

Episode 7: “Sharing Personal Narratives, Reshaping Societal Narratives”

Angie Carter

The Art of Climate Dialogue

Vivian:

Welcome to The Art of Climate Dialogue: Stories from Iowa, produced by myself, Vivian M Cook and the The EcoTheatre Lab and welcome to today's conversation with writer, organizer and sociologist, Angie Carter.

Angie:

I'm reading from a Feminist Guide to Fighting Pipelines, which was published in the anthology, Fracture. PROVISIONS, OR WHAT YOU'LL NEED TO GET STARTED (AND TO KEEP YOU GOING):

A community: Your sisters, your brothers, your elders, your allies. Find them next door. Find them far away. Commune with them. Practice. Together you will hold one another accountable, find strength, heal wounds, laugh. You do not do this alone. You do not do this as two together. You do this as many, as more, as a growing movement.

Inspiration: What we are trying to do right now has not been done before, is unfinished, is underway. Something to inspire the unknown is necessary.

Love: Yes, you hate the destruction, the exploitation, the commodification, the corporation. But it is because you love this fierce world, your beloveds' places in it, the challenge that comes with change, the hope that you might help to make it better, to make it just.

Rage: Righteous rage to fuel you to say the things they say you shouldn't, to stand up in places where they say you can't. Most importantly, to build the fire to bring others in. Rage to tell the polluters, the manarchists, the doubters, the compromisers, the profiteers, the tycoons. Halliburton, ExxonMobil, Energy Transfer Partners, Mayflower, Bridger, Sandpiper – no more.

Memory: Honor the countless before you whose names you do not know, whose names were not recorded. Remember the trafficked, the silenced, the vanished, and the forgotten. The crusaders and the truth speakers. Carry them with you. Feel their weight not as rocks carried on your back but hands pushing you on, pushing you further, pushing. Think of this as a birth, a becoming, the beginning.

Risk: What you are doing now has not been done before. You do not have a guarantee that what you're doing this time will work, but you do know your rage and hope will drive change. It has to. Those before us gambled on a future that couldn't be predicted. As a result, people of color, women, Native Americans, LGBTQ, those with disabilities, and others have more rights and respect than they once did. Though there is so much more to win, you're doing that now, every day.

STEP ONE: BUILD COMMUNITY

Build community with purposive inclusivity, but go beyond inclusivity.

Meet people where they're at, and create space for people to make their own connections. Move beyond teaching rhetoric and talking points. If we put our hearts into building relationships and real coalitions, we are doing more than fighting the pipelines in our backyards. We are standing against commodification, exploitation, racism, capitalism, and patriarchy.

Use your local values as tools. Find those values that enable you to say no to the proposed pipeline, to extreme energy, to the colonization of our future. More importantly, say yes to neighboring. Livelihoods. Family. Values, Love. Together, build a new narrative. Amplify it. Do not be afraid to privilege the voices that need to be heard. Live and learn in your narrative, together.

Episode 7: “Sharing Personal Narratives, Reshaping Societal Narratives”

Angie Carter

The Art of Climate Dialogue

STEP TWO: MOVE BEYOND THE HERE AND NOW

Reach beyond your local context. It’s not just one pipeline. It’s all pipelines. It’s the oil industry. It’s commodification, exploitation, racism, capitalism, and patriarchy. Destruction. War. Victory does not come when the pipeline project moves or is shut down. Winning is bigger. If your pipeline is stopped, we’re still facing total destruction or almost total destruction. This is about generations from now and the world in which they will fight and love and eat and pray and, at night, dream. They are your light. Follow them. Forge the paths to reach them.

This is not a political campaign. There is no single target. Though we don’t know exactly how we’ll win, we must trust that today’s, tomorrow’s, and next week’s struggle will get us there.

Connect to existing regional movements; build real coalitions united by hope for the future. A farmers organization protects their agricultural heritage and legacy. A religious group works to stop the human trafficking industry in the Bakken region of North Dakota. A neighborhood alliance forms to preserve landowner rights. A grandmothers’ organization presses for protections for future generations. Students call for divestment from the fossil fuel industry. You may not all agree about the path forward, but you all believe in a shared future.

There is we and there is us, and these are built stronger from each unique story, challenge, perspective, journey, and life. I, me, and my are an important part of us, but there is no alone.

STEP THREE: CARE FOR YOURSELF

You will work with people with more privilege than you. Sometimes they will be people you respect, admire, and learn from. Sometimes they might take credit for your work. Steal your thunder. Take up too much space at a meeting. Yell at you. Question your identity and experience and lived knowledge. Expect this because it will happen. Many times. Do not question yourself because of it. Privilege and its associated authority does not grant omniscience. Do not apologize for their privilege. Step aside, not back, to let them leave or pass.

Apologize. Forgive. You will make mistakes, and so will others. You make them out of anger, in frustration, in fatigue, out of privilege or habit. Others will, too. It is no surprise that we are anxious, intolerant, allergic: our earth is sick, poisoned, grieving. Focus on the work, on what you must do today, do tomorrow, do next week.

You will need to change, to shift, to slough off the layers of what they said you should do, said you should be. You have not been trained to do this; no one has. It is hard; it hurts. You will fail and try and sometimes, you will get it right. Let it go. Keep going.

Do what inspires you and drives you, even and especially if it requires checking out. Stepping back and caring for yourself is critical. This struggle is centuries-long; it could outlive you. Checking out to feed your spirit, to find validation or encouragement, whatever that looks like, enables you to continue tomorrow, next week, next year.

See Provisions.

STEP FOUR: IMAGINE THE IMPOSSIBLE

Be brave enough to believe in the world your heart knows is possible. It is okay that you don’t know what it looks like or how we’ll get there. Learn from those before you, those with you. Remind yourself we have not yet known a world without exploitation. But somewhere, deep in your bones, you know that we will find it. Or build it.

Trust that through the undoing, the dismantling, the collapse, we will learn to remake and will remember to question, to honor, to debate and disagree and come together again.

Episode 7: “Sharing Personal Narratives, Reshaping Societal Narratives”

Angie Carter

The Art of Climate Dialogue

Share this. Post this. Highlight and cross out and revise this. Make it yours. A guide is a living thing, evolving as we learn and know and do better. There are wrongs we have not even learned to see yet that have not yet been named. There is so much more to learn, to change, to do.

Vivian:

Addressing climate change is urgent, but in order to move toward action, we first have to find ways to talk about climate change with one another. The Art of Climate Dialogue: Stories from Iowa is a podcast series featuring 13 conversations with artists, farmers, community-engaged researchers and community organizers and activists who have all used arts and storytelling strategies to talk about climate change and agriculture. Through this podcast, they generously share these strategies so that listeners can implement them in their own communities.

I'm Vivian and I invite you to explore The Art of Climate Dialogue with me. As we enter into these conversations around climate action, sustainable agriculture and community engaged arts in Iowa, The EcoTheatre Lab and I want to first recognize that Indigenous nations have been leaders in such conversations for centuries and continue to be today. Iowa now occupies the homelands of Native American nations to whom we owe our commitment and dedication. Iowa is now situated on the homelands and trading route of the Ioway, Meskwaki and Sauk, Ojibwe, Omaha, Ianktonwan and Santee. And because history is complex and time goes far back beyond memory, we also acknowledge the ancient connections of many other Indigenous peoples here. The history of broken treaties and forced removal that dispossessed Indigenous peoples of their homelands was and is an act of colonization and genocide that we cannot erase. And as a result, Indigenous ecosystems within Iowa have suffered from extraction, degradation, and unsustainable agricultural practices, contributing to the ongoing climate crisis.

Understanding and addressing these injustices is critical as we work toward climate dialogue, action, and justice in our communities. My thanks to podcast interviewees Shelly Buffalo, enrolled member of the Meskwaki Tribe, Lance Foster, enrolled member and tribal historian of the Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska and Sikowis Nobiss, Plains Cree/Saulteaux of the George Gordon First Nation for their collaboration in developing this acknowledgement.

Angie Carter is a writer, organizer, and sociologist whose work focuses on rural communities, agriculture and movements for ecological and food justice. Originally from the land between two rivers or what is now known as Iowa, she continues to remain engaged in the movements for ecological justice in the heart of what is now the commodified agricultural system. She currently lives in a very different watershed today, Lake Superior, where she works at Michigan Technological University as an associate professor in the Department of Social Sciences on Michigan's Keweenaw Peninsula. She also serves as co-president of the Women, Food and Agriculture Board and on the Western Upper Peninsula's Food Systems Collaborative planning team. I'm excited to share our conversation with y'all today.

Welcome, and thanks so much for joining the podcast today, Angie.

Angie:

Thanks. I'm so glad to be here, Vivian.

Episode 7: “Sharing Personal Narratives, Reshaping Societal Narratives”

Angie Carter

The Art of Climate Dialogue

Vivian:

You had just shared with us yours in Ahna Kruzic's essay, A Feminist Guide to Fighting Pipelines, which was included in the 2016 anthology Fracture: Essays, Poems, and Stories on Fracking in America. Who did you write this piece for and why?

Angie:

So at the time, Ahna and I had done a lot of activism and organizing together as graduate students at Iowa State, and we were fighting against the Dakota Access Pipeline in Iowa with a really great coalition of fellow organizers across the state. But it was really hard work and in any type of collaborative endeavor, people get frustrated, there's different personalities, folks work in different ways, they have different theories of change. It's really easy sometimes when you're in the trenches to maybe question if you're making difference and we were so used to hearing success stories, we thought it was important to write something that showed maybe how you feel when you're in the struggle and in these moments. So I think we wrote it for ourselves, to help us remember to keep going, and then also for others who might feel like they wonder if what they're doing matters and the throes of the trenches that they are into.

Vivian:

Well, thank you for writing it, first of all. I know as someone who has been engaged in similar work, then I was very moved by the piece, which is why I talked to you about potentially sharing it on this podcast because I think it is very helpful for the people who might be listening to this episode on several of the guides provisions and steps. Also echo ideas that other interviewees on this podcast series have emphasized when we're talking about climate action and dialogue and especially how arts and storytelling can contribute to that. Some of these ideas include the importance of relationship building, memory and imagination, local values and context, meeting people where they're at, creating spaces for people to make connections and tell their own stories and healing. How might artistic strategies support those of us who are trying to gather the provisions and pursue the steps that you and Ahna outlined in this guide?

Angie:

Yeah, that's a great question. I think that artistic strategies help us maybe relate to each other on a different level. As a person who works in academia, I'm really used to data and facts. And...

Vivian:

Yes.

Angie:

I think this is often what gets lifted up too when we're talking about the stories we see in media about climate change. They're very overwhelming data and facts. It's really easy to feel powerless in the face of all of that. But there has to be something that keeps us waking up and moving about our days and doing the acts of friendship and neighboring and taking care of each other anyway, even though all this overwhelming stuff is happening. And so I think art, whether it's poetry or other types of creative writing, whether it's song, whether it's photography, painting, whatever people might choose, just helps us communicate at a different level with each other and maybe find ways to sneak past all of this ideological baggage we carry about who we are and find some common connection. Because we're all

Episode 7: “Sharing Personal Narratives, Reshaping Societal Narratives”

Angie Carter

The Art of Climate Dialogue

living in places we care about and we all care about people where we live. And so I think through art, maybe we can see how that can help guide us to some shared work.

Vivian:

In a lot of what I've talked about with other people on this podcast series and then what I've read about climate action and climate dialogue, then this idea of there being so much data out there that we are infiltrated with all of the time. And it is overwhelming and that we often think that if we're not talking about climate change, if we're not addressing climate change, then maybe it's because we don't have enough information. But really we all have a lot of information now and most of us, in some way or another, do make a lot of decisions about what we talk about, what we do, how we engage in these conversations emotionally, whether we want to admit it or not. And so what you're talking about here, I loved what you said in your provisions about how you need love, you need rage, you need risk. Yes, we need the data, we definitely need that. But there are other human elements that are critical to being able to actually start the conversations with our communities and with the people who have the power to change things.

Angie:

It's a lived experience, it's a human experience. Tables of data are not very friendly. How do we make something that's so discouraging and depressing and overwhelming, how do we make it understandable? I think we do it through art and we've seen this coming through and hopefully soon out of the pandemic too. A lot of people turn to their more creative self and found hobbies again. And that it's a way that we can process these really complicated feelings we have and a way that we can share how we feel with each other. And I think for a lot of us, the reason why we do things, it's not because of facts, it's because of the feelings.

And so Ahna and I, in writing this, we were exhausted, we were mad, we were hurt, but we're also really motivated because it was inspiring to see so many people from very different backgrounds coming together because they knew the pipelines were bad. Maybe for different reasons, but we all shared a common goal, which was trying to stop Dakota Access. And that's very powerful when you can share that with community members. And so yeah, we wrote this from that place and the struggle that we were in.

Vivian:

Can you tell us more about your organizing efforts and specifically your work with the Bakken Pipeline Resistance Coalition?

Angie:

Yeah, so I was very lucky as a graduate student at Iowa State University. I had some really great mentors who were very involved with community-based research and had already had a lot of connection with different environmental and agricultural organizations in Iowa who were very welcoming to students who are bright-eyed and want to do better and are good intentioned and want to help out. And so I had already learned a lot from organizers who'd been active during the farm crisis and other things in Iowa, and I knew that there was an Iowa that could work together and we just needed to find it again. And so when the news about the pipeline hit the Des Moines Register front page in summer of 2014, this group of students at Iowa State and I who had been so active in resistance to all different types of things,

Episode 7: “Sharing Personal Narratives, Reshaping Societal Narratives”

Angie Carter

The Art of Climate Dialogue

wanted to have a community meeting to try to get folks together to see what concerns they had and what steps we might take.

And we organized this meeting at the city hall in Ames, and we thought it would only be for Story County folks because the pipeline passes right past Ames in Story County. And we were very surprised because people came from all across the state. There were hundreds of people there.

Vivian:

Wow.

Angie:

And we were just so overwhelmed by the people showing up for their communities, for where they live, even that early in the game. And so we realized quickly thereafter that we needed to try to keep building that momentum because that was our power. Big oil is pretty mighty, but the community power, if we could keep building the momentum of that and working together across the state, that that's where we might have power. And so there were different actors from across the state that were very active in it. Some of them were well established nonprofits that had been around for a long time, like the Sierra Club, like Iowa CCI, Science and Environmental Health Network, Iowa Farmers Union.

And some of them were newer groups that were maybe emergent just in response to the pipeline. There was a very active group down near Fairfield, Iowa, for example, and some of them were just community residents and neighbors from Boone County that were working together. And so we had this really motley, beautiful crowd of folks who maybe didn't share a lot in common. Some of those groups had worked together in the past, some never had. And what United us all was trying to stop to Dakota Access.

Vivian:

And at that first community meeting, you said there were many more people than you expected to be there. What did that meeting look like? I know you said there were a lot of different people who were there from different organizations, may have been worried about and resisting the pipeline for different reasons. How did y'all create space to share all of those different perspectives and stories?

Angie:

It was maybe five or six of us who were organizing this, and we included art. There was a photo booth where people could take selfies that we were going to share on social media about why they wanted to stop the pipeline. And there was a place where children, we invited children to help make a mural of what they wanted to protect from this pipeline so that we would have some children's activities. We didn't know how many kids would be there, if there'd be kids there, but we just wanted to make sure that the space had something for everybody to do. And we had invited several, I would call them experts to speak. Some of them who were more on the data side, like Dave Swenson talking about the inflated employment numbers that Dakota Access was putting out there in the public. Andrea Basche who was a graduate student talked about the risk to soil health that the pipeline would pose.

And we had folks that were talking maybe from a more emotional place connecting to sense of community like Carolyn Raffensperger, who was talking about thinking about our future generations and what is our responsibility right now with this project in our backyards. And our hope was to show different facets of concerns about the pipeline and then have space for community questions. And

Episode 7: “Sharing Personal Narratives, Reshaping Societal Narratives”

Angie Carter

The Art of Climate Dialogue

because we had hundreds of people there instead of the 30 we thought we would have, we broke out into different discussion groups. We were graduate students, so we were into maybe organizing classroom space and shared learning.

Broke out into different discussion groups and there were a lot of landowners there and people who had been contacted by Dakota Access already who had certain information that maybe hadn't been in the press yet. And it was just really powerful to have so many people there from different places in Iowa and different points of concern sharing why they thought we needed to stop this pipeline. And we got a lot of contact information. We started a listserv, we started a weekly call. This is before pandemic, we weren't on Zoom. It was a conference call, old-fashioned type. But we just started trying to get to know each other from across the state, those of us who were concerned about this and inviting other folks into the work.

Vivian:

That's really incredible. And it sounds like the space and platform that y'all offered for storytelling, not only were people able to share their concerns and rage and love for what they valued and wanted to protect and all of those things y'all talked about in that essay, but it sounds like it also ended up being a place for resource sharing. That when people were telling their stories about how they'd already been contacted by the pipeline, that perhaps offered a very concrete, applicable resource for other people who might face the same challenge in the coming weeks.

Angie:

There was a lot of learning from each other, and I think it helped shift the story about the pipeline because if it's only the folks who have land that the pipeline's crossing who get to speak about why they don't want it, that's really not a lot of people. You feel disempowered if you don't own, I didn't own farm land in Iowa then like most people did not, but we all drink the water. We all live there. We all have this idea of a future that we hope future generations can live in and so I think having the group of different focused folks helped people learn how we could talk about a more collective story and narrative that was inclusive of landowners, that was inclusive of people living in town, that was inclusive of whether you lived in Des Moines or Southern Iowa, whether you were a kid or a granny, that there was a way that we needed you to help contribute to this. And so I saw it move how we talked about the pipeline from an issue that was just a landowner issue to an issue that was really a statewide issue.

Vivian:

That is very powerful. So you started with that first community meeting, but then you told me that y'all continued to have different opportunities for people to gather and be in resistance and community with one another. You've told me that you shared the piece that you read for us and others from the Fracture Anthology at several events that brought together this broad coalition of protestors. So can you describe what some of these future events looked and felt like?

Angie:

Yeah, I was very lucky. I think we all felt lucky to be working with each other on the good days. We had a fun group, but there were people that had a lot more organizing experience than me. And so I think about 100 grannies for a livable future over in Iowa City. They really loved using street theater and using art in that way to call attention to different issues and the folks in Boone County, Mark Edwards was really influential in helping to teach us about the Des Moines River watershed. And we had a flotilla

Episode 7: "Sharing Personal Narratives, Reshaping Societal Narratives"

Angie Carter

The Art of Climate Dialogue

down the Des Moines River watershed where the pipeline was proposed to cross. After one meeting, we had a shared community meal in Pilot Mound in Boone County, and we invited people to share song and poetry and art at that community potluck meeting. And I read this piece there, and I remember Taylor Brorby, one of the editors of that anthology, read his poem and I was standing in the back of that community hall next to one of the landowners and really quiet, stoic farmer, a stereotypical guy.

And he turned to me and he said, "I've never been to an event where people read poetry before." And I just thought, "Wow, this is so..." I haven't been in a space like this before. I was used to maybe going to environmental spaces and then going to agricultural spaces and then going to student spaces, but where all those things were emerging in this way where people were listening to each other. And that to me was a great success of the organizing, even though we didn't stop the pipeline that we were able to create and hold that space for so long together I think was very important. Because there's a certain vulnerability in that, but I think that's how we found connection together. And maybe over, it was almost three years by the conclusion of the organizing and throughout that we eventually connected with organizers at Standing Rock who came down and did direct action trainings.

Vivian:

Yeah, so you talked about how there was a sense of vulnerability and people listening to each other. Prior to that point, you had been in a lot of environmental and other kinds of spaces that didn't necessarily incorporate all of this, including opportunities to share artwork and storytelling very directly. What do you think art and storytelling contributed to those spaces that maybe made a difference in people coming together or in the success of those events, however you might define success of those events, what do you think it brought to those spaces?

Angie:

Yeah, I think having art and storytelling in those spaces was important because it helped people connect in this different way, together, and also helped us process some of the sadness or anger or confusion we had about why this was happening where we lived or to this river we loved. And also, I was very lucky to have mentors and all of this who would remind us we still need to take care of each other and laugh and have fun and not everything all the time can be so heavy. You can't bring folks into a movement that way. There needs to be space for people to get to know each other and appreciate and learn from each other. And so the storytelling, the art, that's one way you can do that to get people to maybe have a different perspective or consider the issue from another point of view.

Vivian:

That makes a lot of sense I think about being able to share a lot of different perspectives that way. That opens up that space to people beyond who are maybe considered experts and brings it into a broader community with a lot of different groups. You're talking about it's important to laugh and let go of the heavy parts of it that we're immersed in all the time, that makes me think of the part in your guide where you talk about self-care and you talk about checking out. And what you're describing sounds really valuable in that maybe there are opportunities to check out for a second, but to do it together in community so you're still connected to the issue that you really care about. You're still connected to that resistance, but you're taking time in unity with one another to breathe.

Episode 7: "Sharing Personal Narratives, Reshaping Societal Narratives"

Angie Carter

The Art of Climate Dialogue

Angie:

Together. Yeah, you're not alone in it. I think too often we see people burn out, especially in this kind of work, and we don't need people burning out. We need people in the work for the long haul because it's long haul work. And how do you do that? Well, you need to be able to have, like you said so well, some community together. And that doesn't just look like data back sheets or showing up angry places all the time. We needed time on the river together. We needed to hear some folks playing some songs or read some poetry. We needed that community space and not let that be one of the casualties of all the things we're standing against. We need to make sure that we're taking care of that space as a community space to help us get through it together.

Vivian:

Absolutely. Can you tell us about some of the responses to the readings that you did from Fracture?

Angie:

Yeah. We had another reading down in southeastern Iowa at the South Skunk River. There was a landowner, Sylvia Spalding Rogers, who hosted a flotilla down there. And then we had a reading in town and it was just a way for community members too, who might be curious about what's going on but not everybody feels comfortable going to a protest. But maybe they'll come to a reading at their local bookshop or community building, that seems a little less intimidating perhaps for some folks. And so it was a way also to invite community members to learn more about what was going on and how this is connected to larger problems, thinking about climate change and thinking about our water and everyone who's downstream. And it was a way for them to contextualize and situate what was happening in their corner of Iowa with a larger story and movement that's really happening around the world.

So the readings were a way that we could be a bridge, I think, to try to create a space that, "Oh, this isn't just an environmental movement you watch on the nightly news. This is something that actually everyday people in our town, our neighbors are affected by and concerned about too. And here's something we could take action on in our county in southern Iowa." So I thought that they were a really great space to share different voices because we would always have different readers from the anthology, but also make sure we were connecting to community in this way that it was through story rather than whatever their idea was of what protests are. Those can be really fun too, but I understand that some people might be maybe intimidated. Maybe that's not the first step they take as an environmental activist or as a caretaker or somebody standing up to the pipeline, but going to hear some people read, that maybe is a easier first step.

Vivian:

And you told me that there was some pretty strong responses to the guide when you read it aloud. Can you tell us about some of those?

Angie:

Yeah, we were invited to share this several... I've read it a lot of different contexts. Some of the places have been feminist meetings or gatherings or support spaces where people weren't so interested in the pipeline resistance part of it, but just maybe what it means to organize in a way that is less hierarchical, more inclusive. And then there were times where we would read it in community in Iowa up and down along the pipeline route where sometimes I would cry. It's emotional, it was in real time for me. But also

Episode 7: “Sharing Personal Narratives, Reshaping Societal Narratives”

Angie Carter

The Art of Climate Dialogue

sometimes people come up to us having read it in tears because it felt like a part of something that they had experienced or were experiencing was validated, that somebody else was talking about it. I think often in our social movement organizing, it's so important to have a shared front or narrative.

You don't want to be fighting all in the ranks and becoming each other's worst enemies because the enemy's the pipeline, but there's still things that happen that maybe are not okay and need addressed. Because we're all learning. We all make mistakes, we're all learning, we're trying to do this work better. So there has to be space to address that and also to heal from that. And that's really hard. I don't know that we talk about that enough. I mean, it's important to organize, but how you organize is what matters. That's what builds the power and this foundation for the long term struggle. So I think that really resonated with a lot of people. And at some of the readings, Ahna and I would alternate. We'd alternate reading it together and I found that really powerful because I personally had done a lot of organizing with Ahna. It was neat to be able to share from our point of view something we had experienced together as friends, but I think it also felt like we were giving voice to lots of people that maybe had felt marginalized in different ways in organizing, whether it was as being women or being seen as young women or whatever it might be, having their experience discounted.

Vivian:

I didn't realize that y'all had done some of the readings together and that does seem very powerful, especially. Because you talk about in the guide how there is an I, me in us, but there's no alone. And that it really is about supporting each other and figuring out what are those stories and values that we share. I wish that I could hear this piece in multiple voices because it does seem like it lends itself incredibly well to that too. And it was lovely hearing you read it out loud after just reading it myself on the page.

Angie:

Yeah, thank you. We wrote it over ice cream.

Vivian:

Yeah. That's wonderful.

Angie:

It was fun to write and then really meaningful to be able to share. Yes.

Vivian:

Yeah. So this is one of several pieces of creative nonfiction that you've written, and I encourage listeners to check out more of what you've written because I think it is very poetic and accessible. A lot of the work you've done that I've read that merges all of your different disciplines and talks about these really important questions, but in a way that is creative and rooted in personal values and personal experiences, and then collective values and experiences. So you have an interdisciplinary background in creative writing and sustainable agriculture and sociology and social and environmental activism. And I'm probably missing something in there, but how do your experiences studying and practicing creative writing inform your research and climate justice work?

Episode 7: "Sharing Personal Narratives, Reshaping Societal Narratives"

Angie Carter

The Art of Climate Dialogue

Angie:

It's really about asking questions. Creative writing is really about questions and observing the world around you, which is really what sociologists also do. And so I think that in both arenas of my life, whether it's as a creative writer, as a sociologist, it's about listening and learning from people's stories. And I'm really interested in the power of community and how we shape change. And story is one of those ways. And as a sociologist, I can see how the stories we tell or the stories we don't tell shape our cultural stories and who we are as a town or a state or a nation. And that's really about whose stories get heard. And so I'm very much interested in sharing the stories of the places that I live and the changes that I see there, especially as a rural person, because I think we don't really hear a lot from rural folks who are, especially in Iowa, having to bear the brunt of all of these changes that they're seeing on the landscape, the risks from these pipelines, the pollution of the water, the realities of climate change with flooding in their communities.

I don't think we hear a lot. We hear a lot from maybe urban people in what they think about rural places, but we don't hear a lot about rural people in their own words and from their own perspective. And oddly, even though I grew up in a little town and have lived in rural places most of my life, it was not until later as a grownup, somebody in a meeting once was like, "Oh, Angie, you're a rural person. What do you think about this?" That I ever really understood that that perspective of mine was important. I never really recognized that as something that mattered.

Vivian:

Oh yeah.

Angie:

And so I am just very interested in that and I've learned a lot from rural people and just the place-based knowledge that people have and bring and share in community. And it doesn't always match or reflect perhaps what people might use in policymaking language or scientific language, but it's the same. They're just using a different language to talk about the same problems. But I think that the story especially is a really good way to try to connect on these things because we all live our lives in story. We have a story about who we are, about who we aren't. We have a story about what we want to do. We have a story about where we've been and what we've done, and that's just how we live our lives. And so it seems like a very appropriate medium then to think about using story for how we create change and that it's a much more powerful vehicle for change than data sets or legislative hearings. Those things are important and we need to be there, but I think we can use our stories to try to shape changes in whether it's science or policy or whatever.

Vivian:

Yeah. We've talked about this idea that we all have these individual stories, we have communal stories, and that it does shape these broader societal narratives about farming and about agriculture and about rural places and about, I think even about what climate change is and how we're allowed to talk about it and what its impacts are and who it's affecting and how, and who's allowed to be a part of that conversation. And it sounds like a lot of what you've explored in your work and some of these organizing initiatives and in your creative work and in your research is how we can amplify other stories to help reshape those larger narratives that we hold onto, even if it's harmful.

Episode 7: "Sharing Personal Narratives, Reshaping Societal Narratives"

Angie Carter

The Art of Climate Dialogue

Angie:

I mean, we need to write some different stories. I think we need to be telling and listening to some different stories. And that's what was so powerful with the pipeline organizing because through the organizing, the people that were standing up to share their stories about why this pipeline, the Dakota Access pipeline, was harmful or something they didn't want, we saw how, through our shared learning about each other and just making the space, that it shifted from just being against the pipeline to really being about we want to make sure future generations still have clean water to drink and that future generations haven't seen biodiversity collapse because of climate change and that future generations aren't dealing with accelerated worsening flooding like we've been seeing because of climate change. And so it became a story about protection and future thinking and not just being against something, which that can be very motivating, having a common enemy. But eventually, if we're going to make a better future, we all have to be for something too.

And that can be hard to get to that place to motivate people to really work on what that vision looks like. But having folks stand up at meetings to share their stories who weren't usually the folks who were always doing the talking, that was very important. Making sure we were hearing from folks who weren't just farmers, making sure we were hearing from Meskwaki members, making sure we were hearing from children, making sure we were hearing from elders. All their perspectives are important for that future story that we were hoping we could get people to orient toward.

Vivian:

And figuring out those common values about what we want to protect seems really critical when we're talking about climate change and how that dialogue can move towards actual action or pushing for changes in policy. And what I've noticed in the work that I've done and seen and then hearing so many stories from you and the other interviewees, is that there is something about creating space for people to just share their stories and experiences, where it's not about being right or wrong. I think it's really easy for people to get stuck in this idea of, "Well, are those facts correct? I'm just going to disagree with the facts. You are wrong. I'm right." But if you create space for people to say, "This is what I've experienced," most likely people aren't going to say, "You're wrong. You haven't experienced that," because they're just saying, "This is what I've lived through, this is what I'm seeing." They're not claiming some fact or anything. And suddenly we are able to dig deeper into what are the actual things that we agree on.

Angie:

Yeah, find that connection and learn from each other. At the same time we were doing this organizing against the pipeline. I was wrapping up my dissertation at Iowa State, and I had partnered with Women, Food and Agriculture Network and learned a lot from Betty Wells and Jean Eells and Denise O'Brien and Danielle Wirth about this learning circle model and bringing women together to talk about their land and what they wanted to see in the future on their land. And it's just such a simple research technique, but so powerful. At the time of all this organizing, I was going across the state already to meet with different groups of women in different areas of the state, and it would be 20 women, some of whom knew each other before, some of whom were strangers, sharing really personal things about their land and the struggles they had and trying to protect their land acts of implicit and sometimes even explicit violence because people thought they should be doing different things with their land or managing it a different way.

Episode 7: "Sharing Personal Narratives, Reshaping Societal Narratives"

Angie Carter

The Art of Climate Dialogue

And just making the space for women to share their stories about their land helped them find, "Oh, here's this great person you should connect with. They'll answer your questions. They'll take you seriously at this NRCS office or at this extension office, and here's who you should call." And, "Oh, I have that same struggle with my tenant and this is what I did with my lease." Or, "Oh, we had that trouble in our family too, and this is what happened and my lessons learned from that." And yes, sharing their stories. And that was the curriculum of the meetings. There was no PowerPoint, there was no brochure to give them. It was just, "We're inviting you into this space. We're giving you some snacks and coffee, and you're going to share your stories."

And it was great because most of them, even if they did know each other from within their community, when they usually saw each other they were talking about something else. Their kids or their business or the church things happening. They were not talking about their land. They didn't have a space... You think about the farmers at the co-op or the coffee counter. They didn't have a space like that to just share what's happening today with their land. And so yeah, it was just very powerful seeing that in action, just learning from each other in those circles.

Vivian:

One of those projects that you did with the Women, Food and Agriculture Network was called River Stories. Can you tell us about the River Stories PhotoVoice project?

Angie:

Yeah. So this was a project that was funded through a Toyota TogetherGreen Foundation fellowship that I had and the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture. And it was at a time where there was a lot of attention being paid to the watersheds north of Des Moines because of the lawsuit that the Des Moines Waterworks had against the drainage districts. And I had noticed in the media that all the discussion about this, it was Bill Stowe who was a great advocate for clean water and for Iowa. It was then Governor Branstad. It was guys from the Farm Bureau and different agribusiness organizations, but it was all men talking about this, and it was all, for the most part, people who didn't even actually live in these watersheds. And so I was really interested in connecting with women landowners and farmers in these watersheds to hear what was happening on the ground, how they were thinking about these concerns.

It's an area of the state that's had a lot of challenges with flooding, has seen a lot of problems with increased rainfall that we've had and also has a lot of agricultural pollution. And so I recognized that even though they have all these challenges and these watersheds, these are still places people live and that they love and that they're taking care of. And so I recruited a small group of women to take part in this photovoice project where we met together a handful of times in person and a couple of times on the phone where again, they were invited just to share their story about their land and I was facilitating it. They came up with the prompts and were using pictures, everyday pictures, didn't have to be professional photographers. It was supposed to be using this art as a prompt.

It was supposed to be very low stakes and not intimidating. Just use the camera in your phone you have in your pocket. You can just take pictures of every day, what you see on your land, and write some narrative for that. And some of the women who took part in the project did have a real eye or experience in photography and some of them did not. And it didn't matter because all the stories they put together, their pictures and their narratives, were really powerful to show their experience as women living in this watershed, what changes they had seen over the course of their life while they were living on that land. There were positive stories, things that they were seeing in terms of

Episode 7: “Sharing Personal Narratives, Reshaping Societal Narratives”

Angie Carter

The Art of Climate Dialogue

conservation practices they had adopted to try to address some of the challenges we're seeing with climate change. There were also stories about some of the heartache they had with what's been lost, what they don't see in their watershed as often anymore.

And celebrating the monarchs is really this canary in the coal mine that we're seeing in terms of biodiversity in the Corn Belt and just the rarity of them and thinking also about other types of wildlife they would see. Lots of pictures of water, whether it's tile lines or floods, pictures of surface soil erosion and water where it shouldn't be. Also, pictures of the Raccoon River that were really lovely and beautiful and people taking their kayak through White Rock, for example. It was a small group of women. They weren't in any way trying to be representative of all people in the watershed. They were just sharing their personal stories again, of their experience there. And when they showed this exhibit, we had a public exhibit launch downtown in Perry, and it was so affirming for them to see people take their stories seriously.

It was written up in Farm News. Some of the participants had never been in the newspaper since they ran track in high school, so they weren't used to always sharing their stories so publicly, but because they were part of this group, they got pretty close. They felt like they had a community and they could share their story from that place. They had more power. And so the exhibit went on to be shown at Reiman Gardens and Ames and different Arboretums, the Des Moines Public Library, the PFI conference, these kinds of places did a tour for maybe about a year and a half. And that too was great because it wasn't me running it as the researcher, it was the women who were participating in it that were finding opportunities to share the exhibit. They really had ownership of this project and were proud about it.

There's a website that I'll share with you where you can see their different photo stories and we have a PDF slideshow that people can look at, but it loses a little of the power when you're not in a room seeing all these stories around you. And then added bonus if you have the women there too, because they're excited to talk about their stories. So it was just a great way to use art in a way that wasn't intimidating for people, but to try to communicate a different perspective on what was a very contentious issue at the time. It still is, I'm sure.

Vivian:

What conversations emerged related to climate change from this project, both amongst the participants and the people who viewed the exhibit?

Angie:

A lot of the conversation around climate change was reflection about changes they've seen over time in their lives. So thinking about times of year and which birds used to show up when and how many of them. And thinking about the monarchs and their migration and things that now might seem more rare that they had once taken for granted or used to happen more frequently. The reflection on time and the changes they've seen with climate change in their own lives. And then also reflections on extreme weather events. So times when they had experienced flooding, it's already happening, right? We're already experiencing climate changes impacts. And how that had motivated them or made them reconsider practices they were doing on their land and realizing that they needed to be doing more than the minimum if they were going to really be working on protecting soil and water, making sure that soil and erosion from their farm wasn't ending up in Des Moines in the next big flood. Thinking about what was washing off their farm and wanting to make sure that that wasn't causing harm downstream.

One of the participants had a really stark visual display of the flooding on her neighbor's farm and how in the spring now each year, seeing that flood across the street and just the sorrow, knowing that this is

Episode 7: “Sharing Personal Narratives, Reshaping Societal Narratives”

Angie Carter

The Art of Climate Dialogue

some of our most precious soil that is just being treated in this way and how the combined factors of climate change and then the consolidation and increased market pressure and agriculture, those things together have really resulted in a landscape that's not resilient anymore, that's not very adaptive. And so many of them were trying to do prairie restorations or using fire on the landscape again or doing different types of livestock integration and things to try to promote soil health and biodiversity and think of the ways that they could be change agents in their corners of the watershed.

Vivian:

And it sounds like specifically this strategy for using everyday art, that it's very short stories, these everyday photographs, and that created a platform for people to talk about, even if they weren't using the language of climate change, to talk about climate change impacts and to talk about climate resilience when they might not have otherwise with one another.

Angie:

Yes, I think so. And it goes back to one of the points in the essay I read at the start from Fracture, just the importance of doing this in a collective way. Because I think that each may have felt like they were doing something important on their own and they knew they needed to do this, but having the affirmation and validation from other women like them in their watershed made it even more powerful for them what they were doing, and to know that they weren't alone in that work. There's a lot in agriculture that is very isolating. And so knowing that they had these other women in their watershed, some of whom they had never met before who were doing similar sorts of conservation efforts or trying to learn about different things or they could go visit their farms to see what that looked like in practice, gave them a lot of very practicable, tangible actions that they felt that they could take.

And I think this is pretty common. Lots of people are living through and dealing with realities of climate change, but we don't see climate change as climate change always in our lives. It's like the change in the migrations of an animal or a butterfly, or it's the loss of certain species you don't see around anymore. And so these are all impacts of everyday things that are results of a climate change. I don't know, when I was little, I was learning about the polar bear, and that was not very applicable to my life growing up in rural Iowa. But if these women can share the ways they're trying to protect the river or just stop or slow flooding on the rivers, that connects to the everyday lives of lots of other Iowans. Many Iowans have dealt with these increased rates of floods. So it was using story to tell the realities of climate change, but in their own words, their own lived experiences in Seattle.

Vivian:

When you described the pieces and the photographs that were a part of this exhibit, you talked about extreme beauty in the monarchs and in the river and taking pictures of the prairie and fire and the restorative practices that the women are trying to use, but also pictures of flooding and damage and harm that's coming to the environment. How did the participants find balance in telling stories not only of the joy they find in the landscape surrounding them, what they want to protect, but also the challenges in grief?

Angie:

Yeah, this was hard. I think it's like what motivated on Ahna and I to write that piece for Fracture was we don't often tell or share stories about the things we're dealing with in real time. We tell you about them if they turned out okay at the end. We share the success stories. And so this was hard because the first

Episode 7: "Sharing Personal Narratives, Reshaping Societal Narratives"

Angie Carter

The Art of Climate Dialogue

meeting we had, everybody brought beautiful pictures and somebody said, "Well, there's actually other things I saw and I took pictures of, but I didn't know if I could bring them, for example, like a dumpster full of dead hogs across the street at the hog confinement or the soil erosion and the gullies I see on my neighbor's farm." And so I was facilitating, not leading this project. And so I asked the group, "Well, what do you think? What do you see here?" And then we asked one of the prompts in photovoice, "What do you see that's missing here?" And many of them asked, "Well, can we take pictures of those things?" Or, "I took pictures of those things, but I didn't know if it was okay to bring them."

And that's part of the story of the place too. And so we talked about it and they felt like they wanted to be able to show good things and bad things, but they were very conscious of not wanting to bring stigma to their community. They already had some bad press as being bad actors with these lawsuits, but they kept reminding themselves, "We're telling what we want to tell and we'll just use the photos we want to use in the exhibit." So the process of photovoice is not just the output and the pictures and the stories at the end, but this iterative discussion you develop over time with the group where together they create some new knowledge or shared understanding about the experience they're going through. And so through the course of our meetings, I think they all felt like they found a balance for themselves that they felt good with that was true and honest to their lived experience and honored what they saw that was going well that people were trying to do to create change, but was also honest about the real challenges and limitations that they were experiencing in their water.

Vivian:

Thank you for sharing about that. Because I think when you told me, when we talked previously about the challenges and how people weren't sure whether they could share images that were hard and heartbreaking in a way, that they weren't sure whether that could be part of the conversation, I think that may resonate with a lot of us when we're talking about this concept of climate dialogue and how do we facilitate talking about climate change so that we can take action. Even I am immersed in studying climate change for the past several years, and even I sometimes feel hesitance in groups of people of if we talk about climate change is that is going to be a downer. We don't want to just bring this up over and over. And there is a sense of do we need permission to talk about the hard things? But what I appreciate about the guide you read earlier too is that y'all described how it's so valuable to talk about these things, talk about how they're challenging to think about, to plan for, to organize around, to act on, that it is really challenging but that we have to talk about it together. That we can't be alone, we can't be staring at those pictures alone.

Angie:

No. And it's in community again. There needs to be space to grieve. We have to process what's happening to us. It's not healthy if we don't. We need to have space for the grief and then we also need to have space for celebration and care and just still find some joy in the work we're doing together, both those things. And I don't know that we've hit the right tenor or balance yet in our national conversation about climate change. We focus a lot on the gloom and doom as a fear tactic, but it's a much stronger movement if we can be acting together, not out of fear, but out of what we want to protect and control the narrative that we want to share together and do it in our own words, speak for what we want. And I think taking it back to the watershed or taking it back to the community that's impacted is a really important way to do that because they're going to have the words and the stories and the experience, trusting them to share that. It's important for organizers to remember to do that.

Episode 7: “Sharing Personal Narratives, Reshaping Societal Narratives”

Angie Carter

The Art of Climate Dialogue

Vivian:

When doing the River Stories project, what did y'all learn or what surprised you about photovoice and the role that this strategy can play in encouraging these kinds of conversations that are critical than maybe often stymied due to partisan or other conflict?

Angie:

So we were inspired to do this project because Betty Wells, who was one of my mentors at Iowa State at the time, a professor in social sociology and sustainable ag, she had read this book by Shannon Bell called *Our Roots are Strong as Ironweed*, and it was about women who are organizing against mountaintop removal and the coal industry in West Virginia. And it's a really powerful book. They used photovoice to convey these stories of this community, the experiences these women were living with. And we wondered if it could be a powerful strategy in Iowa. It's different because you can see mountaintop removal, it's a very visual harm. You don't really see water pollution maybe the same way or see climate change the same way. But we thought maybe we could find ways to show that right through this strategy or this project. And I think I was a little naive in understanding or thinking about the process and how it hasn't ended.

They haven't shown the exhibit for a while, but we're still talking about it. And we started this project in 2016 or 15 and the women in that group still talk to each other and they're still doing things in the watershed and many of them have gone on to do even more things after this project to be advocates for their watershed. And so I didn't really understand. I mean, I guess I went into it thinking about it more as a research project than an organizing effort and have just learned a lot from it as a powerful method of organizing. And so I have actually started a new photovoice project here with some collaborators I have in the Western Upper Peninsula focused on food justice and food system and food access. I mean, it's a very different landscape, but we're in a region of the world where there have been people hunting, fishing, gathering, foraging, food, living with abundance since time and memorial and food scarcity's actually a new problem here even with our short 90-day growing season.

And so trying to shift the story about scarcity here and instead talk about all the great Indigenous and immigrant foodways that are here, all the knowledge that's here, all the gardening and preserving and foraging that folks still do here. There's just so much to learn from each other. And so we've been doing a photovoice project here to try to make that more visible in our community and help people see that this is still part of who we are and where we're at. So I'm still using photovoice in a similar kind of way, but I guess I was humbled by the project in Iowa and understanding, we had a grant that lasted a year and a half or something and the project went on for years and years and it's great. Yeah, just how the stories evolve I guess. I didn't know to anticipate that.

Vivian:

That's wonderful and that it seems like you can, because of this relatively accessible way of capturing the stories with photographs in a few words, then it does pave a pathway for longevity with those stories and continuing to amplify them as we're talking about the importance of sharing other stories and bringing them into our larger narratives. When we talked about that earlier, this idea of reshaping narratives on not only an individual and organizing level, but maybe reaching to policy levels. How do you think arts and storytelling techniques can contribute to pushing for climate policy?

Episode 7: "Sharing Personal Narratives, Reshaping Societal Narratives"

Angie Carter

The Art of Climate Dialogue

Angie:

I think that they help in making it personal. So you're not just speaking from numbers and facts, you're talking about what you're seeing in your neighborhood or what you're seeing on your street or what you're seeing on your rural county road. And that's very powerful. These are the stories that the politicians speak up and take on the campaign trails when they're running for president. "Well so and wherever told me about what's happening." And so these make it a human problem, not just an economic problem or an infrastructure problem. This is a real person's name or family is associated with this. So that's very powerful. It's very powerful. I think trying to appeal to people's hearts rather than always their minds can help to try to get around some of the ideological barriers we have and talking about some of these issues that have become so partisan in the United States. And talking, for example, I think we saw this with the pandemic too, very partisan topic like climate change.

Even though we're all living with and suffering the realities of this in real time, it's not a partisan reality. And so trying to reframe things to be about community care and to be about stronger and healthier communities, like everybody wants that. And I don't care if somebody's using the right climate change scientific terms when we're talking about soil health and flooding and biodiversity on farms. If they care about those things and they want to work to protect those things, great. Let's work together. So trying to find ways through story to make those kinds of connections, to get past these barriers that we have right now in this very divided volatile political climate, I think is very much needed.

Vivian:

And it seems like most of the work you've done is pairing these artistic and storytelling techniques with organizing as a way to create this larger collective narrative that is multifaceted, that involves a lot of people's stories and perspectives. And if that's being elevated through organizing efforts to a level where ideally policymakers and other people who have power to change some of the systems can hear that the narrative is not as linear and one-sided as maybe we thought. It seems like it can have real power.

Angie:

Yeah and they evolve. I was very active when I first came to Iowa State. It was the fall of Occupy, and people like to say the Occupy movement didn't do anything, but we've seen the framing of issues from the Occupy movement show up in national policy debates and discussion and platforms of our presidential candidates. And so if you don't write your story, other people do it for you. So you got to get it out there. And the more we can try to share some collective story and amplify it and build our power together around that, I think that's where we can start to see some of these wins and gains when it comes to shifting the policy landscape.

Vivian:

And that there's ripple effects, like you mentioned that people said that the Occupy movement didn't do anything with them, we're still seeing the effects of it years later. And that's something we've talked about with some of the other interviewees on this podcast too, is that sometimes with these kinds of strategies, it's very hard to see immediate results, which can cause these kinds of techniques to be discounted. We can't put numbers to them or chart the impacts, but there are ripple effects and we have seen them, and just remembering that we can do that together.

Episode 7: “Sharing Personal Narratives, Reshaping Societal Narratives”

Angie Carter

The Art of Climate Dialogue

Angie:

If it's a slower shift perhaps, and some of us might want, but when you look, you can see the shifts when you look back. So yeah, trying to remember that the work is long.

Vivian:

Yes.

Angie:

So it can be hard, but I've been really lucky in my life to have really supportive family members and mentors and friends of other generations before me who put this in a larger story for me. So it's not as if these are new problems. I mean, even climate change, we could trace that back to the plowing up of the Prairie and the Homestead Act. These have been challenges and problems that have been in the works for a long time, and maybe some of them are just getting attention now, but people have been dealing with the effects for a long time. And so I think we have, when we start to think about the bigger story we're all in. We can see how it's connected in ways that are bigger than us and that helps us understand that we need to take patience with ourselves and each other and make sure we take the time and space to process these things as they're happening. And artistic strategies for change making, that's one strategy of many, but definitely we need these things as part of our movements.

Vivian:

As we wrap up our conversation today then I wanted to ask you for our listeners to take away with them, what are the three key ideas that you want us to understand about the work that you've done at this intersection of arts and storytelling in climate dialogue?

Angie:

Three key ideas. I think the first is probably is the importance of doing this in community and thinking about whether it's climate action or addressing any other societal challenge or need we have, that story is always going to be an important element of the change work and arts are one way we can do that in community together. And so that's very important. Just basing it and keeping it in community and using that as an avenue for change through these strategies. And then I think also it's important to remember that it doesn't matter if it's just the small project you think you're doing in your yard or your town or I don't know, whatever group you're in. There is this cumulative effect of all these things together that we can't even know or realize. And I guess in writing that essay with Ahna, we just did it out of an evening of frustration and had it published in this anthology that we thought was great and thought we were done, but finding that people wanted us to read it in different spaces and that it spoke to people in different ways and different spaces, and that made it just take a life of its own beyond our own experience with it.

That was a good lesson for us I think, in the power of words and story and connection with people even that you may not know or have never met are going to maybe read that and engage with that in some way. And then thinking about this work as an invitation always. This is hard to remember, but doing this work in a way where you're inviting people in. And so you don't have to be a professional artist and you don't have to be a renowned storyteller and you don't have to be the most well-known or respected activist for climate justice. We need just the everyday experiences and stories. Those are very valuable. And if we could hear more of those, it's like that saying that if more women were to speak their truths, we would see the world change. I just think we need more rural people telling their stories about what

Episode 7: “Sharing Personal Narratives, Reshaping Societal Narratives”

Angie Carter

The Art of Climate Dialogue

this looks like where they are. We need more women, we need more queer folks, we need more trans folks, we need more people of color. We need to be hearing more Indigenous stories about these intersections. Just inviting that and making sure that we're always inviting and including others as we're doing this work is really key.

Vivian:

And what is your biggest recommendation for people who are listening to this podcast who are thinking about how they can facilitate climate dialogue in their own communities through some of these takeaways you just mentioned? Invitation and community in hearing multiple stories. What's your biggest recommendation for getting started?

Angie:

Just get some people together, I don't know, have a potluck or a breakfast and just invite your local muralist or poet or puppet maker and the environmentalists and I don't know, your neighborhood organizer. I don't know. Just get some people together and you'll make a plan and it'll be great and it'll be something good for your community and better than any idea somebody could give you from a toolkit on the internet or some national 501c3.

I think we have the answers. We just need to do the work to put them into action. So yeah, just get together with folks in your community and put it out there that you want to have a meeting about whatever at the public library meeting room, and maybe there's three of you who show up. You can do something and then maybe there's five of you the next time and then you get 20 people come to your puppet show and then just start it. I think that that's the hard thing. People feel like they need to be told what to do, and you already know what to do. You just need to start doing it and connecting with others to do it. And that's been really hard with the pandemic. We're all so exhausted from online life. But even doing things outside together in my community there've been lots of meetings at picnic tables and parks, for example, throughout the pandemic. And there's ways to find making those connections happen.

Vivian:

Thank you so much, Angie, for joining the podcast and for sharing all of these initiatives that you've done that have combined storytelling and multiple different kinds of art and organizing and building community. I am so glad I got the chance to talk with you.

Angie:

Well, thank you, Vivian, and I appreciate the time and the space to reflect on all of this. And I look forward to hearing other stories through this project you're doing. I think it's so important, especially in Iowa in this time, that we have space to think and talk together about how we can use art in this way to try to address these very real challenges and problems we're seeing in climate change in our communities.

Vivian:

Yes, absolutely. And speaking of continuing to connect with each other and hear multiple stories, how can people stay connected with you and the work you are doing?

Episode 7: “Sharing Personal Narratives, Reshaping Societal Narratives”

Angie Carter

The Art of Climate Dialogue

Angie:

So I will share with you the website for River Stories, and then I also have a personal and a professional website that I will share. And if anybody's interested in reading any of my writing, whether it's academic or the creative writing, they can just email me and I can send them a copy of a chapter or an article. I'm always glad to do that. And I've also made plans to be back in Iowa some next year. I'm very interested in studying what's happening with the organizing around the current Carbon Storage pipeline projects and so just reach out. Maybe we could connect in person next year too.

Vivian:

Wonderful. And we'll make sure to put those websites and emails and everything that you want to share on the website for the podcast. Thank you again.

Angie:

Thanks Vivian.

Vivian:

Thank you for listening to The Art of Climate Dialogue and we hope you'll listen to the rest of the series. More information about podcast interviewees is available at ecotheatrelab.com. We invite you to engage in conversation with us by leaving a comment, responding to the short feedback forum and our show notes, and checking out The EcoTheatre Lab's website. We want to thank all of the organizations and individuals who made this series possible. This project is funded by both a North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program Graduate Student Grant, which is supported by the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture, and a Johnson Center for Land Stewardship Policy Emerging Leader Award. Our podcast consultant is Mary Swander. Our podcast musician is Omar de Kok-Mercado, and our podcast artist is Moselle Nita Singh. Our podcast land acknowledgement is adapted from tests developed by Lance Foster and Sikowis Nobiss, and from conversations with Shelley Buffalo. Rosie Marcu-Rowe is our podcast editor and I'm Vivian M. Cook, Community Engagement Director for The EcoTheatre Lab and The Art of Climate Dialogue podcast producer and host. Take care.