All Ears with Abigail Disney
Season 4 Episode 11: Jane Fonda
Activism Saved Me
Airdate: April 13, 2023

Abby
It's Jane. Yay!

Jane
Yay!

Abby
How are you doing?

Jane:
I'm doing great! I just got news that my cancer is in remission and I don't have to do any more chemo. Hip hip hooray!

Abby:
Oh, I'm so, so, so, so, so happy to hear that.

Abby:
Hi all, I'm Abigail Disney and welcome to All Ears. In recent months, I've been on the road with my new documentary, *The American Dream and Other Fairy Tales*. In the film, I tell the stories of some Disney workers to show how the American Dream has become a nightmare for so many. Of course, the problem is not just with Disney. Today, nearly half of all American workers are struggling to make ends meet. That's why in this season of All Ears, I'm taking a deep dive into some of the big questions raised in the film with folks who are doing the most Disney thing possible, using their imaginations, in this case to rethink modern American capitalism, because if we don't reimagine how it all works, and fix it, we're going to be in big trouble.

Abby:
I have a whole long introduction I wrote about you.

Jane:
Oh forget that. Forget it!

Abby:
Ok, you ready? My guest today is Jane Fonda. Yes, I just said Jane Fonda. You know that cliche, “my guest today needs no introduction?” Well, I think that applies here, don't you?

Jane is a towering, award-winning, iconic actress and movie producer. She's also a courageous and ferocious activist. And it's her lifelong activism that I want to talk about today, because she has never met a political or social outrage she is unwilling to confront.

I met Jane a few years ago after my first film, *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*. We went to lunch one day and I found an unexpectedly simpatico soul sister. We bonded over complicated mothers and distant, authoritarian, but well-intended fathers, and finding ways to personal and political authenticity that sometimes ran us afoul of the world's expectations for women in general, and for each of us, in particular.

Right before the pandemic, I donned my red coat and hat and gleefully got arrested at one of Jane's “Fire Drill Friday” events to protest legislative inaction on climate change, and I would do it again a hundred times, because Jane's Fierce advocacy has made a real dent in the calcified politics of global warming.

It's our final episode of the season, and I think it's only fitting to talk to one of the most effective and influential voices in the American landscape, and a visionary activist for a better future for us all.

Jane, thank you so much for finding the time to talk with me today.

So, let's start with, you said once “I was raised to feel that service, that activism, is the rent you pay for life.” So maybe start with that. Tell me about what you mean by that, and is there a difference, maybe, between service and activism?

Jane
Absolutely there is.

But, when I say I was raised, that doesn't mean that either one of my parents sat me down on their lap and talked to me about how to live life and about good values and things like that, you know?

I remember once having a conversation with Martin Luther King's daughter. I asked her, I said, did your father ever sit you down and talk to you about values? And she said, “No.” And I said, “Yeah, mine didn't either, but you had your father's sermons, and I had my father's movies.” And so, when I say I was raised to feel that service is the rent you pay for life, what I mean is that his movies, [*The*] *Grapes of Wrath*, *12 Angry Men*, *Young Mr. Lincoln*, *The Ox-Bow Incident* and others.

I loved my dad. I saw those movies. I knew that they were the ones that he loved, that the characters that he played in those movies were the characters that he identified with and wanted to be like. And so that kind of was like the fertilizer in my consciousness that later, because of the Vietnam War, began to blossom into not service, but activism. Service is: you try to do good for people that are in need. Activism is, in my opinion, you try to build people power in order to change systems that are wicked and evil.

Abby
Yeah. I mean, I would never have used the word activist for myself when I was sort of starting in my life of doing things. I was a little scared of that word. And you said you weren't really much of a questioner, right? Is that when you were young?

Jane
No, I just wanted to be liked and be popular and to fit in.

Abby:
Right.

Jane:
That all changed with the Vietnam War. I went from hedonism and unawareness straight into activism, which is my want, I usually kind of plunge in head first and take whatever comes my way, which isn't always easy.

Abby
Yeah.

Jane
You know what I mean?

Abby
I totally understand.

Jane
But also, you know, I became an activist during the time when, I mean the late sixties and then the seventies when, you know, there was so much turmoil, in the world, not just in the United States, but in the world or all over the world, not just the Vietnam War. And, so it was hard to remain on the sidelines.

Abby:
Yeah. Yeah. It was a different time, and you talked a little about Simone Signoret as kind of somebody who led you into it when you met her in France.

Jane:
Yeah. Well, I had known her for quite a long time and she would take me, you know, I lived in, I was married to a Frenchman and I lived in France, and we have to remember that the French, of course, had fought the Vietnamese — prior to the United States, they tried to maintain Vietnam as a colony. And she had been a war resistor during the French Indo-China War. She would bring me, when I lived there in the sixties, to rallies. I remember Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir speaking at rallies against the Vietnam War, and she never proselytized, she never pushed me, she just put me in the way of another way of looking at the war.

And, in 1968 when the Tet Offensive happened, then I went and sought her out, and she lived out on a farm in the country. And, just for those who don't know, Simone Signoret was one of the great French actresses. She was a great actress, married to Yves Montand. Anyway, I went out to see her at her farm and when she opened the door, she said, “I've been waiting for you.”

Abby
Hmm.

Jane
It makes me emotional to remember that. And she took me outside under a grape arbor and we drank wine and ate cheese, and she talked to me about Vietnam, the history of Vietnam, the history of the French involvement in Vietnam, and helped me understand why the American War there was so wrong, and I will always remember her for that.

Abby
Mm. Wow.

Jane
And then it was, shortly after, that I met GIs, American GIs, who had fled Vietnam. They had been active soldiers, had come to Paris as resistors, and by the way, were housed and fed by the great sculptor, Alexander Calder, interestingly enough.

And you and I were arrested at the foot of the Calder statue in the Senate building, remember?

Abby
Right! We were.

Jane
And, again for the audience, Abby and I and hundreds of other people were arrested and we sat on the floor and as we sat there, she reminded me of when she was a young girl and they had all gone, the family had gone to this very building where Walt Disney was receiving an award and how he would croak at the idea of her being arrested with me.

Anyway, these American soldiers in France, I met them and they talked to me about what they had experienced there and gave me a book to read by a book by Jonathan Schell called *The Village of Ben Suc*. And, when I read that, that is the moment that I said, “I'm going to leave my husband and move back to the United States.” And I became involved in the GI movement.

Abby
That's an amazing story. I mean, to go for a second back to Walt, it's a very perverse thing and I know Walt, if he were alive today, would *still* be really mad at me for getting arrested that day.

But in the deepest spirit of what he was doing, which was trying to create a world in which children thrive, in that sense, I feel like I was honoring his name. Does that sound crazy?

Jane
I understand exactly. Yes. No, it's not crazy. I think it's absolutely true. It's the same with my dad. He would never have wanted me to get arrested and he certainly would never have done so himself. But I think, in the end, he was proud of me.

Abby
You know, you were mentioning like Beauvoir, and Sartre, and Calder and, like, it was a ferment of actors, and poets, and writers, and artists. Do you feel that being an artist, in some way kind of calls you to activism?

Jane
No. I'm ashamed to say no, although, well, yes, insofar as it was my father's art, his films, that made me have that spirit inside me to become active when the moment arose for me to be called upon, but I don't feel like an artist. I don't consider myself an artist.

I consider myself, first and foremost, an activist now. No. When I came back to the United States in 1970, I was completely confused. There were the Maoists, there were the socialists, and the communists, and the this, and the Trotskyists. And people were shooting each other, and the Weathermen were blowing up buildings. And I didn't understand all the ideologies and all the, I mean, Hoover was at his peak of violence and vengeance and killing Black people, the Black Panthers. And so, and I was just, I was very confused and didn't really understand everything that was going on. I'm not an ideological person.

Abby
Actually, that's what I love about your activism, frankly, is that it's not rooted in ideology so much as humanity, and isn't that really where politics belongs anyway?

Jane
Yes. Yeah. Yeah.

Abby
So, let me ask you this. So, you moved back to the U.S. and, am I reading correctly that you were living with your father when you kind of started your activism?

Jane
Yes.

Abby
How was that, and how did you navigate the tension? Didn't he say he would turn you in if he thought you were a communist?

Jane
Well, I went and Angela Davis had been arrested, and she was in prison in Northern California, and I went and visited her. And when I came back to my father's house, — I lived in the servant's quarters, you would understand that — my father berated me for having gone to see Angela Davis, who was an avowed communist, and also a professor, by the way. My father said, “If I find out you're a communist, I'll be the first to turn you in.” And I just remember running to my room and pulling the sheets over me and crying.

But during the time, see, I was living on the first floor, in the servants’ quarters. My father was up on the second floor, and I could see him looking out the window as a carload of Black Panthers arrived to meet with me back in the servants’ quarters, and then a carload of indigenous leaders with a car full of books for me to read came to meet with me. And, watching all this happen, and my father was as confused as I was about everything, and really scared because, you know, he lived through the fifties, and the witch hunts, and he'd seen people destroyed by Joseph McCarthy, and he was scared for me.

Abby
Yeah. The one thing that I didn't have in common with you was my parents were never uncertain.

Jane
Yeah.

Abby
I never, they never saw their struggle with certainty, but I can understand him being afraid for you. Did you ever think about, “Oh, maybe I should dial it back to make my father less uncomfortable.”

Jane
No, no. You know, I went to a military base in Northern California and met with active duty soldiers. And, one of them, he was very young, and he couldn't speak above a whisper, and he leaned very close to me and he was trying to, he couldn't, he kept stammering. He'd killed children, okay, to cut to the chase.

And others told me about things that they had seen being done that was horrific. I came back and I told my father what they had told me, and he didn't believe me, and he said, “If you can prove to me this is true, I will lead a march on the White House.”

And so I went and I got Donald Duncan, who had been a Green Beret, a decorated Green Beret, to come in and talk to my father, and he talked to my father for hours about atrocities that the United States was committing. And my father heard him, and was affected by what he heard, but of course it was a generational thing. He was not somebody that would lead a march or anything like that, but he did hear.

Abby
That's extraordinary, really, that he could hear you.

I mean, he must have been, by that time in his life, somewhat evolved to be able to hear you, I mean, because the generational thing was so powerful, was tribal.

Jane
Yeah. But he loved me, he loved me, so he wanted to believe me, and he was able to accept that, and before he died, I mean, you know, those were the days where I was accused of treason and he would write letters to people who were publicly accusing me of treason. I have, I got one of them yesterday from his widow and, you know, it was very moving to me.

Abby
Oh, I mean, I think that that's actually maybe the most painful irony of everything was that it was specifically GIs that pulled you in and gave you the passion you had about the war. And it's been, you know, veterans from another political perspective who've been the most acrimonious and had the hardest time letting go their disagreements with you.

Jane
Yeah. And I understand it because, you know, if you've been a soldier and you've fought in a war, sent there by the government, it's very, very hard to blame the government. Somebody has to be the what do you call it? You know, the target of your hurt, your rage.

And I was a convenient target, you know? Wealthy, famous, privileged, why not her? I'd been a kind of a pinup and then suddenly I seemed to turn face, and I can, I understand why they were angry. It came from ignorance, but I can understand. I've been ignorant about a lot of things.

Abby
It's a remarkable amount of grace that it takes to acknowledge what it's coming from, because the acrimony is so intense.

Jane
You know, I'm on the board of an organization, a fantastic organization here in Los Angeles called Homeboy Industries. It was founded and led by Father Greg Boyle, a Jesuit priest, and he often says this: “Bad behavior, horrific behavior, is the language of the traumatized. You can hate the behavior, but not the traumatized.”

And that has kind of informed my later years, you know, even Trump. I hate the behavior, I don't hate the man. And it just, it helps me. I'm 85, I don't have that much time left. I don't want to go to my grave hating people, but I can hate behavior and policies and things like that.

Abby
The trauma-informed way of understanding American politics, and what you saw in GIs was moral injury.

Jane
That's right. Exactly. Yes.

Abby
You know, to understand moral injury as a form of spiritual trauma is an incredibly important way to understand American politics.

Jane
It's important that you said that. Can I talk about your documentary?

Abby
Sure, please do.

Jane
Yes. It's called *The American Dream and Other Fairytales.*

One of the really important things that you raised in that documentary, and I'm so grateful for it, is, I think, one of the most important things that we in North America need to think about: the move away from understanding the collective, the public sphere, the commons.

That place in our heart was emptied out very deliberately in the 1980s when Reagan became president and replaced it with 'me'. "I'm only concerned about me and my close family, and I don't care, I'm not going to give $25 to create a salary for a librarian in our town. We don't need a librarian."

Because I'm old enough, I remember when it wasn't that way, when people joined each other, helped each other. When people, more people, belonged to clubs, book clubs and all kinds of group things that would bring people together.

Club membership and group activities have plummeted now and people don't think about the community, the collective and why? Because when people are part of a collective, they're powerful. Individually, we don't have power. Collectively, we have power. And so, very deliberately, during the Reagan Administration here and the Thatcher Administration in England, that concept of thinking of others and not just yourself was, well, they attempted to demolish it and they did a pretty good job.

And you raise this issue and explain it so well in the documentary, and we have to, have to get that back. We have to talk about that as much as we can so that people can understand what was done to us, because it was done to us. You know, people like Reagan were trying to, you know, what did he say? The government…?

Abby
Is the problem.

Jane
Yeah. “I've got a problem.” “No, the government is the problem,” you know? They want to make us believe that the less government — there is an institution that looks after the good of everyone should be demolished. Why? Because it puts regulations and policies in place that curtail the greed of corporations. They wanted to do away with that.

Abby
Of all the damaging things said during that period, it was Margaret Thatcher saying “There's no such thing as society,” — that breaks my heart, because, you know, when they took that collective spirit and they dismissed it as just a communist or a socialist plot or something only stupid lefties liked, they took from people something essential, spiritual, something really important to the human experience, and made it into a left right problem.

And so, the people who were raised to believe of themselves as right — which is just, it's such a non-sequitur left and right when we talk about this stuff has nothing to do with left and right — but the people on the right, who still crave a collective but want to arrange society around self-interest showed up on January 6th in collective and, as a collective group, tried to tear down a government that was trying to enforce and implement a collective spirit of how we should be organizing ourselves. It’s so perverse.

Jane
Yeah, and the reason that they could get away with it is neoliberalism. And what that is is when people put more power in the hands of Wall Street. And that includes President Clinton, President Obama, President Biden.

Abby
Yeah.

Jane
There's a whole swath of this country, the flyover part of our country, that politicians don't pay attention to because it's not Wall Street, it's not the banks, it's not where the money comes from.

And people know that, and Trump could play on that, and that's why so many people now believe that's what government does, doesn't care about us, just cares about money and big corporations and Wall Street, and that's what we, we have to change that.

Abby
Yeah.

Jane
And that's why I wanted to talk about that with you today.

Abby
Yeah. You know, I mean, I think that one of the things that they did was they identified dissatisfaction with bureaucracy, which is, you know, of course something that comes with government in all forms and bureaucracy almost 100% of the time is bad, makes big mistakes, can be exposed to be inefficient or ineffective or cruel sometimes.

And that, I feel, is a governance problem right? And they took that, and they turned it into a systemic analysis of all collective governance and then used that to kind of empty all the water out of the bathtub that we were sitting in.

Jane
Yes.

Abby
And then left us sitting here, on our own, completely naked and without anything to protect us. And it has been an incredible loss to the American systems.

Maybe we can take that and talk a little bit about the environment because in the long course of your activism — and it's kind of remarkable how much activism and how many issues that it's covered, and how thoughtfully actually, you've gone about strategically thinking about how to apply your energies — you are now, at this point in your life, very committed to environmental activism. So, what do you attribute that to? Was there always an element of environmental activism in all that you were doing before? Or is this something kind of new that came along?

Jane
Well, I've always been an environmentalist because nature is what's important to me. I'm a person who feels my best at the top of a 14,000 foot mountain peak, or walking in a forest, or studying the ocean. I've always loved the environment. From the beginning of the sixties, I've always been an environmentalist, which is a little bit different.

An environmentalist is like conservation, we want to protect the environment, and then suddenly I realize, “Wait a minute, there's something happening that is threatening all of the environment, not just certain species or certain ecosystems, but human life, and that is the entire planet is becoming too warm to sustain life. This is a real threat.”

So, I have focused now for the last three years on climate because if we don't get that under control — and time is running out — then everything else is moot, because if you have extreme weather event after extreme weather event after extreme weather event, how do you run a democracy? How do you govern? It's total chaos. And what happens in chaos? Strong-armed men, tyrants, despots, rise to the surface, and it affects every family, the economic ability of every family to support themselves, to move, to rebuild. All those things get thrown into question. That's why they call it *the* existential crisis.

Now, that said, over the years that I've been focusing on climate, I have come to understand that if there were no racism, there'd be no climate crisis. If there was no patriarchy, there'd be no climate crisis. It's a mindset that views life as a hierarchy.

White men and their wants and greed at the top and then so forth down with nature at the bottom. You know, they look at a woman and they see her as an object of sex, or whatever. They look at a black person and see somebody that's trying to take their job. They see a tree and they think, “flooring that would make great flooring. I can cut that tree down.” You know, that's the mindset that leads to a climate crisis.

The fossil fuel industry, the executives who run it —one of whom was actually our Secretary of State during the Trump Administration — they knew, they've known for decades what the burning of fossil fuel has done to the planet, but they lied about it like the tobacco industry did before, and they've duped us, and now we're trying to overcome those lies and that duping and the greenwashing to try to act swiftly, but it was greed and all those other things that caused this to happen.

There's another thing I want to say about your comment about all the different issues that I have been involved in. When you get involved in any one issue — like for me, it was the Vietnam War — as you get deeper into that issue, suddenly you come to understand racism, right, and sexism, — what we did to the Vietnamese women — and imperialism, and greed, everything becomes exposed. It's true with the women's movement and women's issues, violence against women. You get deep into that and you learn everything is connected.

Abby
Yes.

Jane
You know, that's why the move out of silos and into what we call intersectionality — that means that the movements are interconnected — that is critical. And see, that way we can unite, talk about collective, that way we can unite.

Abby
Yeah, I was just going to bring it back to the collective, the crime of taking from us the collective, the ability to think collectively about the way we understand how we live lives of meaning is also connected here because the 21st century is about each of us, as an individual, understanding the collective consequences of our individual decisions.

And so, you know, while it may not matter that I'm not recycling my plastics as an individual, it matters what we do collectively. And so, it actually, this robbing us of our collective understanding is robbing us of the very thing that we need to set in motion, spiritually, to understand how we go forward in a healthier, better way. And what we all want, collectively, is for our children and our families to thrive forward into the future. And so, it's a really kind of a

crime on top of a crime to take away from us our ability to see the world in a connected and collective way.

Jane
Here, here. Yes.

Abby
Yeah. And so, for me, I mean, I think I said this at Fire Drill Fridays when I spoke that day, because I had always worked in economic inequality and women's issues and racism, and that was where, and I always thought somebody else would take care of the climate thing. It always felt like somebody else was always working on it, and they seemed smart, and I didn't have to get involved.

And then what I realized was the deeper I went into every single individual siloed issue brought me to a common well of concern, and a common well of need, all of which was connected, and that if I went forward without an analysis that involved justice around the future and climate, I might as well just be whistling in the dark.

Jane
Yeah. Good for you.

Abby
And so that's why I jumped in. But, you know, one of the reasons I jumped in was because you and I had a conversation about it and I said, “Why Fire Drill Fridays?” And you said something about Greta Thunberg, and about the obligation people who are not young have. Do you remember any of that? Do you remember how you came to this?

Jane
Well, there were several things that happened at the same time.

One of my heroines, Naomi Klein, who is a writer-activist, she had just written a book and I had the galleys, and I read them over Labor Day in 2019. And, in her book, which was called, *On Fire, the (Burning) Case [For] a Green New Deal*.

First of all, she talked about Greta Thunberg, and she explained why Greta's autism was her superpower. People who are autistic, they have this laser focus on something that they know about and care about, and they don't care about what people think of them or what other people say. They really focus full on that. And for Greta, it was science. And when she found out through science what was happening to the planet, the fact that nobody around her was behaving like this was an extreme crisis, like, “Our house is on fire, why aren't you doing something about it?” she went into a depression that lasted a year. She didn't speak. She couldn't eat. She lost weight. It probably stunted her growth.

I knew when I read that, that what Greta saw was real and it hit me like a bolt, like a lightning

bolt to my stomach: “Oh my God. We adults have to protect these young people's futures. This is a real crisis.”

And that's when I called Annie Leonard, who runs Greenpeace USA saying, “I want to come to Washington and do something that will, you know, that will really stop things and make a difference and put my body on the line.”

And that was, and then the other thing about Naomi's book was the science. You know, she explained that the UN Panel on Climate Change that issues a report every year said, “We have until 2030 to cut our fossil fuel emissions in half,” and suddenly there was a deadline, there was a timeframe, and there was a specific goal.

Fossil fuels are the enemies. See, up until then, I'd been focused more on, you know, increasing wind turbines and solar panels and things like that, and that's important because we have to have those in order to replace fossil fuels. What I hadn't realized is that the culprit and where we have to focus the narrative is burning fossil fuels. If you leave that out, then it's like trying to bail out a sinking boat with a coffee can and not plugging the hole.

Fossil fuels are the enemy and we have to reduce them in half by 2030. That's less than eight years from now. So, time is running out, and the fact is that we're going in the wrong direction and increasing emissions, not reducing them. And so, those are the main things that happened to me all in one reading, all in one book, in 2019.

And the narrative has changed since then, more and more people are talking about fossil fuels being the problem, and we have to reduce the burning of fossil fuels.

Abby
Are you willing to take some credit for that?

Jane
Uh, yeah, but I mean, it's a collective, it's been a collective effort and I'm part of the, you know Fire Drill Fridays is part of the collective.

Then, after three years, because when COVID hit we took Fire Drill Fridays virtual, and in 2021 we had 10 million audiences. A couple of months ago we had 11 million people watching over all the platforms. And then we, of course we did another one live recently, which you know, in D.C.

Abby
But I remember you telling something, telling Annie, you said you told Annie at Greenpeace that you were going to come and you were going to camp in a tent.

Jane
For a year.

Abby
Yeah.

Jane
Yeah, I wanted to stay for a year.

Abby
Yeah. But you just wanted to know where to poop and pee, right?

Jane
Peeing is no problem. But I said I don't know where to put, I mean, for decades I've camped out in the wilderness and you know what to do, but in a city I didn't know what to do. And she said, well, you don't have to worry about it because you can't camp anymore. It's illegal.

Abby
Yeah, so it was you and Annie, or did you bring other people in to sort of think through the strategy?

Jane
Well, I was in Big Sur with Catherine Keener and Rosanna Arquette, my friends, when I read the book and decided, and I said to them, “I'm going to move to D.C.” And it was Annie Leonard, Naomi Klein, the author of the book that got me going, Bill McKibben, founder of 350.org, and the lawyer, Jay Halfon.

And that was when we decided to do it on Friday, and every Friday we would engage in civil disobedience. We knew that 70% of Americans were concerned about the climate, but they hadn't done anything about it. Our concern was to rouse those people to move from concern to action, and people came from all over the country who had never been to a rally before and never gotten arrested before. And it was, I think 900 people eventually engaged in civil disobedience and it was important.

Abby
Well, and it, you know, the mental health crisis among young people is some other thing we could spend a whole hour talking about. But I do think it's partly connected to what you said earlier about Greta Thunberg seeing that there was the house was on fire and nobody was doing anything about it.

And so, for me, at a personal level, it was really important so that my children could see that I would put my body on the line and I would get arrested, and that I was taking this seriously enough. I just wanted young people to watch us take some risks on their behalf because I do believe that this is a big piece of the mental health crisis that they’re experiencing right now.

They can't believe we're not doing enough to make this right. It's so within our grasp.

Jane
But do you find, because I do, that when you take action, you get less depressed? It really helps your mental health. I was so depressed before I started Fire Drill Friday because I knew, given that I have a big platform, I wasn't using it appropriately or enough. And then when I started Fire Drill Friday, I wasn't depressed anymore. I mean, I knew about the problem. I knew I was doing every single thing that I possibly could.

Abby
You know, to go back to activism more generally speaking, you know, I read something that Roger Vadim said after you were divorced about how you lost your sense of humor or something like that, and my parents would always say, “Oh my God, get a sense of humor.” Whenever I disagreed with them, that was the first thing.

And one of the things I noticed is I am at my happiest, like the way when we had dinner last week, Jane and I had dinner with a bunch of activists, and those are the happiest rooms you can be in. These are people addressing the hardest, the biggest, the scariest problems on earth, and they all have a sense of humor and there is just love pouring out of every vein and pore of these people and for me, who should be crazy, and you, who should be crazy, we're fine!

Do you think activism, in a way, kind of saved you?

Jane
Oh, one thousand percent activism saved me. But, I will have to admit that in the beginning, like when I was first finding out about the reality of the Vietnam War and trying to, and talking to soldiers, and trying to find a way to help end it, I had no sense of humor. You know, nothing seemed funny to me.

The more activism I did, the more deeper I got into understanding how things worked, the more I didn't have to be all stern and frowning and “There's nothing to laugh about, this is really serious,” you know, I could relax a little.

Abby
I mean, to a certain extent, you had to prove your legitimacy. I mean, you were going to either just be another movie star, or you were going to be a serious person. So, I'm sure you must have felt a threat to your legitimacy, right?

Jane
Well, yeah, I mean it was hard in the beginning because people didn't take me seriously, number one. And number two, my privilege separated me from the people that I was working with.

See, unlike a lot of celebrities. I actually was in the trenches. You know, I went to the places, I was with the people that I was fighting for. And boy do you learn, when you do that, get out of your comfort zone. That's the most important thing you can possibly do.

And, you know, I had a two year-old child, my first born, and I would be with women activists who were carrying their babies on their backs and wanted to know where mine was, and I realized I could afford to pay somebody to take care of my child while I went on the road. You know what I mean? It just, it felt awkward,

But then I met Tom Hayden and I married Tom Hayden, who was talk about deep activist, you know, one of the founders of SDS and the co-author of the Port Huron statement. And, you know, he was a movement hero with depth in political activism, and he really helped me sort of sort things out.

Abby
Well, you seem to always have had the humility to let yourself be advised, let yourself hear what other people think. I mean, I think that's why your strategies tend to be really strong.

Jane
Yeah. I've always tried to be part of a movement and not just individually. When I was an individual, I was like a loose cannon, you know? I got into a lot of trouble. Once I became part of a movement, it was much better because I, as I said at that dinner that night, I'm a cheerleader. I'm the one that can get the word out and rouse people, but I don't necessarily come up with the right strategy. So, yeah, it's good for me to listen and follow.

Abby
You know, one of the most amazing things about you is the longevity of your cheerleading capacities, because a lot of people wrote you off, I think, at the end of the Vietnam War and when you became an exercise person, and I think that there was a perception that you, maybe, had gone soft or bourgeois or something like that. I mean, were you worried about that?

Jane
No, I did the workout to fund a political organization that Tom Hayden and I founded called The Campaign for Economic Democracy in California. And so I knew what I was doing.

Also, because I had just recovered from 30 years of eating disorders, the workout was very important to me. And so for a while there, it kind of saved me, but I knew why I was doing it. But, it's true, you know, I was married to Tom Hayden, the Vietnam War was what brought us together. When the war ended we got involved in economic issues, which I think are really important, but it didn't touch my heart the way the Vietnam War did, and so I kind of stepped back. So, I was the one that was raising money to run the organization that focused on economic issues, but I wasn't as involved as I had been before.

And then, of course, I married Ted Turner and then people really thought I was bourgeois, but that's okay. He founded, he started a foundation that I helped him with.

Abby
I mean, was he married to you when he made that billion dollar pledge to the U.N.?

Jane
Yeah.

Abby
I mean, did you talk him into that?

Jane
No, I never would've asked him to give him a billion dollars to the U.N. I could think of other things to give a billion dollars to.

But, when he told me he was giving a billion dollars to the United Nations, I said, “I think you should talk to a lawyer.” And then he did and discovered that he couldn't give that money to the U.N., that he had to start a foundation parallel to the United Nations. But no, I had no influence on that. That was when we knew we were going to be splitting up.

Abby
Yeah. Well, and he did that when there were a handful of billionaires, there weren't a lot of them. And a billion dollars was real money back then.

Jane
Right. Well, he was very important in influencing other billionaires to spend the money while they were alive, because we didn't have that much time as a species to make things better. He, he really understood that.

Abby
He was really way out in front of people in a lot of ways.

Jane
He was way — we're talking like he's dead. He's not. I just had dinner with him the other night. But, yes, he was way ahead. He is a true, true visionary.

Abby
Yeah. So, you sort of gathered yourself up this year and, or last year, and started a PAC. Is that the first time you've been a political contributor in the way that you, in this kind of a way?

Jane
Well, in this kind of a way, I mean, I've always given money to candidates that I think are good, but yes.

You know, after Fire Drill Friday and we're still doing Fire Drill Fridays, and it was great and it's making a difference and we're continuing, but we still, all of these bills, both locally or in the

state of California, bills that would've been really decisive in terms of the climate crisis, didn't pass, because so many politicians, Democrats and Republicans, take money from the fossil fuel industry.

What were we going to do? And that's when we decided to start the Jane Fonda Climate PAC, that gives money to climate champions.

And we started last March, and because we're new and we're not the Koch brothers, we focused on down ballot races, and boy did we make a difference. I'm just astounded at what a difference the Jane Fonda Climate PAC has made. And we're, you know, I think this is the most important thing that I've ever done in my life, and it's going to continue until I die.

Abby
So, 2024. Like, are you gearing up?

Jane
Yeah. We're going to, we have two years to recruit candidates, see who's good out there, who needs help, who needs training, and so forth, and we're going to be ready for 2024. Absolutely.

Abby
I mean, there were a lot of really, really astonishing candidates. Who stands out for you?

Jane:
Oh my God. Stephanie Garcia Richard, Land Commissioner in New Mexico. Dana Nessel, Attorney General in Michigan. Lina Hidalgo, the top executive in Harris County, which is a huge county. Greg Casar, who just got elected to Congress, and oh my God, he's already the Whip of the Progressive Caucus.

They're all young, most of them are of color. Very brave. Very, very brave. And they all have a climate plan. And you cannot help but be hopeful when you meet these young people who have just been elected to office up and down the ballot and what they are capable of doing. It's just thrilling.

So we have to wrap up.

Abby
Yes, we have to wrap up and, Jane, we covered a lot of ground there.

Jane
Oh, Abby, I could talk to you forever.

Abby
I know, me too.

Jane
I hope we have a chance to talk forever sometime.

Abby
Yeah.

Jane
Thank you for having me on your podcast.

Abby
To join Jane in her fight against climate change, follow Fire Drill Fridays on Twitter, and check out their website, firedrillfridays.org. They have a bunch of resources and lots of ways to join the fight. This is our final episode of the season. We hope you've enjoyed these conversations–I know I have.

And don't forget to check out *The American Dream and Other Fairy Tales*. It's available on iTunes, and Vudu, and Amazon. Making it was a labor of love, and I hope you enjoy watching it.

I'll be back for season 5 in a few months, so stay tuned.

You've been listening to All Ears with me, Abigail Disney. Our supervising producer is Alexis Pancrazi. Jake Frankenfield is our associate producer. Our engineer is Florence Barrau-Adams. Bob Golden composed our theme song. And our executive producer is Kathleen Hughes.

For Fork Office, the All Ears team is Angie Wang, Dominique Bouchard, Phil Nuxoll, Codey Young, and Cathie Camacho.

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