

Episode 117 Journalist Gregg Stebben Meets with Former Russian Parliament Member – The Whole Story

Patti Brennan: Hi, everybody. Welcome to "The Patti Brennan Show." Whether you have \$20 or \$20 million, this show is for those of you who want to protect, grow, and use your assets to live your very best lives.

Joining me once again is my friend and your friend, Gregg Stebben. You may recall that Gregg and I did podcast series during 2020 and 2021 entitled "COVID and Courage." Today, we're going to talk about a different kind of courage.

Gregg, welcome to the show.

Gregg Stebben: Thank you. [laughs] It's great to be here and in-person, by the way.

Patti: Absolutely. By the way, everybody, I have to tell you that Gregg is literally just off an airplane from Warsaw, Poland. Wait that you hear about what he's been up to over the last...What do you think? Nine months?

Gregg: Since February 24th, let's just say. If that number rings a bell.

Patti: If it rings a bell. Absolutely! I've got to tell you, Gregg, when I heard about what you were doing, I was A, impressed, B, a little worried, wondering what was it that made you go over to Ukraine. What is it about the conflict that has gotten you so personally involved? By the way everybody, in the meantime, Gregg has co-authored a book.

"Does Putin Have to Die?" This is a book that Gregg just co-authored, and the subtitle is, "The Story of How Russia Becomes a Democracy After Losing to Ukraine." Wow, that's a pretty radical statement, and I don't know you as a radical person, Gregg.

Gregg: [laughs]

Patti: If anybody stands for journalistic integrity, it is Gregg Stebben. What's going on?

Gregg: There's the 10-hour story, and then there's the 10-minute story, and I'll do my best to keep it sound bitable. When the invasion happened...First of all, I'm of Russian descent and of Polish descent. I think I'm probably of Ukrainian descent. When I was growing up, my grandparents fled Russia as children. They were Russians because that's how the borders landed back then.

I'm going to tell you a crazy story, and I can only justify it in retrospect, I look back and go, "Why was this invasion so personal to me?" I had been interested in Ukraine, certainly since the annexation of Crimea since 2014.

There were so many stories and scandals involving Ukraine in the last few years, both on the Conservative side and the Liberal side, and others. Hunter Biden on one side, Paul Manafort on the other side. It had been on my radar.

When the invasion happened though, frankly, my biggest concern...Well, I had two concerns. One was I did not like and have not liked for a long, long time the bullying of Russia and Vladimir Putin, he's a bully. It doesn't sit well and I'm going to tell you a story

about that from my own personal perspective that now, in retrospect, I look back and I go, "Oh, this is kind of a family thing with me."

Patti: Got it.

Gregg: My first concern, not that I wasn't terribly concerned about Ukraine, but the first phone call after Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24th of this year was to a friend of mine - he's not an academic, but he's spent his life traveling around the world analyzing risk, political risk, for mining companies and things like that.

His understanding of the geopolitical world is profound. He's also Polish. He grew up in Communist Poland. His understanding of that part of the world is amazing. He also has an adopted family in Asia, so his understanding of Asia is profound.

I bring up Asia because my biggest fear on February 24th was, is China going to invade Taiwan tomorrow? How will the world deal with two conflicts at once? Frankly, as bad as we've seen Russia can be, I think we need to think of China as 10 times worse. That's really why I was so keenly interested when the invasion happened.

Patti: It's very interesting that you bring up China because we're in convention season and I have been traveling also. Different advance, really good in-the-know speakers, etc. You might know this, but John Emerson has been on the show as well. He's a really smart guy, very knowledgeable, former ambassador to Germany when Russia invaded Crimea.

He has incredible insights into that whole situation, as well as China. It's interesting. Within the span of about three weeks during this travel time, in one conference, the Forbes Conference, which is a big conference, everybody that's anybody in the industry was there and speaking, and talking behind the scenes, etc.

At that point, China was a big concern. It wasn't a matter of if China was going to evade, but when.

By the time I got down to the Hall of Fame Conference, and that was a smaller conference. There's only about 100 of us that have been admitted to the Hall of Fame. That was an intimate meeting where we really got to get deep and real.

I was fascinated to learn that within the span of about six weeks, the China thing is abating a little bit. They're beginning to see what's happening over in Ukraine. They're thinking, "Maybe we better not." I think of this whole thing as a game of chess with our world leaders. I find it fascinating. I'm really interested in hearing your perspective.

Folks, you probably know this, but I'm going to say it anyway. Gregg and I did not prepare for this. This is one of these things where it's two friends talking about a trip that Gregg took. I'm really interested in learning what you learned while you were over there.

You know a lot about Ukraine, some of the corruption that was going on over there, and where things might be going over in Russia. Tell us more.

Gregg: Sure. Let me give a little chronology because I think it'll add some context. First of all, when the invasion happened, I began to say to my wife, Jodi, "I have to do something." We can give money. We have given money. Probably, everybody listening and watching has given money, but I wanted to do more, if I could.

President Zelenskyy of Ukraine, as you may recall, shortly after the invasion, launched a website where foreigners could join their territorial defense, become part of their military. I didn't think they were going to take a 60-year-old guy with a little bit of an extra stomach and put a machine gun in his hands, but I thought maybe they could use a communications expert.

Patti: I was going to ask you, have you ever done war journalism?

Gregg: No. Full disclosure, I've done nothing like what I'm going to describe in my life. I'm not even an incredible student of history. I've been interested though.

Patti: You're a journalist.

Gregg: I'm not an expert in any way. I think people should take my observations and the things I say through that context. I was looking for ways that perhaps I could do something. I was willing to go to Ukraine if that would help with the war effort. I had a few other ideas that I pursued with friends from that part of the world.

Then one day, this was a few weeks after the invasion happened, a friend of mine from San Francisco called me. He's an incredibly successful, wealthy Silicon Valley entrepreneur. He's an older gentleman. For fun, he likes to start little businesses because he likes to hire, manage people, and inspire them.

One of his companies is when you're traveling in Europe, there's these walking tours that you can take that are free, and then you tip the guide at the end. He owns one of those companies. When COVID hit, he didn't want to lay all his tour guides off.

He built an online platform so that his tour guides could continue to do tours, but to an online audience. You couldn't physically hand them a tip at the end of the tour, but he put a tip button. People were watching these tours all over the world through COVID. He had a tour guide in Kyiv.

The day after the invasion, or a few days after the invasion, she realized she had to leave with her kids. Her husband was already in the military. She went on the platform. She already had a following on his platform. It's called BeamZ, B-E-A-M-Z. It's beamz.live.

She went on the platform. Of course, people were looking at her because she's in Ukraine. She announced on the platform, "I'm just going to turn on my camera as we pack to go. I'm going to leave it on as we leave our home and try to get to the border." Try to get to the border.

Patti: Wow.

Gregg: There's a tip button. The money, the support poured in for her. I don't know the amount. If you lived in Ukraine, it was a lot of money. Of course, my friend's company, BeamZ, said -- normally, they take a percentage -- "It's all yours. We're going to take out the part for the credit card, but it's all your money."

As he saw that, he began to think, "What else could we do to use the platform to raise more money for Ukraine?" A few days later, he contacted me with that question. I said, "Well, I'm a journalist. I'm a radio guy. If you send me to Poland, I'll meet people while I'm there."

I'll do a show on your platform every day about what I'm seeing and who I'm talking to, and we'll pick a cause or two and raise money for it." That's how I got there. His company sent me for a month, and I spent a month there reporting every day on what I was seeing and what was happening there, raising money.

We were quite successful. Truthfully, I thought we could raise a million dollars, we did not raise a million dollars. We were not that successful, but we were quite successful.

Patti: I have a sidebar question for you, and it may not be relevant, but do you know the languages?

Gregg: No. I speak English and a little Spanish. [laughs]

Patti: Got it. I was curious about that.

Gregg: I'm there, and he and I have a mutual friend who's Ukrainian, who introduced us to a gentleman by the name of Ilya Ponomarev, whose name is on this book. It's really Ilya's book. I helped him.

A little background on Ilya because the rest of the conversation is about him. I've been fortunate to be part of a team to working towards accomplishing something frankly quite extraordinary.

He is a former member of the Russian parliament. In 2014, he was the only member of the Russian parliament to vote against the annexation of Crimea. One vote, it was his.

Patti: I remember this.

Gregg: You can imagine how courageous that was. It's part of an early chapter in the book.

Patti: It's basically Odesa.

Gregg: The first question, of course, he says, everybody in the West asks me is, "Why am I not dead?" Interestingly enough, because he grew up in a communist country, he became an entrepreneur in high school and started his first successful company. Then went onto have a successful career in business.

He's young, he's 47. He had a successful career in business. He was starting or part of a company in, I think, 2001 that was launching an interactive TV channel in Russia. Their investor was Ted Turner.

Big stuff. Ted Turner is flying to Moscow to sign the papers when Putin made his first pass at shutting down independent journalism. Ted Turner gets to Moscow, goes, "Sorry, guys, maybe I can talk some sense into this guy's head, but you're not getting a check for me." That investment completely died.

It was at that moment that Ilya said, "I never ever want the government to stop me from doing what I want to do again, and I don't want it to stop anyone else either." That's when he decided to go into politics. A few years later, he became a member of the...It's called the State Duma. It's like our House of Representatives.

It's interesting. This part threw me. I'm going to be interested to watch your face as I say this. His district was the largest city in Siberia. When I hear Siberia, I think Gulag. It turns

out the third largest city in Russia is in Siberia. It's a beautiful place. It's cold, but it's a beautiful place. It's called Novosibirsk, New Siberia.

It's the Silicon Valley of Russia. His district was the Silicon Valley of Russia. If you represent the Silicon Valley of Russia, you spend a lot of time in Silicon Valley, USA, in Boston, in Austin, in Washington.

He's very well known in the United States, which is a good thing because he was in a hotel in San Jose a few weeks after the vote on Crimea. He woke up and on his phone, were hundreds of text messages, and he went online, and it turns out two things had happened overnight.

The first was that he was dead. He had been murdered by Crimeans, which makes no sense because he voted to support them. He's reading Russian newspapers, Ponomarev is dead, he's drowned. They ran his car off the bridge that was recently blown up. We could talk more about that if you want.

The next story is, even though he's dead, he's also been forced out of the country and can never return. He's in a hotel in San Jose. His first reaction is his family. He has a wife and kids, and then he checks his pockets, and he realizes he has like \$21. He runs to an ATM.

Patti: They've frozen his accounts.

Gregg: Of course, and he's talking to his wife, how do I get you out of the country safely? It's the Duma's phone. The phone goes dead. Here's the extraordinary part. This is all in the book by the way, and I highly recommend it, but then I did help write it.

Patti: Sure.

Gregg: He says once he knew his family was safe and he got enough money to know that he was going...He had to run back to the hotel and check out. He couldn't even pay for another night. I don't think he can go down to the concierge and say, "Can I stay another night without paying for it because I've just been exiled from my country?" It's awkward, right? [laughs]

Patti: Yes, a little bit.

Gregg: He had friends. He got some money. I think he slept in someone's car for a few days. Probably part of it was that maybe some people would say, "You're not coming and sleeping at my house because they might come and kill me." Anyway, he gets an apartment. He gets some money; he gets his family safe.

He said once he knew his family was safe and hours within learning that he cannot return home, he said it was the most freeing and liberating thing in the world. He was free, and he never understood how oppressive it was to live and try to succeed and try to fulfill your dreams in his oppressive motherland of Russia.

Then what fascinated me, and it's written this way in the book is, he then goes through a list of so many companies in the United States, especially tech companies, that were started by Russians who escaped.

Patti: Really?

Gregg: Google.

Patti: No way.

Gregg: I can't even remember but Evernote, use Evernote stuff, and I can't remember that, but so many Russians. Because early before this, when someone was what they call an oppositionist, they would encourage you to leave if they didn't throw you out. So many people particularly in the tech segment, would leave and come here and then start companies.

In some ways that oppression, and then being set free, helped them succeed because they had thrown off the shackles, and they were determined to live their best life in a free democratic society.

Patti: Think about how much of a drain that was, what the potential for the Russian people could have been if they could have stayed and done what they were able to do in the United States. That is wild. We take it for granted sometimes, don't we?

Gregg: Let me get to that. I spent a month in Poland in April and May, came home. This BeamZ Network, or platform, the CEO of the company who had asked me if I would go to Poland had said to Ilya as they got to know each other, "Why don't you just do a 30-minute show with us every week?" I would interview him every Thursday.

First, I didn't know what to expect. I read his Wikipedia page; I watched some speeches he gave in the US. What others had said about him. I thought, "Another politician. He's just a Russian politician."

Patti: You say that as a man who has interviewed a lot of politicians.

Gregg: I have interviewed a lot of politicians.

Patti: You are in that world very nicely.

Gregg: I thought, what am I going to ask him every week for 30 minutes? He's a normal guy. He's very smart. He's very well read. I mean not just Russian history, but you start talking to him about something of US history and he'll start explaining things to you. Very smart.

I begin to understand that he was up to something. By the way, if you're Ukrainian...Here in the US, we think this war started on February 24th, 2022. To a Ukrainian, it started in 2014. They've been fighting this war for years.

Patti: Absolutely; sure.

Gregg: It was a small, contained conflict. When the invasion happened on February 24th, he's now a Ukrainian citizen. To get to a point or question you had asked earlier, he has security provided by the Ukrainian government, because his life is at risk. He went and he signed up for the territorial defense or the military.

The first day he's standing on a street corner in Kyiv with a machine gun. He gets a phone call, basically from some...I'm not sure if they were current Cabinet members, or previous Cabinet members, or a mix, but he ends up at a very high-level meeting. Remember he has a tech and a media background.

He proposes that he start in Kyiv, a TV platform in Russian, that will beam on YouTube, live reporting into Russia for Russia, so they can hear an alternate point of view from the Putin

propaganda machine. He started a network called February Morning. We'll get back to that too because it's very significant.

In any case, he and I started doing this weekly interview. As I began to understand, he had launched his own TV network, and it was clear there was a bigger plan. When I began to understand the bigger plan, I said to him one day...We had only known each other a few weeks.

I said, "You know, I think I understand what you're doing, and I think it would be great if the western audience knew you better. I think you should write a book."

He agreed. He thought that was a great idea. Book in English, by the way. What I didn't tell him was that I had already gotten him a book contract. If he liked the idea, it was a done deal. That's how we came to have a book.

The real story is that what was that bigger idea that he's working on. It really is the core of the book and it's summed up in the subtitle, the story of how Russia becomes a democracy after losing to Ukraine.

He joined the Ukrainian military. He's still a member of the Ukrainian military, but if you ask him, he's not fighting Russia. He's not fighting Russians. He's fighting Putin. He's fighting fascism. He's fighting a dictatorship.

He wants Russia to win. He's just defined win differently. To him, winning is Russia will be a free country. If Russia can come out of this conflict with the will, now the Russian people, to build a democracy and be a free country, then Ukraine wins, Russia wins, and frankly, almost the rest of the world wins.

Patti: What's interesting about that is from what I know, the Russian people are living their life, things are coming along. They have no idea really what's going on in Ukraine. By the way, life is pretty good. To your point earlier, they don't even realize they're being oppressed.

The question would be, you've got to get a lot of people on board with this whole idea of democracy. Again, who is the pillar of what democracy is about? It's America and we're not a great example right now.

Gregg: Let me play devil's advocate about that. You ask a lot of great questions. See if we can take care of them one at a time.

To us, some of us, we have real political divide in this country today. I think it's fair to say we're recording this the day after the midterms and we're waiting to see what is going to be the makeup of the Senate? What's going to be the makeup of the House of Representatives? The governors and all that.

I'm concerned about democracy in this country too. Everybody should be. In fact, my brother looked at the subtitle of this book and he said, "Oh, the story of how Russia becomes a democracy. Maybe the sequel can be the story of how the USA remains or gets back to a democracy."

I think those are great concerns. Let's not lose sight of something that's easy for us to lose sight of as Americans. We get to talk about these problems. No one shows up at your door

with a gun, or tells you, you have to leave in 24 hours. No one ever said democracy was a one and done. Set it and forget it.

You can go back and find lots of quotes about democracy and how it's a process. Sometimes you have to fight to keep it.

Patti: It's messy.

Gregg: It's messy. What we're going through, I don't like it. It's not unnatural to the phenomenon of democracy, because democracy only lives because of the will of the people who are living under a system of democracy. That's us.

If you voted, you began to participate. There may be a lot more you can and should do. Compared to what they see as democracy, we're living the dream. I don't think we should forget that while we recognize there's work to do, just as there is, frankly, in any relationship. It's a relationship that we have to take care of.

Patti: It's interesting because Ilya was a member of the Parliament, right?

Gregg: Yes.

Patti: I'm going to show you my ignorance, how did he become a member of the parliament?

Gregg: [laughs]

Patti: Was he voted in? How does that happen?

Gregg: It's a great question. Let me answer that by telling you where I was until yesterday. I just got back from Warsaw, Poland. I went back. I was there for a month. I just went back. Why did I go back? Ilya and 50 other previously elected, largely, now exiled elected Russian politicians.

Patti: Elected.

Gregg: Elected. This gets to your question. I have a great video of Ilya talking about this. I'll do my best.

Patti: Sure.

Gregg: Before 2014, generally, people regarded Russia's elections as legitimate. Not without problems. Can we relate to elections with...?

Patti: You bet. Sure.

Gregg: Generally, considered legitimate. Not legitimate since 2014. To be honest, I'm not sure what the relationship is between Crimea and that legitimacy. I suspect there is a relationship. I couldn't explain it to you.

If you were elected before 2014, you were elected by the people of Russia. If you were elected after, you were not elected by the people. There may be an election tally, but it's a bogus election tally. You were handpicked. It's not a free and fair election.

He gathered 50 plus people who had been elected before 2014, so legitimately elected by the Russian people. They formed a constitutional convention. Does that ring familiar to you since we're here in Philadelphia?

Patti: You bet you. Yes.

Gregg: They met in Warsaw, Poland to begin forming a new government.

Patti: I think about that, Greg, and think, wow, you were a witness to history being made right before your very eyes.

Gregg: It's the weirdest thing for a guy who was... [laughs]

Patti: You just want to go over there.

Gregg: As I have said to friends and family, on January 1st, 2022, my prediction for the year was not, "I'll go live in Poland for a year and report on a war." I never went close enough to the war zone to be in danger, but I did go into Ukraine.

That I would go back to begin watching a group of Russian politicians who'd been forced out of their own country to form a new government for Russia. That was really my role, was I took 150 pounds of books, of course. We were giving books to people there. We wanted them to read it.

My role with many other people was to be an observer of this, and as you said, in a sense, be eyes of history for the rest of the world.

Patti: I think the title is so interesting. My question to you is knowing what you know and what you saw, does Putin have to die?

Gregg: Yeah. That's a great question. I'm going to answer that the way we answer it in the book. First, I want to give you the answer to the same question or a very similar question. If you remember when President Zelenskyy was asked a few weeks ago...I don't remember the exact question. Something along the lines of, "What happens to Putin when this is all over?"

Do you remember what he said?

Patti: No.

Gregg: He said, I don't care. I think that's the best possible answer because we should all strive for a time when we just don't care. Did he live? Did he die? I don't care. He's gone. He's no longer in power.

Patti: He's irrelevant.

Gregg: That's exactly right. In the book, I wish we had said it that eloquently. I wish we could have waited until now to quote the president of Ukraine but that's not how books work. That's how the Internet works. I want to be clear that this is Ilya's book. It started as a book he wrote over a 10-year period in Russian. That was my beginning text, 700 pages.

Patti: I was going to say, Greg, I can't believe how quickly you rolled this thing out.

Gregg: [laughs] The first draft happened in six weeks. There was not a lot of sleep going on.

Patti: I got to tell you, I've read some of it, it's really grabby, it's very well done.

Gregg: He is an amazing storyteller. He's had an amazing life. He understands what's important and communicates it well and I helped. To the question of does Putin have to

die? As we say in the book, it's up to him? He's got all the money. He's got all power, he can leave.

He can pull out of Ukraine, and he can get on a plane and he can go to some compound that he already owns or a new one he buys with a big wall around it and have plenty of security, and protect himself for the rest of his natural life and probably his children and his grandchildren, that's his choice.

Patti: It's very interesting because when I was away, one of the people that I was talking with said something profound to me. What they said was, "Putin has drawn his line in the sand." It's all ego for him. He has to win for his ego, etc., and also if he wants to live.

Zelenskyy has also drawn the line in the sand, and he also wants to win. The recent talk what he's been talking about is not only are we going to get our country back, but we're also going and getting Crimea back, because that's ours.

Gregg: Whoa. Let me help you here.

Patti: Help me out.

Gregg: Be glad I'm not Ukrainian. [laughs]

Patti: All right. Good.

Gregg: Ukraine getting their country back includes Crimea. It's not their country back and Crimea, Crimea is theirs. Don't feel bad for what you said because we're being bombarded with propaganda that makes us think that Crimea is somehow this gray area of sovereignty, and it's not. It's Ukraine's land.

I'm not going to say it's always been Ukraine's land because the history which we try to capture here is many, many centuries old. Ukraine became a country, a sovereign nation about 30 years ago, and there was an agreement that Ukraine would be part of it.

When Russia took it, there was no basis for the annexation, it just was a political and military efforts.

Patti: Operation. You said that earlier in the podcast in terms of this war didn't start in February. It's been going on since 2014 from the Ukrainian perspective.

What's interesting about that is what you just said is so true, even amongst those of us in the West. What this individual said was, when you look at this whole chess board, Putin, he can't win, he can't lose.

Gregg: He can die. [laughs]

Patti: He can die. Same thing with Zelenskyy. He can't win and he can't lose, and he can't stop. Neither one can stop. In today's paper, I showed this to you. "New York Times" as well as the "Wall Street Journal," both have had articles about this and talked specifically about this concept of peace talks.

Zelenskyy is holding the line and saying, "I'm open to having peace talks. I don't think we're going to have peace talks with this leader, we'll have peace talks with the next leader. By the way, when that happens, this is what we want."

Gregg: These are non-negotiable. There's a word for it. It's a diplomatic word. The preconditions. Or frankly, the preconditions that anybody with any sense of righteousness, a moral background, and a sense of fair play, would agree to. They want their country back. That means including Crimea.

They want reparations for the damage that's been done. They want war crimes for terrible things have been done there, atrocities. There's one or other two points, but there's nothing you or I wouldn't ask for as well in the face of this set of circumstances. Those are the preconditions.

Now, it's interesting, and I want to segue a little bit here maybe, but they're called appeasers. People who, "Oh, give them a little something and they'll go away." The problem with appeasement is, I believe, is if Putin gains an inch, it's positive reinforcement for him, it's positive reinforcement for China.

Look, what happened a few weeks or a month before this invasion? Remember, there was the Olympics in China. China and Russia, Putin, Xi Jinping, we're brothers. That wasn't the exact term. Xi Jinping's way smarter than Putin. I'm sure the deal was like Putin's a little brother. You go try it, see what happens.

Patti: 100 percent.

Gregg: If it goes well, we're taking Taiwan. If it doesn't go well, sorry, buddy, you're the one who... [laughs]

Patti: You did it.

Gregg: You own it, but we're going to change our course because we learned from you. If Russia gets an inch, it messages China, messages North Korea. There's a lot of dictators we don't even talk about. It sends a message, it's OK. Even if you lose, you're going to win.

That's one of the reasons so many people in the West, diplomats, generals, military people, political people all over the West say...Well, not only say, but it's why all these governments are backing up Ukraine. It's about Ukraine, but it's also about us.

If you flip that and you look at it a different way, and this is how I look at it, we should be thanking Ukraine for fighting this war for us, it's a proxy war. They're doing it for us.

Thank God they have the resilience and the determination and the willingness to fight this battle, because another opponent. I do believe that Putin thought that Ukraine would fall in three days. He basically took Crimea and there wasn't much of a fight.

What did the Ukrainians do when Crimea fell? They didn't say, "Boohoo, darn, that wasn't fair. I'm going to call my therapist." They started training to be a better military and be prepared for not if, when it would happen again.

Patti: Interesting.

Gregg: To bring it back to Ilya, when that annexation happened and he was the only vote, I guarantee you, if you were alive in 2014, you saw him in TV talking about because every...BBC, every TV network and every newspaper in the world spoke to him about it because he was the only one who opposed it.

One of the things he said over and over and over again was this will lead to a full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia. When it does, I'm fighting for Ukraine.

Patti: Wow. Again, courage. Talk about courage.

Gregg: Also, just understanding the culture. There's no way that this is the end. This is the beginning.

Patti: Putin showed his hand. "This is the intention. We're going to go." I find it so interesting how he justifies it too.

Gregg: Yes. You mean the mosquitoes this week, the...I can't remember. It's the LGBTQ communities. "I'm so threatened by mosquitoes and people who are gay. I'm terrified." It's absurd.

Patti: Ridiculous.

Gregg: It makes sense to his base because to go back to something we spoke about much earlier, they've lived in a world of oppression, where information is largely controlled.

They can't be objective. It was very difficult and maybe even dangerous to look around and question authority, and then find other information so that they can think about things on their own. The culture around them has been designed to give them no reason to do that.

Something I didn't understand until I got involved is, if you go to Moscow or you go to St. Petersburg, it's like living in San Francisco, restaurants, and clubs, and cars, and clothes, and nice apartments. but not the rest of Russia.

Patti: Is it still that way after all of our sanctions and many other companies moving out? Is it still that way?

Gregg: I think they're struggling, and they are losing access to things, but you don't wipe out a lifetime of brainwashing in nine months. They're still being brainwashed. There's no other...

Patti: Input.

Gregg: ...objective. The night before I left Poland, I was with a friend of mine who also grew up in Communist Poland. She was taking me a walk around the neighborhood she grew up in. Just tell you a couple of stories she told because it blew me away.

Patti: Ok - it's interesting.

Gregg: Poland is a fascinating case study of how a country goes communism to capitalism or dictatorship to democracy. One of the things she said is, "On the day of the change..." It was many years of work to get to that moment. "On the day that we were no longer part of the Soviet Union, and we were a free nation," she said, "my family was not very political. I was not very political."

She was young, she was a teenager. "But my mother and I used to listen to this radio show every Sunday," or Tuesday, or whatever day of the week it was. She said, "We turned the radio on that morning and there was nothing there." She said, "We live across the street from a government building and there was nobody there."

That's how dramatic. The government controlled everything. How can you and I, how can people watching and listening to us even comprehend that? We have debates in this country about how big government should be. We have no idea how big government...

I'm not landing on one side or the other. I'm just saying, "You want to see a big government, talk to my friends who grew up in Communist Poland. They'll tell you what a big government looks like and how happy there are that that's no longer the system that they live in."

Patti: I'm not a history person. How long ago was that? How long did it take for the Polish people to say, "Oh my goodness, we could start our own radio station?"

Gregg: It wasn't that easy. [laughs]

Patti: I'm sure.

Gregg: First of all. Again, I'm not a scholar.

Patti: Neither of us are.

Gregg: I'm learning as I go. I wish you would have been with me this evening that I was with her because I learned a ton. You remember probably from your teenage years or when you were in college, *solidarnosc*, solidarity. That was the workers' union.

She and I spent a lot of time the other night talking about it. I know some things about it before, but the union movement in Poland was so strong that it was years, not months, to finally gain enough power to push the Soviet Union out. I think that took a period of nine years. They lived under Martial Law for nine years.

I knew that there had been Martial Law. I thought a couple of months, a summer. It'd be such a horrible summer if you have Martial Law. Nine years, I think, she said, but years. That's the kind of work, frankly, and sacrifice that you have to make if you want to make this kind of dramatic change in your country.

Patti: Then fast forward to Russia, and this goal, this ideal that Ilya has, it's going to take a lot of buy-in from the Russian people. It's a much bigger country, much more spread out to get that message to say it's going to be messy.

When we get on the other side of this, we are going to be a better nation. Much more well-respected and back in the world. Not feared, but cooperating collaborate...

Gregg: Partners.

Patti: Right, with the rest of the world.

Gregg: How do you do that?

Patti: Tough.

Gregg: Got to read my book. [laughs]

Patti: I've got to read it. Man, that is interesting!

Gregg: It's interesting. By the time we got to the end of the book, I felt like...The book says history of the Soviet Union, how you do this. It's a mixture of things. I think it's a good read.

I thought, by the time I got to the end of the book, that there were things in his head I had not drawn out yet.

The way we addressed that was the last chapter of the book is an FAQ. I had just asked him the questions that I had, and he answered them. It takes everything that came before and wraps it up with a bow. It's essentially the end of the book.

The second to last question is basically, "What you're describing is a revolution." He says, "Yes." Then the next question is, does the revolution have a name? If it's really a revolution, we must have a way to refer to it. He says the name of the revolution is The New Russian Revolution.

Then the last question. "You are the leader of the new Russian Revolution?" The last word of the book is, "Yes." It's bold. Earlier, in that FAQ, I asked the same question you asked. What happens the day after Putin's gone, the week after Putin's gone? What happens?

Patti: What a mess.

Gregg: Again, he answered it in the best possible way he could. It's tempting to say it's going to happen like this, it's going to happen like this, and it's going to happen like this. We don't know how it's going to happen. We don't know when it's going to happen, but there is a plan. Will the plan be executed as we planned it? No.

Patti: Probably not. No.

Gregg: [laughs] Am I going to tell you the plan? No, but there is a plan. When this Congress in Poland over this weekend came together, when he first told me about it, for me, it was like suddenly, my brain was full of oxygen.

It was the first time I saw a manifestation of his plan in the world, huge manifestation, in the world, as opposed to things that people behind the scenes were talking about. Suddenly, reporters from The New York Times, "The Washington Post," CNN, and news, there's all this interest in this event because it's really happening. It's not trivial.

It's significant that Russia now has a government that is legitimate.

Patti: This is a question, and I should probably know the answer. How long is Putin in office? Is he there indefinitely? Again, I'm asking the question with the understanding that you may not know the answer, but it's interesting.

Is there going to be another election? Is that the way that he got into office? Is it like the thing in China, where Xi Jinping was pretty much a shoo-in?

Gregg: Anointed.

Patti: Yes, he was anointed. He anointed himself. I'm just curious, could there be a natural event for him to be unelected?

Gregg: He just turned 70 on October 7th. If I'm correct, his term ends in eight years or something.

Patti: Man. Not soon.

Gregg: Not next week. Not next year. You also must also understand that he's already been in office longer than the term limit of when he took office. How did that happen? When

you're a dictator, you just change the terms. Was he elected? Yes, he was elected in 1999 or 2000. The country was in an incredible state of disarray.

The Yeltsin plan was unsuccessful. People were hurting in Russia. By the way, even in Poland as my friend said, they're in good shape today, and this was about 30 years ago, but there was a long period where the people of Russia were really, really struggling and hurting.

Unlike the people of Poland, unlike Russia, they stuck with it, and they probably, frankly, had a better plan untainted. Part of Ilya's plan, which again, it's in the book and it's a very important part of the book, is that his vision is that there will be an interim government for Russia that serves for a contractually legal period of time, which he suggests is two years.

There'll be a president or some whatever they decide to call their leader and a cabinet. Those people they'll have many things to do, but the primary function is new constitution, which they began working on this weekend, new laws, new judicial system, and free and fair elections.

Within two years, we're going to elect our next leader. For now, we have this interim government. All of that is exactly as you would expect, except for one wrinkle, and I don't think this is original to them. Other countries have done this, but it tells you the character of him and the people he's working with.

Once that interim leadership team hits that two-year mark and there's an election and there's a transfer of power, those leaders may never participate in Russian politics again for the rest of their lives. Why is that important? Because what happened with Yeltsin is, they designed a government that served the people in power.

If you know you're not going to be in power anymore after two years, there's no motivation to do that. Corruption is a huge part of the problem. Maybe it's the biggest problem. It's what makes the oligarchs the oligarchs and gives Putin his riches and his power. You have to find a way systemically, to wipe that away and eliminate the risk it will ever happen again.

Patti: That's so interesting. That is fascinating. I'm going to ask you a question and I'm going to ask it, and it's a rumor, and I'd be interested at your quick answer. I heard a rumor that Putin is sick. This is his last stand. Eventually, he's going to die just because of whatever it is that ails him.

Is there any truth? Guys, this is a rumor, and I don't mean to feed into rumors, but since I've got Gregg, I'm going to ask the question. What do you think? He doesn't let anybody near him. Go ahead.

Gregg: I'm going to turn the buzzer off on my phone.

Patti: I love this. This is very real.

Gregg: [laughs] You can edit that out if you want or not. First of all, I have no knowledge of that. I can tell you; I've had this conversation with Ilya.

On October 7th, which was Putin's 70th birthday, Ilya predicted as he had been predicting for many months leading up to the birthday, that it would be Putin's last.

Patti: Interesting.

Gregg: We sent Vladimir Putin 5,000 birthday cards basically saying, is this going to be your last? Maybe if you live, you can live to see a few more. 5,000 birthday cards. That's a lot of birthday greetings, isn't it? [laughs]

Patti: It sure is.

Gregg: Ilya's take, and it's a realistic one. You can go online and see shots of Putin's hand where maybe he had an IV. You know a lot about this. This is from your past life. There are other pictures where he's bloated or he's holding onto a table. There's lots of circumstantial evidence that might suggest that he has some kind of terminal illness.

It's also important to remember that the Russians as one of their primary things, have been very, very interested in and have invested a lot of money in extending life in age reversal. I think if Ilya was here, and I wish he was, because he'd be a way more interesting guy than me or the two of us.

I think he would say maybe he's sick, maybe he's not. It doesn't look like he's going to die anytime soon. It's not going to impact what happens next. He's either going to leave or...To get back to your question about the title of the book, Does Putin have to Die? He can leave or he can choose to die.

If he chooses to die by staying, how is that going to happen? The consensus is that someone very close to him, around him, is going to pull a trigger, tie a knot in a rope, hit him with a chair, disappear him, because he is not just a threat to the Ukrainian people, he's not just a threat to the Russian people, but he's an incredible threat to the people who are right around him.

When you think about him talking about nuclear war, if you're within 15 feet of him, aren't you thinking, I don't want to die that way, and the only way I can stop it is to stop him?

The first time I asked Ilya about this, he said something that was so out of a Russian novel that I love to quote it. I said, "How does this war end?" His response was, "The last shot fired will be in Moscow."

Vladimir Putin's greatest risk is not the Ukrainians, it's the people around him.

Patti: Very interesting. With that, Gregg, we're going to wrap it. Boy, talk about putting a bow on this thing. Before we do that, do you ever worry about your safety? Do you ever think about that?

Gregg: I wear a seatbelt. Is that what you mean? [laughs]

Patti: Fortunately, we live in America.

Gregg: I think about that question. People have asked me that. My name's on the cover of the book. Frankly, I did ask myself. I put my name when I sent the first draft of the book. I'm the one who typed with Gregg Stebben. I did wonder to myself, is this a good idea?

Then I realized to know what I know, to have done what I've done to help him write this book, to the degree that I can help by having my name on the book. It wasn't out of ego or anything like that, but people in media know me. I'm doing radio interviews; I've done some TV interviews.

I thought it would be the ultimate act of cowardliness to write this book and stand for this change in Russia and not be willing to put my name on a book that I made happen. It's Ilya's book, but it wouldn't have happened without me.

Patti: For those of you who have listened to our podcast, and if you go back to one of our prior conversations with Gregg, we talked about what Gregg's goals were. Gregg retired. In that podcast, you talked about your five goals.

Let's go back to that podcast and those five goals. I remember it especially number five. It kills me to be having this podcast today knowing that conversation occurred. Here you are, fulfilling it.

Why don't you explain to our listeners and our viewers what those five goals were and why has put you in the position to allow you to fulfill the goals.

Gregg: You've had a huge influence on me in number three. I don't know how much time we'll spend talking about it, but I want you to know, knowing you has made a big difference in my life.

Patti: Thank you.

Gregg: We'll get to number three after number one and two. Number one's my priorities in life -- my wife, my dog. Number three, our financial well-being. I've learned so many things from you in our conversations in front of a mic and off, our conversations and things.

I know you have this impact on people. It's your mission and I know that. I know that you have a huge impact. That was number three.

Number four, I have a family member who's been ailing for some years. She's like a sister to me. Her care and well-being are also very important to me. Number five though is a personal breakthrough for me. Because I've always been a little bit of a Don Quixote and I've, "Oh, that's...I'm going to go chase that windmill."

Frankly, sometimes it's worked out well. Sometimes it's just been a plea to fancy. I don't regret it, but I reached the point in my life where I decided, "Let me be a little more choosy about my windmills." Number five is to save the world, but only if you can.

When that invasion happened and I looked at my communication skills, my journalism skills, my willingness to jump on a plane and go to Poland for a month, my willingness to go to Poland for a weekend. I think I have some valuable insight and frankly, willingness to really work my butt off.

I thought this might be a place where I can help save the world and it's really number three and number five. Because if I hadn't taking care of the money, I could not have afforded to follow this dream of mine. If I die tomorrow, I just want that book right here.

What I've done in association with this is the singular, most important thing in my life to me, other than marrying the woman that I married. I would never give this up. How could I not put my name on it, to answer your earlier question? I want to live to see a free democratic Russia.

I know my grandparents would be so proud, I know my parents would be so proud, but mostly, I want to walk down the streets of Moscow and know I can say any damn thing I

want and do anything I want within the confines of society and know that everyone around me has the same rights. That was saving the world, but only if I could. It turns out, I got to make a small contribution.

Patti: It's amazing. I literally just got tears and welled up in tears and chills. It's an amazing story. What makes it even more so Gregg, is you didn't just write a book. You're out here. You're here in West Chester, Pennsylvania, today with me, doing a podcast so that we could share that message to everybody.

All of you who are watching and listening to this podcast today, this stuff is important. It's important for the world, it's important for America, and it's important for all of us from an economic perspective, a financial perspective, and a human perspective. That human element is one that we can never lose sight of.

Gregg: Can I add one more story before you wrap this up?

Patti: Go for it.

Gregg: When I decided I was going to go to Poland for a month in April, one of the things you quickly learn is that people in that part of the world communicate through apps like WhatsApp, and Signal, and Telegram.

I've had these apps on my phone before, but here in the West, we don't really use them. I've never really been a regular user. I put, I think, WhatsApp or Signal on my phone, and within a minute, I got a message.

It was from a guy in Ohio named Joe. I think his last name is Palmisano. I'm going to talk to him later today. I want to tell you Joe's story. I've met Joe over the phone a few times over the years. He worked for a radio station. I saw his name pop up and the message was, "Are you in Ukraine?" I'm like, "Talk about spies." [laughs]

Patti: Wow. You're not kidding. That's wild.

Gregg: When you sign up for these apps, it goes through your contacts and tells anybody that is also using the app that you're now using the app, and my name popped up on his phone. You may not like that, but that's another debate.

He saw my name, remembered it from...I think the last time I talked to him was in 2016. He remembered my name. "Are you in Ukraine?" I write back and I go, I recognized his name, "How did you know?" I'm almost tempted to pull out my phone and read. Can I do that?

Patti: Yes.

Gregg: Will you give me a break? This is the most amazing...

Patti: This is so cool.

Gregg: I meant to do this before I got here, and I forgot. Let's see if I can find him. Wait till you hear his message. Where was it though? It's telegram. Hold on. It may not be telegram. Hold on. Right here. I'm going to read you Joe's message.

"Greg, are you in Ukraine? This is Joe Palmisano, formerly of WHBC Radio in Canton, Ohio. I spent almost two weeks in Ukraine. I went on my own, unattached." This was around the

same time I was thinking about joining the military. It never occurred to me to get on a plane and go.

[laughter]

Gregg: Joe just got on a plane and went. Wait.

"Essentially, grabbed a shopping cart and began walking. Ended in Ukraine, wherever buses dropped off women and kids. Filled my cart with their luggage and walked them across to borders to the buses taking them to safety. Did it over, and over, and over again each day.

"Gave each family \$100 and all the love I could. Exchanged numbers and have stayed in touch with most. Did it every day until my 69-year-old post-radiation body couldn't do it any longer. Home now, but my heart is still there. I was known as the cart guy."

He was two weeks out of radiation therapy for prostate cancer when he went.

Patti: Amazing.

Gregg: Amazing.

Patti: Amazing that people would just get on a plane, grab a shopping cart, and help complete strangers.

Gregg: [laughs] Yes.

Patti: Complete strangers.

Gregg: At the most traumatic moments, perhaps, of their life. The reason I wanted to read this is I don't know if Joe had a whiteboard where it said, "Save the world," but only if he could. He told me in a phone call. He said, "I went to the border. I had no plan." I was at the same border, by the way. It became a tent city. World Central Kitchen.

He said there were people all over doing all kinds of things to help people. He said, "But that's not how I wanted to help people." Not that it wasn't important, but it an assembly line. You got your coffee. You got your sandwich. You got your health care.

They were helping lots of people a little bit. He said, "I wanted to help a few people a lot." I don't know. He must have taken a lot of cash, kept hitting an ATM machine, or something.

The point I really want to make is, and this is not about Ukraine, it's about life. That is there may be something more you can do that will change someone else's life.

Like I said, on January 1st, 2022, none of this was on my radar. I thought we're going to hang out, play with the dog, and maybe take a little trip. I did take a little trip.

[laughter]

Gregg: I think if Joe was here, and if you'd like to talk to him someday, he's a fascinating guy. His life will never be the same because of what he did for those people from Ukraine. He got people apartments in other parts of Europe. He helped them pay for it. He's become the fairy godfather to these families.

I look at my time there, my life will never be the same because of this. You can't buy that.

Patti: Gregg, as you were telling the story, I was reminded of a sign that I have in my conference room. I wish I could tell you who said this. The quote says, "To the world, you may be one person, but to one person, you are the world." It's something to that effect.

Patti: I think that's a great way to tie this up, and to really hone in on that point of what an amazing sacrifice it is that you have made, that Joe has made, and that we all can make.

Gregg: I'm not even sure I would agree with the word sacrifice. You think maybe you're making a sacrifice or you're doing it for someone else, but at the end of the day...

Patti: We get more back. It's so true. It makes such a difference in those people's lives. Can you imagine those women, the children, and the impact?

Patti: What I want to say to you, my friend, is thank you for coming in today. Thank you for sharing your story. Thank you for sharing Ilya's story in this book, and for giving us a perspective that we otherwise would not have had. There's a lot to be excited about.

This is such a difficult time for the people of Ukraine, as well as the people of Russia. What you have done through this book, through your incredible communication skills, your energy, your willingness to come back to the United States, let us all know what's going on over there, and what the future could look like, all I can say is thank you.

Thank you so much for coming in today. Thank you for sharing the message with me, with my team, with our viewers, the listeners. All I can say is let me know how I can help.

Gregg: Thank you.

Patti: We can make a difference. Look at one person. You are one person. Look at the impact you're having on the world.

Gregg: To go back to the idea that there's something we can all do. If I sit at home and think about the trip I made, and don't talk to you, share it with you, and share it with your audience. Your audience will share it with someone else. I hope you'll share it with other people. I know you will.

Patti: Sure.

Gregg: There's an entire chapter of the book devoted to what we're talking about right here, which is it's going to feel awkward for us in the West to rally behind the Russian people the way we've rallied behind the Ukrainians. It's easy to rally behind the Ukrainians. They're victims, but the Russian people are victims, too.

In some way, their victimhood is harder. The Ukrainians were free and lost their freedom. They're fighting for their own land. If you come in my house, I'm invaded. The Russians were invaded a long time ago. Largely, psychologically.

I think the more the Russian people know that we have their back the way we have the Ukrainian people's back, I think it's ultimately going to make a huge, huge difference for them. It's going to be hard for us. It's hard to look at the country that's doing what it's doing and then thinking, "But I need to support the people so they can fight for a change."

They can fight for a change. They're not fighting for it now in the numbers we need, but they can. I believe they will. I think us cheering them on is going to make an amazing difference. We're going to live in a better world because of it.

Patti: Gregg, I am reminded of a dear friend of mine whose father wrote a book after World War II. He was a German soldier. He wrote the book from the perspective of being a soldier under Hitler. Having that psychological brainwashing. He had to do what he had to do.

Gregg: To survive.

Patti: It's so interesting. What you said reminds me of what he went through. He came to America. He experienced what America is all about. It was only until he got here that he realized, "Wow. That was incredible, that I actually did those things and was willing to go to that degree for something that somebody just said you have to do."

Gregg: They held a gun to his head.

Patti: Held a gun. Exactly. Maybe Putin isn't holding a gun to people's heads.

Gregg: Yes, he is.

Patti: It is interesting. I think that there's a lot to be learned from that experience with Hitler. I know a lot of comparisons are being made. Again, we're learning from history.

The other thing I'm going to say is, and this is a practical statement, is that what I've learned is that when you look back at every war, the nation that lost, lost because of one reason. It was logistics. Russia's not doing so hot in that area. It's logistics. It's getting stuff to the front line. It's getting the right diesel, the food. All those supplies

Gregg: The right soldiers.

Patti: The right soldiers. Exactly. Trained soldiers. It is going to be interesting how this thing unfolds. I hope Ilya can do what he needs to do for the Russian people, as well as the people in Ukraine. Got to rebuild that country. It's amazing. Their leader is really interesting, really amazing.

Gregg, thank you so much for being here today.

Gregg: My pleasure.

Patti: I appreciate the friendship that we have. Thanks to all of you for tuning in, listening to us today, watching the videos. Please, feel free to share this information. Get the book. You know Gregg, you know me. He's objective. He's going to give it to you straight.

It's a great book with lots of interesting questions, especially towards the end. He answers more questions than I had. He has a way of coming up with different perspectives, ideas, and questions to test a theory and test an idea, which is what is unfolding.

Thank you so much for joining us. If you'd like to hear more about this, let us know. Go on to our website at keyfinancialinc.com. We'd love to hear from you. If you'd like to hear about anything else, let us know about that, too. Thank you so much for tuning in. Have a great day.