**A216C003\_230131XC\_CANON.mp3**

[00:00:01] **Speaker 1** So thinking back almost a year ago to February 2022, what were those first few weeks like for you?

[00:00:07] **Speaker 2** The first day I was in disbelief because the day before the war escalated, I was having conversations with my friends and I was absolutely sure that it's just not possible in today's day and age that. The war could be escalated to that level. Especially in my country and my world. And then the first day of the war, I spent just in front of my computer staring in sort of stupor, trying to figure out what I can do or what I should do and what I could do. And coming from the background and experience of documenting stories of Holocaust survivors and witnesses in Ukraine and for the past three years working on documenting Holocaust atrocities and teaching generations to come about Holocaust stories and what it was like to go through those stories. The question, the nagging question in my mind was, would I be a bystander or what would I do if I were faced with a situation where I had to save somebody else's life? Was. Sacrifices of my own or some other type of sacrifices. Every time my children would ask me, Mom, can you give us lunch or dinner? What's for dinner? I couldn't stop. But to think if somebody else's children were hungry or didn't have access to water, would I? What would I do? And. When the war escalated was not a word in question for me is that I'm not going to be a bystander and I'm going to do something about it and I'm not going to. Let this happen without doing everything I can to save as many people as possible. Help people to overcome this horror in a more dignified. Healthier, possibly, if you can say that way. So we're on the second day of the war. I started calling people that I knew trying to reach out to see how they were doing. They needed something. Trying to reach organizations, offering my skills and trying to figure out where I should focus on how and what and where things needed to be done. And there were many of us aimlessly calling people, not knowing what to do. I came across an organization being told to undress tool kit in. Germany and Berlin. And we started discussions about what we can collectively do to make a big difference. To make an impact, real impact. What we realized very quickly that my experience of working within European countries and Ukraine in particular, and the countries of the former Soviet Union and the infrastructure that I have built over these years combined was the In Angels experience over the past seven years helping refugees from world, from all over the world, from war, from war torn countries. We created a very powerful combination and we decided to work together and unite. And of course, this. We registered friends of the angel here in the United States and the rest is history.

[00:04:44] **Speaker 1** And what was the strength of being Angel and being Angel helping you?

[00:04:50] **Speaker 2** Oh, we focused on three different. Philosophy is of assistance. Of course, that is critical aid and rescue, and that's something that takes all main focus. Then there is a second area of focus, which is sustainability. And the third is for building in the future. Of course, our main focus is right now we're at the stage of aid and rescue and. Or. Activities involved evacuating people out of Ukraine and bringing in humanitarian aid. When we talk about evacuation, our focus is on people that are left behind, handicapped, severely ill, people in wheelchairs, elderly women was. Children who cannot easily move around either because they have some kind of handicapped or they have many children. They're too scared to travel. And we go to the very front lines. To regions like New Goliad. Share and similar regions our teams. So a lot of rockets have near misses, but that was stopped us. The team reports a near miss evacuates people and the next day they go back to the same spot where. There's a lot of danger. And those people really, truly sacrificed a lot to save others every single day. And there are a lot of. Organizations similar to ours was selfless. People would do that in the pieces. We bring those people to the that. You should know where we provide medical assistance. Short term and then depending on the circumstances, most of the time. Take them further down to these two EU countries. We. We decide based on their conditions and illness, where they need to go. What's the best place for them to be? We have a team who monitors locations and coordinates the effort of bringing people to the best. Place under the circumstances on that particular day was in Europe, mostly Germany. We also bring people to Austria and. As well. And then we have a special. Evacuations for very, very ill people, especially children. We focus on. Those children who need ambulances and we take them out of the country and ambulances are in small vans and then we fly them to Germany. Moldova or sometimes Poland. It depends again on. Situation, condition of each child and family circumstances. I also sponsor personally people with children mostly of as smartwatches, spinal muscular atrophy to come here out of the United States to be treated in a variety of hospitals. We currently have two families here that I brought. San Francisco, like the ones in Los Angeles. And those children without medical care have survived. So that's evacuations. Up to date. We have evacuated 18,000 handicapped and. You know, and vulnerable people as an organization. We also deliver humanitarian aid. We work with a lot of organizations like. Now. The Rotary Club of. And just many other wonderful organizations that donate medical supplies. We in the United was in the United States, but we also get a lot of supplies in Europe. We ask for short dated supplies that most company, most companies no longer need or can use. But of course, they're very useful in Ukraine. Those supplies get donated to us. And truckload to be where we partner with an organization called the Women's Movement for the Future. And we have a network of about 15,000 volunteers, mostly women, throughout the country. And you take a village, we have a women volunteer, and those are mothers, mostly of mothers, young mothers who work with us to help distribute that humanitarian aid. And our focus is very similar. Front Frontline. Hospitals. We distribute aid to orphanages, homes for the elderly, nursing homes and just people. We also focus on internally displaced camps because those people had to leave their homes and everything behind wearing. Sometimes somewhat clothing that now it's winter, they don't have anything and they label. And the camp all this time. Just simple things like children's film crow. And they can't sit on their shoes anymore. They need everything from pillows to shoes to clothing to food and hygiene products. So we provide all those, a variety of different things. To. The population of displaced persons and frontline. People, people who live at the frontlines to make sure that they they have what they need to make it through the day and throughout the night. We also. Try to provide as much water purifying packets as possible. I think we've been able to provide with water purifying packets and water purification systems that we have delivered close to 1 billion liters of plain water. And up to date we are about a few thousand tonnes of humanitarian aid that we delivered and distributed, including medical aid. And of course we work very closely with Somali here in Milwaukee, but we also. Very fortunate to have developed very close relationships with in Europe. And it's really a collective effort of various organizations, and it's a big team effort. And of course, we have the Freedom Project, which was started in August. We. Realized that winter is coming and it's going to be a tough winter. And in order for us to prepare, we started negotiating with various suppliers of generators in August to lock down prices that were still relatively low. And we were able to assess five different types of generators based on the cost to kilowatt ratio and based on need. And also we had those generators evaluated by engineers to determine which type of generator is best suited for these five types of scenarios that we were looking to cover. Our focus was to make sure that we were bringing in work to both generators. We didn't feel that our legislation was equipped to handle large stationary generators and overnight I had to learn a lot about generators that. It was really a crash course for me. We focused on two and a half kilowatt generators that were good for one room or a very small apartment or basements that you could move around was you or the family can move around. It's fairly light. And then we went up to about eight kilowatts. The generator that can handle a little bit more can handle the small house, single family home and can. Keep the entire family warm in a house that's a little bit larger than just one rule. Yeah, but it's also portable. So the family had to move. Or they could put the generator in the car and. Go to a different location and keep using the generator. Then we went to a silent type of generator in case the family was close to the front lines and had to still keep warm. But couldn't make a lot of noise home. The fourth time was 12 to kill about and the last one was 17 until about so 12 and 70 and the 12 was focused on. Supporting churches, synagogues, small community centers. Moving hospitals, orphanages. 17 kilowatt is able to support an operating. Once you get above 17 kilowatt, you're pretty much made to a stationary. Generator was generator project. We realize that if we can bring one large generator and install it in one large hospital, one bomb can kill all that money and effort. While if we diversify instead of many, many, many small generators. We would be able to increase the longevity of impact. To. Many more people, and I did feel safer with the circumstances.

[00:18:59] **Speaker 1** And you bought over a thousand of these units before you even had the money for it. So what were you thinking if you.

[00:19:06] **Speaker 2** Heard that story? Yeah. I don't know whether to be proud of that or to be embarrassed. I think a little bit of both. Well, we. Committed to purchasing 1100 generators. And I said, Well, it's my responsibility. If we're going to do that, I will have to figure out a way to raise my contract. Thousand dollars in two months. And he signed the contract with the blessing of the board. What I didn't tell them is that that is approximately the size of my pension fund that I knew if things go through bad. I'm not able to raise the money and this is how I'm going to cover.

[00:20:08] **Unidentified** The debt and.

[00:20:13] **Speaker 2** I went into this, my family and my friends don't know that. So it will be it will be an interesting. Generation for them to learn. We started raising the money. I reached out to all my friends and family and reached out to people I work with. The first two organizations I reached out to a world of connection and Project Aid and Rescue. And those were my two first partners who told me that they've got me and they've got my back. And no matter what happens, they're not going to leave the dry. I reached out to the women's Movement for the future in Ukraine, and my partners at that time told me that what I'm doing is insane, but it's going to save thousands of lives and. It's only Miami and we'll figure it out. One way or another, I reached out to Doug and I told him my story and he brought me to a Rotary and I was very open was that I would be honest. I said, I've never ordered 1100 dirty radios before. Actually, a few months ago, I didn't even know how to start a generator, and I didn't know anything about generators. And. I ordered his generator. I signed the contract. At that time I where you've raised about $450,000. And I said, I need I need a lot more money. Please help. It was extremely humbling experience to come to a group of serious business leaders and say that I did something reckless, I did something that will save people lives. But at the same time, I was embarrassed that I made this decision, that I was very transparent about it. And they they have my back. And as Asia has been working round the clock, the entire team been reaching out and raising funds and holding meetings and sending e-mails. It's been 24 seven effort. It's been tremendous, tremendous. Outreach that is conducted over the past few months, and we're almost there. We've raised enough money and reached out to people all over the world. We had people sending money from Somalia from. Israel. But of course, the most amazing response was from the Rotary Club of Milwaukee, who organized all of the Rotary Clubs of Wisconsin to participate in this effort. And we gather I think we're up to $135,000 that will go towards the. Purchased two generators. And I am I feel absolutely blessed to be a part of this effort. I am blessed that all these people gave me an opportunity to be a part of this community here that stood up to a bully and said, We're going to fight, too, no matter how hard it is, no matter what the cost is. And we. We are in the process as we speak right now. We're delivering the first 100 generators. Nypro where people. Cold today and they're going to be warm tomorrow. And it's just warms our hearts. And it's truly it takes a village. It's truly the team from the various organizations. We have about 50 organizations participating right now in this generator effort. We have Rotary Club of Milwaukee having the way leading the way for. Of all the Rotary Clubs of Wisconsin, we have a forgery club and we believe they are helping us. It's tremendous effort of hundreds and hundreds of people were trusted that be an angel and friends of the inmate will be able to complete this project and bring it to fruition.

[00:25:47] **Speaker 1** So as somebody who has friends and family in Ukraine and across Europe, how has the war impacted your relationships?

[00:25:57] **Speaker 2** Oh, that's a complicated question because I have family and friends on both sides. I can't. Deny that a lot of money. Family and friends are not talking to me anymore because of what I'm doing or distancing themselves from me. Which is okay. It is. It's painful. It's difficult. But I always think of people who are on the ground in Ukraine in the same or similar situation, whose relatives on the other side of the border do not support them, do not believe. So it's much harder for them. I also am very fortunate to have my team in Europe and here in Milwaukee was the Rotary Club and Common people I can talk to about what's happening with them. My family dynamic, all my friends and they understand and they listen. I talk to a lot of my colleagues and. In Ukraine and women's movement for the future. Colleagues and they relate to what I am experiencing and they inspired me by their words of wisdom. It's. It's very difficult for everybody. And I don't know how it's going to impact the future of my family and friends. I think that it's irreparable damage. I also. Until the beginning of the war. I was very proud of my Russian heritage. Right now I'm very embarrassed. And I used to. Teach Russian to my children. We used to speak Russian at home. And now I have. To apologize every time I have to speak Russian to my Ukrainian friends. It's embarrassing and it's definitely an identity shift. And something that you've been proud of your entire life. Now you have to admit that you feel embarrassed of it.

[00:28:49] **Speaker 1** And after all this hardship and hard work, what is it like to actually see your generators in Ukraine and people using them? And your other eight efforts.

[00:29:05] **Speaker 2** You know, it's interesting. We don't have. It's such a marathon. We don't have time to celebrate victories. We sometimes tell each other, okay, we've got to stop and we got to look at the big picture of what? What you've accomplished, but we've almost never do that because today there is a small victory was delivery of the generators. And yes, it feels good for a second, but there is this. Pressure to do so much war and the next project. We have trucks coming and ships, ships sailing and planes flying with supplies with baby formula. We have needs that come to us every day. Stories after story one more tragic than another, and you can truly celebrate any small victories or big victory is because there is this tremendous. Cloud of. Collective tragedy that is happening that you are trying to fight all the time. So. We will want very quickly from just acknowledging. Yes, okay, we did that. What's next? Right now, we have a lot of medical supplies that we need to deliver. We need. To deliver food that is on the way. We have a lot of very ill children and handicapped people that we need to evacuate. And you get to know the story of each evacuation. You get to know those people and your heart is in what you need to do today to save these people and not what you did 5 minutes ago. By. Completing the project. So it's it's just a very, very fast moving. Marathon of. What's next that is so much more to do. And what would you say to.

[00:31:52] **Speaker 1** Americans who have never experienced war and might think that the war in Ukraine doesn't affect them?

[00:32:02] **Speaker 2** Well, I think that. Every person in the world. It has to find. A place within themselves where they think of being sick, of being someone like them in a parallel universe somewhere in Ukraine and seek you know, the mothers have to think about what mothers are going through. The man. The fathers have to think, What is it like not to be able to defend your women or your children from the horror of the war? For a single young man and woman. Think what it's like to be a teen and have. Dreams to go to schools and universities and become musicians or physicians or. Artists. And instead you have a military uniform. You have to learn how to shoot a gun and your horrendous conditions at 18 when you can't really have a drink at the bar in the United States. And he never even saw it months ago. That. You can be a soldier and all of a sudden have to do that thinkable and kill another human being or be killed. I think everybody has to realize that there is somebody out there just like them. Whose life? Was turned upside down. Whose elderly parents cannot go to the restroom because the toilet doesn't flush. Cannot warm. A cup of tea can now go downstairs to the bomb shelter because the elevator doesn't work. You cannot have medicine or watch TV or things that we take for granted here every single day. And. Those same people for just eight hour flight or ten hour flight. We experience those. Inconveniences, but at the same time horrors of losing the loved ones and fear. Imagining being in the middle of the darkness of the night cold Or was bombs falling on you not knowing if you're going to live tomorrow? I think that kind of. I thought will inspire people to be more present and to support people. All of Ukraine was a little bit more empathy. And I always say, you know, when we have children and we prepare breakfast for our children, we don't say, okay, you had breakfast, good bye. I'm done with you. Bye bye. Lunch? They're hungry again. But you have to make dinner. And then tomorrow it starts all over again. Well, children and people in Ukraine a different. So if you helped once, it's great. But. You have to continue. You can't be desensitized to somebody else's pain, to somebody else's suffering. You have to continue participating in saving the world for these people. You have to continue on the monthly basis, decide I'm not going to buy an extra cup of coffee. I'm going to. Put $7 away once a month to allow a baby in Ukraine to eat all day for that $7. There's so much that each one of us can do to save one life. And we save we save one life a day. We're good. So if each person in America would save one life, we would save the entire country. So I would ask to. Bring a little more humanity to the surface of our everyday life and have a little bit more compassion. And not get desensitized and be strong. And yes, it's going to go for a little bit longer or maybe much longer. We need to stay with those people. We need to stand by them. We can't give up.

[00:37:59] **Speaker 1** Did you have any other comments?

[00:38:03] **Speaker 2** No, I just it wasn't as eloquent as I thought that I wanted it to be. But that's what this.

[00:38:10] **Speaker 1** It's really emotional. Thank you for sharing this because.

[00:38:17] **Speaker 3** Even before we cut down the guitar. We just have to keep, like, dancing at like 20 seconds and just hold the refrigerator and can take out the swing. Take that on post or the L on the other side. So starting now, we will be quiet for the next 4 seconds.