

KOSMOS LIVE Preparing for Profound Change

Episode_4 Judy Wicks

Engaged Business, Activism, and Local Economy.

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From our recording studios in Philadelphia, this is Kosmos Live and I am your host Rhonda Fabian.

I think that's the thing that we ... sometimes overcomes us, is that we think, "Oh, I'm only one person. What can I do about this problem?" So I think the most important thing about activism is to realize your own power, that every single person counts, and that's how change comes. That we each take action in a way that we can, and that we build on that.

Kosmos: That's Judy Wicks. Judy is the co-founder of the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies, BALLE, and an international leader and speaker in the local living economy movement. She is former owner of the White Dog Café, acclaimed for its socially and environmentally responsible business practices. She is also my friend of 30 years. Welcome to Kosmos Live, Judy.

Judy Wicks: Thank you Rhonda. It's great to be here.

Kosmos: **Judy, the idea of a local living economy is something that inspired you, I think, long before you even had a name for it. How did your understanding of those three words evolve, and when did they first spur you into action?**

Judy Wicks: The word "living" for me means an economy that supports life, both natural life and community life. The natural and the manmade. Ecosystems that our businesses are part of. So I guess that began for me, the living part, as a child, both living in a community of a small town that was very supportive and also living close to nature. My parents were great nature lovers. We went on canoe trips for our family vacations, so I was always very attuned to the living world. And then later in life, when we were forming what became BALLE, the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies, I heard the word "living" used in that application from David Korten, and so it seemed like a good way to describe that part of what we mean and building these new economies.

And then the "local" part obviously means local, but to go further, producing goods, especially basic needs, as close to home as possible, and having business ownership be local -- that the owner of a business lives within 50 miles of his or her business. And that was the way that things were done when I was growing up in the '50s. The local drugstore, the locally owned gas station, the local butcher, the grocery store. These were all owned by people that I knew personally and I went to school with their kids, and our town was surrounded by farms and much of our food came from local farmers markets or from my own parents' vegetable garden. They were both gardeners and I was always sent up to pick the vegetables.

And we would drive into the city to buy clothes for school at one of two family-owned department stores in Pittsburgh. I lived in a small town outside of Pittsburgh. And I remember when the first mall was built outside of my small town along the highway going into Pittsburgh, and the first McDonald's was close, nearby that mall. And as a teenager, I thought this was really cool. You go to the mall and hang out, to go to McDonald's, and that was really a cool thing. But as I got older, I began to see what this was doing, how it was changing our culture.

Kosmos: I'm sure many people listening to this remember similar moments in their own communities when things seemed to shift. But you actually did something about it! Describe some of the ways that you aligned your work with your values when you founded the White Dog Café.

Judy Wicks: At the White Dog, my mission was to be fully of service. Service to my customers, service to my employees, service to my community, and service to the natural environment. So when I made a decision, the first thing wasn't for me how much money are you going to make by that decision, but rather how will that decision best serve one or more of these areas: customers, employees, community, or the natural world.

So when things came up like the opportunity to buy renewable energy from a local wind company, it was going to cost a lot more money, but it would serve my mission. So I was the first business in Pennsylvania to buy 100% of our electricity from renewable sources. And that story just continued throughout my business life. I guess probably the most important practice was buying from local farmers, and even though at the time it was more expensive to buy from local farmers, and a lot more labor to buy from local farmers.

But because of my background, when I started The White Dog, which was in 1983, the localism, the local food movement, wasn't on the radar screen. So I was really, I wanted to have food like my mother cooked. I had been 10 years in a French restaurant, and I was tired of that, of imported ingredients and heavy cream sauces and so on. So I just ... To me, it was the natural thing to try and find local food and to cook it in a style that enhanced the natural flavors using natural herbs and so on. So I started buying from local farmers and we became one of the first in our region to buy local.

But I think probably the decision I was most proud of was after many years of cultivating farmers, we had 25 or so farmers that we bought from, including farms that sold pastured animal products, and that was one of the things I cared most about. The factory farming of pigs was so horrifying to me when I heard the story of how the mother sows are kept in cages and not able to walk even one step forward their entire lives. I was so appalled that I took pork off the menu and found a source for pastured pork. So that then ended up, once I got that established, I had a trade route, so to speak, established. We had several sources of local pork. Then I heard about the plight of the cow and how cows are herbivores, they're supposed to eat grass and so on. So then I found a source for grass-fed beef, and of course pastured chicken, and uncaged eggs, and so on.

So I was very proud of our menu, that we were cruelty-free, that all of our animal products came from small family farms and at first I thought, "Well, this is going to be our market niche. This is our competitive advantage. This is all about us." But then I had a transformative moment when I realized that if I really cared about the farm animals, if I

really cared about the environment that was being polluted by the concentration of manure in these factory farms, if I cared about the workers in these horrible slaughterhouses and factories, if I cared about the consumers that were eating meat that was full of antibiotics and hormones, then rather than keeping this list of farmers as my proprietary information, that I would share this with my competitors. This was a way for me to serve a whole region, to serve in a wider way, to expand a network of farmers that supplied The White Dog to a network of farmers that supplied our city.

And it occurred to me that there is no such thing as one sustainable business, that we can only be part of a sustainable system, and that we need to see that, see the larger picture. And that we can only build a sustainable system by cooperating, including cooperating with our competitors. So that was a major turning point in my life, when I made that decision. And from that point on, it just felt so good to share, to cooperate. And I just kept doing it.

You're listening to Kosmos Live, a production of Kosmos Journal, dedicated to transformation of self, communities, institutions and planet – in harmony with all life. You can subscribe at www.kosmosjournal.org. I'm speaking with author and activist Judy Wicks. Her book Good Morning Beautiful Business is both memoir and primer for running a socially conscious business in service to people and planet.

Kosmos: I wonder, as a woman, a fiercely independent, uncompromising woman, I might add, what obstacles that were typical barriers for women were not obstacles for you? And what unexpected challenges did you encounter as an entrepreneur and a localist?

Judy Wicks: I think I was fortunate in that I don't feel that being a woman held me back in any way. I had the usual sexist experiences where salesmen would say, "Well, I'd like to speak with your husband." And I said, "Well, my husband's not here, this is my business." So that happened all the time. But it really, I guess my business taught me that ... about my feminine power. As a child I was a tomboy, and so I tried to deny the fact that I was a girl, that girls were sissies, and I always played with the boys and played baseball and built forts and so on. And I didn't want to be seen as one of those sissy girls that wears pink and plays with dolls.

But as an adult with my own business, I began to see that the traditional feminine values, such as a focus on relationship building, having compassion, cooperating, nurturing, sharing, all these things, were traditional feminine values. And as a young manager, when I was working for someone else, a man, he used to tell me to be businesslike and make those tough decisions and don't get emotional about things. In other words, make your decisions from your head, not your heart. And this, of course, is traditional business advice. This is how business works. It's not in our culture.

So this all made me realize how out of balance our economy actually is in terms of feminine and masculine energies. And when I speak of those energies, I see them as available in both men and women. In fact, we each, no matter what sex we are, need to balance our feminine and our masculine energies.

And I had a farmer one time that gave me this great story about this, and he said that

good farming was the appropriate balance of masculine and feminine energies, which he described as the masculine being efficiency, and the feminine being nurturing. So he would explain that if you have too much masculine energy and not enough feminine, that you might have a well-run farm, using your time wisely, but you're not going to have a good product. You're not going to have good tomatoes or chickens or whatever. On the other hand, if you have too much feminine energy, too much nurturing, you might have great tomatoes and chickens, but you're going to going out of business because you're not working in an efficient way. You're not using your time in a wise way, which is a huge thing in farming, the use of time.

So this got me thinking about how the whole economy is out of balance. That there's too much masculine energy, too much focus on efficiency and cost controls and so on. And nothing could exemplify this better than the factory farming of animals. And when you think about this, say, the hens, the battery cages of hens, the name of the game is how little can you give the hen? How little space, how little light and air, how little food and water, to produce the cheapest egg on earth. And there's no feminine energy whatsoever in this system. It's really ... There's no nurturing at all.

And so this was a lesson to me in how lucky I was, because I feel like because of the way that we're raised in our culture, that feminine values are brought out in women to a large extent, but repressed in men. And for women who want to succeed in business, we also repress our feminine. But by having my own business, I began to see how it was my feminine qualities that really made my business unique. That it was my capacity to share and cooperate, to have compassion, to build a business that was based on relationships rather than money, that made it successful and made it unique.

Kosmos: You could have stopped there. The White Dog was so successful. What was the impetus for starting BALLE?

Judy Wicks: Well, BALLE is now 16 or 17 years old, so it started in 2001. In 1999, two events happened that really kind of woke me up to the loss of local economies. And that was the sale of Ben & Jerry's to Unilever, it was a forced buyout. And I actually sat up in bed in the middle of the night and thought, "Oh my gosh, they bought Ben & Jerry's," because that was really our model for socially responsible business, and the fact that they were bought out by a multinational was startling to me and it was a wake-up call.

And then within, in the exact same period of time, was the Battle of Seattle in Seattle, Washington, where many people stood up to the World Trade Organization with protests at their meeting there. And I didn't know anything about this, I was a small businessperson with my head in the sand running my business, but my daughter was in college at the time and she went to Seattle and it was from her that I really began to understand the big picture. How these students and professors and environmentalists and union leaders and so on were all there, not protesting globalization, but the idea that the global economy was controlled by these large multinationals, and that the roles of the WTO would override local laws that were meant to protect the environment or protect workers.

So this was a one-two punch, the sale of Ben & Jerry's and Seattle, that woke me up to the fact that we were losing our local economies. And then there were obviously other things that my life ... taught me this as well. Just seeing in my own small town, how the

local hardware store, where the men used to sit on the front porch and talk on Saturday mornings and have coffee, and then that went out of business when the Home Depot came to town, and the malls and so on. So I think all of us really, have experienced that loss of community that chain stores and globalization has caused, let alone the damage to the environment of our economy, our extractive economy.

So it was, at the time that Ben & Jerry's was sold, I was in a leadership position at a national business organization called The Social Venture Network, and I saw that the issues that I cared about, such as local ownership and a sense of place and community and scale, having an economy that's at a human scale, were not valued at Social Venture Network, even though they were very progressive. The idea there was to grow your progressive, socially responsible company as large as big bad companies and beat them at their own game. And then I realized the fallacy of that, because what would happen is as our companies got bigger and bigger, they would be bought out, just as Ben & Jerry's was by Unilever. And then this continued to happen. With The Body Shop, another icon of our movement was also bought out by L'Oreal, and Tom's of Maine by Palmolive Colgate, and on and on and on.

So that's what inspired me to co-found BALLE, the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies, along with a friend, a fellow board member at SVN, Laurie Hamill. And so it's been 16 years now since we started BALLE, but that's how it began.

You're listening to Kosmos Live, made possible by Kosmos Community, dedicated members who support Kosmos in numerous ways. I'm speaking with local economy pioneer Judy Wicks. She is also an author, public speaker and veteran activist.

Kosmos: Judy, one of the things I admire most about you is your willingness to show up on the front lines for a cause you believe in, and you bring your whole heart with you, or sometimes you even bring the front lines to where you are. And it's gotten you into some hot water at times. What are some of the key lessons from your life as an activist?

Judy Wicks: Well, I guess the biggest thing is that ... not to feel powerless. When I sold The White Dog, I was moping around when an issue came up. Now at The White Dog, when an issue came up, I would hop right on it and I would have a program, whether it was the war on drugs or public education or foreign policy or climate change, I would have speakers, I would do tours. We did a child watch tour of the lives of inner city kids. It was a way that I had of addressing, of being an activist through my business, being an entrepreneurial activist and really running an activist business. Our slogo was food, fun, and social activism. So it was an integral part of my business.

And when I sold it, I was bemoaning to a friend that now I was only one person, what could I do? And my friend said to me, she said, "Judy, you've always only been one person." Hey, that's right! So I think that's the thing that we ... sometimes overcomes us, is that we think, "Oh, I'm only one person. What can I do about this problem?" So I think the most important thing about activism is to realize your own power, that every single person counts, and that's how change comes. That we each take action in a way that we can, and that we build on that. And to think big, to dream big. And to begin with just

connecting with the people around you, with your friends, saying, "How about going on this march?" Or, "Let's do this," or whatever, and then building that out.

So just to give you a recent example, since I've been retired, really. I heard about the fracking north of my home in Philadelphia, and I went on a tour, because I think maybe the first step in activism is to become knowledgeable, become knowledgeable of where you live and what are the issues there, whether it's around food or energy or whatever the issues are, to know about it.

And so I realized that as a person living in the city who was buying natural gas and benefiting from natural gas, that I was complicit in this system. So just like I stopped buying factory meat and how I stopped buying electricity produced by fossil fuels, I decided I was not going to buy natural gas.

So anyway, after I converted my own house, then I joined a campaign to solarize my own community. And then I got involved, and this gets back to the activism, in a pipeline fight out in Lancaster County.

They had Greenpeace volunteers come to the farm there, where they have an encampment. They made a camp right in the line of where the pipeline is going through, and they're training people in civil disobedience. So I'm signed up, I'm on the emergency list, so when the pipeline comes, if all the legal means have been tried and failed, I'm signed up to join in civil disobedience, to stand in the way of the pipeline.

So I'm continuing this work, but I feel like in a way, that it begins with making sure your own house is clean. A lot of times friends of mine that are progressive are maybe out there marching about climate change, but when you ask them, you find out that they're using dirty energy in their house. So I think we have to start with our own lives and then build out from there.

Kosmos: Judy, you and I spent time together at Standing Rock last fall, thank you again for the invitation, and we both witnessed a heavily militarized fossil fuel industry and the flagrant disregard for community there, and human rights. What did you take away from the experience at Standing Rock?

Judy Wicks: Well, well. Well, first of all, I'm so glad you came on that, Rhonda. You were such a big help and helping to prepare meals and so on for so many people, so thank you for coming. I guess the thing that stands in my mind so vividly is that sharp contrast of opposing worldviews. You see the military, they look like Darth Vader with riot gear, with these helmets dressed all in black, with black uniforms, with bulletproof vests and these clubs and so on, standing in a line with tanks. And then opposed to this are Native American people on ponies or on foot, dressed in regular clothes, carrying signs about protecting the sacred. And sitting in prayer circles.

And just the contrast in worldviews was so stark. Here's, on one side, a worldview or symbols of a worldview that's based on domination and violence, and is fear-based, versus a culture that's love-based and peaceful and based on values of sharing and cooperation. And being there was really eye-opening, just to the extent that the native

people went to maintain their values in the face of this horrific violence against them, where they were beaten and maced and people lost eyes and one young woman, she was an ally, a white ally, had most of her arm blown off by a grenade, and that happened right before we arrived. So even with all this violence towards them, they maintained their love. And they explained to the police officers that they were doing this work for the future of all children, including their children and the children of the pipe companies, the energy companies and so on.

And so it was witnessing this ... love in action, I guess, is what it was. And their ... and really, I was so inspired by this. I don't know whether I would be fighting the pipeline in Lancaster County right now if it weren't for my experience in Standing Rock. It empowered me, inspired me. It made me realize how important it is to risk putting our bodies on the line for ... to protect Mother Earth, our common mother for us all. And the indigenous people really inspired that in me, that we ... that what they were asking for, after all that we've done to indigenous people was stealing their land, the genocide and so on ... All they are asking for, of us, is that we respect our mother and that we protect our children. Now that is ... How can we not give them that? They ... I just, I was blown away, really, by Standing Rock and by the values that were represented there by the indigenous people.

Kosmos: You've done such wonderful work there. I know that along with some of your friends, you've raised a tremendous amount of money and awareness about that situation, and I don't think that the lessons of Standing Rock are over. I think that it will always be in the history books, sort of that marker, that place, where people took a stand. But given the converging crises that we are facing, environmental, economic, and political, and all you've learned, Judy, and this is a tough question, what's your prognosis? What changes do you see coming?

Judy Wicks: Well, I'm an eternal optimist, so even though-

Kosmos: I know that about you.

Judy Wicks: Yeah, right, right, right. So there's a lot of bad things happening in the world, including in our own White House and Congress and so on, that are very discouraging. But what I see ... I do see indigenous wisdom and energy rising, and I see feminine energy rising. I agree with you that Standing Rock will live on forever, and it's symbolic not only of our ... protecting what we love and protecting the sacred, but also of building awareness about indigenous rights and how indigenous people are the protectors of Mother Earth and should be honored and protected themselves for that.

And all over the world, indigenous people are standing up. It's not just here at Standing Rock, but in the Amazon and all the indigenous people there are using sticks to fight off the oil drillers. It's happening everywhere and I feel like it is affecting us. And indigenous people, I mean, they're not all the same, obviously. I'm speaking in generalities. But traditional indigenous values are, I think, a balance of masculine and feminine energies. That they have this balance that we all should be seeking, and I think as part of indigenous energy rising, feminine energy is also rising.

And I can see that ... that I see speciesism, our, humans' arrogance and disrespect for other species, as being the root of other -isms. Of racism, sexism, and so on. That is very fundamental of how we, as human beings, treat other species. And when we get away with brutalizing animals and treating them with such disrespect, we go on to do the same to human beings

And I see such movement now in animal rights movements, that compassion for animals is becoming ... And I think we all have that in us, our ability to have compassion for animals, I think that's our natural state. But because of the horrific treatment of animals in the factory farms or in the testing labs and so on, or how the pharmaceutical companies will go into a jungle and just capture all these monkeys and ship them to the United States for these very cruel, horrific tests ... I mean, it's so horrible that people don't want to hear about it. They just don't want to hear about it.

So these animal rights groups are ... I so respect them, and they're making headway. And just in, for instance, like the circuses. The circuses, when we were little, we thought the animals were having a great time in there. But now that we find out, due to the undercover work of the animal rights organizations, that these animals are being tortured and that is really barbaric domination on display in the circuses. And now the circuses are getting rid of the animals or retiring the animals to sanctuaries and so on, because of public demand. That the public is now having compassion and they're becoming knowledgeable of these things.

So I see that as a sign of what's coming. That when we change our relationship with animals, as we defeat the factory farm system, as we put the circuses out of business ... And the pharmaceutical companies are so powerful, but I feel like that's, there's inroads there, that there's a strong movement now to do away with experimenting on, in particular, dogs and monkeys. And of course they've now retired the chimpanzees from experimentation, the federal government has. So to me, that is a huge, huge vision of what's to come. That if we can have a culture that respects and has compassion for animals, that that's the ground floor of building a compassionate world, so that we as human beings can really find our place in the web of life and the family of life. Not as torturers and exploiters, but as lovers of life and of all species and of each other. So that's my dream, that mankind will find our place in that way, in the family of life. And that's the ultimate goal for me.

Kosmos: That's beautiful. And Judy, do you have any recommendations for practical ways that people, businesses, and communities can come together to address some of the injustices that we see today and to prepare for what's coming?

Judy Wicks: Well, preparing for what's coming ... The first thing I think of, of course, is climate change. And so in terms of practicality, to me the most important thing that people can do is to build local, self-reliance in our basic needs, in particular food and energy. When we do that, first of all, we're addressing the causes of climate change. If we move to buy food that's raised in our own region and if we buy renewable energy that's also produced in our own region by solar or wind, biomass, whatever it may be ... Number one, we're reducing the carbons that are causing climate change, but number two, we're preparing our communities for what's coming.

And we don't know exactly what is coming, but we do know that we will always need food and we will always need energy, and the more that we can build up our local self-reliance and basic needs, the safer we'll be in an unknown future, because right now, so many of our communities depend on long-distance shipping routes to deliver us our basic needs.

So I think the number one thing that people can do is to buy local food and locally produced renewable energy.

And in doing this, in building local self-reliance, we get to know our community better. We get to know our farmers, our farmers markets. And I think there's a joy in this. When we go to the farmers market, there's a real happy spirit when we go to farmers markets. There's a joy in actually talking to the farmers that come in with their goods and knowing where our food comes from and knowing that the animals were well-treated, that the soil was well-treated, because it's organic. And clothing as well. I mean, locally made clothing is on the rise and sustainably made clothing that's using natural dyes and organic materials, bamboo and hemp and so on.

So that's, I'd say, the most practical thing we can do. But then I guess in a sort of, philosophically or spiritually, whatever, that we need to shift our mindset from me to we. That as Americans, we're kind of raised as independent individualists, the independent cowboy or whatever, and so we take great pride in being strong individualistic people that can do it on our own, and that we're only looking out for ourselves and our own family. And we have to change that mindset to a we, that we really look at our communities, and that we make decisions for the good of the whole. Just as I made the decision to share my supplier list with my competitors, that was ... I was moving from me to we.

And I'll tell you, I didn't make that decision because I knew in my head, this is the right thing to do. You learned in kindergarten to share, this is the right thing to do. I made that decision totally from my heart, because I love the pigs. So it was my love of the pigs and of nature and of small farmers that overcame my fear of not having ... losing profits and losing sales, and not having enough for myself. So I think that for all of us, we need to make our decisions from a place of love, just as we've seen indigenous people do, from that strong feminine energy that's in all of us.

And be willing to protect what we love, to stand up. And I think that the coming years are going to be bringing more and more opportunity and necessarily for civil disobedience, for people who have never been on a march before, or maybe haven't been on a march since the Vietnam War, to get out into the streets, to make our voices heard, and to get out into the rural areas and help to stop the pipelines. That we need to have all hands on deck, because this is really a struggle for life on Earth, as I see it. I think it's clear, and the indigenous people know that, that we all have to rise up as they are doing to protect our common mother.

Kosmos: Judy, for 30 years I've witnessed the power of your personal effort to align your values with your actions, using The White Dog as a political platform, divesting from big oil, forming fair trade alliances around the world, and I'm just so grateful for the work that you've done. I'm so grateful to call you a friend, and so happy you could spend this time with us on Kosmos Live.

Judy Wicks: Oh, it's just great to be here, Rhonda, and I'm so grateful that we're friends too.

Kosmos: Well, I look forward to seeing you soon. And thank you, thank you again.

Judy Wicks: You're welcome.