

Music: [00:00:15](#) [inaudible].

Josh Mangelson: [00:00:17](#) Welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts Community of Christ offers for today's world.

Music: [00:00:31](#) [inaudible]

Karin Peter: [00:00:34](#) Welcome to Project Zion Podcast. I'm Karin Peter and today we're talking with Lindsay Hansen Park. Lindsay is a podcaster, a mom, the executive director of Sunstone and advocate for justice and a social reformer. So welcome Lindsay.

Lindsay: [00:00:53](#) Ah, thank you for having me. I sound really fancy and all those by-lines

Karin Peter: [00:00:57](#) Well we try here at Project Zion, so there you go. So we asked you to share with us today, um, a little bit about your interaction with the people and the town of Hilldale, Utah or what's better known? I think I'm in Mormonism at Short Creek. And if you're not familiar for listeners, it's the home of the FLDS polygamous sect of Mormonism, which has been in the news on and off, you mean United States for quite some time. But before we talk specifically about short Creek, I wanted to, to talk a little bit with you, Lindsay, or have you share a bit about kind of what started this journey for you into relationships with polygamous groups. And that was your decision to do a podcast on the polygamist wives of Joseph Smith. And so if you could share with us, why did you decide to do that? What led you into that area of research and podcasting?

Lindsay: [00:02:01](#) I know it's such a weird topic to focus on, right? Especially focus like the last six years of my life on a, and people will say all the time, you know, they'll, they'll be like, um, so you have a podcast on polygamy. It's great. So are you, um, are you a, and what they're trying to ask is, am I a polygamist? Do I have a background in polygamy? And the answer is no, I don't. I'm not a polygamist. I've never been a polygamist, I have polygamous ancestors, as many Utah Mormons do. But really I grew up in the LDS tradition and grew up hating polygamy. I was taught that our church had abandoned it a long time ago. And it was this quirky thing that Brigham Young did, but we don't do it anymore. And the people that do it are weird and wicked and gross.

Lindsay: [00:02:47](#) And so when I discovered I was actually 25 years old when I discovered that Joseph Smith was a polygamist and I didn't even

know how to make sense of that. And you know, outsiders will say like, well I don't get it? You knew Brigham young was a polygamist and absolutely I did. Like I grew up, I had my eight year old birthday at Brigham Young's, you know, original home in Utah, the Lion House I had,

Karin Peter: [00:03:11](#) Oh really? For the hot rolls, right?

Lindsay: [00:03:15](#) Yeah, we had, we pulled taffy and I got my first porcelain doll and it was like a big deal, you know? And so of course I knew about bringing me on, but I didn't know that Joseph Smith was a polygamist. I didn't know the history of it. I actually didn't know the church's history of it. And so when I did it, it threw me for a bit of a loop.

Lindsay: [00:03:35](#) But I decided to do, I, and I started to blog about it for Feminist Mormon Housewives. Cause this is, you know, 10 years ago, the blogs were really big and Feminist Mormon Housewives was one of the largest Mormon blogs ever. It was a huge deal. And so I use that platform to discuss something that I found was really painful for people. So many women, uh, we're in so much pain, so many people, men and women, but mostly women were in pain over the subject. And I just thought, you know, the more information we have on something, the better it's going to be. And so I started blogging about it and that became really popular. And it was, it was an interesting way to cut my teeth on Mormon history because I didn't know anything about Mormon history. I had grown up with a mother who was a public historian.

Lindsay: [00:04:26](#) We would dress up as pioneers and go to youth conferences and EFY and teach, you know, pioneer anecdotes from, uh, some of the whitewashed history, sort of the heritage history. Have you taught? And so I, that is, that was my formal training, you know, like reading, uh, faith promoting stories. And so I learned really quickly and really harshly that the landscape of, of Mormon history particularly, but in academia, but particularly in Mormon history was very brutal. I mean, where are you got your sources from mattered, who you use to cite things mattered. And so I sort of learned as I went along through trial and error. And when I made mistakes, people were brutal. I mean, I had someone dox me for two years because they said I didn't cite my quotations appropriately enough on my podcast. And so yeah, I had to learn to, be really precise in my work and it's still something that I'm, that I'm working on because precision is not, uh, it doesn't come naturally to me. I'm very messy and loose and, um, you know, accessible. And that's what I think people like it. So we started this podcast and I started

this podcast and over the course of time, it really started to change and have an impact.

Karin Peter: [00:05:55](#) So I've listened to the podcast. In fact, many times when my spouse and I would drive to Utah from Washington state where I live, we would listen to episodes of that particular podcast on the, on the way down. And of course, I noticed that as you had gotten in further and further and further into the podcast, the year of polygamy became two years of polygamy. And you began to delve into, fundamentalism and how this principle of polygamy was still being, being lived out. So how, how did that happen? How did the podcast kind of lead you into these interactions? Or, or how did that first interaction with people who still, um, who are living polygamy now, how'd that happen?

Lindsay: [00:06:45](#) So I think that's one of the most interesting things about the podcast. When I started at, it was really easy to take an anti polygamy, uh, standpoint. And, and I think I did, but I, I was careful of it because I knew that that being anti polygamy was a bias. And I knew enough, I didn't know anything about historical scholarly research, but I knew enough to know that, that that would be a problem. So I really tried to leave that by the wayside and I'm glad that I did that because what it did isn't it made the podcast accessible, but some fundamentals have pointed out that in the early episodes I call polygamy like an abomination, you know, I was really much against it. Everything about it hurt me, like personally, it was a very emotional thing. But as I, it's, it's funny because the podcast is meant to be a year.

Lindsay: [00:07:37](#) Yeah. We, we're just going to explore the topic for a year and then move on. But I sort of got sucked into it and that initial instinct that I had to, the more information, the better it would be really like took, took root. And I just, the more I found, the more insight I had in, and it really complicated the narrative for me because as we got into the modern day, it's, I always say this, but it's really easy to talk about dead people, but people that are still living, they can talk back to you and you can have a dialogue. And I've actually learned a lot about writing history and telling stories and telling history from this too, because it is so easy to derive an opinion and a conclusion from a few quotes in a newspaper or a letter or a journal, right? But when you dig in and talk to people, um, who are modern day polygamous, this, the story is complex.

Lindsay: [00:08:32](#) It's so much more complex than any history will ever be able to write. And that sort of took over for me. I, I, it's been, it's been one of the, probably the most controversial things about the

podcast is people really joined in because they hated polygamy like I did. And then to see me sympathize with modern polygamist has been really difficult and challenging for a lot of people. And I think I do that not to be nice, but it's just feels honest to me. Um, what I found, what was the surprise of my life is that some people are genuinely happy and in polygamy, uh, genuinely and I would say as happy as they are in Mormon monogamy. I know so many miserable Mormon, monogamous, so many, so many in abusive scenarios and situations. And I just didn't really see much of a difference in modern Mormon polygamy.

Lindsay: [00:09:28](#) Now I'm going to say that with a, with a caveat, which is there are absolutely horrific stories that are coming out of some Mormon fundamentalist communities, but I think to pin all on polygamy actually sometimes compounds the problem and does more damage than it than it does good. So I've been trying to be responsible with how I talk about it. So no, I would never live polygamy. I don't think it's great. I haven't like changed my mind on it, but I also don't think I can take the first opinion that I had on it, that it's like it's just damaging, you know, out the gate and that it's, that nobody should be living it and we should pull everybody out of it. I just, I, I can't feel that way anymore.

Karin Peter: [00:10:18](#) So did you know people who are living polygamy before you started a podcast?

Lindsay: [00:10:25](#) I didn't, not that I knew of. I mean, I, now that I have the podcast, I know that I actually knew several polygamists. In fact, this is the, this is the other big surprise of the podcast was how just how prevalent it is in my area and in Mormonism, I actually found, uh, there's been a few examples are our nannies out in Tooele County, they came from Centennial Park. The girls, uh, were from a plural family in that group. And there was a woman in our stake that was a secret polygamist, covert polygamist. And there we grew up with a polygamist family. I actually grew up with Lance, all red in my neighborhood and he, he is the son of a famous polygamous for the AUB and he came to church with us. He won. I went to school with them. I had no idea. No idea.

Lindsay: [00:11:17](#) So it's stuff like that that you find out, you're like, Oh my gosh. And it's more pieces of this really messy puzzle that come into place. But yeah, it's, I think that that speaks to how, how interesting and complex this issue really is because people want to make it a binary. In fact, when I started getting involved with fundamentalists and realizing that there was a lot of problems in one community in particular the FLDS. And just to be clear,

everybody wants to think that all polygamists are FLDS and that's not accurate. The FLDS is one specific group of Mormons with in their heyday about 10,000 people in the town. And the town is going through a lot of problems that are maybe tangentially related related to polygamy, but not directly related to polygamy. And so as I start to go down and do work down there, I just realized like it's, it's so messy, but it's not that different from my own experience and Mormons everywhere kind of the same whether they're polygamous Mormons or not.

Lindsay: [00:12:23](#) And that's really a hard thing for LDS people to contend with.

Karin Peter: [00:12:28](#) It's easier to other them, right, to make them the other that, that you can dismiss.

Lindsay: [00:12:34](#) I mean we have this apocryphal story in my house that we had this aunt who was older and they called her senile and she would call one of her kids and say, the polygamists are trying to kidnap me, you know? And that is sort of the view that I had about it and I just thought like they were dangerous and harsh and, and now they've become some of my most beloved friends, you know, these people, because I grew up in the LDS tradition where we're the majority in this state and were, I would say collectively pretty judgemental, especially about fundamentalists. You can talk to any fundamentalists and they'll say the biggest persecutor is not outsiders. The biggest persecutor is LDS people.

Lindsay: [00:13:19](#) And I was one of those, I judged them well when you get down and dirty with polygamists and talk about doctrine and messy stuff, I found that their way easier to contend with, um, conflict and sort of the seedier parts of history, they aren't as defensive, they don't shut down. And that was really refreshing to me to, to meet really faithful Mormons who could talk about the heart history because some of them claim that heart history as like, you know,

Karin Peter: [00:13:54](#) They're not white washing, they're not.

Lindsay: [00:13:56](#) And you know, a lot of them are way more flexible when it comes to what we call Word of Wisdom. So the health code, you know, I know Community of Christ interprets this differently, but one of my favorite stories is going down to Short Creek. There's a little town, so at the FLDS split off split in the 1980s and there was a group that came out, came out of it called Centennial park.

- Lindsay: [00:14:16](#) And I would say they are like the golden standard for the best case scenario for a Mormon polygamy that I've seen. Like they live in a nice tight knit little Mormon community and there are problems of abuse and, and all of the things that go in any Mormon community. But for the most part they're modern. They, you know, listen to rap music and modern music, have their iPads,
- Karin Peter: [00:14:40](#) And go to nursing school and do all the things that everybody else does.
- Karin Peter: [00:14:44](#) And educated for the most part just great. I go into their liquor store and there's photos of Steve all over the wall. Steve Young, the Mormon, the LDS football player and it was the wildest thing to be in a liquor store with these BYU photos everywhere. It's like, what world am I in? And so I asked people, I said, what, what is this about? Because you know, in the LDS tradition we are very strict about alcohol that would be seen as almost blasphemous, right? And they're like, Oh yeah, no, Steve Young, he's Mormon, he's our guy. And they were just like rooting for him the same way that LDS people root for him. And I thought that was really interesting.
- Karin Peter: [00:15:22](#) I'm not sure Steve Young would be thrilled about his photo all over the Centennial park. A liquor store or any liquor store for that matter. But how funny. So let's, let's kind of skip to something else for a minute. Cause it's gonna it's gonna take us around. Back to where I'd like to go. So just for a minute, let's talk about Sunstone. You're the executive director for Sunstone and for some of our listeners who are not familiar with Sunstone, can you describe it in just a couple sentences?
- Lindsay: [00:15:53](#) Yeah. Sunstone is a Mormon studies open forum that has been around for over, it's almost 45 years. Just a place where we have a magazine and conferences where people can come and discuss any issue in and around Mormonism. So you don't have to be Mormon to be there. But if you're interested in the restoration at all, you can come present papers, talk about theology, history, culture, all that stuff.
- Karin Peter: [00:16:19](#) So, um, the tagline, the current tagline for Sunstone is there's more than one way to Mormon. I have a cup in my cupboard that says that there's more than one way to Mormon. You decided to really push that to the, to the boundaries of some people's comfort zones. With that. Now you're aware that in Community of Christ, when you guys refer to us as under the Mormon umbrella, we get a little freaked out over that. And, and we're learning to claim, you know, our place in that

narrative as well. But you, you decided to broaden the scope of groups that were represented at the Sunstone conferences. And in fact, you held, uh, your initial Sunstone regional conference, Short Creek conference a few years ago down in Hildale and invited representatives from various polygamist groups to come. So I'm, I'm curious if you could tell us a little bit about that. Why did you decide to broaden it by inviting representatives from a polygamist groups? Why did you decide to do that first short Creek conference?

Lindsay:

[00:17:27](#)

That's a great question. Well, first of all, I started with this really, uh, accidental phrase. There's more than one way to Mormon. I just like was saying it and we're doing it, writing an advertisement. And I just, I decided to start using the, uh, deliberately because what I've learned through the podcast and through meeting Community of Christ was that Mormonism, the restoration, the book of Mormon, our theology, our doctrine, our history was so much broader than what I thought it was. And that, that was actually turned out to be a gift in the LDS church. We would have seen that as a negative thing. You know, we want it to be the one true church, the one and only. And so to have to contend with other groups was really uncomfortable for me. I didn't want to do it.

Lindsay:

[00:18:21](#)

I didn't want to have to acknowledge that. And it's a really weird mirror to have held up to you when you see your own scripture and your own doctrine interpreted in such a different way that's foreign to you and institutionally. Right? And I loved how that expanded my mind. I loved how that was a practice and compassion and empathy for me. And I felt like that was the most honest thing to do was to acknowledge that there is actually more than one way to Mormon. And in fact, that's just the truth. That's just the truth. I tell people all the time that we all know how to be Mormon in the LDS church. We all know how to perform Mormonism. We put on the costume at church and we go and we say the right things. We know what you say at church and what you don't say, and we know how to act and how to do that.

Lindsay:

[00:19:10](#)

And then everyone goes home and they kind of take that persona off and they're just who they are. And I just wanted people to live more authentically in that. But of course we ran into the problem of like you'd mentioned, community of Christ didn't like being sort of looped under that umbrella. And at first I was kind of careless about it. I was like, well, but, but you guys were Mormon nights too. You come from the same tradition. You're, you have so much of the same shared history. You were called your, your ancestors were killed for being Mormons, the

actual term Mormons too. But now I've been tried trying to be more sensitive because I realized that that has a really painful fraught history for a lot of Community of Christ members. And so we try to include the restoration. But I mean, I always tell Community of Christ folks that LDS church has a huge crisis right now where, um, people are, are not only losing their faith but losing their identity and there's a lot of depression and suicide and opioid, uh, you know, prescription drug abuse.

Lindsay: [00:20:13](#)

And so if you want to, if you can afford to be generous with us, come into our umbrella here. Because what you do is you help us complicate the narrative. When you take on that label and sort of claim it, you're allowing Mormons to be more diverse and that's what the LDS people need. Now, you shouldn't have to do that on behalf of the LDS people, but it is a favor when you do that. I mean that's the agenda behind this tagline, which is if we can sort of complicate and even water down, I, that's, you know, people don't like it when they use that. But that's the truth. If we watered down the identity of what it means to be Mormon, then maybe it's a little more safe for, you know, some gay kid in Parawon, Utah who is struggling with his sexuality. He can say, you know what, I'm different. I'm still Mormon. I'm weird. But I know other people you know are different too. I know I have an uncle that's a weird Mormon that doesn't go to church or I, you know, whatever. And that's kind of the focus behind it.

Karin Peter: [00:21:16](#)

Well, we talked earlier before we started recording that it's part of what I refer to as the tradition of the restoration with a lowercase R as opposed to restoration with an uppercase or lowercase R is do we have the grace within ourselves to be about a restoration and wholeness with all aspects, right? Which is what you've done with polygamist groups is you've extended personal grace and that relationship

Lindsay: [00:21:41](#)

It's been hard. I mean, so Sunstone has partnered with community of Christ. A lot. Committee of Christ has been really beautiful for me on a personal level and on sort of an institutional level, a Sunstone, we sometimes get criticized for being too partnered with community of Christ because LDS people, especially ex Mormons, are really hesitant to dip their toes back in any sort of religious waters and I always invite them to sort of be challenged because Community of Christ is a great way to do that, to embrace your heritage. They, you guys have modeled for us how to sort of do that in a healthier way. And that's why I like keeping us under the same umbrella, but I really have had to be more thoughtful and recognize that like some of

you guys don't want to associate with the term Mormon and that's okay too.

Karin Peter: [00:22:41](#) And, and probably have the same feelings about it as some ex-Mormons have about associated with religion in general. I think it comes from the same place.

Lindsay: [00:22:51](#) Yeah. I mean we did. So Community of Christ did, uh, they let us use their facilities since some user facilities in Boise and Toronto. I think we both had interesting experiences cause I brought fundamentalists there to speak and some of the Community of Christ people are like, what is happening? This is everything we stood against. And so it's been sort of a learning process for all of us. But again, when here, here's my theory, when we make polygamous, uh, monsters, when we make them the villains in the Mormon story and some of them rightfully deserve to be that way. But when we do that as a whole, uh, just for the practice alone, we're actually participating in a system of oppression that has existed for a long time. Yeah. You're participating in an old historical system that marginalizes polygamous. Uh, it forces them into more rural communities, uh, isolation, they become fearful of outsiders of government.

Lindsay: [00:23:55](#) And it allows people like Warren Jeffs, who was the prophet and basically cult leader of the FLDS to abuse his, his congregation to abuse their faith too. I mean, if you're being molested by a family member, you can't, this is a very real thing in these communities. You don't go to the police, you don't report it because not only does it make your church look bad and you're already persecuted and marginalized as it is. You don't want to make it look bad, but your whole family could go to jail. At least that's what they believe. You know, if you, if you step forward, your dad and mom, they're breaking the law. And so that culture, that system has allowed some really heinous things. And that's why I say polygamy is part of it. But not in the way that that we think it is like the fact that polygamy has been so underground has allowed some really her ethic at practices to emerge. And so we, I just, I fundamentally use upon believe that we need to associate with, uh, people from our tradition more and stop pushing people to the margins. It doesn't do us any good. It's, it's sort of cancerous to, to everything. And then we are walking into this old struggle.

Karin Peter: [00:25:12](#) So Lindsay, you've done that not just through Sunstone and by extending invitations to two different groups to come to Sunstone, but you've done it through your own relationships that you've developed with people. I'm at Sunstone symposium at salt Lake. We've had Christ Church missionaries there helping

with the logistics of what's happening and helping to make things run smoothly. You've had an intern at the office, you have personal friendships with people from a polygamous communities and you've been intentional about developing those and inviting other people into those relationships in order to expand people's experience and understanding about what it means to really have more than one way to Mormon. As you began to specifically participate with the FLDS down in Short Creek in Hilldale, you began to see some of the dire circumstances of individuals and families in Short Creek as well as the town of Hilldale as well that have come about because of a more Jeffs and his tenure there as prophet of that group, what's been happening there. Tell us a little bit about that and what you discovered and how you've been able to use your sphere of influence to try to bring some elements of healing and restoration to bear in Short Creek?

Lindsay:

[00:26:41](#)

Well, like I said, I think I went in initially with sort of a paternalistic viewpoint. You know, that the general, the general consensus was my life, my way of thinking is better. They're misguided, they need help, let's go fix them. And I think that that's the a problem that, you know, this town encounters all the time and there's a lot of problems in it. What ended up happening was I realized just how similar we were. Like I said, it holds up a mirror. And one of the hardest things has been a lot of the women that I admire, a lot of my Mormon feminist mentors who have hated polygamy like I do. They think it's abusive and oppressive to women. Uh, my work has really made them question my feminism. Question my integrity and my motives. Like, you know, there's a S a specifically an older generation of women who really are uncomfortable with my work.

Lindsay:

[00:27:42](#)

They think I'm trying to normalize polygamy or something. And I don't think you can normalize polygamy. We're employment, there's nothing normal about it. But going into the town, what I saw were not polygamous. I just saw people who were suffering from the same challenges my own community was suffering from. And then compounded by the fact that there they were dealing with a leader, a religious leader who really made things hard for them. And I just, my goal is to be hard on a system's not on people. And this was a whole huge system, a Mormon system that I was quite familiar with because of my own work. And so it was easier for me to translate, but I was a little bit arrogant in that I thought I understood the issues like I, because I was LDS, we were so similar.

Lindsay: [00:28:37](#) I thought I understood some of the intersections and what I didn't realize is just how vulnerable this, this population was. So we went in, one of the first things that we are going to do is they had a, so the town is all owned by the church. So what had happened was a lot of people, a lot of people don't realize that before Warren Jeffs the town was a lot like this, this group in Centennial Park that I told you about their families and they're just, you know, living very conservative lifestyles, conservative dress or whatever. But for the most part, everybody that grew up in generation before Warren Jeffs talks about it favorably. Like it was just a nice family community. And then, um, Warren Jeffs was able to get power. And of course we talk about all of this in the podcast. Year of Polygamy if you want to know that the history, cause it's actually fascinating.

Lindsay: [00:29:28](#) He actually, Warren Jegg became obsessed with Joseph Smith. He became obsessed with original source doctrine and the way that he wrestled power from his own father. Rulon Aldred who is the prophet of that group, is similar to the way that Brigham young did it in the succession crisis. It's really interesting to see how they mirror each other. But he took over and they predicted the end of the world during the, the winter Olympics. Um, in the early two thousands, they made everybody move down to Short Creek, sell their stuff, give all their property to the church if they hadn't already. So the majority of the town is owned by the church. Well, uh, Warren Jeffs started kicking people out of their own homes, uh, getting rid of his enemies, things like that. And so eventually the state government came in, seized the trust, they call it the United, they called the United Effort Trust.

Lindsay: [00:30:19](#) Okay. And we call it the UEP for short. And the, and the trust ceased the UEP. They took it and they started giving property back to the people. So when I first got involved, we were trying to help the community of, there were a few, what we call apostates that were living secretly in town. We were trying to get them the zoo property. They had a zoo down there in Southern Utah, like with giraffes and bears. And it's a wild, it's just everything about the place of surreal. But we were going to get the property and turn it into a nature center. Our thinking was that would be the first way that we could safely like come in, open up sort of a state funded nature center and it would bring some outsiders into the community. Well when we went to do our contact down there, got the lease to the zoo from the trust that had, you know, it had been seized from the church and the FLDS police arrested him for trespassing.

Lindsay: [00:31:13](#) People don't realize in 2000 in the, you know, 2000 I think this was 15 at the time, that, that there were police in the United States of America acting under the orders that are prophet, not, you know, the, the, the American law. So they arrested him and put him in jail. And so our first service project ended up being a rally against the police down there. And we had one person from town, Terrell Musser. He's a brave individual that left the community when he was like,

Karin Peter: [00:31:45](#) Yeah, he is.

Lindsay: [00:31:46](#) Yeah, he came back and everyone in town that was that sided with us that thought that this was wrong. You know, people in town had been abused by the police for a long time. There's stories of like a girl went and you know, she reported being molested by a stepbrother and the police center back to our Mormon Bishop to repent. And so people knew the police were corrupt.

Lindsay: [00:32:07](#) So we went down there, I brought about 75 volunteers and we had posters and we gave them to people in the town that were too scared to rally and we let them write in the message. And then we sort of held up the signs by proxy and we were worried, we thought we'd be arrested. We had to get the, the Marshall's office there to help us. And over the course of the night, it was really cool to see people started coming and driving around and around and honking and honking a little louder and then coming around the block honking a little louder than a few people got out of their cars. And that was really the first change in the town. And there were some amazing people like Shirley Draper, who was a plural wife, who'd left the community, went and got her master's degree in social work, came back. She was able to come and open up, um, a nonprofit called Cherish Families, which I support where they're getting resources back into the town. In fact, they just opened their medical clinic, the first medical clinic, like legit medical clinic this week. They got a library set up. They got the schools reopened. Warren Jeffs had shut down public schools. You'd taken away all the toys, you'd taken away all the dogs.

Karin Peter: [00:33:17](#) Yeah, he shut down everything.

Lindsay: [00:33:20](#) Yeah, shut down everything. So now the, so now a lot of my work is focused on rehabilitating the town and it's, I, I used to do it a lot louder. I mean, it's really sexy issue to raise money for people stuck in polygamy. People will throw money at that. But I don't feel ethically I can raise money that way because that's not exactly what we're doing. You know, I'm working the, the

mayor of the town down there, Donia Jessop, she's a plural wife. She's the first female mayor in their first legitimate election and she's a plural wife. And you can't tell me, she's not one of the most amazing, incredible, brave women ever. And so if I were to go with that approach, I would be attacking something that's her family. You know, something that's very important to her. And people don't realize that, that people's beliefs might change, but their families, their families are families. Like they've been in these plural families for 20 years, 25 years. And it's just not right to ask people to give that up.

Karin Peter: [00:34:19](#) So you've developed a lot of friendships and relationships with people from Short Creek and from some of the other, um, polygamous groups. And recently you wrote on Facebook, I post about a dear friend of yours who had come out of the FLDS and seemed to be on a road towards some healing and wholeness in his life. Would you be willing to tell us a little bit about Roy?

Lindsay: [00:34:51](#) Yeah, sure. I, along the way, I've been able to make friends with people. The majority of my friends from the FLDS, I call them FLDS but the majority of the people in the FLDS are out now. They've been kicked out or sent away or left the church down there. It's really, really falling apart. So the majority of the work that I'm doing is actually not with the FLDS. It's with the ex FLDS. Uh, the FLDS are in a really vulnerable position too, but the majority of faithful I've moved to South Dakota. They're not even within our reach. In fact, they're so isolated. They're so scared of outsiders that nobody can have access to the, not even their own family members. It's really, really concerning. And you know that there are some watch groups that are trying to pay attention to that. But I, I had the opportunity to meet Warren Jeffs' son Roy, he, he was one of Warren's sons.

Lindsay: [00:35:40](#) He comes from a Warren's third wife and he's just delightful. He was one of the first people from Warren's family to leave. He and his sister Rachel left about the same time and they went immediately on CNN and told their story and, and sort of threw him into the public spotlight. And when I met him, he had believed and was told that if he told a story, it would be helpful. You know, it'd be helpful to his family, he'd be doing them a good favor. But I don't think that any of us, especially Roy, realized that every time he told a story how traumatic that was, it wasn't just re-traumatizing him, which, you know, he was aware of at the time. But it was every time he told his story in a public venue, predatory predatory people would come out of the woodwork. I mean, when I knew Roy, he was being catfished.

Lindsay: [00:36:36](#) Uh, he had been catfished and frauded and scam like six times since he had been. I mean, he's just so trusting. He doesn't understand how the world works. He grew up wealthy in, in his church because he was the prophet son. And so everyone in the community really resented him. They resented him because he was a Jeff's, because his father was such a terrible persecutor perpetrator to so many of them. And they saw Roy as a, as a boy with privileges. And in some ways he was, he had a better education than most FLDS boys. He did drive in nice SUVs and he lived in nicer homes. But people don't realize that Warren Jeffs tested out things and doctrines on his family first before they'd try it on the community. So Roy just, he was kind of lonely. He didn't, he wasn't accepted by the exFLDS. They thought he was a Jeff's, they couldn't let go of that bias.

Lindsay: [00:37:28](#) And the FLDS thought he was a trader and everyone else I, you know, in the larger world felt sorry for him, but thought he might be a little bit of a pervert because he's Warren Jeff's son. And so yeah, Roy took his life this June and it's been very difficult because it, the hardest part for me has been seeing the narrative that Roy took his life because of what his dad did to him when he, when Roy was four, his father molested him. But I always say that Roy survived the FLDS. He didn't survive as rescue because there was, like I had when I went into Short Creek, this general assumption that, you know, those people are weird and wicked and gross and Roy is so much better off now in the real world. And Roy, aren't you so glad we saved you from that. And I just saw Roy really struggle in the outside world.

Lindsay: [00:38:18](#) I don't think the outside world was better for him. I don't, I don't know that it was better or worse, but it wasn't better. He, it was a hard place for him and it was hard. These stigmas, these old stereotypes really challenged him. He contemplated several times changing his last name, but I just think it's such an unfair position to be in. I mean, he was also a, Jeff's like that. That's who he was. That's his identity. And it shaped so much of his experience. And I, I just don't think right now in our society there's a lot of kindness or compassion for where he came from and that really affected Roy. And I don't think he could overcome that.

Karin Peter: [00:38:58](#) So you, you wrote in your post and got a quote just a couple of lines if you don't mind, you wrote that his death has made me rethink so many of the ways we tell stories, do good work and to help others. Roy's life has taught me so much, but probably not so much as his death. I've learned that good intentions are to enough that telling stories isn't always as important as how

and why we tell them and that every decision has echoes we can't anticipate. So good intentions aren't enough. How has the way you tell stories changed?

Lindsay: [00:39:41](#) You know, I'm still, it's only been since June and it's, so, it's been about six months, so I'm still grappling. I'm still grieving. Roy and I became very, very close. Uh, we took him in, he became just a dear friend. Uh, and you know, I'm grappling because I, Roy didn't have anyone. He was the loneliest person I ever saw and I don't say that to as a slight, he just, I don't know that anyone could understand what he went through. It's so unique and it's so unusual, but we became friends. I think we bonded on a few things. One of them is I had felt a lot of shame growing up in the LDS church, Roy Roy and my shame, we recognized each other, you know, passionate with each other and we became very, very close. So his death has been very hard for me. And I just want to throw this out, this disclaimer that I will probably change and develop a year from now, I'm going to probably hold different viewpoints, but I feel in part responsible not for his death, but for the impact of storytelling.

Lindsay: [00:40:47](#) I put them on the podcast, you know, it, I for sure wasn't one of the first interviewers. He had been out doing interviews for about two years when I met him and I thought I was doing enough by saying like, okay Roy, like giving him some, I always give my guest some media literacy training saying, okay, once you put your name out there, you can't, it's there forever and this becomes a story and the only identity by which people know you. And I thought I was being responsible, but what I didn't realize is that Roy grew up with a doctrine called uh, obey upon a suggestion. It's something his dad started to incorporate. And I, I, the only way I can explain living under Warren Jeffs is like if you have any OCD tendencies Warren Jeffs, like instilled these in you. Like you could only clean things with your right hand and you had to Intuit what you thought he was saying he was speaking in code and you had to make sense of that.

Lindsay: [00:41:44](#) And so Roy didn't know how to say no. A lot of these people in the community, how to say no, he, it's literally not a skill that they have. And as a Mormon woman who already struggles with this so much, like I'm sympathetic, but I just didn't realize that I thought it wasn't enough. And so yeah, every time, every single time Roy told a story, like one time he told he was looking for his mom, he, um, his dad had isolated him from all the other children in his family because, uh, when, when Roy was six, it was discovered that he and his brother were like fooling around, you know, experimenting, which is very common in that

community since there is literally no narrative, uh, about sex. There's no language for it. All that happened was Roy was cut off from all the children from six basically on, and his mother was his only friend.

Lindsay:

[00:42:37](#)

And so you can imagine what that was like. I mean, my heart aches for him, you know, people have heard him tell that story and they label him a pedophile and it just like his dad and, and things like that. And so he had to live with that. But here he is grappling with that, trying to find his mom. And he talks about that publicly. And this may on this LDS man contacts him and says, I know where your mom is, but I can't tell you. You have to call me on the phone. And so Roy of course calls him on the phone and it ends up being this like, uh, sexual invitation from a closet and Mormon man. And so that's what I mean. Like I just don't think any of us could have interpreted that. So, you know, I've really sort of pulled back from allowing vulnerable people to tell their story.

Lindsay:

[00:43:23](#)

I feel like I, one of my things is, I'm not going to tell someone's story. This is just my own personal choice from one of these communities until they've been out at least a year that they have had some professional health resources and that they have a way that they will benefit from their story. I think the thing that I've seen the most happened in this community is people will go in to these communities, make a career off of telling their stories, you know, write a fancy article, make a documentary or whatever, and then leave. And the people are left with the impact. They're left with this identity that's super imposed on them. They did not choose. And so now when you know, I get press requests all the time, people saying I want to talk about Short Creek, will you connect me and I will. Sometimes I'm a lot more judicious and who I you know allow to to visit my friends and not because I'm a gatekeeper but because of this.

Lindsay:

[00:44:17](#)

And I say, okay, I will, but what plans do you have to reinvest in the community of the people whose stories you tell and the people that show progress towards that? You know we have, there's a podcast that's coming out, a stitchers doing the podcast with Ash Sanders. She is going down there and she is, this is an example of giving back to community. She's telling their story but she's training interns there. She's going into high school, she's teaching people how to podcast down there. She's giving back and that to me is a more responsible rubric I think. And I think I really just wish Roy would have benefited from his story rather than suffered because he only suffered every time you told a story. I don't ever think that it helped him.

Karin Peter: [00:45:03](#) So one of the questions that you posed one time when you and I were having a conversation, you said, what does justice look like when the person is both the victim and the abuser? And you have run into this, um, in short Creek it, it happens at other places as well. It's not just in polygamous or fundamentalist groups but what does it look like for folks in Short Creek as well as for those of us trying to build relationships with people when those relationships bring both healing and harm. I mean that's what happened with Roy. That's relationship brought healing. But it also brought situations he could not deal with. He wasn't, he wasn't prepared to deal with. And what does it mean for the people who tell the stories like yourself, what does justice look like?

Lindsay: [00:45:51](#) This is why it's been really helpful for me talking to Community of Christ because you guys have actually been working on this theology, right? This idea of restorative justice, um, you know, conflict, uh, your articles of conflict and how you deal with that faithful disagreement is really, really, I think progressive and beautiful and inspired because I don't see that. I don't see that applied. And I think, you know, I have been a social justice warrior. I believe in the theories. The feminist theory is really important to me. Privileged theory is important. I, I regard, you know, people say that I make too much space for Mormon men all the time. And it's true. I have as a, as a woman growing up in the LDS church, that is sort of my default, but it's just so hard for me when I can see the pain that this system has caused men and women.

Lindsay: [00:46:43](#) And so rather than having it be sort of this contest of who was hurting more, I just tried to be responsible with the intersections. And I don't think society is prepared for that. One of the, one of the most destabilizing things for me in regards to justice was learning that, you know, I would go into Short Creek, I would meet these really incredible brave people. They did great things in their actions, helped save suffering for so many people in that community and, and I just sorta wanted to build them up on this platform, this pedestal. And then I would find out like Roy that you know, like when they were kids they were fooling around or that they had been, they had abused or molested someone. And I couldn't wrap my head around it. It didn't, I'm still wrapping my head around it. There's not a lot of discourse.

Lindsay: [00:47:37](#) There's no forgiveness, there's no redemption for abuse. And I understand that, I understand that because abuse is, it's so damaging and it can do permanent damage for people. I saw that firsthand every day. But what does it mean when the

majority of abusers are also victims? Like where is that discourse? And I'm not saying it because I want to be nice and like forgive people. I just think it's effective. Like it's a missing piece in how we're talking about justice. If we just want people to burn for their mistakes, then we're not doing anything new that hasn't been done for centuries. And I just don't think that that's really gotten rid of abuse. I don't think it's really curtailed it. Uh, there, there are conflicting data on that, but I just think that there, well, what I'm realizing in my position at Sunstone and my position at the podcast is I get to hear everyone's secrets all the time.

Lindsay: [00:48:38](#) And everybody is the perpetrator in someone's story. Everybody has done damage somewhere. Everyone has done some really awful things. They have, some are way worse than others. Like I don't mean to say that like what Warren Jeffs has done to his community shouldn't, you know, have accountability. But I just think that the way that we're engaging the entire discussion is incomplete. And I, I don't really have an answer for that, Karin. That's why I went to you. I'm trying to understand like what does that mean? So you tell me you guys are a lot wiser on this than I am.

Karin Peter: [00:49:15](#) And we struggle with it like everyone else does. But we have these, you know, ideas that drive us in Community of Christ that we want to abolish poverty, we want to end needless suffering. And so that question that you posed, um, continues to kind of play over and over again with me is as I look at those particular issues, because it isn't black and white, it isn't cut and dried. And so what does justice look like? When would all of us in some way or have participated in the victimization of others as well as at times been victimized? So we work through it.

Lindsay: [00:49:59](#) I have, I, like I said, I grew up as an LDS woman, a people pleaser. I think one of my strategies for navigating the unsafe spaces and a Mormon patriarchy for me was to acquiesce or sort of comply. And so I recognize that I sometimes err on the side of too much compassion without accountability. And that's something that I've been trying to, to work on. It's a very challenging thing for me, but at the same time I look at Warren Jeffs and I have to deal now on a personal level with with my interactions with Roy and the things that that I knew about him that no one else knew. I have to contend with that, but also the impact of what he has done on the community. I mean I'm forever changed the, the stuff that darkness that I've seen perpetrated by this one man is unspeakable.

Lindsay: [00:51:02](#) I mean it's, it's actually some of the things that he is doing and has done in the community are truly unbelievable. They are so heinous.

Karin Peter: [00:51:10](#) and that when you go down there, it's like you're walking in the upside down or the shadow side.

Lindsay: [00:51:15](#) Yeah, that's what I call it. I feel like, you know, on stranger things, I'm in the upside down and you know, I get a little bit martyred about that sometimes. Like it's been hard for me. I've had to have therapy for PTSD for some of the stuff that I've had to encounter. I, I never thought I was opening that can of worms and it's really hard. It's hard for me to look at Joseph Smith's legacy and not sometimes be so angry at him. But at the same time I have this, and I think that this is, this is an effort for Roy.

Lindsay: [00:51:50](#) This is my, my honor for Roy, but I have this image in my head of Warren Jeffs is a seven year old boy eating oatmeal at his table. It's just so, it's so vibrant in my mind. And I picture him as a seven year old kid who like Roy he was being molested, he didn't have resources. He had no way to talk about it. The only way he had to make sense of it was his scriptures. And so what he ended up doing was institutionalizing abuse. And so people say, you know, well, you're just nice, you're too empathetic or compassionate to do that. But I think, no, gosh, that's, if we want to be effective, we got to look at seven year old Warren Jeffs. We got to pinpoint what resources he needed when he didn't get them. And that's not because I want to forgive and abuser or you know, let him off the hook.

Lindsay: [00:52:42](#) But it's because I don't want him to hurt people. I just think that hurt. That's unaddressed trauma that's unaddressed, comes out sideways. And I see that every single day in the Mormon community. And if we don't allow people a redemptive path, and I, and I'm not prescribing one, I don't know what that looks like, but we have to, people need redemption. They do. And I don't, I don't even know what that looks like for Warren Jeffs you know, I've thought about that. I don't think it's really my place to say because I'm not directly a victim of his, but they are questions that keep me up at night.

Karin Peter: [00:53:26](#) So as you continue to walk with the folks down in Short Creek and the different people that have met, you've been altered from your relationship with Roy, you've articulated of that for us today and I appreciate your vulnerability in shared that, but with this and with the relationships you have, where do you see hope? Where do you see the possibility of, of what, uh, what I

would call the wholeness of God's restorative purposes in short Creek? And in this Avenue of morbid is of a general.

Lindsay: [00:53:54](#) Honestly, sometimes I feel like I have to excavate it. It doesn't, I mean, you know, it's really hard being an LDS person who, anyone that knows me knows I'm so loyal to the Mormon tradition. I'm like deeply loyal to my detriment. I wish I wasn't, but I'm called anti-Mormon all the time because talking about these things and it's painful for me, but I think it's hard for me to take a positive viewpoint of the church when I see so much of the shadow side. Right. The pain, but I have to remember there, it would be irresponsible of me to tell this story is if it's so dark down there. I mean, standing with Terrell Musser and holding up posters as an outsider, as a guest into this struggle was one of the most incredible experiences in my life. To be able to have people there.

Lindsay: [00:54:49](#) Terrell is one of them who I call family now to be able to sit there under the stars that we had this moment where Andrew Chat when he was our guide that I talked about that got arrested years ago. So he loves to hike. So he was taking me and some friends this summer on a hike and we go up their little town is in the backside of Zion Canyon, so Zion national park actually just purchased the rest of the property down there, which would be interesting to see how it changes the town. But the town for, you know, the last century had been going up into these beautiful red rock cliffs. So Andrew takes us on this beautiful hike and we go back there and there's this, we hike like 25 miles up the Canyon and there is this pond, this swimming hole in the middle of nowhere. It's gorgeous.

Lindsay: [00:55:39](#) And there are some Cricker boys, some boys from the community, they're swimming. And we're just sitting there marveling. And I thought this is, this is a grace for me like that this town had seen so much darkness that they have this beauty, they have these moments where these boys are jumping in and like in spite of all of that, there's grace in human in life. And I think that we do a disservice when we tell a victim's story as if it's all tragedy because it's not. And so that's part of the equation too. Like remembering that through this tragedy, through this community of the FLDS for example, beautiful things came out of it there. They have beautiful traditions. I'm beautiful family connections and things like that and it's a miracle. It's honestly such a gift to watch, to be able to be there at a moment when you are sitting around a fire with, you know, the mayor and the police chief of the town and they're just drinking a beer and relaxing for the day and you know that like in that moment they're just taking care of themselves. That to

me is, is what it's about because I, I deal with the darkness so, so much. I deal with so much death, so much pain, we're losing, um, so many men, especially to suicide down there. And yet I've been down there with these people and I've seen them and I've danced with them and I've eaten with them and cooked with them and it's not all bad, you know? And so that's, maybe that's not adequate for, for what you're asking, but that's where I'm finding little moments of grace.

Karin Peter: [00:57:24](#) So Lindsey, as a podcaster, as the executive director of Sunstone and as one who obviously yearns for healing and wholeness to take place, not just in short Creek but in the world, what's next for you? What's on your horizon?

Lindsay: [00:57:44](#) I need a nap. Um, I've been thinking about that. I don't know. I know that Roy's suicide has, is, is doing some interesting things to me and I'm just sort of submitting myself to that. I'm just letting it teach me what I need to be taught. That's how I still, I don't know, communicate with Roy. I still have a relationship with Roy is allowing our new relationship as he's gone to transform me. And I'm sorry that I get emotional about it, but he just, he was very dear to me. I, right now I'm focusing on compassion and empathy. I really think that this world is so hard for everybody. And so I'm really interested in the ways that people are finding compassion and connection in spite of that, especially when they disagree, especially when there's hurt involved. And again, don't, don't get me wrong. If you've been abused by someone, I would never tell you how to associate with or feel about your perpetrator.

Lindsay: [00:58:51](#) That's not my place. But what I am interested in is how we all respond to that, you know, and how, if that's compounding the problem. And I just want everyone to be comfortable. I just want everyone to be happy. And I realize that that's not realistic, but that's still the idealist in me. I just want, I just want people to be happy. And so I think I'm just trying to finish the projects and work on the things that I'm doing in Mormon studies that, that allow for that. I'm working on a biography for Juanita Brooks right now with Signature Books and so that should be out sometime in the next two years. And so I've really just sort of retreated with my grief into the history again and knowing all that, like the six years of education that I've had through hard knocks and criticism to just become a better researcher. So that's kind of what I'm focusing on right now.

Karin Peter: [00:59:49](#) Well, we will look forward to following where that journey takes you, Lindsay, and we appreciate you taking the time to visit with us today here at Project Zion. Any closing thoughts or

comments you'd like to leave with our listeners recognizing that they are made up of both the Community of Christ and LDS and ex Mormon folks?

Lindsay: [01:00:10](#) Yeah, I would just, I just want to say a thank you to Community of Christ again to you, Karen, personally to Robin Linkhart, JoAnn Fisher, uh, Lach Mackay there, Seth Bryant, gosh, I could go on and on and on. There's so many Community of Christ, people that have been healing the, the community that I'm in, in Mormon studies, especially with ex-Mormon Mormon world, there's so much pain. There's so much, so much dysfunction. We're not taught how to talk, how to communicate. There's a lot of passive aggression, there's a lot of pain, there's a lot of, there's just a lot of cruelty out there. And I have found, at least in my experience with Community of Christ, that you guys have been such a soft place for me to land. You've allowed me to be messy and I honestly, I, I wish listeners could know behind the scenes Community of Christ has allowed me to make mistakes.

Lindsay: [01:00:57](#) They have worked with me on so many projects and so many conferences and they're, you guys are just so generous and it's your generosity that has really been a gift to me and I just really admire the way that you guys are taking sort of the restoration, this theology, even the bad parts and repurposing it. It's, it's really inspirational to me. It's something that I've incorporated into my own practice and I know you guys have your problems. I know you're not perfect, but that's what I love about you is that that's okay. You don't need to pretend that you're something. You're not. You don't need to be better than you're not. I mean, one of my favorite sunstones in Toronto was where two Community of Christ people had a very strong argument in about LGBT rights within the Community of Christ. And I was sitting there, I was like, the Mormon woman in me was so uncomfortable. I was like, Oh no, people are fighting. What do we do? But no one in the Community of Christ was uncomfortable. They were just allowing it to unfold and it was such a, it's just such a refreshing thing. And so I think the gift that I've seen you, your tradition give my tradition is the power to navigate messiness and I just really appreciate that.

Karin Peter: [01:02:15](#) Thank you for that, Lindsay. It was unexpected but very kind. Well, I'd like to thank you again for being with us and like to encourage our listeners. If you have not attended the Sunstone symposium in Salt Lake, I would invite you to look into that and you can find that at Sunstone magazine. Um, dot. Is it.org or.com. Lindsey?

Lindsay: [01:02:32](#) Sunstone.org or Sunstonemagazine.com.

Karin Peter: [01:02:36](#) [inaudible] dot org [inaudible] dot org and you can find that, um, and check it out and see what's coming up for that and as always Sunstone would appreciate not just your participation but your financial support and there's a way to give and support the work that they do as well. So thank you Lindsey again for sharing with us today about some really tender things that have been really impactful in your life. And maybe we'll check in with you in the future and see how that biography writing is going.

Lindsay: [01:03:07](#) Okay, sounds good. Hopefully I get it done.

Karin Peter: [01:03:10](#) Okay, so this is a project science podcast. I'm Karin Peter here with Lindsay Hansen Park. Thanks so much for listening.

Music: [01:03:25](#) [inaudible]

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Music: [01:04:22](#) [inaudible].