

Season 8, Episode 4 Culture in Crisis Final Transcription

Lizzie Peabody: A note for listeners... In this episode, we describe scenes of violence in the wake of disaster that may be difficult for sensitive listeners.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: This is Sidedoor, a podcast from the Smithsonian with support from PRX. I'm Lizzie Peabody.

Hayden Bassett: All right, so let me share screen with you now.

Lizzie Peabody: Okay.

Hayden Bassett: Okay.

Lizzie Peabody: Hayden Bassett is showing me a satellite picture. A piece of evidence, actually. It just looks like a house from above and it's a black and white picture, but you can tell it's snowy and... Yeah, it just looks like a house in the suburbs.

Hayden Bassett: And what I'm going to show you now is approximately one week later. What you're looking at now is that same building.

Lizzie Peabody: Wow, it looks like someone just took the roof off.

Hayden Bassett: It does. The roof is missing. The inside of the building is completely exposed, and as you can see inside of that building, the contents are completely burned. The ash and other debris is spilling out of the windows. But otherwise, this is a shell of what it once was.

Lizzie Peabody: This was the Ivankiv Museum of History and Local Lore, in northern Ukraine. Just a couple days after Russia invaded Ukraine in February of this year, the museum was destroyed along with everything inside.

Hayden Bassett: Including upwards of 20 pieces of art that, unfortunately, were burned when this museum was burned.

Lizzie Peabody: Hayden Bassett is the Director of the Cultural Heritage Monitoring Lab, a geospatial lab that captured evidence of the museum's destruction using satellite technology. Sitting at his desk, he looks like he could be manning the command center in some disaster movie. In front of him, a wall of computer screens.

Hayden Bassett: And what we're looking at is a picture of the globe.

Lizzie Peabody: Covering the globe are hundreds of thousands of tiny dots, each representing a museum, a place of worship, archeological sites, cemetery, or monument. What Hayden refers to as cultural heritage sites.

Hayden Bassett: Cultural heritage, what does it have? It typically has identity and it typically has dates.

Lizzie Peabody: Dates and identity in combination amount to a claim to a history by a people. The mission of the Cultural Heritage Monitoring Lab is to watch where cultural heritage sites might be at risk. Like in Ukraine, where cultural identity is at the very center of the conflict. In a speech just days before the Ivan Kiev Museum was destroyed, Russian President Vladimir Putin addressed Russians and the world saying Ukraine never had its own authentic statehood.

Ihor Poshyvailo: This is war not only for the territory, not only for human bodies. This is war against our culture.

Lizzie Peabody: This is Ihor Poshyvailo, Director of the Maidan Museum in Ukraine's capital city of Kyiv.

Ihor Poshyvailo: They want to destroy our historical memory, our cultural identity, our individual identity as Ukrainians.

Lizzie Peabody: That's why the Cultural Heritage Monitoring Lab is remotely monitoring 28,000 cultural heritage sites in Ukraine. As of the taping of this podcast, the lab has confirmed damage to 108 of these sites, including the Ivankiv Museum.

Ihor Poshyvailo: And so, today it's quite clear that we struggle not only for our future, but also for our past.

Lizzie Peabody: The front lines of this struggle are in the basements where paintings have been stashed, in town squares where monuments are shielded by piles of sandbags, and in cemeteries where names and dates on gravestones create a tangible link to the past. And that frontline requires a different kind of defense.

Hayden Bassett: What do you do when you have a burnt out museum? What do you do when your collections are compromised but you have to salvage them in some way?

Lizzie Peabody: While Hayden is able to document the destruction of Ukraine's cultural treasures, then what? From there, where do you go? Who do you tell?

Hayden Bassett: So, this is where the Smithsonian comes in, the institution that has created a global cultural heritage network of responders.

Lizzie Peabody: This time on Sidedoor, the second front line in times of crisis. How a little known department at the Smithsonian grew from a pickup team with no authority, no resources, and no playbook into the hub of a global rescue effort to protect cultural treasures at risk of vanishing forever. And how a decade of disasters prepared them for the rescue work in Ukraine today. That's coming up, after the break.

[MUSIC]

Reporters: The major disaster may be unfolding right now in Haiti, hit today by a powerful earthquake.

Lizzie Peabody: On January 12th, 2010, a magnitude seven earthquake struck just south of Haiti's capital city, Port-au-Prince. For 35 seconds, it shook the mountainous Caribbean island leaving entire hillsides flatten.

Barack Obama: The reports and images that we've seen, collapsed hospitals, crumbled homes, and men and women carrying their injured neighbors through the streets, are truly heart-wrenching.

Reporters: Almost 1300 people are now known to have died. Many more are fear to be trapped under the rubble of collapse buildings.

Olsen Jean Julien: It was the worst days in my life.

Lizzie Peabody: This is Olsen Jean Julien, the former Haitian Minister of Culture.

Olsen Jean Julien: You can even bury friends. It's like so many people was there, you don't have time to go to funerals.

Lizzie Peabody: The earthquake left over 200,000 Haitians dead and one and a half million homeless. Around the world, people watched the devastation on television. They saw Haitians pulling family members from the rubble, sleeping in public parks, but they saw something else too. Singing. In the streets and the parks of Port-au-Prince, through the day and into the night.

Olsen Jean Julien: And they're singing songs and drawing from the Asian culture. When a culture is able to provide those resources to people in such dire situation, is a very strong culture. This is something that we need to help save.

Lizzie Peabody: But Olsen Jean Julien knew that the earthquake put Haitian culture at risk. Artwork, texts, religious collections, lay scattered in the wreckage of leveled museums, libraries, and homes. And he says these objects are vessels for Haitian heritage.

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Olsen Jean Julien: How do we transmit education to our kids? How do we transmit value? How do we transmit beauty? How do we transmit the sense of space, the sense of time? The very values we wanted to save and to protect are embodied in artifacts.

Lizzie Peabody: And Olsen says, while saving human lives is always the top priority...

Olsen Jean Julien: People live for a reason, and the reason for living is in culture. You can see that. So, after trying to save people's life, you need to try to save people's reason for living.

Lizzie Peabody: Over a thousand miles away, in Washington DC, a somber group gathered in a boardroom. It was a gray February morning, just a few weeks after the earthquake. Cori Wegener sat at the head of the table.

Cori Wegener: The goal of the meeting was to see what organizations in US and in US government might be able to assist.

Lizzie Peabody: Cori Wegener has an unusual combination of specialties. First, she's an art historian. At the time, she was a curator at the Minneapolis Institute of Art, but she was also a monuments officer in the US Army Reserves. And she wanted to use her expertise in art history and cultural preservation to help out in Haiti, but she knew she couldn't do it alone, so she called on her connections.

Cori Wegener: And I had heard from colleagues that you should invite Richard Kurin from the Smithsonian, because he's a guy who really gets things done.

Richard Kurin: Well, I was aware that meeting had been called. I was curious. What are we going to do?

Lizzie Peabody: This is Richard Kurin. At the time, he was the Under Secretary of the Smithsonian, meaning he had a corner office in the Smithsonian Castle and all the cachet that goes with it. But let me just say, I once watched Richard eat ice cream for breakfast. It was Ben and Jerry's, straight from the carton. He does not mind tossing convention out the window when the moment calls for it.

Richard Kurin: I'm a kind of doer.

Lizzie Peabody: Not kind of. Richard gets it done. He spent many years producing the Smithsonian's Annual Folklife Festival.

Richard Kurin: Whatever year you had to start anew and basically build a town or a city on the National Mall of the United States in the midst of a lot of regulation and never enough money. And so, I was a problem solver.

Lizzie Peabody: Kurin had worked with Haitian curators for the 2004 Folklife Festival, celebrating the bicentennial of Haitian independence, and he'd kept in contact over the years.

Richard Kurin: So, I planned to go to this meeting and I got, I think, the last seat at the table.

Lizzie Peabody: On that gray, February morning in DC with the sky outside threatening snow, representatives of government agencies and NGOs and cultural institutions went around the table and, one-by-one, they shook their heads and agreed. What was happening in Haiti was terrible, but...

Cori Wegener: They didn't really have the assets or they didn't have the money or they didn't have the expertise.

Richard Kurin: The authority to do anything.

Cori Wegener: Or the permissions.

Richard Kurin: Or were not really organized for this.

Cori Wegener: The last speaker was Richard Kurin and he said, "Wow, I can't believe that there's not more of response to this."

Richard Kurin: We really needed to do something. I couldn't believe that the United States government and US organizations, while there was a will to do something, there wasn't a clear organizational path of how to get it done.

Lizzie Peabody: After the meeting, Richard caught Cori as she stepped outside into the first flakes of falling snow.

Cori Wegener: He asked me to stay behind and talk for a moment, and he said...

Richard Kurin: We're going to do something. We're going to figure this out.

Cori Wegener: And I remember thinking, oh sure.

Richard Kurin: And I'm not sure Cori really believed me.

Cori Wegener: But no, really...

Richard Kurin: Two weeks later, we were in Haiti.

Lizzie Peabody: But once they arrived in Port-au-Prince, there was still a lot to figure out before they could get to work. The city was devastated. Infrastructure in pieces, spotty electricity.

Richard Kurin: It looked like bombs had been dropped all over the capitol. Buildings were a shell of themselves. Places in rubble, museums, fragments of paintings on the ground. It was like a war zone.

Lizzie Peabody: But remember, Richard is a problem solver. He knew just who to call.

Olsen Jean Julien: We put together a great team for the Folklife and we stick together.

Lizzie Peabody: This of course is Olsen Jean Julien.

Richard Kurin: He had been a coordinator for the Folklife Festival in 2004, and he'd gone on to become the Minister of Culture of Haiti.

Olsen Jean Julien: When WeChat came, we start discussing what should be done.

Richard Kurin: And my first impulse was actually to think of it like a Folklife festival, interestingly enough. There's that saying, if you're a hammer, everything in the world looks like a nail. So, okay. We needed to establish some kind of temporary presence.

Olsen Jean Julien: And that's what the idea of creating a culture recovery base to save everything we could.

Lizzie Peabody: With the support of the Haitian government, the idea was first to set up a base where Haitians could bring paintings, sculptures, books, and religious collections.

Olsen Jean Julien: And the government officially requested the Smithsonian to manage and fund the project.

Lizzie Peabody: Why? Why the Smithsonian?

Olsen Jean Julien: Why the Smithsonian? Because the Smithsonian shows up.

Lizzie Peabody: A coordinated effort was coming together, dubbed the Haiti Cultural Recovery Project. They had the willpower and they had a plan, but they still needed money. And that's when Richard got an unexpected call.

Richard Kurin: The Broadway League in New York wanted to do something to help colleagues in Haiti. And the question is why?

Lizzie Peabody: The answer? 911. A decade earlier, New Yorkers had lived through the terrorist attacks that left thousands dead and dispirited the soul of the country. And they remembered.

Richard Kurin: It was very important for people on Broadway to get Broadway back up and running, get the lights on Broadway, and show that we're alive. And so, they made the equation

that the Haitian earthquake was like 911 in New York. And getting Haitian culture back up and going and saving it so people in the future in Haiti could be creative, could craft their own future, could help in their resilience, was very important.

Lizzie Peabody: The Broadway League raised over a quarter million dollars.

Richard Kurin: And they said Richard will give it to you.

Lizzie Peabody: Wow.

Richard Kurin: And I needed it because I didn't have any Smithsonian money. We had nothing. But that enabled me to get going.

Lizzie Peabody: With a little funding, the Haiti project got to work. They set up a temporary cultural recovery center in Port-Au-Prince and flew in volunteer conservators to stabilize the paintings and other artifacts that had been crushed or left outside in the rain to mold. Here's Cori Wegener again.

Cori Wegener: So, you'd need to vacuum them and treat that mold and then they're stable. We didn't do conservation to the level of putting it back in a gallery, because we had so many thousands of objects.

Lizzie Peabody: It was like a MASH unit, not like a brain surgery situation.

Cori Wegener: Exactly. Stabilization is like a MASH unit. You stabilize it to wait for further treatment later down the line, but you're preventing further damage.

Lizzie Peabody: They also piloted a training course to teach Haitian curators on the ground the basics of emergency conservation. Is this kind of thing that you're teaching, it's not typical knowledge that a curator at a museum would already have?

Cori Wegener: No, it's really not typical knowledge. Normally curators are dealing with the history of the objects, writing labels, creating publications, working with the public. And doing an emergency response for damage in the museum is just not usually on the curriculum in grad school. I didn't learn it, and most people don't.

Lizzie Peabody: This course would be one of the most important things to come out of the Haiti project. Over the next two years, it trained over a hundred Haitians from three dozen cultural organizations in emergency conservation, better preparing them for the future. And it established a curriculum that could, and would, be used again.

Cori Wegener: What we're really aiming at is to provide people with the means to take care of their own cultural heritage. It's the whole 'teach a man to fish' idea. You can't go parachuting in

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every time someplace around the world has a disaster. It's so much smarter to create a network of people with this training, because there are just a lot of disasters out there.

Lizzie Peabody: The Haiti Project was the first ever complex emergency response for cultural heritage. It brought together the US President's Committee for the Arts and Humanities, the US State Department, the Department of Defense, USAID, the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the Haitian Government and Ministry of Culture, the American Institute of Conservation, nonprofits, universities, cultural heritage groups, museums, and charitable donors. All coordinated by the small, but mighty, team of doers.

Olsen Jean Julien: We needed to make a difference and we did make one. A huge one. We save about 30,000 artifacts.

Lizzie Peabody: The project led to the construction of a permanent conservation center at Quisqueya University, that trains conservators and preserves Haitian culture today, with Olson Jean Julien at the helm. After their work in Haiti, Cori went back to her job at the Minneapolis Institute of Art, and Richard went back to his desk at the Smithsonian, where he put his feet up, heaved a big sigh, and was probably just about to dig into a fresh pint of Ben and Jerry's when the phone rang. It was the head of the National Museum of Mali, Samuel Sidibé. He'd worked with Richard on the Folklife Festival in 2003.

Richard Kurin: He said, "Richard, we have terrorists who are burning manuscripts in Timbuktu. We feel our collections are endangered by terrorism. Can the Smithsonian help us?" But he said, "You're doing this thing in Haiti? We've heard about it. How about us?"

Lizzie Peabody: So, Richard was like...

Richard Kurin: Of course.

Lizzie Peabody: Of course. But I can't do it without Cori.

Cori Wegener: And so that's when I came to the Smithsonian to start up the Cultural Rescue Initiative Program.

Lizzie Peabody: The Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative. The team in Haiti, pulled together on the fly in response to an acute emergency, had revealed a deeper need across the international heritage community, the need for an organization with money, authority, and expertise to intervene on behalf of cultural heritage in times of crisis. And so, the Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative, or SCRI for short, became official. And just in the nick of time, because the calls kept coming,

Richard Kurin: We started getting requests from, really, all over the world.

Lizzie Peabody: Nepal, Egypt, Syria.

Richard Kurin: So, all of a sudden, we found ourselves, I guess, we're in business,

Lizzie Peabody: But every crisis is different. It's one thing to see an ancient sculpture crushed by a falling building. It's another to watch someone deliberately sledgehammer it to smithereens. And Richard and Cori would soon find that protecting the world's treasures from human destruction requires a different set of skills. That's coming up, after the break.

[MUSIC]

Reporters: Two days ago, a bomb went off at this World Heritage site and a group of about 20 cultural first aiders have arrived on the scene to assess the damage to that cultural heritage. They have...

Lizzie Peabody: This is a video of a simulated disaster. It's the final training exercise for the course, First Aid for Cultural Heritage in times of crisis, a collaboration between the Smithsonian and two other cultural heritage organizations, ICCROM, and the Prince Claus Fund. This is one of many courses that have been offered by the Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative, but this one was the one they first piloted in Haiti back in 2010. In the years since, it had grown into a four-week intensive, available to heritage professionals from all over the world. And Cori says, it's not that the information taught in this course is new.

Cori Wegener: Of course, there's been training for emergency response for heritage for a long time. What set the first aid methodology apart a little bit is that we were really focused not on the preparing, not on the mitigating, but on the disaster itself.

Lizzie Peabody: After learning the methodology in the classroom, trainees put their knowledge to the test in a high-pressure simulation.

Reporters: Unfortunately, another bomb just went off.

Cori Wegener: And that's often when you find people that if they haven't practiced it, they freeze and they don't know what to do.

Reporters: They will have to physically retrieve the items from the wreckage of the bombing and stabilize them, dry them out, and pack them and move them off to safe storage.

Cori Wegener: Practicing. It is so much better than reading it in a book.

Lizzie Peabody: And just like a medical first aid course, it's meant to simplify.

Cori Wegener: We're not saying you have to have five years of conservation training and a master's degree to do this. It's really step-by-step simple and there's no reason to freeze and leave things in the rubble.

Lizzie Peabody: In the years since the Haiti earthquake, the Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative had continued to grow, leaning on the skills of Smithsonian experts, from archeologists to conservation scientists, to collections managers, to become a global resource for heritage impacted by disasters. They offered a wide range of courses to build a global network of trained responders. And in addition to those trainings, SCRI sent professional teams wherever they were asked to help. Mali, Nepal, Egypt, Syria, and Iraq.

Reporters: This morning, ISIS claims to have destroyed priceless pieces of history. A video posted yesterday shows people taking power tools and sledgehammers to irreplaceable statues and artifacts in Iraq. What could be the loss of artifacts Up to 2,700 years old. Sledgehammers, grills, and bare hands. The weapons used by ISIS in its latest demonstration of destruction. Released through social media Thursday, the five-minute video uses music and slow motion to dramatize the destruction at Northern Iraq's Mosul Museum.

Lizzie Peabody: In 2015, the Islamic Extremist Group, ISIS, published videos of their members smashing ancient sculptures, intentionally destroying the Mosul Museum, an act of violence against Iraqi national identity. Years later, Iraqi, Kurdish, and Allied Forces recaptured the city, but the museum lay in ruins. And in 2019, the Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative was part of the team working to rehabilitate it, but they couldn't just go in and start cleaning up.

Cori Wegener: Because there was a lot of evidence from the videos and everything, that war crimes had been committed there. The intentional destruction of cultural heritage.

Lizzie Peabody: According to the 1954 Hague Convention, an international treaty that came out of World War II. The purposeful destruction of cultural property is a war crime. So, Cori Wegener wanted to make sure these crimes were documented before they started cleaning up the museum.

Cori Wegener: I started looking around to see who would come and do that documentation before we started our salvage operation. And I found out nobody.

Lizzie Peabody: Oh.

Cori Wegener: I talked to international law professors and they said it's up to the aggrieved country. And I thought, that's terrible because they're in the midst of a war. They're still fighting ISIS and the victim should not be the one responsible for documenting the crime against them. So, we set out to learn how to do it ourselves.

Lizzie Peabody: But where do you go to learn about art crime stuff? The FBI.

Cori Wegener: We have a good relationship with colleagues in the FBI Art Crime Team. And so, we went to them and we said, "How do you train agents to do the kind of work of documentation when you have criminal activity involving art?" And they said, "Well, have we got a deal for you?"

Lizzie Peabody: The FBI offered to teach Cori's team the basics of crime scene documentation. Photography, measurements, sample collections. Basically, how to collect evidence that would be taken seriously in an international court of law.

Cori Wegener: I was like, well, it's been a long time since ISIS was in there. There've been all kinds of reporters going through the building. The evidence is already tampered with. And they said, but that's what happens when you have a cold case.

Richard Kurin: It was an eye-opening concept to think of a museum as a crime scene.

Lizzie Peabody: But that's what they did. Richard remembers seeing the museum for the first time. The hole, the size of a camper van blown in the middle of the floor, exposed pipes and rubble all around and on the floor,

Richard Kurin: What I thought looked like, not quite snow, but New York City slush. It was kind of white but gray and mushy and whatever. And I said, what is that? And the director of the Muslim museum said, "That is what 25,000 books and manuscripts burnt up look like."

Lizzie Peabody: Oh.

Cori Wegener: It was horrifying, because everywhere you walked, your boots would crunch. And you knew you were walking on an object fragment.

Lizzie Peabody: The team got to work.

Richard Kurin: So, we were all assigned various tasks. My job, I remember, was to do measurements. How far away... Here was a pile of rubble. It was obviously blown off of a wall. How far was it? How do you document those pieces of... So, you can try to reconstruct what exactly happened?

Cori Wegener: And so, they taught us how to look for evidence of the use of explosives.

Lizzie Peabody: So, like swiping walls for residue and stuff like that?

Cori Wegener: Right. And we were also looking for what's not there, what's missing. It became pretty clear quickly that a lot of objects, the objects were just gone.

Lizzie Peabody: So, the reason that documentation was so important was, one, just for enforcement of the Hague Convention to prove that war crimes were committed. But two, to

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figure out what actually happened to some of these antiquities. Were they blasted to smithereens or were they trafficked somewhere else?

Richard Kurin: That's exactly right. Yeah.

Cori Wegener: And this is a case where the information that came out of this team effort with our Iraqi colleagues to document this very carefully, now they have that information and they can work with the international law enforcement community to try to keep an eye out for those objects.

Lizzie Peabody: At the Mosul Museum in Iraq, the team practiced the basics of forensic documentation, methods SCRI would incorporate into their own trainings later on. But they weren't just limited to their work on the ground.

Richard Kurin: We were able to monitor ISIS destruction of cultural sites by getting satellite imagery and then doing analysis of it. It gave us another tool, and of course that's a tool now we're using in Ukraine.

Hayden Bassett: So, we're using high resolution, frequently updated imagery, but we're also using some of those sensors that are currently in orbit.

Lizzie Peabody: This is Hayden Bassett again, Director of the Cultural Heritage Monitoring Lab, a partnership between the Smithsonian and the Virginia Museum of Natural History. Working with NASA and other partners, the lab uses sensors, infrared imaging, and satellites to monitor missile impacts or any other changes to the Earth's surface. If these changes happen close to cultural heritage sites, they can zoom in and assess the damage. But Hayden says almost as important as the sites themselves, is the surrounding area. Remember the Ivankiv Museum? The one Hayden showed me at the very beginning of the episode with no roof? Well...

Hayden Bassett: Look at the houses. Look at the trees. Look at the grass. Look at the paths. Everything seems to be intact, except for the museum.

Lizzie Peabody: Yeah, everything else looks untouched.

Hayden Bassett: Right. And there's only so much that we can say from a satellite image, but that at least provides us with some level of information to suggest that this might not have been just collateral damage.

Lizzie Peabody: But Ihor Poshyvailo, Director of the Maidan Museum in Kiev is a little more direct with his assessment.

Ihor Poshyvailo: It was deliberately targeted object, this museum.

Lizzie Peabody: Ihor says this museum was deliberately targeted and he wonders not just if, but when, his museum might become the next target. He's been preparing for this kind of attack since Russia annexed Crimea in 2014.

Ihor Poshyvailo: After the war started in 2014, I first person from Ukraine. I participated in the training course on the first state to cultural heritage.

Richard Kurin: Ihor was in a first cohort of people as we were starting training programs in cultural rescue and recovery, disaster planning and preparation. And then he became a trainer himself as we were working with colleagues internationally. And, of course, in the current crisis in Ukraine, pivotal.

Ihor Poshyvailo: And so, I participated in that four weeks training course. And after this, I prepared with my colleagues a guidance and a toolkit, what should be done.

Lizzie Peabody: By the time Russian forces invaded Ukraine in February of 2022, Ihor and his colleagues had already packed up their most important collections, secured hiding places for them, and arranged all the transportation logistics.

Ihor Poshyvailo: And so, we were ready and we encouraged a lot of other museums, and some of them really listened to our advices.

Lizzie Peabody: Ihor took the training and built on it. He helped found a Ukrainian Emergency Response Initiative, working alongside the Ukrainian government on damage and risk assessment to cultural collections and preparations for recovery. He and his colleagues have organized field trips to damaged museums and other sites, to document the destruction and treat stored collections to ensure their preservation. He says the training was a great starting point, but he continues to learn from his own experiences.

Ihor Poshyvailo: And some things worked, some did not. And in this situation, if we have a possibility to analyze, to adopt, adjust so that we can help to respond as much as effectively, in possible other crisis situations.

Lizzie Peabody: Because there will be others. And that's exactly the importance of this network.

Hayden Bassett: The network that SCRI has built is important for a few reasons, but it's particularly important in 2022. One thing that we can expect now, moving forward, is more hurricane events. More wildfires. We can expect natural disaster to occur on a scale each year greater than the previous. SCRI's network is going to allow cultural heritage responses to be effective no matter where those natural disaster events strike, simply because there's going to be at least one person, one group, or several groups, hopefully, that are able to effectively respond quickly.

Lizzie Peabody: Whether it's fire, flood, bomb, or blast, there's always going to be threats to the world's cultural treasures. And it takes individual people with training and courage to save them. But there are more of those people out in the world now than ever before, and that is what keeps Cori Wagener going.

Cori Wegener: Culture is still being lost. We're still having armed conflicts. All those things are terrible. But seeing a world that has hundreds of cultural professionals who have training how to respond in wartime. In 2003, I could count them on a hand. And now we have this big network of people, and it's not just Smithsonian, it's a movement.

Lizzie Peabody: People working against the odds to protect the objects that reflect the spirit, identity, and history of people all over the world, wherever they're endangered. A network that is growing every year.

Cori Wegener: We don't have to sit around and wait for things to happen to us. We can keep our heritage safe.

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Lizzie Peabody: You've been listening to Sidedoor, a podcast from the Smithsonian with support from PRX.

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Lizzie Peabody: To learn more about the Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative and the work that they're doing in Ukraine at this very moment, we'll include a lot more information in our newsletter. You can subscribe at si.edu/sidedoor. We'll also include photos of cultural protection work sent by colleagues in Ukraine, and pictures of Richard and Cori's work at the Mosul Museum.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: There are other critical players in this story who we were not able to mention by name in the episode, but who played significant roles in the success of SCRI. Eryl Wentworth of the American Institute of Conservation, who organized the group of volunteer curators trained in conservation who helped out in Haiti. Stephanie Hornbeck, who came out of retirement from the Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art to help with conservation in Haiti. And in Iraq, Zaid Ghazi Saadallah head of the Mosul Museum. Jessie Johnson, Brian Lione, and Katharyn Hansen of the Smithsonian Museum Conservation Institute, Brian Daniels from the University of Pennsylvania, and Jake Archer from the FBI Art Crimes Team.

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Lizzie Peabody: The course, First Aid for Cultural Heritage and Times of Crisis, was developed in partnership with the International Center for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property, or ICCROM, and the Prince Claus Fund for Cultural Emergency Response.

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Lizzie Peabody: As you now know, the Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative does not work alone. Their work wouldn't be possible without the collaboration of countless organizations, which you can find in the episode description.

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Lizzie Peabody: Special thanks to this episode to Richard Kurin, Cori Wagener, Hayden Bassett, Olson Jean Julien, and Ihor Poshyvailo.

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Lizzie Peabody: Our podcast team is James Morrison, Nathalie Boyd, Ann Conanan, Caitlin Shaffer, Tami O'Neill, Jess Sadeq, Lara Koch, and Sharon Bryant. Episode artwork is by Dave Leonard. Extra support comes from Jason and Genevieve at PRX. Our show is mixed by Tarek Fouda. Our theme song and episode music are by Breakmaster Cylinder.

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Lizzie Peabody: If you want to sponsor our show, please email sponsorship@prx.org.

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Lizzie Peabody: I'm your host, Lizzie Peabody. Thanks for listening.

Richard Kurin: Yes, I remember being covered in artificial blood, because they try to make these things as realistic as they can to give you a sense of what a situation may be. And my mother was in a nursing home up nearby.

Lizzie Peabody: Oh no.

Richard Kurin: And I went to visit her.

Lizzie Peabody: Oh, no. No, Richard.

Richard Kurin: Yeah. I walk into the place and these are all aged people in their eighties and nineties.

Lizzie Peabody: Oh my God.

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Richard Kurin: And my mom. And here, I realize-

Lizzie Peabody: You're going to kill someone.

Richard Kurin: ... I look down, I say, my God, I'm covered in the... My mother, who's the biggest worrier.