**“Glen’s Parallax Perspectives”** is a series of TV programs offering fresh ways for people to see issues such as foreign policy, social and economic justice, governmental functioning, the environment, and so forth. We provide voices and viewpoints that are rarely heard in mainstream media.

**Mainstream media, politicians, and culture see the world in conventional ways. Therefore, in order to solve problems, we need to see things in fresh ways.** Glen Anderson created this TV series to help people see things differently so we can solve problems at all levels from the local to the global.

This series title refers to “***parallax***,” which is the view you get by looking from a different perspective. For example, put one finger in front of your nose and another finger farther away. Close one eye. Then open that eye and close the other. Your fingers will seem to move. This is called a “parallax” view. **This TV series invites you to look at issues from fresh perspectives.**

Each program airs three times a week (currently every Monday at 1:30 pm, every Wednesday at 5:00 pm, and every Thursday at 9:00 pm) for the entire month on Thurston Community Television (TCTV), channel 22 for cable TV subscribers in Thurston County, Washington. TCTV is part of Thurston County Media. You can see their schedule at [**www.tcmedia.org**](http://www.tcmedia.org)

**You can also watch the program described below through your computer** at [**www.parallaxperspectives.org**](http://www.parallaxperspectives.org). All episodes of “Glen’s Parallax Perspectives” are posted on this blog’s “TV Programs” part and also in one or more of the categories listed in the right side of the computer screen. Also, see information about various issues at the category headings at [**www.parallaxperspectives.org**](http://www.parallaxperspectives.org).

**This summary includes some information and insights that we did not have time to include during that hour. Many of these are ideas that a guest or Glen had said while preparing for the interview. These additional insights are added under the relevant topic headings below.**

**🡪 Please invite other people to watch this video and/or read this thorough summary at the “TV Programs” and “Nonviolence” parts of** [**www.parallaxperspectives.org**](http://www.parallaxperspectives.org)**.**

**🡪 Also watch and read PART 2 of this two-part interview (November & December 2020).**

**November 2020
“How to De-Polarize American Society”**

by Glen Anderson, the TV series’ producer and host
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**Glen introduced the viewers to this interview topic:**

The November 2020 interview on “Glen’s Parallax Perspectives” is very timely now in the autumn of 2020, and it will continue to be a useful resource for people long after it airs on cable TV in Thurston County, Washington, and on my blog.

Nearly everybody knows that our nation is sharply polarized regarding politics and public policy issues. More than a century and a half ago – at the time of our nation’s Civil War in the 1860s – President Abraham Lincoln said, “A house divided against itself cannot stand.” Some people are seeing the U.S.’s current polarization as a crisis that threatens our nation’s very survival as a constitutional nation that values democracy and the rule of law.

Many Americans recognize that we must heal the extreme polarization that is tearing our country apart. **This TV interview features three guests** sharing their insights and remedies so all of us can help to de-polarize our nation. **Douglas Dolstad** has long experience with Marshall Rosenberg’s Nonviolent Communication model, especially with an organization called Northwest Compassionate Communication. **Susan Partnow** and **Rachel Eryn Kalish** have long experience with the Compassionate Listening Project.

All three guests have exceptional knowledge and skills about how to resolve conflicts based on their experience working with methodologies and non-profit organizations. Various guests have conducted trainings and workshops in many parts of the world, including Israel, Palestine, Japan, China, Guatemala, Cuba, Nigeria, Kashmir, and in American prisons.

We taped this interview on October 8, 2020. It will air 13 times throughout November 2020 on cable TV channel 22 in Thurston County WA (every Monday at 1:30 pm, every Wednesday at 5:00 pm, and every Thursday at 9:00 pm). In mid-November two of these guests will tape another interview on this topic for airing throughout December 2020 with the same schedule on the same cable TV station. I will post BOTH TV programs to my blog my blog, [**www.parallaxperspectives.org**](http://www.parallaxperspectives.org), so people anywhere can watch BOTH programs at any time long into the future. Also, I’ll type up a very thorough summary of what we said during BOTH TV interviews – and include links so people can get additional information – and post those to my blog too. (You are reading November’s thorough summary now.)

**This program takes a humane, creative approach instead of labeling people and blaming people who are on the “wrong” end of the political spectrum.** All of us need to de-polarize, so we invite people to cultivate understanding and compassion.

This does NOT mean ignoring our values. NOR does this mean compromising our beliefs about issues or simply meeting our adversaries half way.

Instead, this TV interview seeks to actually help everybody protect our common humanity and help our nation make progress toward solving problems. This is a positive, healing approach that is more compassionate than many people’s attempts to defeat their adversaries politically. When people lose elections, they still continue agitating and within in our society and seeking revenge.

We can move toward healing the common polarizations and the animosities. I believe our nation could de-polarize somewhat if enough people of good will do enough **deep listening** and practice **compassion** and try to **heal** our nation, not just **defeat** people on the other side.

**What kinds of polarization are Americans experiencing nowadays?**

Glen’s introduction to this interview said that most Americans recognize that our nation is polarized in several ways, including across the political spectrum. He said he believes our nation could start to heal our divisions if people were to listen deeply with compassion to various kinds of people. He said this TV program transcends the polarizations instead of labeling and blaming people with whom we disagree. Also, he said that even within any particular spot on the political spectrum, some people in that particular spot polarize against some other people in that same spot. This TV program really seeks to help everybody affirm and protect our common humanity so we can help our nation solve problems.

He asked what Douglas senses that the American people are observing and feeling nowadays. Douglas said some people seem to have difficulty expressing themselves without getting a reaction that they find challenging. Some people are feeling discouraged or scared or confused or alienated and wondering where they belong. Many people want something that will “make sense to them and connect them with their own humanity and other people.”

Rachel Eryn added that this topic is very important to explore nowadays. She said everyone has participated in our society that has such a long history of adversarial animosity that trying to blame people nowadays does not make sense.

Furthermore, she said, “Not everybody has done inner work to heal our own polarization internally,” so this causes people to jump quickly into blaming others. Also, we have “siloed information sources” so different people are not getting the same information anymore. She said many movies have apocalyptic themes that focus on horrible futures, so we don’t see enough positive possibilities. The skills that people need are not being taught enough in schools or workplaces or elsewhere. Beyond that, we do not have the institutional structures necessary for publicizing and teaching the conflict resolution models we need, such as Nonviolent Communication and Compassionate Listening.

She summed up these underlying reasons by saying they have cumulatively contributed to the breakdown we are experiencing now – and most people do not know that there is another way that would be better than the status quo.

Glen suggested that – in light of what Rachel Eryn said – we really do need to break new ground and show people that there is another way. This is not being offered to us by news media or other entities. He said that political parties and advocacy organizations keep asserting, “I’m right – my gang is right – and your gang is wrong.” He said it’s like urban gang warfare where each member of a gang tries to protect the member of their own gang against the people in the competing gang. This approach leads us down the wrong path.

Rachel Eryn agreed that “it’s very tribal.”

Susan said she has heard people say that “the new segregation is ideological. We’re not even coming into contact with each another.” Instead people group together in their own bubbles, which might be geographical too. Our diminished mingling with different kinds of people leads to the “othering” of each other, she said.

Glen said that for a number of years he has been encouraging people to talk with people who are politically different from themselves, but talk about anything **except** politics. Talk about their kids and grandkids, talk about their gardens, and so forth. “Leave the politics out of it and ask, ‘How are your tomatoes doing this year?’” Rachel Eryn said this would build connection.

***We did not have time during the interview to mention these additional points now about some of the causes of our nation’s increased polarization nowadays:***

Other people have identified reasons why the U.S. is so polarized, but we did not have time to mention these now.

For example, businesses created social media (Facebook, Twitter, and so forth) in order to sell advertising and use clever ways to attract people’s attention so they will see those ads. Social media businesses monitor every click people make and gather extremely detailed information about every person who uses social media so they can sell ads – and convey political messages to them – and actually addict them to the social media, cell phones and so forth. See the documentary film titled, “The Social Dilemma,” which provides compelling information – including insights and confessions from people who have worked at high levels in social media businesses. They explain how social media have polarized people especially toward the extreme Right Wing and to other political positions and have manipulated people’s thinking and behavior.

Somebody who reads a conspiracy theory on the internet gets fed more conspiracy theories by their social media and search engines. This leads to “confirmation bias,” which occurs when people are fed only the information that reinforces their own existing biases instead of providing fresh information from other viewpoints. Research has shown that the internet and social media spread false information 6 times faster than true information.

**Briefly explain Marshall Rosenberg’s model of “Nonviolent Communication”**

Glen said that our guests will spend a few minutes summarizing an overview of each model they are representing here, and after that we’ll flesh out how each model is relevant to our topic about how to de-polarize American society.

He expressed appreciation for Douglas’s thorough experience with the “Nonviolent Communication” model that Marshall Rosenberg had developed. In all kinds of settings – families, workplaces, local communities, and society at large –better skills could help people resolve conflicts. Marshall Rosenberg’s model of **“Nonviolent Communication”** – often called **“Compassionate Communication”** – is a helpful 4-step process to help people resolve conflicts.

Before explaining the 4-step process, Douglas emphasized how important is the intention of whoever uses it. Without the right intention, somebody trying to use the process might cause the other people to feel that they’re being manipulated and feel further separated. Instead, he wants the person who seeks to use the Nonviolent Communication model to do it authentically, with the truth of this model actually working through them. He emphasized that intention is probably the most crucial aspect of using the model. He added that most people probably are not aware of what their intention really is when they speak. He invited our listeners to apply that even now and wonder what Douglas is intending now and what Douglas’s world is like.

Instead of the 4 “steps” that Rosenberg laid out, Douglas likes to think of 4 “elements.” He referenced the ancient concept that our world consisted of earth, water, air and fire, which swirl around instead of being “steps” in a linear sequence.

He said Rosenberg recognized that the people he admired were using a different language from most folks. Instead of trying to get retribution, the people he admired were practicing a different consciousness. Rosenberg noticed that those people distinguished between a neutral observation and an evaluation about what they had observed. So one of the “elements” is to get a clear ***observation*** of what has happened.

Rosenberg also noticed the importance of ***feelings***. As social animals we inherently care about our offspring and each other. This requires an exquisite neurology related to emotional intelligence. But often people confuse feelings with thoughts. Nonviolent Communication helps people distinguish between a feeling and a thought.

A third “element” involves exploring, “What is it that motivates life? What is life calling to itself?” Rosenberg used the word ***needs*** to represent this. This concept is very different from the accusation that someone is “needy.” Also, ***needs*** are very different from “strategies.”

His fourth insight involves a ***request*** – the reality that we are always saying either “thank you” or “please.” Sometimes we’re expressing gratitude that someone has made our “life a little more wonderful and help me connect with some precious needs that remind me of the miracle of being alive.”

Alternatively, even if somebody says something bad to us, or even calls us a bad name, somewhere underneath that is a buried request – an attempt to say “please” – a desire to be connected with life.

Douglas used another way to physically illustrate what he had just said. He held up his hand with the palm facing toward the TV camera, and he invited each of us to hold up one hand too with the palm facing forward and wiggle our fingers. He invited us to think of our four fingers as **the four elements: observations, feelings, needs and requests**.

Next Douglas invited us to hold up **the other hand** with the palm facing toward our heart. With both hands he said we could recognize that “at every moment there is life in somebody else that can be revealed through the doorway of one of those four elements – **OR** – your consciousness is on yourself: What am I observing? What am I feeling? What am I needing? What am I requesting of anybody? Why am I talking? What am I hoping for?” He suggested that we apply these either by listening or by honestly expressing.

Glen said he has been through several trainings on Nonviolent Communication, and he always enjoys hearing the trainers explain it in different ways, as Douglas did just now.

He said we’ll consider how to apply Nonviolent Communication’s model to help us de-polarize American society after we’ve heard a basic introduction to how “Compassionate Listening” works.

**Briefly explain the “Compassionate Listening” model and activities**

Next Glen invited our other two guests to help us understand how the “Compassionate Listening” model – which also is grounded in good listening and compassion – could help us de-polarize our society.

Before applying the model in this way, he invited Susan to summarize the process and how it works to help people transcend differences. Susan and Rachel Eryn have conducted training workshops in a variety of seriously conflicted areas around the world. Glen said that it really has been working well in seriously conflicted regions, so it’s not just a theoretical or academic model.

Susan said its practitioners think of it as “healing the world from the inside out.” She said it very much starts with ourselves – our bodies – and grounding ourselves so we are centered and aware. This allows us to check out the intention that Douglas had said is so important. We must be aware of our thoughts and evaluations, which are always present. Notice them, and perhaps make different choices about them. Be aware of what might “trigger” us – and what we experience when we’re being “triggered.” Do we notice it in some part of our body? Does it alert our “fight-or-flight” reaction? If we are “triggered,” this can feed the polarization and interfere with listening.

When we are aware and centered and managing our “triggers,” then we can truly connect with other people. That’s what the Compassionate Listening work is really about. It’s building a bridge, an energetic connection. It connects from one’s own heart, our intention, our purest and deepest self (the true “me,” not something that I might just be feeling as wounded or defensive or shut down), my beautiful core essence. It connects from that part of me to that part inside of the other person. Making this connection involves compassion, appreciation and gratitude. This includes compassion for our own self. When our own cup overflows we can reach out in this way to the other person.

She said that when we do that we can become what the Compassionate Listening model calls a “fair witness,” someone who notices the conflict in a mindful and somewhat detached way without getting sucked into the conflict. You can notice as a neutral observer what you and other people are feeling. This creates the distance and space for the next step.

She said the third practice involves respecting oneself and the other person. You can recognize that you and the other person have different points of view – different perspectives. “Can I step to your side and try to understand from your perspective – and you from mine?” She said that when you do all of this work you are ready and able to listen from your own heart and speak from your own heart.

This summarizes the Compassionate Listening model. They use a number of skills to help people do that. “The intention is to connect.” She recognizes that this is a choice. We start by connecting with our own selves.

**How could the “Compassionate Listening” model REDUCE polarization now?**

Glen asked Susan how the “Compassionate Listening” process could help to de-polarize American society.

She said at the deepest level Compassionate Listening affirms that we are all deeply interconnected. She said when she connects with her own deep wholeness and goodness, she is able to see another person’s deep wholeness and goodness. This is true even when the other person’s values, politics, strategies, etc., are very different from her own.

She can still see the other person’s humanity and approach the other person with curiosity and wonder so she wants to understand the other person more deeply. This allows for a deeper connection, whether or not they end up agreeing. The connection and feeling each other’s humanity are what’s important. “When we listen with those deep spiritual ears, it melts the person we’re listening to.” She said they can feel heard and loved, so if their heart had hardened and shut down, they can let it melt and open, and we can experience each other’s humanity. This mutual softening allows us to be receptive to each other – and understand each other – even if we do not agree with each other’s politics.

Glen agreed that there is a human level that’s quite different from “the politics that we play in our heads,” so the remedy for polarization includes “getting out of our heads and into our hearts” and making the kinds of connections that all three of our guests have told us about. Susan said it’s like creating an electrical field that can attract different people into it and become transformative.

**How could the “Nonviolent Communication” model REDUCE polarization now?**

Glen thanked Douglas for explaining Marshall Rosenberg’s “Nonviolent Communication” model and its four elements. Now he asked Douglas how they might help us de-polarize American society.

Douglas said that this model requires a lot of time and softness for deep listening so we can look inside ourselves to discover what **we** are feeling and needing – and also to deeply inquire of another person what **they** are feeling and needing. He said that instead of arguing in our heads, somebody who wants to be a change agent could change what they’re looking at – what they’re paying attention to.

So if we find ourselves disagreeing with what someone else is saying – instead of the usual action of formulating our own arguments about why we disagree – we could activate our intention of being a peacemaker and try asking ourselves, “I wonder what that person is feeling right now – and I wonder what that person is needing, what that person is hoping for. What kind of world do they want to bring forth?”

So we might ask the person by saying, “Excuse me. I’d like to catch up with you on what I hear you saying.” Then you could reflect what you heard, and ask whether you understand what they said. Douglas said, “The authority on whether a person has been listened to is the person.” He said this pursuit of understanding is “a different world instead of instructing and declaring.” Instead we have an inquiry and a connection.

Glen agreed and said that “for that person, that’s a whole different thing than having us throw a whole bunch of facts at them or have a bunch of reasons why we think they’re wrong. All of a sudden now we’ve valued them enough to find out what they’re feeling and what they’re needing.” Then “they can feel valued instead of feeling put down.” This is “a whole different approach from the way people normally interact across differences.”

Douglas invited people to enjoy doing this in any conversation we have with another person. Reflect back what we heard and ask what meaning it has for the other person – “before you say what’s going on with you.”

Glen said that when we reach some modest amount of understanding we can build upon that. He said, “This is so different from how we normally function.”

***We did not have time during the interview to mention these additional relevant insights:***

Douglas’s proposal here builds upon his previous urging that our first step must be to observe without any judgement or evaluation, and our second step must be to recognize and explicitly identify feelings, but unfortunately, people usually ignore or obscure feelings (both our own feelings and those of other people).

When we were preparing for this interview, Douglas told Glen that people’s feelings are related to their needs. Often people are not consciously aware of what their needs are. One useful value of Nonviolent Communication is that it helps people discover what their needs really are.

Glen’s experience in working on controversial issues (*e.g*., the death penalty) has shown the usefulness of recognizing what people might be feeling or needing about that controversial issue. Decades ago he participated in an all-day workshop about “answering the hard questions about the death penalty.” Acknowledging people’s feelings or needs can help us address those. Very often it is useful to **anticipate** what people might be feeling or needing about a particular controversial issue and address what might be their **unspoken** feelings or needs. When speaking or writing about it, we might even say, “Some people say …” – and then proceed to address the underlying (unspoken) need or feeling and offer a fresh alternative.

**More ways “Compassionate Listening” could REDUCE polarization:**

Next we connected back with Rachel Eryn and dug deeper into how we might apply the “Compassionate Listening” model to reduce polarization in American society. She said “Compassionate Listening” is “a foundational practice.” By itself it will not resolve a conflict, but it does “set a tone and build a capacity” so something new can emerge.

She said people get caught up in polarization, so when one of us “drops our end of the rope” and starts to listen, as Douglas has said, “we can start to find out what really matters and unpack the deeper values.” She said, “When we go deeper we find there is more and more common ground.”

**When we consider people’s “NEEDS” we could also consider their “VALUES”:**

Glen built upon all three guests’ support for recognizing people’s needs and values. He said that when he uses the “Nonviolent Communication” model, when Step #3 deals with identifying “NEEDS,” he sometimes adds the term “VALUES.” He said his own needs include serving his deeply held values (*e.g*., democracy, human rights, nonviolence, and a fair economy), and he enjoys inviting other people to consider their own deeply held values along with their other needs.

When we were preparing for this interview, both Susan and Rachel Eryn told him that you use this approach too. Now Susan said that when someone hears you at the deepest level of your values, a transformation occurs. She said her values come from her deepest yearning – a source of what’s arising for the world to become whole. She said when something is missing, she is in pain. The deep values are positive yearnings for wholeness.

Instead of the strategies that we typically focus on, she urges us to go deeper and deeper into the underlying values. She said that ultimately it seems to come down to love. “Everybody wants to be seen, heard and loved.” Compassionate Listening helps people explore more deeply than the particular strategies for what they want right now, because those often cause frustration and polarization. But when we dig down into the underlying needs and values, we can recognize what people are really yearning for (safety, connection, fairness, love, etc.) – and then we can really connect on those. This deeper approach can de-polarize conflicts.

Glen said that Susan’s insights connect with what Douglas and Marshall Rosenberg have talked about – the “life energy” that people are seeking in this moment. Susan agreed and urged connecting with the deepest level of that. She also said that during a conflict it helps to reflect deeply.

Rachel Eryn agreed and said that she has found this very helpful when working on very, very hot conflicts, such as her fifteen years of experience working on Israeli-Palestinian issues, including during the Second Intifada there.

Rachel Eryn said if we stay at the level of feelings, people will say. “Of course I’m angry! You would be angry too if …!” She has found it helpful to move from feelings toward values (*e.g*., “It sounds like you really care about justice.”) She has found this to create openings better than any other approaches.

**Recognizing each person’s VALUES could help us de-polarize society:**

Glen said another phenomenon that happens during polarization is that when I say, “I know that I am right, but there are other people on the other side of the issue. So if I know that I am right, they must be wrong. And I know that I am good, so they must be bad or evil or traitors or tools of the devil.”

He said when our nation is so polarized, it’s easy for people to get stuck at the labeling, and that’s harmful and really not accurate. This “us vs. them” polarization shuts down the current conversations and prevents the deeper conversations that our nation’s people need to be having. He said during the Cold War when somebody accused another person of being a Communist, that would shut down the conversation and keep everybody polarized.

***We did not have time during the interview to mention these additional relevant insights:***

Sometimes people are trapped in their **feelings**, so we might benefit by bypassing those and going deeper to people’s **values**. Our polarized nation would benefit greatly from listening deeply and compassionately to transcend the labeling and understand other people’s **unmet needs** and **underlying values**.

Beyond that, we can invite people to **actually live our best values**. This could help our society get beyond the “call-out” behaviors and what’s been called the “cancel culture.” We could always practice kindness, respect and compassion.

When we were preparing for this interview, one of our guests said the Compassionate Listening model deepens conversations, explores values, and asks “deepening questions” that help the OTHER person connect deeply (not merely satisfy our own curiosity).

**Examples:**

1. What is the source of your courage?

2. What life experiences have shaped your perspectives?

3. What are you yearning for?

4. What are the things that you cherish about this country?

People at one end of the political spectrum might feel mystified and disoriented when we hear warm and inviting communications from the other end of the political spectrum. During our nation’s current crisis we are missing opportunities to help people find ways to help new solutions emerge, based on values, etc. We could say something like, “I really hear you, and I honor the underlying values that you’re expressing. Here is what my values are and why I urge …”

Liberals and progressives talk about “freedom” while conservatives and libertarians talk about “liberty.” What does each of us mean by the term we choose? What do our terms have in common? How do they differ? What underlying needs and values support our different concepts?

Each side wants to win an election or win on your particular issue. How can we pursue our goals without provoking hatred that destroys community?

Everybody yearns for a society that reflects their values. Let’s each address our respective values in ways that can help all people feel cared about. At peace vigils in public locations I often hold a sign inviting people to “Act on your best values.” Often I also hold a sign affirming “We all share one earth.” We need to build bridges in a world that is too full of walls.

**Labeling other people – Denouncing them as “evil” or “tools of the devil.**

**Instead of calling any persons “evil,” Martin Luther King identified evil systems.**

Susan provided an image that had been created by a group called Braver Angels ([**www.braverangels.org**](http://www.braverangels.org)). Susan calls their image a **polarization odometer”** because it which looks like a speedometer. Susan talked us through what the image depicts.

**See the diagram on the next page. 🡪**

When our entire American society is so polarized, it’s easy for people to label – and even demonize – the people who are on the other side of an issue. She said the image shows how each group (colored red and blue on your computer screen) sees itself positively and sees their opposite group negatively.

The image’s left side shows the demonization of the opposing group as “enemies” who “want to harm the country.” If we were to soften a bit we might see them as “deplorable” people who are “ignorant and should know better.” This position still shows disdain and judgment. It would be some progress to get into the middle spot where we have pity of the people who have been duped so they are “well-meaning but fooled.” The next two spots on the image show progress.

Susan encouraged people on both sides to “see the full humanity of each other” and realize that issues are more complex than simply binary.

She said the word ***respect*** means “to look again.” We need to respect the other person’s humanity and look more deeply into what they are saying. What am I not hearing or seeing? What valid points could they be contributing, even if I don’t agree with their overall position?

We make progress on the polarization odometer when we reach the point of “Basic Respect” and the final point of “Respect & Appreciation.”

**See the diagram on the next page. 🡪**



**Source: “Braver Angels,”** [www.braverangels.org](http://www.braverangels.org)

Susan has found this model useful. Glen said he enjoyed Susan’s offering it while preparing for this interview. It is insightful, humane and actually fun to see and use.

Glen affirmed that there is a lot of potential to help people move – to help ourselves as well as the people on another side of an issue. It’s not necessarily about trying to convert another person to our viewpoint. It’s important for each side to actually understand the other side, so we can de-polarize our society.

He said he invests a lot of time and effort into reaching out to the general public in many ways, including holding signs at street corners for two chunks of time every week, all year around, for several decades. He said that when he reaches out to the general public in any opportunity (holding signs, working with organizations in outreach on various issues, etc.), he strategizes how he could welcome various kinds of people into tapping into their best values and reaching across our society’s differences. At peace vigils in public locations he holds signs that welcome and include all kinds of people and invite them to affirm what our society needs.

**For example, he made – and holds – signs with these messages:**

* “Act on your best values.”
* “All people are one human family.”
* “Human rights are for everybody.”
* “We all share one earth.”
* “Choose a bold, humane future.”
* “Create nonviolent solutions.”

The first example above (“Act on your best values”) invites people to do something positive. That’s better than blaming people who drive gas-guzzlers.

The signs saying “All people are one human family” and “Human rights are for everybody” are inclusive regardless of a person’s age, weight, race, religion, body piercings, or other variables.

The sign saying “We all share one earth” is true for peace (governments, not God, drew lines on the globe), and also for the worldwide climate and pandemic. Saying that “We all share one earth” affirms that we are all in this together.

The signs “Choose a bold, humane future” and “Create nonviolent solutions” invite people to dig deeper and take positive actions.

He said these kinds of signs elicit tremendously positive responses from motorists and pedestrians who go past our weekly peace vigils. Very diverse kinds of people feel affirmed, valued, and included. Our peace vigil signs help to de-polarize American society.

He urged us to use this kind of positive, welcoming approach when we reach out to the public on any kinds of issues we work on. They will strengthen our grassroots movements and help to heal society.

When we were preparing for this interview, Susan had mentioned that people on the progressive side of issues also need to refrain from polarizing people with different values and different political positions. Now she said many progressives are demonizing “the other,” and this violates our best values and makes the polarization even worse.

She said that judging, belittling, sneering at, and demonizing Trump’s supporters, only pushes those people deeper into loyalty to Trump. Glen added that he has read that in 2016 when Hillary Clinton called Trump supporters “the deplorables,” she convinced them that she did not understand them at all. Her very negative label antagonized many people and convinced them to vote for Trump instead of her. Rachel Eryn said she communicates a lot with Trump supporters, and she said they are still criticizing Hillary Clinton’s cruel labeling of them.

Glen said that whatever political views we may have, we need to monitor what is being said within our own group, so our own group members will not be antagonizing other kinds of people and pushing them away from our views toward finding safety in the other side. Let’s make sure we do not give our own group a bad reputation for being insensitive or cruel or mean-spirited.

Susan said that being disrespectful and calling names contradicts anyone’s best values. We need to take Gandhi’s advice and “Be the change you want to see in the world.” If we want to create a world that will work for everyone, we need to be aware and choose and act in the best way.

Douglas said that instead of working with negative words such as ***de-polarization***, he works only with positive words, so he needs to translate the concept into ***moving toward unity***. He said that if somebody in his close circle of friends were to start talking in the way we had just described (calling names, etc.), an alternative to “calling them out” would be to empathize with them. That person has – and the level of feelings and needs – very good reasons that led them to use that behavior.

He said we might choose to **not** name the feeling because the other person might not like that diagnosis, and it might be perceived as “leading.” He said, “The art of being with somebody means exactly that. It means being exactly where they are without leading them in a sneaky way about the way they should be. It’s just asking over and over in your own mind and behavior, is this what’s true for you?” He continued that, “Instead of calling someone out, just apply what we’re talking about here and empathize with them.” He said this does not imply that we agree with them.

Rachel Eryn agreed with Douglas by emphasizing what we had said at the beginning of this interview: “This is a deep practice and a skill set.” Instead of letting the conflict trigger our brain’s ancient part into a reaction of “fight-or-flight-or-freeze,” she said this takes a lot of work to develop, and we get better at it after we have deepened our skills. Our brains are not already wired in this better way, so we need to develop these skills.

Susan said that she and Rachel Eryn had mentioned this during the training they had conducted shortly before this evening’s TV interview. Sometimes even experienced persons do fail to be empathetic enough or do get triggered, but she said it is possible to go back and re-do the interaction to achieve some healing.

Glen expressed appreciation to all three guests for our preparation for this interview when all three emphasized the importance of really deep listening.

***We did not have time during the interview to mention these additional relevant insights:***

Do not stereotype people. Stereotyping is very often not accurate at all. Glen said his peace vigils keep receiving positive responses from very diverse – and unexpected – kinds of people, including middle-aged and older men in big trucks expressing appreciation for our signs’ messages for peace and human rights. Several people driving big pickup trucks with big American flags flying from the back have shown support for our signs saying, “Abolish nuclear weapons.”

The Civil Rights Movement in the South lived in a very polarized time and place. Many white people did very cruel and violent actions, but Martin Luther King, Jr., never labeled any individual “evil.” Instead he sometimes identified three evil **systems**: racism, poverty and war. He worked to change those systems, and he always worked to help individuals change their hearts and practice better behaviors.

For decades we have seen politicians demonize other people as “evil.” President Reagan accused the Soviet Union of being an “Evil Empire.” George W. Bush kept calling terrorists the “evil-doers.” Nowadays we hear each of the two polarized political ends of the spectrum accuse each other as if they were inherently evil persons instead of people who have wrong political ideas.

Our chattering brains are full of speaking stuff. Life is very complex, so we reduce what’s really happening down to something that helps us manage what we’re experiencing. We devise “stories” about people that simplify them – and we label people in an ineffective attempt to understand what’s going on.

Modern society seems to have increased people’s loneliness and disconnection, so without deep personal connections people seem to have settled for identity labels and extreme viewpoints for themselves and others.

Some people who rely heavily on social media and believe what they see have gravitated to the extreme right wing, but they do not see themselves as being cruel.

When we were preparing for this interview, one guest said, “We don’t have to agree about anything to be kind to each other.”

**Deep listening – being “with” somebody at a deep level:**

All of us have talked about the need for us to practice listening to other people – to really listen deeply to what people are **feeling** beneath the words they are saying. We need to really be **with** people at a **deep level** in order to **profoundly connect**. Now Glen asked Douglas to share any further insights and his commitment to doing this.

He expressed appreciation for what one of the other guests had said earlier about applying the same kindness and attention to what’s inside. He uses the word ***intention***. At any moment when he is listening to somebody, why is he using his life energy for that listening? If he’s not clear about that, he’s probably at a high risk of contributing further to the problems. He called this “the inner game.”

He also starts with the presupposition that everything we do, everything we think, everything we feel is in the service of life – even if he is saying something to himself that is unkind. With that awareness he can translate this confused – almost dreamlike – language that had been taking him away from the deep connection with the needs that had been arising through him and help him connect in a profoundly different way. What was he hoping for when he said and did whatever he said and did? What was he really hoping to experience? What did he want his “inner weather” to be?

Rachel Eryn asked Douglas a question. She said that her extensive communication through social media have made her aware that – during our current time with so much fear and so much polarization – many people are using social media to change other people – to change their minds and their politics and their votes. She said there is a very strong agenda when people come at each other in that way. She noticed Douglas’s interest in people’s intention and his own yearning to make a deep connection with other people. Her question for Douglas was to ask how he deals with people who have their own strong agendas for changing other people while his intention is to make deep connections.

He answered by saying sometimes he’ll simply ask the other person, “Are you hoping that as a result of the time we’re spending together that I’ll change the way I look at the world? Is that what you’re hoping for?”

Also he said that – however the other person might respond to his question – if he is conscious of what he is wanting moment to moment, he’ll be able to sense what he needs to do next.

So, he said, if somebody answers by saying, “Yes, I’m trying to save you, you ignorant person, so if you would just listen to me for a moment your life would be so much better,” then he can reply with appreciation that the other person actually cares about him and his well-being, and ask them, “Is that what’s going on?” The other person is likely to say, “Yes.”

He said that our other guests have done this long enough that they know eventually the other person will stop talking. At that moment the energy can shift, and he said what he does at that moment is critical. At that moment if he can really be with the energy, the universe changes. Perhaps the next thing that happens is that he says, “I really like what I’ve heard. I like the care you’re extending for me. I’m affected by that. Would you like to hear what’s in the way of my doing what you would like me to do?” He described this as an invitation.

He said that at the biggest level what’s going on is that he is expressing that a need of his is interfering with his doing what the other person wants him to do. Because he is committed to being alive, he is committed to honoring his need – that life energy inside him – so he asks the other person to hear him out so perhaps they can collaborate in order to jointly figure out a solution that would satisfy both persons. He asks the other person, “How would that be for you?” He said here that his part of the interaction was “a connecting request instead of a purely solution-oriented request.”

He said that both of the other guests have said the kinds of work they’re all talking about requires a lot of training. He said that he and his colleagues do a huge amount of role-playing, which is very different from most kinds of workshops. They are “exercising a different muscle” in his training workshops.

When they ask their workshop participants, “How was that for you?” the participants sometimes say there were lost for a while, but now they express satisfaction and say they liked “where their heads and their hearts” had moved to, and they report feeling more alive now than they had felt in regular conversations with family members, co-workers, and other people, or with God. He said in many role-play trainings he has played God’s role.

Rachel Eryn said she liked Douglas’s answer very much, and it sounded as though he could do this successfully regardless of where the other person was coming from. She said the sessions that she and Susan do that too. “There’s always a way we can connect.”

**Glen said this is one of the fun things in what we are proposing here. “We do not need to have the other person start with us in wanting to depolarize. We can take the initiative in doing some good listening – some deep listening – and practicing some compassion, so we can change the dynamics of what this interaction is about. We don’t need to do this only with somebody who is of equally good will as we are. We can do this with somebody who is difficult or obstinate.”**

Glen referenced the old saying about being able to “disagree without being disagreeable.” He said we want to get “beyond that disagreement thing” to get down and discover the life energy and actually de-polarize our society.

Rachel Eryn added the important reassurance for people who hesitate to do what we’re suggesting because they’re afraid they’d have to “give up their truth.” She affirmed that in the practices we are encouraging, it is very much possible to speak from our own values and from our own hearts – to “talk about what is true and important. We do this in a way that is more connecting.”

***We did not have time during the interview to mention these additional relevant insights:***

When we deeply listen to other people whom we don’t know – and really hear their stories – we start to understand how they are using their life energy.

Let’s recognize that we are not likely to persuade someone with very different political beliefs to change their thinking. It is good to genuinely hear and understand them – and for them to know that we are really hearing and understanding them.

During our conversations let’s be clear about really being **with** somebody instead of **leading or manipulating** them. They can recognize the difference. Our being **with** someone must be genuine.

One of our guests said much depends on our own preparation. That guest chooses to practice respect, curiosity, and openness. Civility and compassion are vitally important.

During the Vietnam War when people in many nations disagreed with the U.S.’s war there, a young American woman visited France and sat if a public park holding a sign, “An American willing to listen.” People came up and spoke to hear, and she did good listening. Rachel Eryn did this in 2003 shortly before the Iraq war started. This kind of activity creates a fresh opening.

When holding such conversations, it’s good to ask the other person whether they feel truly heard at the level that they wanted. It can help to summarize what we’ve heard from the other person, and ask whether we heard correctly.

We want our deep conversations to create an “opening” – an “opening of the mind” or a “softening of the heart.”

When we were preparing for this interview, Rachel Eryn said, “We don’t have to agree about anything to be kind to each other.” That seems like a good starting point. Even if we disagree we can still do what the old saying says: “disagree without being disagreeable.”

Let’s discuss serious things without promoting or provoking any guilt or shame.

Let’s listen to the other person’s deepest level, so we can be mutually respectful and kind for each other. If we can do this one-to-one, we can scale up and de-polarize our society.

**Glen’s closing encouragement:**

Glen thanked **Douglas Dolstad** and **Susan Partnow** and **Rachel Eryn Kalish** for sharing their good heads and their good hearts – their extensive knowledge, smart insights and compassion – during this interview. He also thanked the people who have been watching this interview.

He said throughout the world’s history, many societies have included fractures and polarizations. These are **not sustainable**! Nor are the polarizations that the U.S. is experiencing now sustainable for our nation’s well-being.

Let’s actively seek healing, transcend the brokenness, and protect the U.S. from the serious crisis that is upon us.

This healing does **not** mean yielding to either extreme: **not** denying our values, and **not** conquering the people on the other side of the conflict and forcing them to submit to our will.

Americans need to decide whether we want to de-polarize and heal our nation. He said that right now not enough Americans are doing the things that our three guests are advocating.

We taped this TV interview on October 8, 2020. Most of its air dates on Thurston Community Media (cable channel 22 in Thurston County, Washington) will air **after** the November 3, 2020, election: Mondays at 1:30 pm, Wednesdays at 5:00 pm, and Thursdays at 9:00 pm. **The points we made during this hour will continue to be relevant, regardless of what happens before and after the November 3 election.**

Also, two weeks after the November 3 election, Glen, Susan and Rachel Eryn will produce another interview on this topic. It will be PART 2 of our conversation about how to de-polarize American Society. That TV program will air three times a week throughout December 2020 – Mondays at 1:30 pm, Wednesdays at 5:00 pm, and Thursdays at 9:00 pm – on cable channel 22 in Thurston County, Washington.

Also, Glen will type up very thorough summaries of what we said during EACH of these two TV interviews and post BOTH of them to his blog, along with links for watching BOTH TV programs. (You are reading November’s thorough summary now.)

Anybody with internet access can watch these TV programs and read the thorough summaries from anywhere at any time long into the future. His blog posts will include some links so you can find more information. Visit his blog, [**www.parallaxperspectives.org**](http://www.parallaxperspectives.org), and click either the **“TV Programs”** link or the **“Nonviolence”** link. Both the November video link and the November thorough summary are already posted there. Look for December’s video and thorough summary by early December 2020.

**In addition to the blog posts with the video and the thorough summary, look also for blog posts with “MORE RESOURCES” and “QUOTATIONS” about this topic, “How to De-Polarize American Society.**

***We did not have time during the interview to mention these additional relevant insights:***

A century and a half ago during the Civil War era, Abraham Lincoln said, “A house divided against itself cannot stand.” Nowadays, Americans must decide whether we want our nation to continue or to break into two warring parts.

Most people with strong positions on hot political issues typically **blame**, **demonize**, and want to **defeat** the people on the other side. But even if one side defeats the other, the people on the losing side are not going away. They will persist and try to fight again. Now in 2020, many Americans are flying the Confederate battle flag – the flag of the army of Southern slave-owning states that started a war against the United States – and now in 2020 many of these people cherish the South’s statues of Confederate military leaders who waged war against the United States.

Defeating the Confederacy’s supporters more than a century and a half ago did not stop the kinds of thinking that led them to wage that war. The Civil War did not solve the underlying problems.

**Now Americans must devise strategies for actually healing our nation, not just defeating whichever side we think is wrong.**

All of us – all across the political spectrum – need compassion, insights and skills to help us de-polarize so we can become one nation again and solve our nation’s problems in humane, sustainable ways. All three of our TV guests affirmed that any person – yes, you! – can start the process without waiting for somebody on “the other side.”

***We did not have time for Glen to recommend some good sources of information:***

Many sources of information exist about what we’ve been discussing. Information sources can help us at the head level, the heart level, and the practical level. Some are listed on the next page, and some are posted to Glen’s blog, as mentioned in the box on the next page.

Relevant portions of Glen’s blog – [**www.parallaxperspectives.org**](http://www.parallaxperspectives.org) – (categories for **“Nonviolence”** and **“Our Current Political Crisis,”** and so forth) provide information and resources worth considering, even when they go beyond the scope of this TV interview’s topic about de-polarizing. Be sure to look for our November and December 2020 TV videos and the thorough summaries of each interview in the **“TV Programs”** category. The thorough summaries of what we said during these interviews end with links to additional books, videos, articles, and non-profit organizations.

**🡪 In late October 2020 Glen will post to those parts of his blog two documents containing collections of additional resources and many quotations relevant to this TV program’s topic. Look for these blog posts:**

* **De-Polarizing – MORE RESOURCES**
* **De-Polarizing – QUOTATIONS from Many Persons Flesh out the Topic.**

The first two organizations listed below conduct excellent training workshops along the lines we discussed on TV:

* Douglas Dolstad is part of this non-profit organization:
**Northwest Compassionate Communication**: [**www.nwcompass.org**](http://www.nwcompass.org)
* Susan Partnow and Rachel Eryn Kalish are part of this non-profit organization:
**Compassionate Listening Project**: [**www.compassionatelistening.org**](http://www.compassionatelistening.org)
* Susan Partnow and Rachel Eryn Kalish are part of another non-profit organization:
The Network of Spiritual Progressives: [**www.spiritualprogressives.org**](http://www.spiritualprogressives.org)
* The diagram Susan shared with us came from Braver Angels: [**www.braverangels.org**](http://www.braverangels.org)
* Rabbi Michael Lerner’s non-profit org, the Network of Spiritual Progressives ([**www.spiritualprogressives.org**](http://www.spiritualprogressives.org)), connects deep values with public policy issues. One of our guests recommended Lerner’s new book, ***Revolutionary Love: A Political Manifesto to Heal and Transform the World***
* Some local communities benefit from having local non-profit organizations that help people resolve conflicts. The Dispute Resolution Center of Thurston County (WA) is an excellent resource at [**www.mediatethurston.org**](http://www.mediatethurston.org) (360) 956-1155. Glen’s December 2013 TV program focused on the DRC’s work and methodology. Here is a short summary and a link to watching that TV interview: [**http://parallaxperspectives.org/tv-how-to-resolve-conflicts**](http://parallaxperspectives.org/tv-how-to-resolve-conflicts)
* The **“Nonviolence”** and **“Conflict Resolution”** parts of Glen’s blog, [**www.parallaxperspectives.org**](http://www.parallaxperspectives.org), include much information and many examples, insights and resources.
* Glen recommends Kathryn Watterson’s amazing-but-true book ***Not by the Sword***. He typed this about it:

|  |
| --- |
| The book ***Not by the Sword*** is about a specific example when compassion achieved amazing results. The author is Kathryn Watterson. Several experts whom I respect have referred to it, so a few years ago I bought a copy and read it.In Lincoln, Nebraska, the cantor at the local synagogue started receiving extremely hateful, anti-Semitic phone calls, and some local African-Americans were also being abused and threatened by telephone calls and in other ways. (The book is much more interesting than my short summary here.) The cantor found out that the man calling him was the Grand Dragon of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan of Nebraska. The FBI considered him armed and dangerous.It turned out that this man was so angry about his serious disabilities that confined him to a wheelchair that he reacted by becoming a leader in the KKK and making hateful, threatening phone calls from his apartment. The cantor and his wife asked him during one of his phone calls whether he needed help going to the store for groceries or other transportation or help. Their reply to him “rewrote the script” of the conflict. (My workshops in nonviolence explain that this is one great power of nonviolence.) He allowed them to come to his apartment for housecleaning, and after a while this turned into a friendship.After a while he publicly resigned from the KKK, denounced the KKK, and went with the cantor and an African-American woman to do joint speaking engagements on behalf of human rights.Later he developed significant curiosity of the Jewish ethics that inspired the cantor and his wife to reach out to him with compassion. His interest in Judaism deepened, and he began to study it seriously for its spiritual value. He ended up actually converting to Judaism. By that time his disabilities had worsened so he could no longer live in his crappy apartment, so the Jewish family invited him to move into their home, where he lived until he died a few years later.Compassion is powerful and transformative! |

The Compassionate Listening Project ([**www.compassionatelistening.org**](http://www.compassionatelistening.org)) recommends resources from a bibliography based on their course on Compassionate Listening as World Work:

**One of our guests recommended watching these relevant videos:**

The danger of a single story - Chimamanda Adichie:
[**https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\_adichie\_the\_danger\_of\_a\_single\_story**](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story)

How to overcome our biases? Walk boldly toward them. - Verna Myers:
[**https://www.ted.com/talks/verna\_myers\_how\_to\_overcome\_our\_biases\_walk\_boldly\_toward\_them**](https://www.ted.com/talks/verna_myers_how_to_overcome_our_biases_walk_boldly_toward_them)

What we can do about a culture of hate – Sally Kohn:
[**https://www.ted.com/talks/sally\_kohn\_what\_we\_can\_do\_about\_the\_culture\_of\_hate**](https://www.ted.com/talks/sally_kohn_what_we_can_do_about_the_culture_of_hate)

Why I have coffee with people who send me hate mail - Ozlem Cekic:
[**https://www.ted.com/talks/ozlem\_cekic\_why\_i\_have\_coffee\_with\_people\_who\_send\_me\_hate\_mail**](https://www.ted.com/talks/ozlem_cekic_why_i_have_coffee_with_people_who_send_me_hate_mail)

**One of our guests recommended reading these relevant books:**

* ***See No Stranger:  A Memoir and Manifesto of Revolutionary Love***- Valarie Kaur
* ***Blindspot - Hidden Biases of Good People***. Banaji and Greenwald
* ***Deep Diversity: Overcoming Us Vs. Them***. Choudhury
* ***The Opposite of Hate*** - Sally Kohn
* ***Republican Like Me: How I left the liberal bubble and learned to love the right.*** Stern
* ***Strangers in Their Own Land***, Arlie Hochschild
* ***Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis*** - J. D. Vance

Glen appreciates the warm welcome and radical inclusiveness that was expressed at the bottom of a flyer for a local event a good number of years ago. The flyer was reaching out to all kinds of people and inviting them to come and participate in a particular event at some date/time/place. The one-page flyer included this at the bottom:

You are especially asked to participate in this effort if you are: a tax payer  African-American  an older person  a student  White  a member of a peace group  a member of the military  homeless  gay  a member of a religious group  not a member of anything  Hispanic  a parent  unemployed  a teacher  a government official  a pet owner  an athlete  Middle Eastern straight  a citizen of the U.S.  a member of the human race

This document finishes up at the top of the next page.

Since February 1987 Glen Anderson has been producing and hosting TV interview program that deal with a very wide variety of serious problems and issues, including foreign policy, nuclear weapons, environment, the climate crisis, social justice issues, economics, and how to use nonviolent grassroots organizing to promote humane, compassionate solutions. Glen’s TV programs always approach problems with a “can-do” attitude and with information and strategies to empower people to solve the problems. Yes, we can indeed solve these problems!

You can get information about a wide variety of issues related to peace, social justice and nonviolence through my blog, [**www.parallaxperspectives.org**](http://www.parallaxperspectives.org)or by phoning me at
(360) 491-9093 or e-mailing me at **glenanderson@integra.net**

I end each TV program with this encouragement:

**We're all one human family, and we all share one planet.**

**We can create a better world, but we all have to work at it.**

**The world needs whatever you can do to help!**