

# If I Am Missing or Dead: A Sister's Story of Love, Murder and Liberation

## Transcript: US Army Resilience Directorate Outreach Webinar

October 19, 2021

### Presenter:

Janine Latus, journalist and author

Host: [00:00:04](#) Welcome to the Army Resilience Directorate Outreach Webinar for October. We'll be discussing unhealthy relationships with Ms. Janine Latus. At this time, all participants are in a listen-only mode. However, you can ask questions at any time by placing them in the chat box in the lower center of your screen. There will be several opportunities to ask those questions throughout the webinar. You can ask them at any time, and we'll have time at the end for questions and answers. This month's webinar has been approved for one CEU through the National Organization for Victim Assistance or NOVA, and we'll discuss how to obtain the credit for attendance at the end of today's webinar. Please note the views of ARD Outreach Webinar presenters are their own and are not endorsed by the Department of the Army or the Department of Defense.

Host: [00:00:55](#) This month our special guest is Ms. Janine Latus. Ms. Latus is an award-winning journalist, best-selling author and advocate, and I would add, a great storyteller. She has a long career of satisfying curiosity, her own and her readers'. She has crawled under George Washington's mother's chair to count chisel marks and bussed down the streets of Chicago to write about what it's like to sing for your supper. She has galloped the beaches of the Dominican Republic, studied the science of oyster farming, and given over an entire evening to the pleasures of a perfect night of sushi—all to gather the kind of you-were-there details that make a story sing. Her work has appeared in *O, The Oprah Magazine, More, Woman's Day, Family Circle, Parents, All You, American Baby*, and the in-flight magazines for US Air, American Airlines, Continental, and TWA. Her commentaries have aired on Public Radio International's Marketplace, and she routinely speaks at conferences, workshops, and press events on things as far apart as domestic violence and the joy of selecting the perfect verb. She has taught at the Missouri School of Journalism and at East Carolina University and at writing workshops in Missouri, North Carolina,

Wisconsin, and now in Virginia. Please join me in welcoming Janine to today's ARD Outreach Webinar.

- Janine Latus: [00:02:18](#) Hi there.
- Host: [00:02:18](#) Hello.
- Janine Latus: [00:02:18](#) Thank you. That is a very long introduction. So yes, I'm Janine Latus, and I am the author of the book *If I Am Missing or Dead: A Sister's Story of Love, Murder, and Liberation*. The book is a New York Times best seller. It's a London Times best seller. It's a Toronto Globe and Mail best seller. It is translated into Mandarin. And I say this not to sound like I'm cool but to make it really clear that this problem is ubiquitous. This problem is worldwide. You are all over the world and you know that this problem is worldwide. But the truth is we want to pretend that it's happening over there—a different race, a different religion, a different cultural environment. But the truth is, is that it's happening here. There are people on this webinar today who are victims, and there are people on this webinar today who are perpetrators. I want to show you something. Have you all seen this? It's the Duluth Power and Control Wheel. It's a visual depiction of the various kinds of abuse, because people think that abuse is that she slaps you or that he punches you. But the truth is that it is a series of coercive behaviors that limit your life and make you afraid. So, you can glance at this for a second, but I'm going to tell you a story that illustrates it, and then we'll tear the wheel apart.
- Janine Latus: [00:03:55](#) This is me and my baby sister. She's five. I'm ten. We're wearing grandpa's shirts because we're going to do a song and dance routine. Grandma had just painted our fingernails. Obviously my mother had cut my bangs. Two years later, I was sexually assaulted for the first time. That little girl right there, two years later. I was babysitting. I was babysitting for our neighbors, and I was the tickle monster, right? And I'm stomping around the house, "I'm going to get you, I'm going to get you." And I grabbed the kids, and we're rolling around on the floor, giggling. And the dad came home, and he said, "I wonder if the babysitter's ticklish." And then he pinned me down, and he started grinding into me, and his kids are behind the chair, saying, "Daddy, stop." And I can't figure out how to get out from under him.
- Janine Latus: [00:04:51](#) You know, the gym teacher had said, "Kick him where it counts, but I'm pinned." But then I remember that when my dad gets mad at me, he takes the little hairs at the back of my neck and he pulls until I'm basically up on my tippy toes, and I know it

hurts. And so I do that to this man. I take the hairs on the back of his neck and I yank and it works. He gets off of me and he storms out of there and I'm safe, right? A couple of hours later, his wife came home and she paid me and she said, "My husband will give you a ride home." And I said, "Oh, that's okay. I'll walk." And she said, "Are you kidding me? Your mother will kill me if I let you walk." So I had to get into the car with that man. I got in and I squeezed up against the door as best I could. And still, he reached over and he put his hand on my thigh, and he said, "We'll never tell anyone what we did, will we?" Well, the first thing I did was I told, right. I ran up the stairs, "Mom, Dad!" I expected sympathy. I expected outrage. I expected somebody to say, "Good job figuring out how to get out of there." But instead what my father said was, "Never tell anyone, or you'll be known as a slut."

Janine Latus:

[00:06:18](#)

My dad said a lot of things. "Your chest is so flat we could iron clothes on it. Your feet are so big it's surprising you don't quack when you walk. You're exaggerating. You're not cold. I didn't say that. Where's your sense of humor?" And so I left home. I left home while I was in high school, and I got an apartment with a classmate. And it was a garden-view apartment, which is code for you're half underground and what you see out on the parking lot is the undercarriage of cars. And we each work two jobs and we hitchhike to school. And for dinner, we would have tomato soup with popcorn floating in it because that really fills your belly. But also because one of my jobs was at a movie theater and we always had plenty of popcorn. So one night we decided to go out to a disco. The drinking age in Michigan at the time was eighteen. And we went out to the Green Door Disco, and we're dancing to ABBA's Dancing Queen—"young and sweet, barely seventeen, you're a teaser, you turn them on." And we're drinking and we're flirting and we're dancing. And eventually I said to my roommate, "Hey, I'm going to head out." And she said, "Okay, I'll catch a ride." I want you to think for a second, which one of us is in danger?

Janine Latus:

[00:07:45](#)

Anyway, I got out and I drove home and I pulled into my parking space and I scampered down those steps and I pull open the storm door and I put the key into the wooden door. And all of a sudden, this hand hits me on the back of the head. A man has followed me home from the bar, and he drags me inside, and he rapes me on the coffee table. And it's a cheap, Formica coffee table. So the edges are really sharp and it just tears up my back. And when my roommate gets home, she finds me curled up in a ball on the floor. And she helps me into the tub and she washes off my back and she puts methyate on every one of those wounds. And we swear that we will never tell. We'd gotten

separated, we'd been drinking, we'd been flirting. I couldn't identify the guy. Everybody would know I was a slut.

Janine Latus:

[00:08:48](#)

We do that, right. We expect the victims to stay quiet. The thing is though—when a rapist rapes and doesn't get held accountable, they rape again and again and again. Do you know that convicted rapists, that very rare group that are actually convicted—when they did research in prison, they found that each had raped an average of eight times. But anyway, I am fortunate because I am resilient. I'm resilient, or I've been through a lot of bad stuff and I have endured. But either way, I made it through high school and I made it through college and I was in graduate school and I was working as a pharmacy technician, you know, pushing a cart of medications up and down the hallways—what my family refers to as the time that I was working as a drug pusher. Anyway, I met a guy. I met a med student, and he was handsome and he was smart. And he had a trust fund. Kind of a really good combination in a boyfriend. And he made me better. Like, after I'd go to a party, he'd say to me, "You know your jokes, aren't funny, right?" Or, "You know you laugh like a hyena, right?" So I learned not to laugh and not to tell jokes. And when I would come down the stairs dressed in my hoodie and my blue jeans, he'd say, "You're going out with me dressed like that?"

Janine Latus:

[00:10:19](#)

So he made me better, right? And that first year for Thanksgiving, we went back to his parents' house. His parents live in the McMansion on a hill, you know, with a golf course for a lawn and chandeliers and silver candlesticks. And we go in and my boyfriend and his father go into the study for some Scotch, and I'm handed an apron. So I go into the kitchen to help his mom. And we get that golden brown turkey out of the oven and we put it on the tray and we put the sprigs of parsley around it and we carry it out to the table and we get the green bean casserole. And she lets me scoop the potatoes out and put them into a bowl. And you make that dent in the top and you put butter in it. You make the volcano of happiness, right?

Janine Latus:

[00:11:09](#)

Take that out to the table. And when everything is perfect, his mother says to me, "You can go get the men." And so I do. I go and I get the men. And my boyfriend, he pulls out my chair and I sit down and I smoothed that linen napkin on my lap, and the father, he says the blessing over the bounty. And then he stops, "Where the fuck are the yams?" And he picks up the turkey and he hurls it at his wife. And it's clearly not the first time because she ducks and it slides down the wall. And he goes storming back to his study and his Scotch, and my boyfriend looks at me and he says, "Help her." And then he follows his dad. And so I

do. I help her and we get that turkey up off the floor and we put it back on the tray and we smooth all the skin back down. And we had extra sprigs of parsley to hide the scars. And we reheat the green beans and we reheat the mashed potatoes. And you can bet we remember the yams, and when everything is perfect, his mother says to me, "You can go get the men." And so I do. And my boyfriend pulls my chair out, and I smoothed that linen napkin over my lap. And everybody acts like nothing happened.

Janine Latus: [00:12:37](#)

Well, my reaction was, "Oh my God, my poor boyfriend. Oh my gosh, I am going to love him. I am going to love him and heal him. I'm going to love him and make him feel valuable. I'm going to love him until he's healthy and happy and whole. He's never going to do anything like this to me." You know where this is going. So a couple of months later, we go on this ski trip. So remember that trust fund. So he's paid for our flights, our lift tickets, our hotel room, and we're out there and we're skiing and we stop and we have lunch and we have a beer and then we're skiing a little bit more. And then we stop and we have another beer. And you know that crabby, dehydrated feeling you get when you drink outside. So we decided to go take a nap. So we went back to our hotel room and that's when I did it. I said the wrong thing. And that first fist hit me in the face. And the second one hit me in the gut. And when I went down and when I got curled up, protecting myself, he's kicking me and kicking me and kicking me. And then he falls down on the ground next to me and he wraps his arms around me and he's crying. And he says, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I love you so much. I'm sorry you made me do this."

Janine Latus: [00:13:59](#)

And for three days I had to stay with this man because he had our plane tickets. "You want them?" Because that's what abusers do; they control the money. So they control you. Now, what I didn't take into account was that about five minutes away was my uncle, Tony. And my uncle, Tony—he's an Uncle Tony. If I had called him, he and my seven cousins would have come. But I was too ashamed. I didn't want him to know that I was a battered woman. I didn't want him to know that I had chosen somebody who would hit me. I didn't want him to know that I had said the wrong thing.

Janine Latus: [00:14:43](#)

So after three days, we went to the airport, and I walked in with my head down. I didn't want anybody to see me. And I sit down in the gate area, and I hear, "Janine Latus, to the counter." And so I go up to the gate attendant, and she moves from here to here. So now my boyfriend is behind me, and he can't see what's going on. And she puts her hand on mine, and she says,

"Sweetie, are you okay?" And I said, "Oh, this? I just skied into a tree." And she says, "No, we've all been there. I can help you. We can say that the plane is overbooked. We can say - security. I can get you on another flight." And for the second time I said, "No, I'm fine." And I've got to tell you, flying with your sinuses full of blood is incredibly painful. But as soon as I got home, I called Amy. Amy is five years younger than I am—hilarious, knows everything about every movie ever produced, just a walking box of trivia, really funny. And we talk all the time. We talk about nothing and we talk about everything. So I called her and she said, "How was your trip?" And I said, "Good, but I'm a crappy skier." And we talked about something else. And then finally, I said, "Hey, he hit me."

Janine Latus:

[00:16:11](#)

"He what?" "He hit me, pretty hard. I think my nose is broken and maybe some ribs." "Well, you broke up with him, didn't you?" "No, I mean, we were drinking. You know what his parents are like, you know what an idiot I can be." And my baby sister got really quiet. And then she said, "Are you going to wait until he kills you?" And so with Amy's help, I did break free. And she took my calls at ten o'clock at night and five o'clock in the morning and three in the afternoon, sobbing, snotty, scared. She took my calls over and over and over again. And with Amy's help, I broke free. But I also had help from someone else. Because see, I couldn't go to the hospital. I couldn't go to the hospital because I've worked at the hospital. And if I went to the hospital, people would say, "Nobody ever deserves to get hit."

Janine Latus:

[00:17:09](#)

And they'd say, "I wonder what she did to deserve it." But I also couldn't go to the hospital because my boyfriend worked at the hospital. He was a medical student. And if I told on him, he would lose his job. And did he deserve to lose his job just because I said the wrong thing? So I called this guy from my softball team. When you work in a hospital, your softball team pretty much has a whole bunch of medical health care professionals on it. And this guy is an emergency medicine doctor, and he comes over and he goes, "Ooh, yeah, your nose is broken and probably three ribs." And he came back another day and he brought me a can of Campbell's chicken noodle soup and some flowers. And we fell in love, even though he was married, and he left his wife for me. And we were so happy.

Janine Latus:

[00:18:06](#)

We were so happy. We did so many fun things together. We were madly in love. And like, so madly in love that actually, you know, he loved me so much that when I would talk to another man, it scared him. And so I learned not to talk to other men. And then, "Your girlfriends? They're a bunch of man-haters. And family? We're family now." Now you all know this, but your

partner is supposed to help you blossom into the fullest version of yourself, right? They're supposed to ask, "What are your hopes? What are your needs? How can I help you?" They're not supposed to make your life small. They're not supposed to make you live in fear.

Janine Latus:

[00:18:54](#)

Now, one of the things you all are being deprived of, because this is remote, is what would be obvious, which is that I have gorgeous legs. That's right. I have gorgeous legs. "And they would look better in a shorter skirt and maybe a shorter skirt and maybe a shorter skirt, and maybe, maybe spike heels, and maybe a push-up bra. And maybe if you go everywhere dressed like that, and you're with me—Oh my gosh, you know, who am I, if you look like that?" Right? Oh, it made him so happy. But then, you know, when you go into the hardware store dressed like that, the helpful hardware man is a very helpful hardware man. He's very helpful. And then you're up all night with that finger, that finger, that finger jabbing you in the chest. "Did you give him your phone number?"

Janine Latus:

[00:19:43](#)

Did you go out and hide out in the lumberyard?" I remember one time we were at a restaurant and I saw across the restaurant this man that I had met at the gym. I went to the gym for a couple of hours every day because my husband weighed me in every morning, because he knew that it mattered so much to me to stay a size two that he would help me by weighing me in every morning. But here's this guy, this guy I know from the gym, and I'm sending him brainwaves, "Don't talk to me. Don't talk to me. Don't talk to me." And of course, being a normal person, he comes over and he talks to me and he says something like, "You're going to eat all that? Wow, tubbo." Basic, you know, gym trash talk. And when he left, my husband said to me, "You're gonna eat all that?"

Janine Latus:

[00:20:32](#)

Oh, tubbo, tubbo. So, you guys do it in a sauna? Do you guys do it in the locker room? Do you just do it right out in the weight room?" It didn't matter where I went, I was doing something wrong. But there were also other times. Because after you fight, you're at the pit, but you can climb right back up to that mountain—that mountain of makeup sex and meals out and trips and gifts and holidays with the children and beautiful, happy times. Right? It's like this. Think of, think of your dream home. Okay. Think of your dream home. And you are walking through your dream home, and two days a week, somebody steps out and punches you in the gut. You don't know which two days it'll be. But hey, you had five good days, right? That's what it's like to be in an abusive relationship.

Janine Latus: [00:21:25](#) You never know when it's going to happen. I remember one time, my husband and I had been playing roll around in the afternoon, and then he was going to go to work. And so he's going down the hallway to the garage for his car. And I go to the front door to wave goodbye. And I see him pull out and then I see his red sports car stop, and he fishtails up the driveway, the way he does when he's angry. And I know he's coming through that door and I know I've done something wrong and I don't know what I've done yet, but I start getting smaller immediately. And he storms in and he rips open the front door and he says, "Who sent them?" And there on the stoop is an orange glass vase with a sleeve of yellow grocery-store roses in it. And he starts pawing through the flowers, looking for a card, "Who sent it, who sent it, who sent it." And I'm thinking, "Did I talk to somebody at the gym? Did I, did I, you know, say something to one of the little league parents? Like who has sent me flowers? What did I do wrong?" And my husband is yelling at me and yelling at me and yelling at me. And then he says, "You made me late for work. Call them and tell them it's your fault."

Janine Latus: [00:22:36](#) And so I do. I call them and I say I ran out of gas and he had come to save me. I lie, because should he lose his job just because I made him mad? A couple of weeks later, I was talking to our friends, John and Jane. Our friends, both of our friends, John and Jane, and they've just gotten married. And John says to me, "Hey, did you get that vase we put on your porch? We found it when we were combining houses and we thought you'd like it." And in a moment of weakness, I told. I told how I was up all night, how his fist hovered over my face, how he told me I wasn't worth it. And when he started to cry, I said, "Oh, no, I'm sorry. I'm exaggerating. I'm overreacting. It wasn't that bad." I lied again.

Janine Latus: [00:23:38](#) Now at about that time, my sister Amy had met her cowboy. He's got a cowboy hat and rodeo belt buckle, cowboy boots, big gold chain around his neck with a cross on it. And my sister Amy had been so obese that walking up a flight of stairs would have winded her. But in the preceding years, she had lost eighty-five pounds. And then she led the hike that this picture is from. She led the hike up the mountain, and she'd gotten her employer at Kimberly-Clark corporation to move her job from Atlanta to Knoxville, Tennessee, so that she could go to graduate school in religious studies. And she had called us and said, "Hey, would you sign for a mortgage for me?" And we said we would. And then she qualified by herself. So she's got—her health is better. She's got a new job.



Janine Latus: [00:24:30](#) She's going to grad school. She's got her own place. And now she's got her cowboy. And he leaves her love notes. And Amy hasn't had very many love notes. And at night they like to sit on the couch and watch movies together. So Amy's bought this big-screen TV and all these surround speakers and the speaker wire just kind of—she kind of tucked it up against the edges of the room. And then in the morning she says they would set the alarm for thirty minutes early so that they could snuggle before she went to work. And I heard her say it. "Before you go to work? Doesn't he go to work?" "Well, he has priors, but nothing bad. I mean, there was a time he test drove a pickup truck and forgot to bring it back." And there were a couple of checks written on other people's accounts.

Janine Latus: [00:25:21](#) And there were at least two DUIs, maybe three. In all, he had been a guest of the state three different times. But he'd never hurt anybody. And Amy was happy. Well then there was a time my mom called and he answered and my mom said, "Is Amy there?" And he said, "No, I chopped her up and buried her in the backyard. Ha! She's at the grocery store." And we're on the phone. Bad sense of humor, dangerous guy, bad sense of humor, dangerous guy, right? Because we make jokes like that all the time in our culture, right? I'm going to throat punch you. You take the last bagel and somebody goes like this, you know, "Oh, I'm going to get you. I ought to smack you." It's normal in our language. And Amy was happy. And the other thing was, Amy had had cancer. And when she had cancer, she called us and we came. We came and came and came.

Janine Latus: [00:26:15](#) I was there from Thursday to Sunday. And then my brother got there from Monday to Wednesday. We were there until she finally said, "Please stop coming." So we knew that Amy knew that if she called us, we would have come. And besides, Amy was happy. About that same time, I got invited back to my alma mater. I am a graduate of the Missouri School of Journalism, which apparently nobody realizes is actually one of the best schools of journalism in the United States, even though it's in the middle of a soybean field. So I was invited back to speak and it was a fairly big deal, kind of prestigious. And we were speaking—there were four of us—we were speaking on being freelance writers. And there was this man I knew. And there was this woman and there was me. And then there was this man I didn't know, and this whole auditorium full of students. And we're telling stories, you know from my introduction that I was writing for the in-flights,

Janine Latus: [00:27:10](#) I was writing for *Oprah*, I was writing for *Fitness and Parents*, and we had all these adventures. And when we were done

telling all these stories, the students stormed the stage, and I was levitating. I was levitating. I went home and I said to my husband, "Oh my God, I was funny. They want to be me when they grow up." And he said, "You met a man." And I realized, "Oh my God, I did meet a man. I met this man right over here. And he was good-looking, age appropriate, and he wasn't wearing a wedding ring." And I had noticed that he wasn't wearing a wedding ring. And therefore I had cheated. Followed immediately by, "Oh my God, you're crazy. You have let all of that messaging get into your head and you're not okay anymore. You need out." And so I called Amy, and Amy said, "I've been telling you that for years."

Janine Latus:

[00:28:12](#)

And I said, "I know Amy, but now I'm ready. I'm ready now." And with Amy's help, I got out. And she took my calls at ten at night and six in the morning and three in the afternoon. And on May 4th, 2002, my husband moved out. I had a three-year-old, I had a huge house, I'm self-employed. But I'm free—terrified, but free. Two months later, so Fourth of July, and I call Amy up and I'm like, "Hey, what are you doing?" And she says, "Oh, I'm planting flowers." At her new house, and we're like, "Ooh, that is really cool." And then she was baking bread in the bread maker that I got her when she had cancer. Because when they did the treatments, her mouth got so raw that warm bread was one of the few things she could eat. So she's planting flowers and she's baking bread and I say to her, "So are you going to go to fireworks tonight?" And she says, "We're going to make our own fireworks." And we both laugh. And I say, "I love you." And she says, "I love you too."

Janine Latus:

[00:29:20](#)

Four days later, my big sister called, "Have you heard from Amy?" "No. Why? What's up?" "Her boss called. Amy hasn't been to work in four days." "That bastard killed her." And my sister said, "I know, but we can't think that yet because if we think it, it might be true and it's not true. Amy's car is gone. Amy's car is gone. She is going to be here. She's going to be here." And so we're on the phone, "Mom, is she there? Jane, is she there?" We're all talking, calling back and forth, calling her best friends, calling grandma. And then it gets to the point where she should have been here by now. So then we decide she's been in a car accident. She's been in a car accident and she has amnesia, and we will find her and we will save her. And then they find her car.

Janine Latus:

[00:30:13](#)

And then they find a letter taped to the inside of her desk drawer at work. And it reads, "If I am missing or dead, pick up Ron Ball." It lists the debts. It describes their fights. And it includes the line, "I hope someday to find this and think it's

funny. But if I don't, don't let him get away with it." It was dated ten weeks before we found it. For ten weeks, I'd been talking about my divorce. For ten weeks, we talked about children and movies and music and politics. For ten weeks, she was scared. And for ten weeks, she didn't tell me or mom or our other siblings or her friends or her coworkers. She didn't tell anybody. We all flew into Knoxville. Helicopters went up, search dogs went out, the Kimberly-Clark corporation let her coworkers off work and they plastered the town with posters, "Have you seen Amy? Have you seen Amy? Have you seen Amy?" Until my mom had to pull her own baby's face out of the way to go in and get a sandwich. The big cyclops eye of the TV cameras followed us everywhere.

Janine Latus:

[00:31:28](#)

And in the meantime, I got a phone call from my husband, "I know you think what you're doing is important, but you have to come take care of this kid." And he was right. I did. She's three. I have to go home and I have to keep my business going or I'm not going to be able to pay for my house. So I had to leave. I went back home and for weeks, the one person I wanted to call wasn't answering the phone. It was a Monday when my mom called. They found Amy. And I knew that they hadn't found my sister with the big laugh and the stupid jokes. What they had found was a body wrapped in a painter's tarp, tied with speaker wire, and buried at a construction site. She'd been underground so long that they had to use dental records to identify her. We all flew back to Knoxville. And I remember exactly where we were when our favorite detective pulled up in that big black Crown Vic, and he opened the door and he walked in and he said, "Mom, it's Amy."

Janine Latus:

[00:32:38](#)

And then he held her while she cried. I didn't save Amy. So I wrote my book to save other Amys. I wrote it because of an inscription at the Holocaust museum, "Thou shalt not be a victim, thou shalt not be a perpetrator, but, above all, thou shalt not be a bystander." I wrote it because of a quote attributed to Harriet Tubman, "I saved a thousand slaves. I could have saved a thousand more if they had known they were slaves." I wrote it because of the idea that what happens in the home stays in the home—that got my sister killed. The idea that a child sexual abuse victim should stay silent—that got my sister killed. All of these ideas that we should keep silent as victims—that got my sister killed. You know, in the 1980s, people were dying of AIDS and their family members were lying. They were calling it cancer. They were saying natural causes. And then a man named Randy Shilts wrote the book *And the Band Played On*. And pretty soon parents were marching in the streets, demanding that our society do something about this thing that

is killing our children. I wrote *If I Am Missing or Dead* for that exact same reason—because we can't keep silent. We absolutely need to talk.

Janine Latus:

[00:34:05](#)

So I'm going to go back to our power and control wheel, but just one slice at a time. "You call yourself a man? You're fat. You're stupid. You're ugly. I didn't say that. If you leave me, I'm going to kill myself. Oh, leave me. I'm going to shoot the dog. Oh, if you leave me, you'll never see your children again. Oh, if you leave me, I'll take every dime. I didn't, I didn't say that. No, you're making that up. That was a joke." None of those things leaves a bruise, but they sure leave scars. Financial abuse. You're supposed to be pulling the cart together. So if the wage-earning spouse withholds money to the non-wage-earning or low-wage-earning partner, then that's control. That's coercive control. But if the non-wage-earner runs up so much debt that the wage-earner has to do things that person doesn't want to do, that's coercive control. When somebody takes your uniform and puts it out front and hits it with some lighter fluid and drops a match on it so you can't go to work, that's coercive control. When they hide the car keys so you can't go to work. When they don't come home to watch the kids in time for you to go work and therefore you can't work, and therefore you are financially dependent, and therefore you cannot break free. All of that is coercive control.

Janine Latus:

[00:35:50](#)

We have all been drilled on this one. Not when your partner's drunk, not when your partner's asleep, but also no coercion. "I know you don't like this, but I want to do it. I know it hurts, but come on, for me. I know you said no, but I want to. Oh, you want to say no? Oh, I see." My husband used to say, "Well, if you don't want to have sex, why didn't you just say that," when I would come down dressed comfortably. All of that is coercive control. And then we know this one—no one should punch, slap, kick, stab, shoot us. Do you know which of these is the most likely to lead to murder? As in, if somebody does this, it's far more likely they are actually going to follow through and kill you. The answer of course is choking. The van-life woman, Gabby Petito, she was strangled. My sister, she was strangled.

Janine Latus:

[00:36:58](#)

So I'm going to open to Q and A, but I want you to see on this slide that my email address is there. You are welcome to send me any questions that you don't want to ask in front of your peers or a question we don't get to or a question you think of a month from now, or send me somebody else who you feel like needs to talk to me. I always answer my emails. And if you don't get my email address off of this slide, I am super easy to Google. And again, I always answer emails. And I am going to answer the

first question before it's asked. Okay. First question everybody always asks is what happened to the guy. The guy tried to spit on the Knox County sheriff and escaped by bicycle. That did not go well for him. For one thing, it annoyed the detectives so much that they put even more resources onto the case, but also the Kimberly-Clark corporation had put out a reward for any information to find him.

Janine Latus:

[00:38:01](#)

The murderer was on his way to his brother's place up in Montana. The brother had already called for the reward. U.S. Marshals, guns drawn, got onto a bus down in Arkansas. They dragged the murderer off. They held him in an un-air-conditioned jail for three days in summer in Arkansas. And then they sent him up to Knoxville. In Knoxville, he pled guilty to second-degree murder. Had he shot or stabbed her, he could have gotten away with manslaughter because you can do those in the heat of the moment. But to hold somebody's throat shut takes eight or nine minutes, which is plenty of time to reconsider. Just think about the police officer kneeling on somebody's neck for eight or nine minutes. Think about how long the cruelty lasts and how long that terror lasts. That's how my sister's life ended. So he got eighteen years for second-degree, plus two years for abusive corpse.

Janine Latus:

[00:39:08](#)

And he was serving 85% of that. And then he was up for parole. Now, while he was in prison, he got a contraband phone and he had contacted a woman whom he had known in junior high. And they had started a prison romance. That woman's sister wrote to me. And she said, "Will your family please testify against him getting out early. Please help me save my sister." Nothing's going to get us in a car faster than "please help me save my sister." And so we all drove to the middle-of-nowhere, Tennessee, where the prison was. And my mom was using a walker at the time and she had to lift it over the gate and there's concertina wire overhead. And her wheels are squeaking down these cinderblock hallways. And we get into the space where we're going to wait and there's this big plate glass window into their activity room. And I look out the window and he's right there. And I don't know if he can see me, but I can certainly see him. We succeeded in keeping him in prison for another year, but unfortunately, the girlfriend stayed with him, and they now live in a single wide in Mississippi. Now, what questions do you have?

Janine Latus:

[00:40:26](#)

David, Alex, or Shirley. Are you going to ask them for me?

Host: [00:40:32](#) Absolutely. Janine, if you go to the presenter tab, you'll see there are a few there already, if that's okay. Or if you'd prefer, I could just ask them to you.

Janine Latus: [00:40:41](#) Could you just ask them to me because otherwise I'm going to have to find that and read them aloud.

Host: [00:40:46](#) Sure. How do, folks are asking, how do I help a friend or a colleague if I believe they're in an abusive relationship?

Janine Latus: [00:40:57](#) And that's one of my favorite questions. So first of all, bear witness. Bear witness. Say to the person, "That looked like it hurt your feelings," or, "I saw her grab you and drag you out of the party." Or "Why do you have a bruise?" Because all of those ways of you validating to the person that this is really abusive behavior and that they don't deserve it—those are an excellent start. Now the other person may resist it, but they still heard it. And the number one thing you don't do is this. "If you're going to stay with that idiot, I'm"—if you say, "I'm out of here," if you tough love it, you have participated in the isolation. You have given that person one fewer friend to rely on. So instead say, "Wow, that sucks. What can I do for you? Because I know that you have the wisdom to do what's best for yourself.

Janine Latus: [00:41:59](#) I know you have the wisdom to do what's best for your children. So if you stay, I'm here, and here are some resources. And if you get out, I'm here, and here are some resources." Do not abandon the person. And one of the best resources is that darn Power and Control Wheel. If you go old-school and print it out, and then they just take a highlighter and mark everything that's happening. You know, the first time I saw it, I was like, "Well, that's normal, that's normal. Oh, crap." When you see it cumulatively like that, it's far easier to understand that you are in an abusive relationship. So bear witness, don't abandon, help them find resources that will help them see that they're in an abusive relationship. Because when you're in it, it's really easy to believe the manipulator who's telling you that you're unworthy, that you're unlovable, that you'll be alone for the rest of your life if you break up with them. It's easy to believe those things. And you, as an outsider, can help them find the resources to realize that they get to have a healthy and happy life afterward.

Host: [00:43:10](#) And Janine, and so that strikes me as getting it—the first part of it, you've been discussing, identifying the unhealthy or abusive relationships. But if we do that or if a person identifies that and gets out of it—I mean, that's a positive. But I think there's a second half where then they have to move on with their life.

And it seems to me that they would require support there as well. So how, you know, some suggestions for helping someone that's left that abusive relationship, moving on, and then how do they trust again in future relationships?

Janine Latus: [00:43:47](#)

Okay. So I'll start from the end. The best way to trust in future relationships is to not have one for a little while and make sure that you're healthy and whole by yourself, because relationships require compromise. And if you come into it healthy and your partner comes into it healthy, then you can lean toward each other. But if you come into it feeling like you're undeserving and they dominate, then you're not going to be able to trust that person again. You have to be able to be alone in order to be able to walk out if you need to. If you know you can walk out, you're in a far better negotiating position in a relationship. You're going to be much quicker to recognize negative behaviors and say, "Nope, that is unacceptable to me." If you can walk, that's a big one. To help somebody, first of all, you all have resources on your bases and in your communities that you can turn to, including the chaplain and family services.

Janine Latus: [00:44:42](#)

And I don't know what it's called within your particular base. And then continuing to be there for them and to do stupid things like sending them a text that says, "You're beautiful," or sending them a bowl of soup. Doing something kind so that they realize that they're not going to be alone, that they've got a team helping them as they're moving through that. And I don't know what the Army has in place as far as helping people financially, if they need to break free. That's something you might have to answer.

Host: [00:45:19](#)

Thanks, Janine. We've been talking about victims, and I think sometimes—I don't, I don't know, but it seems that sometimes that's easier to identify—someone that's being victimized or I don't know if it's easier to make them see it or not . . . but what about if you see someone or know someone that's an abuser. How about approaching someone that's an abuser and getting them to see and acknowledge what they're doing?

Janine Latus: [00:45:46](#)

Statistically, that's really difficult. Often they believe they're modeling behaviors. This is what society has said to them that, "I am the dominant one and you are beneath me and I am the head and you are not the head. And you're supposed to obey me." Or maybe they've seen modeled in their family of origin that one parent is dominant and the other one is submissive or that one is always angry or always alienated. And so they think that this is what love looks like. And so approaching somebody who is an abuser is really hard. It requires establishing a lot of

trust so that the person can hear you. Even when I speak, I'll get audiences and we're like this, because they don't want to hear me. And so when you come to somebody, you have to establish trust and friendship and find a way to introduce it. And sometimes maybe doing it third-party—"Hey, I read this essay I thought you'd like. Hey, I read this book I thought you would like." Because some people are abusers and they don't know they're abusers and gently telling them that that behavior is not healthy for anybody, for your partner, for yourself, or for maybe any children involved, is at least a way to start.

Host: [00:47:09](#) Rebecca mentioned a comment here that she'd heard about a business card for victims—it's Betty from Betty's Cakes and a number that you can call if you are being abused, but just so that the abuser doesn't see it. And I've seen some public service announcements about calling 911 and asking to order a pizza, and then they walk you through a series of questions. Are you aware or familiar with any other, similar ideas that are out there or that people can use?

Janine Latus: [00:47:44](#) No. And those are all at the beginning stages. So you hand it to the bartender and the bartender has no idea what you're talking about. Plus you've got to have a bartender who actually cares enough to do something about it. So there are grassroots efforts to find ways to secretly indicate it. For a long time, I had business cards that looked like the cover of my book but had the domestic violence hotline number on the back so that anybody who had carried it could kind of pretend that the only reason they had it is somebody had recommended a book. But in the meantime, they always had that number on them. When you are the friend on the periphery, or family member or employer or coworker who is helping, providing that phone number in a way that the person can actually carry it is another way to help them.

Janine Latus: [00:48:35](#) It's hard to get out. The only way to get out is to decide to get out and then take very careful steps. You all know about an emergency bag, right? That's the bag you keep packed that has a spare set of car keys, some cash, a burner phone, diapers, medications, whatever you would have to have that you can either keep in the car or pick up on your way out to the car as you're trying to escape, because the most dangerous time is when you are trying to leave. And if you're running around the house, trying to get the baby's formula and your own family jewelry and your passport, all that time, the thing is whipping up and the danger is getting higher and higher. You need that bag. You need to be able to walk out the door. Leaving takes time. My sister was trying to break up with this guy because she



found out he had another girlfriend and he was just using her for a place to stay and free food and all the money she invested in his business. So, she was trying to break up with him, and he got angry and he killed her.

Host: [00:49:45](#) What would you say to someone that acknowledges the abuse that they're in an unhealthy relationship, but then says, "I have to stay there for the kids." They have children. How would you approach that? And what would you, how would you advise them?

Janine Latus: [00:50:02](#) You know, we say that, "I'm going to stay together for the kids." But they're copying us. I mean, everything we do, the religion we choose, the sports teams we follow. My daughter, she puts ketchup on her mac and cheese—which is an abomination—but she does it because I do it. And if you had your little pumpkin in a relationship and she or he was being treated the way one of you treats the other one, and your first thought is, "You're going to have to come through me to do it," then stop showing your child that that's what love looks like. It's far better to have two healthy households and the possibility of two loving relationships to model than teaching your child to put up with something that's occurring in your relationship. Don't stay together for the kids. Break up for the kids if it's an abusive relationship.

Host: [00:51:07](#) So some of the time, I mean, I don't know any of the statistics or anything . . . but, how do you feel—you're in this space a lot, you deal with this a lot—do you have some thoughts on how the justice system, how they believe or don't believe victims, how abusers are—is there justice? Do you have some thoughts on that and that maybe there's a necessary overhaul in the systems? Or just interested in your thoughts or insights into that.

Janine Latus: [00:51:43](#) Yeah, we've got a terrible system. I mean, just terrible. The disbelief, all the way from the initial 911 call all the way through the judicial system, if it goes to a judicial system, is just terrible. That the victim is always overreacting or trying to get him in trouble for some reason or get her in trouble for some reason. And too often, they arrest the wrong person, and then it goes to court and it's "he said, she said," and maybe the only witness is a child. So, are you going to put the child on the stand to testify against one of the parents? It's super, super fraught. And the system is set up to try to keep the family together rather than allow the people to go their separate ways. So I don't have any solutions. I see the family justice centers as incredibly helpful.

Janine Latus: [00:52:35](#) They are—I think the last time I did a speech for one of them—there were like 13 around the country. And they're one location that has the prosecutor, the sheriff, the detective, the shelter, daycare, maybe a jobs training, someplace to stay. So instead of the victim getting in the car, carrying, or getting on the bus, carrying the kids to go to this office and then this office and then this office, and the prosecutor never talking to the detective—everybody's all in one place. They work as a team to help the victim. And that has been incredibly helpful cross-country where it's been developed. It's funny. There was one that was in an abandoned mall. Think of all those rooms that can be used for something. And there was one that was in what had been a former school. So people are repurposing buildings to make them these hubs of services that violence survivors need.

Host: [00:53:35](#) Janine, I just want—because you can't see them—I just want to share a couple of the comments that some of the participants are saying, and just talking about what you were saying, "Don't stay together just for the kids." And one of the participants commented that she had tried to stay for her son—she didn't want to become a single mother, but got over it quickly when her son started repeating things that his dad was saying. So I think that generational—do you see some things generational-wise that need to be broken or reasons to get out?

Janine Latus: [00:54:10](#) Yep. That idea that our kids keep copying us, shows us that we need to get out. We also need to do something about the domination of predator and prey in our culture, as far as men and women in music, videos, games, movies, even the cute rom-coms are like, "He asks her out and she says no, and he keeps asking her and asking her and asking her until she realized that she meant yes, all along." That just completely takes away the woman's power, even in the cute rom-coms. So, there's a lot we need to do about re-messaging, both within the family and within our culture.

Host: [00:54:52](#) And speaking of men and women, is it primarily men or is it always men or can women be abusers as well?

Janine Latus: [00:55:01](#) So when we look at the statistics on physical damage, it's almost always male on female. Females can physically harm men, but it's harder and it happens more rarely. But when it comes to manipulation, to emotional abuse, to controlling somebody through finances or through sexual behavior or through verbal assaults, women are at least as guilty as men. And yet our system is set up that men can't ask for help. Men can't ask, can't go to somebody and say, "I feel like I'm being abused." They just

are not allowed that emotion, that ability to be vulnerable that way. And it happens also in same-sex couples. People think that it wouldn't because there's not the societal position of dominance, one over the other, but it does. It depends entirely on the upbringing and what each of the security and insecurities that both of these parties bring to the relationship. And honestly, sometimes gay men are even more vulnerable because they have multiple secrets to keep, and therefore they're left alone to deal with this. Obviously that's getting better, but it's still a challenge.

Host: [00:56:24](#) Folks, I think we've got time for one or two more questions. And another comment, and maybe you could offer some insights here as well. Someone shared that when they're dealing with some of their clients, she would ask the question, "If this relationship wouldn't be good enough for your daughter or mother, why is it good enough for you?" And Janine, any thoughts on the mindset that, yeah, we wouldn't have our daughter in that, or we wouldn't allow our mom to go through that, but we would allow ourselves to go through that.

Janine Latus: [00:56:55](#) Yeah. I'm sure you all have heard the question, "Can a fish see water?" Like, I didn't know I was in an abusive relationship until I knew. You can't—it's just you believe that you deserve it. And that you asked for it, that there's so much that you've done. And so when you're the one being abused, there are the two prongs. One is you're ashamed and you don't want to tell anybody. And the other is, you honestly believe you deserve it. But when it's external, when it's your sister or your mother or your daughter, you're like, "Nope, that's a hundred percent unacceptable." And honestly, one of the things that I tell people to do is to write about their own story. Because when you look at it on the page, you can see it. You can see it as if it were a character in the book, and you can see cumulatively that this person doesn't deserve that behavior. I used to keep these pro's and con's lists on staying married: "Well, today he didn't yell at me." Write it down and then you'll be able to recognize it more because it's as if it's happening to somebody else and you can see it more clearly.

Host: [00:58:04](#) Oh, that's a great technique, Janine. Thank you very much for sharing that, and from a writer. Exactly. You can see it on the page. That's very, it's a very great idea. Okay, I think we've got one more—we've got time for one more question. And I think you've touched on this a little bit, but someone's asked, "How can we address the cultural and religious beliefs that seem to be intentionally or even unintentionally facilitating these abusive relationships?"

Janine Latus: [00:58:36](#) Right. Yeah, because we've got so many religions in which men are in the positions of power and women are in the positions of caretaker. Think of priests and nuns, for example. But in many, many religions, the people who are in power are male. And we keep calling the deity a "he," which kind of makes it seem like men are godlike and women are not. And all of those things play into it—the idea that you're supposed to cleave unto, and that the man is the head of the family within the church—and all of those ideas help perpetuate this idea. And then too often you go to a pastor or a preacher or a chaplain or whatever, and they say, "Well, you just need to do your wifely duty and make it work." And they're getting better. They're getting a lot better at actually realizing that both parties get to have a healthy life. But yeah, generationally, churches have been a bad place to turn to for help. Sorry for all the people who have had success getting help within a church. I'm sure that was offensive, and I apologize for that part.

Host: [00:59:47](#) Go ahead, Janine.

Janine Latus: [00:59:50](#) That's okay. Since we are essentially out of time, I do want to end on a little parable that you probably have heard. Okay. So I have on my wall a cartoon of Happy and Crabby. It's by a guy named Andy Singer. And Happy and Crabby are walking on the beach, and there's been this big storm, so there's flotsam and jetsam all over the beach. And Happy sees a starfish, and she bends down, she picks it up, and she frisbees it out into the ocean. And they walk a little farther, and she sees another one and she bends down and she picks it up and she throws it into the ocean. And they walk a little bit farther, and she sees a third one and she bends down to pick it up. And Crabby says, "What are you doing? You'll never save all of them." And she tosses it into the ocean and she says, "I saved that one." You know with the work you all are doing on your bases, that you're saving people. So use what you learned today and go save somebody else. Thank you so much for your time and attention.

Host: [01:00:52](#) Janine, thank you. Thank you so much. And thank you for sharing so much of yourself and so much of your family. Thank you for that. It's a powerful narrative. And you can tell by the comments and I'll share those with you later, you can see some of the people in the audience really relating to it. So thank you very much for that. And thank you to all of you for participating in this morning, for most of you this morning, on the webinar. Remember we're going to do this again at 1400 hours eastern. So if you found this beneficial, or if you'd like to listen again, or you know someone, friends, family, colleagues, that could really gain something from listening to Janine's, and her family's,

story, please share the link. It's open to all; no registration is necessary. But again, thank you all very much for joining this first edition of the webinar.

Host: [01:01:46](#) As you can see on the screen, there's our survey slide. If you could go ahead and fill out that survey, that would be much appreciated. That's how we get great presenters, like Janine, and great topics that we've got. And speaking of great topics and great presenters, next month we're going to have Colonel Eric Kreitz from the 1st Special Operations Command. And he is a recovering alcoholic and still having a successful Army career and serving at very senior levels. And his story, like Janine's, is also very powerful and a testament to resilience. So you'll want to join us there. And then in December, we'll be hearing from the SHARP Academy out at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. So please give us some feedback. If there's someone you'd like to hear, a topic you'd like discussed, please put that in the survey. The surveys are read by the ARD leadership, and that's how we move forward with each month's webinars.

Host: [01:02:43](#) Also, for those of you that are SARCs or VAs, or are maintaining your certification through NOVA, this webinar was approved for one CEU, a live CEU hour, as part of your thirty-two hours required every two years. To get credit for attending this webinar, please download the ARD, the survey slide, which is in the files box to your left, update your training annotated on your DD 2950-1, and have your SARC sign off on it. If you are the SARC, go ahead and have your commander or supervisor sign off on it. And don't forget to update your training records in DSAID as necessary. Thank you again for joining today's webinar. Remember we've got the ARD website, Janine's website. She's graciously agreed to give the slides out. You can download those in the files box as well, and as always, our main on board to answer any administrative questions or anything else that you have; you can type them in the chat box. But thank you again for your time.

Host: [01:03:59](#) Please share for this afternoon. And for those of you that did not receive a direct invitation to the webinar, you can sign up to receive invites to ARD events. You can receive our bimonthly newsletter. You can receive a media update, a weekly media update, on news and information relevant to the areas that ARD covers down on for the Army, by going to the ARD website and signing up where you can maintain your own subscription. So thank you again for joining us, and I will remain on board for about fifteen minutes to answer any questions. Thank you again. Hope to see you next month.