



## Collective Resilience: We Rise Podcast

### Episode 04 Show Notes

**RELEASE DATE:** 6/24/2021

**TITLE:** For A Person To Rise Up, Featuring Lou Ann Wallace

### EPISODE DESCRIPTION

In this episode of the We Rise Podcast, host Christine Gyovai sits down with Lou Ann Wallace. From Southwest Virginia, Lou Ann has spent twenty years focused on the empowerment of counties and towns to thrive environmentally, as a community, and economically.

Lou Ann started her work with a non-profit called St. Paul Tomorrow and also as a member of the St. Paul town council. She then moved into a board position with [Virginia's Soil and Water Conservation Districts](#). She now works with the [Russell County Board of Supervisors](#) in Virginia, overseeing District 2, and helping towns including St. Paul, Dante, Castlewood, and more.

Learn what it takes for a community to create change for itself as Lou Ann shares her methods for success and seeing individuals and towns thrive.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

#### Building the circle

Change happens not when you expect someone else to take action, but when you surround yourself with like minded individuals envisioning the same thing. When you build a circle of people that desire that change as much as you, then together you can be the conduit for possibility.

By calling yourself into a greater way of being, you take action on what matters to you. Starting at the grassroots, creating a community of folks that desire the same things, and taking action, leads to the community you envision.

In the thick of struggle, it can be difficult to feel confident in stepping out and taking a stance for change. Lou shares the importance of staying positive, encouraging others, and helping to build their confidence in the face of fear and the unknown.

While spending a year as a substitute music teacher, Lou noticed a student with a beautiful voice and low confidence. Envisioning what could be possible for this seventh grader, Lou worked closely with her, encouraging her and helping her find her voice. At the All County Choir, this once shy girl owned her confidence and won.

This same philosophy applies to community transformation. When people empower people, helping foster self-confidence and encouraging them to love their communities, they feel empowered to notice what's not working and what they want instead. They find agency to fix those faults and create change.

Lou Ann talks about the importance of “disrupting in love”. When you compassionately interrupt what isn't working you feel the permission to reach out for support from others and create a network around you, helping you move forward. She experienced this personally when she sought the help of [The Nature Conservancy in Virginia](#), and the outcome was a partnership of mutual empowerment.

Recognition of a problem or what isn't working is the spark needed to ignite a fire of change.

### **The power of planning to create a legacy.**

Lou observed communities wanting the government, coal companies, or corporate businesses to be the catalyst for change. She promotes a different way, one grounded in community autonomy.

As our culture has shifted toward big business and a corporate economy, there has been a loss of entrepreneurs and small business owners. Lou Ann works to help communities revitalize downtown communities.

This requires dedication, planning, and a willingness to fail and keep trying. It is important to find the individuals within a community that have the desire, vision, and bandwidth to bring about change.

Creating a flourishing community means capitalizing on the assets of that community. For towns in southwest Virginia like St. Paul and Dante, this meant utilizing natural assets, rivers, mountains, and outdoor recreation as means for economic growth.

Lou reminds folks like Jennifer Chumbley, the mayor of Cleveland, VA and the town of Dante that transformation doesn't happen overnight. For a town to transform they need to create a plan and retain funding. This comes from grant writing, strategically networking, and building relationships with those that can help you.

Tourists are not concerned about town boundaries. They are there for an experience. Reaching across the aisle to surrounding towns and counties lends to a stronger economy as you build one another up.

### **Moving the needle through small victories.**

When Lou and her team initially wrote the strategic plan for reviving St. Paul, they set out to develop a farmers market, a boat launch, and the restoration of a local theatre. Over twenty years they accomplished the first two of these goals, and are still working towards the theatre.

These victories also led to unexpected outcomes, such as the start of a local brewery. It also led to the development of 75 miles of ATV trails across St. Paul through [Spearhead Trails](#). As the town built its economy and began creating a name for itself, it has inspired other towns and businesses to take notice. Invited to share the story of St. Paul with groups like the [Clinch River Valley Initiative](#), [Virginia Main Street](#), and [Department of Housing and Community Development](#), which further led to the building of The [Western Front Hotel](#).

As momentum takes root in a community, new businesses and opportunities arise. Growth becomes the catalyst for more growth.

When you take action towards a better future, honoring where you came from and claiming who you are, you will thrive. This takes time, and does not come overnight. As you experience transformation, you become an example, inspiring others to rise up and create a better life for themselves and their communities.

### **NOTABLE QUOTE FROM LOU ANN WALLACE**

“Growth comes when you realize where you came from, who you are, how you got there, and how much you appreciate everybody and everything.”

## **LINKS/RESOURCES MENTIONED**

[Heart of Appalachia Tourist Authority](#)

[Clinch River Valley Initiative](#)

[Russell County Virginia](#)

[Town of St. Paul Virginia](#)

[Virginia's Soil and Water Conservation District](#)

[The Nature Conservancy in Virginia](#)

[Spearhead Trails](#)

[Western Front Hotel in Saint Paul Virginia](#)

[Virginia Main Street](#)

[Department of Housing and Community Development](#)

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