 101: write stories featuring people that you actually want to spend time with. That's what you're ultimately going to be doing as a storyteller.

Kevin Allison (35:31):

Oh my God, that backstory is hilarious and amazing because one of the things that so impressed me about the book is that as crucial as the information in it is, it's very entertaining. It's very compelling and has a spirit of adventure and fun about it, even though it's about such, oh my God.

Andrea Chalupa (35:55):

Ron DeSantis [laughs].

Kevin Allison (35:56):

Yeah [laughs]. I remember when I was in college, I went to Shakespeare & Company across the street from my school, the Tisch School of the Arts, and found a graphic novel about Carl Jung and another one about Noam Chomsky's theory of how the media works. And those books changed my life because graphic novels can be such an entertaining way to take in huge ideas, and that's exactly what this reminded me of. Reading this book, afterwards, I was like, "Okay, I'm kind of changed by this book."

Andrea Chalupa (36:38):

Thank you so much. Well, we don't delve into the genocide denial that Chomsky's now wading into when it comes to Ukraine. We actually fact check the Chomsky's out there with this book.

Kevin Allison (36:49):

Yeah, and it's so chalk full of fascinating stories. One of the things... The scales fell from my eyes with the story about George Bernard Shaw, who was another person who was kind of a hero of mine when I was a kid because I was a fan of *My Fair Lady*, which is based on his play, *Pygmalion*. Was that you? Was that you or Sarah that was kind of a fan of that musical?

Andrea Chalupa (37:13):

Oh, obviously me. I did the whimsical stuff. I'm like the theater nerd in this couple.

Kevin Allison (37:19):

[laughs] Yeah. It was such a shock to me to learn that he was not only this great playwright and passionate socialist, but also a huge fan of Stalin! And it was really interesting because that was one of the ways you guys start to unpack how people from all strata of society can be “useful idiots”, with the way that he was out there making the case for Stalin in the press as just being this playwright. So, very interesting.

Andrea Chalupa (37:54):

Oh, yeah. No, the whole thing is a time capsule of how we got here. We take names, like Jeff Zucker has his own section for what he did at CNN in helping bring Trump to power. It's really going after all the enablers. And what was really interesting is when we did the final fact check, that's when Putin unleashed his total war in Ukraine. And you saw all of this viral disinformation going around, like JJ Mearsheimer, a political scientist at the University of Chicago. I had *Gaslit Nation* listeners sending me his viral clip saying how it's NATO's fault. This horrific genocide in Ukraine by Russia is obviously NATO's fault, according to Mearsheimer, who it turns out is snorting lines of Koch dark money—he's connected to the Koch political network—when that was going around, and *Gaslit Nation* listeners were bringing me that clip saying, “What do you think of Mearsheimer”?

Andrea Chalupa (38:44):

I'm like, “What Mearsheimer is saying could only be true if Soviet history did not happen.” The reason why NATO expanded is because the Russian Empire, whether it's the Soviet Union or the time of the Czars, was always imperialistic and they're always carrying out their conquest through genocide, where you come in and you liquidate the elites. You come in and you murder anybody who's trying to stand up to you. You use rape—systemic rape—as a weapon and you take people's homes and you force everyone to speak Russian, think in Russian, and their culture is eradicated. That's what happened in the Baltics. That's what happened in Poland. That's what happened in Ukraine, as you see in *Mr. Jones*. That is why all those countries scrambled to try to get into NATO. It was to protect themselves from future genocides because that was deeply traumatic in their history. So I did some changes, last minute, which the editor was like, “Damn!” And our amazing artist made some changes to push those facts in just to combat in real time the disinformation that people on the far left and far right were spreading.

Kevin Allison (39:47):

Well, that is the most striking thing about not just this book, but your entire project with *Gaslit Nation* is we do live in this time in which disinformation is so all over the place. What would you wish that the average American who might tend to think of themselves as being in the middle or maybe even leaning a little bit but they would ordinarily maybe vote for Democrats? What do you hope—

Andrea Chalupa (40:20):

The white moderate that MLK talked about?

Kevin Allison (40:22):

yes, exactly—that they start to pick up on more in these coming years?

Andrea Chalupa (40:29):

Look, we're dealing with a whole new science and psychology because the disinformation is separating families. That's been going on in Ukraine for years with the Kremlin disinformation. You have relatives in Russia—Ukrainians are getting their homes bombed and the relatives in Russia are like, “Oh, that's not

really happening.” And so it's a crisis that the whole world is dealing with, and we're forced to figure out how to live with this and protect ourselves from it because it takes lives, as we saw with Covid obviously. And I think in this case, how do we get through to the white moderate? I mean, MLK, you could just hear the frustration in his voice when he was trying to get through to the white moderate. And I will answer that by talking about the larger point of this moment in history we all find ourselves in, which is Trump, right?

Andrea Chalupa (41:17):

We've had this indictment, it just came through. We're grateful for *something* after Merrick Garland, but it's not going to ban him for running for president. There's no 14th amendment triggered here. And there's justification for that. We could talk in another conversation, but currently, at this moment in time, he's running for president. He's got a proudly fascist, consolidated KKK base, and he narrowly lost some of these key states the last time around. It is as scary as it looks, but there are some hopeful signs. And one thing that people have to remember—what the white moderate has to remember and what white people have to remind themselves of—is Trump's always been there. Since the start of America, Trump has always been there. Trump is the norm. Trump is the norm. This is the latest Trump that we're going up against, and it's absolutely true.

Andrea Chlaupa (42:05):

What the *1619 Project* says is absolutely true. American history is authoritarian history for non-white people. There wasn't just a genocide of Native Americans, they were also enslaved. And then of course you have the Holocaust of slavery. And so all the progress we have is communities like Ukrainians are doing right now against Russians, fighting for survival. All of our rights that we have are the most vulnerable communities fighting for their children, fighting for their survival. I remember signs in Euromaidan in the 2013 revolution, you had a mom out in the square where the riot police were going to come with her batons, and she had just had a simple sign that said, “Ukraine is my child.” “Ukraine is my child.” We owe all of our rights to people like that who said, “This is my child. This is what I'm fighting for.” And so to the white moderates out there, they just have to understand that this has always been here.

Andrea Chalupa (42:57):

Trump's always been here, but now he's going to come after you too. Because of climate change, the pandemics are going to be more frequent and the diseases are going to be spreading among us; because of climate change, you're going to have flooding of homes and all sorts of things. And understand that you need someone in charge that believes in good governance, who believes in stability because if you have a fascist in power, he doesn't care if you live or die. If you have somebody who is completely bought off, like some of these centrist Democrats—like the Kyrsten Sinemas and Manchin being the most extreme examples of those, but there's other centrists that fly under the radar—if you have somebody who is just shortsighted, cashing in, selling us out, thinking that they're just going to escape into their pod in the sky or to New Zealand, that's not a thing.

Andrea Chalupa (43:44):

It's not possible. What they have to understand is that if we don't all rally right now and come together as a community and fortify our communities and stay engaged and fight like hell, it's going to be game over for civilization. And what we're up against is really an endurance test. I know all of us want to go on our vacations. We all want to check out, and absolutely a trillion percent do that because that's what we need you to do to stay going, because we need us all to do more self-care and take care of ourselves. But the one thing I ask of everyone here, whatever your background is, whatever your experience is, as we get towards the next spring, start warming up. Start doing your stretches. Start reading your inspiration.

Make your inspiration board, print out MLK, go to the Gaslit Nation Action guide. And I go back to MLK all the time because the Civil Rights movement faced off with actual authoritarianism.

Andrea Chalupa (44:33):

They put their lives on the line. People died for those rights. That's where we are now. So if you go to the Gaslit Nation Action Guide, the very first book is written by a young MLK—he's in his twenties—and it's a case study on how he did the Montgomery Bus boycott. And that's such a spiritual text. It's so practical, pragmatic. He opens it telling you, Here's where my ideas came from. Here are all the leading thinkers I turned to for inspiration. Here's why some didn't work with me, like Marx. He's like, No, I don't believe that the ends justify the means. You don't kill millions of people to try to build utopia on earth. It doesn't work that way. And then he talks about, Now here's how to be a manager. Here's how to build teams and coalitions. Here's how to keep your ego in check.

Andrea Chalupa (45:10):

Here's what to do when you're tired. We open the Gaslit Nation Action Guide with that book for that very reason. That is a hand to hold. I go back to that book all the time when my soul feels depleted. That book's there for a reason. And so what I'm asking everyone in this room to do, what I'm asking myself to do, what I'm going to be doing alongside with you—and my husband's going to get dragged into this too, he always does, watching the kids so I can be with you—is we're going to do what we can wherever we are with whatever we have, whatever your strengths are, whatever you have in you, stretch yourself, make some phone calls, knock on doors, write some postcards, write some letters. You can absolutely do it. And it's such an amazing thing once you get in the swing of it.

Andrea Chalupa (45:50):

In the last midterm election, which is good news—what happened in the last midterms was wonderful news for us—no election denier won a single big office in any of the key states we need to win to protect the electoral college. We fortified the blue wall. We won big in Arizona. We protected ourselves. We did what we had to do in the last midterm elections to have a stronger chance in 2024. We're good. We did some really good work that we're going to be able to build off of in big ways in 2024; we flipped the Pennsylvania House; we put a lot of fortifications into our democracy on the all important state level. That's our community. *Gaslit Nation* got together and we had several get out the vote events. We made several tens of thousands of phone calls to some of these key races, including 90,000, something like 90,000 phone calls for Senator Warnock in Georgia.

Andrea Chalupa (46:39):

We did that together. I, with a baby and a toddler and this job and all sorts of things and all sorts of stress, just like you, made over a thousand phone calls.

Kevin Allison:

That's incredible.

Andrea Chalupa:

I made over a thousand phone calls and I'm telling you, as someone who's shy and introverted—and thank God for these lights because I can hardly see you guys—it's a really scary thing to pick up a phone and call a complete stranger who has a million other things they'd rather be doing than talking to you. You get those calls. You hang up on those people all the time, just like me. It's a numbers game. It's a volumes business. And so as you go through your calls, you're always going to reach that one person that desperately needs to talk to you because they're scared because they're in some corner of Arizona and

they're gay and they're scared, and they're worried about genocide towards people like them. And you're going to find that person and uplift them and give them a shot of courage. That's what you're making those phone calls for, to reach the Americans across the country who are scared, just like you, and need to hear your voice. It's an extremely powerful thing, and it makes an impact, and it is how we were able to win as much as we did in the midterms. We're going to have to do that all over again, and we're going to do it together.

Kevin Allison (47:51):

Oh, you are such an inspiration.

[crowd applauds]

Andrea Chalupa (47:54):

Stop. You are. I'm here because of you.

Kevin Allison (47:58):

[laughs] Yes. I remember turning to the podcast and to the page you had on your website with the Guide for activism around the election as a support. And I also have to say that the activism that I did get involved with around the George Floyd period, and then the last election really did become like a spiritual sort of experience for me, really was inspiring.

Andrea Chalupa (48:27):

Exactly.

Kevin Allison (48:28):

The Black Trans Lives Matter March that we did in Brooklyn in the summer of 2020 was one of the most beautiful experiences I've ever had to see how community... I have a friend who's an activist who always uses the phrase, "We keep us safe," and that's what it's all about. That's incredible.

Andrea Chalupa (48:49):

And we're ultimately going to win. We're ultimately going to win because... We just are. I mean, I look to Ukraine a lot for guidance because it's a country that should not exist after all the genocides and Chernobyl, everything that's faced and the resilience there, the defiance there. They didn't expect the world to come to their aid. They really did not, because that's been the track record. Angela Merkel led a policy of appeasement of Russia for so long that allowed the Russians to get entrenched like they did, and gave Putin the green light to go total war. And so the Ukrainians really... Zelensky stayed in Kyiv thinking, "I'm on my own." And that's very Ukrainian. And a lot of that country's idea of self and resilience and defiance comes from their artists because artists are subversive. When you're doing art right, you're fearless. It's a spiritual practice.

Andrea Chalupa (49:39):

You're speaking with a higher mind. And the very idea of Ukraine has existed for centuries through its leading thinkers, through its artists. You had these young hipster kids out on the square in Euromaidan in the big revolution for dignity holding up placards of Ukraine's Walt Whitman, Taras Shevchenko, like Ukraine's like, Lesya Ukrainka was a big time feminist playwright. Imagine us marching with Walt Whitman signs. You know what I mean? That's what Ukrainians did. So just remember, for the creatives

out there, for the storytellers out there, I told Kevin this before we came out: we need you, people like you, right now. We need the creative people. Tell your stories. Whatever your comfort zone is for the story that most pulls on your heart, that's the story the world needs out of you. And it doesn't have to be some very serious genocide film like *Mr. Jones*.

Andrea Chalupa (50:27):

I remember... I swear I'm throwing my dad under the bus with this conversation, but I remember my dad going, "Hey, you're a young woman in New York City. Why don't you tell those stories? Why are you doing this screenplay?" You know? My dad wanted me to write Lena Dunham's *Girls*. That's what he wanted me to do. And when that came out as this cash cow, my dad's like, "See!" I'm like, "But that's not me. That's not what I want. I want to do this thing." And so whatever that thing is, that comfort zone, we need that. I'll give you a very quick example. So when November 8th, 2016 happened—and keeps happening in our minds—when Trump came to power with Russia's help, my sister Alexandra Chalupa, who was an independent DNC contractor who put her life on the line, warning anyone she could—Democrat, Republican, the media—that if Paul Manafort, the Kremlin's longtime operative in Ukraine was here running Donald Trump's campaign, that means the Kremlin was here running Donald Trump's.

Andrea Chalupa (51:27):

And she was right. She was right. I want to go on record in the history books in front of the whole entire world that my sister, Alexandra Chalupa, launched the resistance to Donald Trump at 3:00 AM on election night when the whole world was shocked and falling apart. When Ben Rhodes was caught on camera by a documentary film crew in this great film called *The Final Year* on Obama's failures, his foreign policy team's failures, when Ben Rhodes is looking like, "Oh, I guess we underestimated..." He's caught on camera on election night saying, "Oh, I guess we underestimated the Russians." Ya think? So when the whole world was falling apart, my sister very calmly, very coolly, knowing that she had stuck her neck out so publicly that there's now a big target on her head, she drafted—calm, cool, collected—just drafted a memo saying, "The Russians are here."

Andrea Chalupa (52:16):

"Here's what they did. We've got to audit the vote. We've got to look at the disinformation. This is the narrative they're pushing. Here's how they did it. Paul Manafort is central to all this." Just typed it all up. And she's such a private person. She's not a cable news talking head. She's not a self-promoter. She's had Rachel Maddow's producer trying to get her back in the day, like, *60 Minutes*. Everyone wanted a piece of her. She's not that person. For her to break ranks and go from being a very private, shy individual to then taking this memo very calmly, coolly putting it on Facebook where it went viral, where then Sarah and I blasted it out to our followings to make it go viral, she launched the resistance to Trump that minute when she did that.

[audience applauds]

Andrea Chalupa:

And they punished her for it. They relentlessly put her through hell. [pauses, begins to cry] And I'm going to change subjects, but I just want to say that an update on her is that she, because of all that she went through, she packed up her family and relocated to Australia.

Kevin Allison (53:13):

Oh, wow. Yeah. Yeah. Oh my goodness. Oof. Well, here's to her.

Andrea Chalupa (53:22):

American hero. American Patriot.

[September 2023 Gaslit Nation Song Feature plays - [The Cost of Living by PrisonPenPal](#)]

[outro - theme music]

Andrea Chalupa:

Our discussion continues, and you can get access to that by signing up on our Patreon at the Truth-teller level or higher.

Andrea Chalupa:

To help people in Maui rebuild, donate to the Maui Strong fund at [hawaiicommunityfoundation.org](http://hawaiicommunityfoundation.org). And if you or a friend want to go to Burning Man next year, instead donate that money to the Ali Forney Center, the largest community center in the US helping homeless LGBTQ youth. To help humanitarian aid in Ukraine, donate to Razom for Ukraine at [razomforukraine.org](http://razomforukraine.org). In addition, we encourage you to donate to the International Rescue Committee, a humanitarian relief organization helping refugees from Ukraine, Syria, and Afghanistan. Donate at [rescue.org](http://rescue.org). And if you want to help critically endangered orangutans already under pressure from the palm oil industry, donate to the Orangutan Project at [theorangutanproject.org](http://theorangutanproject.org).

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