| **Owl**  Script By: Laila Brown and Jeffrey Parris |
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**Trigger Warning: Before we begin, we’d like to warn you that this episode covers sensitive topics like forced sterilization, abortion, profanity, and mentions of violence.**

**Privacy Notification: Names have been changed to respect attorney/client privileges and the privacy of our subjects. Please do not attempt to seek out or contact any individuals mentioned in the podcast.**

[***Slow Fade Of******Music***]

[***Hook/Narrative***]

**Laila**: Back in 1993, Reverend Joan Maruskin was a Methodist minister in York, Pennsylvania. One day, Joan was reading the newspaper and saw something shocking.

**JOAN [Interview]**: The article in the newspaper said that the men were being deported and there was no, there was no one permitted to see them except the attorneys. I called the attorney [Craig Trebilcock] and said you know what can we do and he said a Presence is needed. So I called friends. The first vigil had Christians, Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and some just general people so it was a matter of coming together members of Faith communities that I knew out of concern and that's how we got together and he went to the prison to pray to see what we could do because we felt it was our responsibility to do something for these men who were apparently from what we could read being unjustly detained or detained with very little help from anybody except the attorneys and that was kind of the start of the whole thing.

**Laila**: The next steps Joan and other individuals would take would go on to become one of the most important events that occurred in York and make national headlines.

[***Transition Music***]

**[Section 1]**

[***Intro to Topic***]

**Jeffrey**: Welcome to another episode of Golden Dreams.

[**Introduce ourselves**]

**Jeffrey**: I’m Jeffrey Parris.

**Laila**: And I’m Laila Brown.

**Jeffrey**: In this episode, we will talk about the responses from the community of York, Pennsylvania, and the importance of community activism and engagement. We will also discuss how the York community and news of the Golden Venture impacted immigration policy nationwide. Towards the end of the episode, we will have guests Rev. Joan Maruskin and Zehao Zhou (or ZZ for short) join us, and speak about their experiences and the part they played in the story of the Golden Venture.

[***Transition Music***]

**[*Introduction/ Brief Overview*]**

**Laila**: After many passengers of the Golden Venture fled the ship and reached the shores of Queens, New York, they were detained by the Immigration and Naturalization Service, or INS. The INS did not inform the Golden Venture passengers where they would be going and put the passengers on a bus to detention facilities across the country, including in York. At the time York had the reputation of being indifferent to newcomers. However, there was a budding activist group that would change the lives of the passengers and have an impact on immigration laws and prison reform for years to come.[[1]](#footnote-0) As much as there was growing support for the passengers, there were some individuals who opposed the refugees’ presence in the United States.

**Jeffrey**: The opposition from some in the York community did not sway the commitment from Joan and the other activists. If anything, their dedication brought about a growing change to the horrendous conditions the passengers were experiencing in the York County Prison.

Joan, like many others, saw the local newspapers’ reports on how the Golden Venture passengers were going on a hunger strike refusing food and water.[[2]](#footnote-1) The passengers' protests resulted from hearings only being held behind closed doors and attorneys having a difficult time getting fair trials for the passengers.

Around this time, on August 29, 1993, Joan and about 100 people were holding prayer vigils outside the prison. These vigils would bring national press (and worldwide news) reporting on the conditions the passengers were facing in the York County Prison. This would also catch the attention of The Pennsylvania Newspaper Publishers Association (who would later file a suit against the INS to demand access to these INS hearings and eventually win). From there, the vigils grew with more and more people participating in these services to bring awareness to the conditions the passengers were experiencing. By September 1993, most of the people attending these vigils would be known as the People of the Golden Vision.

**Laila**: During our interview with Joan, she highlights the involvement of The People of the Golden Vision and how frequently they would hold vigils for the Golden Venture passengers.

**JOAN** **[Interview]**: So it [People of the Golden Vision] grew exponentially with people who were interested, people who supported, people who helped. It sort of came down to a core group of about 30 people in York working consistently and being there every Sunday to have the vigils to find out what's happening, to travel to different detention sites, to travel to different places, to demonstrate and to choose to be very vocal. I think it's important to stress, it was not a political movement really, because it was totally non-partisan, nobody cared who belonged to what political party. We all were looking at it as a human rights injustice issue.

**Laila**: As Joan puts it in this brief interview section, this is a human rights issue.

**JEFFREY**: When you came to our class I remember you referring to York, Pennsylvania, as the “ Alabama of Pennsylvania, um could you elaborate on that and tell us what the political climate of York was like before the Golden Venture?

**JOAN**: Uh, Well, York and central Pennsylvania, it's kind of has been considered, there’s eastern Pennsylvania, Western Pennsylvania, and “Alabama in the middle. This is sort of- It has Clan Territory. It was considered Klan territory, a very strong lan holds within York. The government had started resettling immigrants into the detention center or putting them in detention back in the 50s as I understand it. And the reason this site was picked was because they thought no one would care about the immigrants and about immigration detention and in fact no one even knew about it until the Golden Venture came into play.

**JEFFREY**: So would you say that the fact that immigrants are detained here, had, you would save the government doing that was intentional maybe to say, isolate them?

**JOAN**: Oh absolutely. absolutely. and you know I can add though the first thing that I said actually York during the riots in the late sixties had the second largest riot in violent most violent riot adjusted for population so our response during that time of rioting in the 60s for civil rights is part of the reason why york had this reputation . And yes so nobody knew they were there or was concerned

**JEFFREY**: And so do you, so you are saying that nobody really knew or was concerned about the immigrants that were being detained here. How did the culture of York change as a result of the golden venture ?

Joan: One, I think their eyes opened to just the fact of immigration detention that was one thing. Secondly, I think that the culture changed, the men were brought here because they were looking for places to put them where their cases would be heard and they would be deported immediately. That was the plan from the White House and so because of York’s reputation they thought nobody's going to respond but when people heard about what was happening they started to question. And along with being this reputation that they had York is a community of people of faith of a variety of faiths and that was the concern from a justice viewpoints and a love for all people viewpoint is what brought about our first prayer sessions at the prison by people for many faiths and with that positive response from the faith groups that enabled us I think to get positive responses from people all over the community

**JEFFREY**: That's great to hear. So how did you and that initial prayer group, how did you all first get involved with the Golden Venture.

**JOAN**: So, the involvement started because I had read the article in the newspaper and the article in the newspaper said that the men were being deported and there was no, there was no one permitted to see them except the attorneys. I called the attorney and said you know what can we do and he said a Presence is needed. I am a retired Methodist Minister now and I also was connected with it. so I called friends. the first vigil had Christians, Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists and some just general people so it was a matter of coming together members of Faith communities that I knew out of concern and that's how we got together and he went to the prison to pray to see what we could do because we felt it was our responsibility to do something for these men who were apparently from what we could read being unjustly detained or detained with very little help from anybody except the attorneys and that was kind of the start of the whole thing.

**JEFFREY**: And out of that how rapidly would you say did the support grow for the prisoners held in York. like out of that at first initial vigil group

**JOAN**: I think I told you about the major newspaper coverage that we had, immediately the next morning there were more people and then next morning there were more people and it eventually continued to grow and then we and so we also began to learn about Golden Venture detainees and other sites around the country. so then it got not only York but also other people and other detention sites began to become part of the People of the Golden Vision. and work with us. So it grew exponentially with people who were interested, people who supported, people who helped. It sort of came down to a core group of about 30 people in York working consistently and being there every Sunday to have the vigils to find out what's happening, to travel to different detention sites, to travel to different places, to demonstrate and to choose to be very vocal. I think it's important to stress, it was not a political movement really, because it was totally non-partisan, nobody cared who belonged to what political party. We all were looking at it as a human rights injustice issue.

**JEFFREY**: How large of a part do you think the community banning together for this effort just to community coming together as a whole how large of a part do you think that played in helping bring more awareness to the people that came on the Golden Venture?

**JOAN**: Oh I would say that that was what did it. That was what brought the attention. I would say, and I believe and I believe the attorneys would agree it was sort of 50% of the work Was the attorneys who were doing all the incredibly important legal work that was needed to be done but for the people around the world to get to know it and the community become involved, that was part of the people of the golden vision. so we're kind of working hand in hand but we were really that to say it is about like one third one third one third. One third attorneys, one third of the people and one third the media because the media was just as intense on making positive publicity and helping with their freedom. Which sounds really interesting because they're supposed to be impartial but the stories that they told were the truth stories and they were good stories.

**JEFFREY**: Was there any backlash to the movement?

**JOAN**: What I would say is okay, there was not really a backlash to the movement but there were people in some of the churches that were very unhappy that their pastors were doing this. but they all came around

**JEFFREY**: Okay

**JOAN**: Because it was totally new, there had never been Pastors in York County standing in the streets every Saturday night or every Sunday afternoon calling for release of immigrants from another country or being involved in another culture in another population so when you look at the kind of traditional Church culture that was a new thing and it was difficult for some people to handle at first but then I think they began to understand that oh the pastor was still caring for them and the world was opening up.

**JEFFREY**: so you wouldn't say they had these deeply rooted beliefs they had, it was just something new to the area that they had to come around to

**JOAN**: for the most part yeah now there were a few people who were of course deeply rooted that they didn't want immigrants and they didn't want anybody so you heard that you point that would be here and heard periodically, but it was very minor

**JEFFREY**: so in being a long-term resident of York

**JOAN**: [laughter] Long, long

**JEFFREY**: how would you say that you know your time with people of the golden vision and that whole period, how would you say that positively impacted the community of York if anything

**JOAN**: Oh I think that it was a positive impact because of the Acceptance that grew and so people that have never been exposed to immigrants and other cultures before got to realize oh they're just like us. and it expanded them from just settling men of the Golden Venture to other Asylum Seekers from other countries so churches and people and Faith groups around this state becoming more and more aware of their people who maybe look different than we do speak a little differently but inside we're all alike. We are all alike and that's the thing that we learned. the more you become in contact with people of other cultures, the more you realize we're just all one people

**JEFFREY**: Would you say that bringing national attention to the issue had a positive effect on reforms that were made to prison and immigration?

**JOAN**: Oh absolutely I mean and I mean we can directly Point well we can directly point to the legislation in 1996 that had some really negative immigration stuff but had to grant asylum to 1,000 Chinese for Family Planning, you know forced abortion and family planning rights. So that's the very positive thing and that was done actually national network of churches formed through National advocacy along those lines so that was very positive.It also helped to a direct result of it is an immigration detention reform, the religious standards that they now have are directly resulting from the work that was done as a result of the Golden Venture.

**JEFFREY**:In addition to the community activism, and the widespread media coverage, do you think the sale or the creation of the artwork had anything to do with the people being made aware of what was going on inside the prison?

**JOAN**: absolutely. absolutely. So actually I'm glad you said that I'm going to like, go back and redo what I said. Okay this change came because of the attorneys, the community advocates, the media, and the Man in the person who had the hope. who had the hope and responded positively and knew What we were doing, and how we were doing it, and I just want to qualify, the attorneys never took any salary. it was all used for their legal expenses just so somebody doesn't misunderstand that. but I'm taking it back I'm changing forever, I'm saying it's all it's it's a four-way thing. absolutely there were many newspapers covering it, and Life magazine, you may have seen the article, had a really big article about it and that article actually helped one of the detainees to get his asylum. It's pretty good.

**Jeffery**: In our interview with Joan, a theme that kept coming up was the community component of the Golden Venture. Especially the impact of the local news outlets in spreading the word regarding the immigrants. According to Joan, community activism was central to the release of the immigrants by bringing national attention to them. This event provided a chance for the community of York to become more politically aware and change the culture of the city. Through community activism and the belief in humanity, legislative change in both prison reform and certain immigration policies occurred.

[***Transition Music***]

**[Section 2]**

[***Laila, Jeffrey, and Zehao Zhou*** (***ZZ***)]

**JEFFREY**: I remember when you came and spoke to our class, you talked about, um, how, like, uh, when the a lot of prisoners that came to York that were, uh, you know, non white prisoners mainly.

**ZZ**: Yeah. A 100% non white. Not mainly.

**Jeffrey**: There's a large part of that was the cultural isolation that they may have faced coming here. And so, like, um, how did how did you deal with that when you when you started working with them to kinda bridge the gap between, you know, the community and the prisoners?

**ZZ**: But for this group of people, when they first arrived, I think 120 some strong people and they were, you know, not prepared linguistically otherwise for life and so on. And they had problem with food, you know, they have to have a sandwich. I remember the thing that they loved most was ramen noodles, you know, and that was the biggest treat. And, uh, so when they came here, you know, they were isolated. And, uh, so I had I was able to talk to them, serving as a bridge between the press and those guys, serving as a bridge between the lawyers and and those guys. I went to the cell blocks, actually nothing through the partition, but actually walked into the actual cell blocks. And I was a bridge between the religious workers and them. And I was, uh, was serving as a bridge, uh, between the community supporters and them. So all in all, and so I even I assume so they had all the communication barriers. They did not know what was going on. And we had an activist called Sterling Showers and he would bring all the newspapers, uh, Chinese newspapers. So he's a, he's what they call a sinophile. Are you familiar with that expression? Sinophile. Sino being China, phile being friendly. So he was like somebody who is somehow born to love Chinese, the culture and the people. So Sterling Showers was such a person.

**Jeffrey**: *Interject here:* Sterling Showers was a well respected member in the york community. According to jis obituary, “… he became involved in supporting the detainees of the "Golden Venture" by visiting them, getting them to their hearings, providing supplies and housing and finding them jobs upon their release.” He passed away in 2020.

**ZZ**: So he would go to different, uh, other restaurant. He will pick up packs and bags of, uh, World Journal in Chinese. Yeah. And he would bring them to prison and to feed them with the information. What the progress of the legal progress, you know, what outside the community is conceived, thought of them, what the possible government, um, you know, policy towards their situation and so on. So, so he was able to I was able to facilitate all those communities that were trying to establish connection with them. When I got a message, uh, somehow from the prison. And then, uh, somebody called me from somebody was able to get a message out of the prison to say these people are going on hunger strike. And I was able to then contact the York Daily Record, contact the press to let them know a hunger strike was going on. In protest of the rushed process, you know, the failure of due process. Right. And I think I was very instrumental in getting the message out to the press. And then there was, you know, there was an outcry of support, uh, for their plight because they got their attention to their plight instead of just a regular detainees. You know, there was a but I was also able to provide, um, some cultural education, um, to, to the community about why they were here. I think I wrote quite a few op ed, you know, op ed, uh, in the paper to describe the circumstances, you know, in which they came and, uh, the driving forces for them to come here. And so I was serving basically as a cultural ambassador, if you will. Right? Okay. Um, uh, communicator, you know, for all groups involved, particularly when it comes to Chinese culture, Chinese language. And then I became a translator for so many of these detainees because they all have legal case. They have to have letter of support from their loved ones in China to provide testimonials, to provide evidence about the persecution that they said they received. Right? So, and then I was busying myself with translating letters and the letters there to to be put in the legal file. That took me it took a lot of my time. And so that was a sort of, uh, I'm ending role.

**LAILA**: Were there any challenges as, like, an interpreter, like, communication between, like, the community and the Golden Venture passengers?

**ZZ**: Yeah. They, the passengers basically cannot talk. You know, they, most of the time, they were talking through the partition, you know, the glass wall, and they had to pick up the phone. And, uh, so there was tremendous challenges in terms of the one child policy, how did it work. Right? Then I need to provide cultural context for them. But the language itself was difficult. So they would write letters to me. Became their window, you know, to the outside of the world, right? To say, Hey, we heard that that was this new government policy is going to impact us. Is that true? Is there any, uh, any truth to it? Can you verify? Um, Oh, by the way, did you say if you are Christians, you know, you may get to some, you know, preferential treatment. Is that true? And so on. Right? So there was, uh, the discommunication, uh, challenges were there.

**Laila**: Unfortunately, this scenario of miscommunication happened constantly throughout the passengers’ journey. It is also interesting to hear that the passengers overhear that identifying as Christian could increase their chances of receiving equal opportunities and resources.

**Laila**: The interview with ZZ brought awareness of the different challenges the Golden Venture passengers experienced in the York County Prison. Specifically, language barriers, unfair treatment of resources, and loneliness as well as other consequences among the passengers experience. But it is remarkable to think so many individuals were involved in assisting the passengers throughout their time in prison.

**Laila**: [And] With the interviews with ZZ and Joan, it is fascinating to hear how they were involved in the Golden Venture saga. Another important event that we want to highlight related to the Golden Venture is that Joan and her husband, Ray, went on to create The International Friendship House, where they would allow passengers to stay in a house for the time being (and this house would eventually be used for other refugees).[[3]](#footnote-2)

**Laila**: In this interview we can conclude that ZZ was a bridge between the passengers of the Golden Vision [Venture] and the individuals who helped the passengers throughout this journey.

**Jeffrey**: Our guests today helped provide some insight into what life was like for some of the detainees of the Golden Venture. In doing so they helped us understand the importance of community activism and how given the right circumstances can affect legislative change for years to come.

[***Transition Music***]

**Laila**: For this episode, we decided to focus on the Owl sculptures the Golden Venture passengers created. Even though some passengers developed the sculptures to earn money for additional food (different from the prison), making art brought solace to the passengers. The thing about art is that you do not have to understand it to get what it means. Sometimes art just speaks to you and that is the true meaning of art.

[***Transition Music***]

**Jeffrey**:

Credits:

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It was reviewed by Dr. Jacqueline Beatty, Sara Bokus, Kayla Buchanan, Alaina Crowell, Dalton Emig, Zach Grossman, Ryn Johnson, Shane Mundis, Katie O’Neill, Sara Purdon, Sydney Slack, and Benjamin Werkley

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[***Outro Music***]

1. Immigration-York’s Ship Comes In. Historical Newspapers from 1700s-2000s - Newspapers.com, April 13, 1998. https://www.newspapers.com/image/614280931/?terms=Golden+venture&match=1. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. *Immigration-York’s Ship Comes In*. Historical Newspapers from 1700s-2000s - Newspapers.com. (1998b, April 13). https://www.newspapers.com/image/614280931/?terms=Golden+venture&match=1 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. “Aug 26, 1997, Page 6 - York Daily Record at Newspapers.Com.” Historical Newspapers from 1700s-2000s - Newspapers.com, August 26, 1997. https://www.newspapers.com/image/554185464/?terms=Golden+venture&match=1. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)