

## **If I Am Missing or Dead: a sister's story.**

**Guest lecture: Janine Latus**

### **Abstract**

Author Janine Latus will talk about an emotionally and physically abusive relationship from the inside, and what it's like to survive her sister's murder. She'll talk about how you can recognize abuse in your own and others' relationships, and how you can intervene.

Latus is the author of *If I Am Missing or Dead: a sister's story of love, murder and liberation*, an international bestseller that follows two sisters, both of whom grow up to choose angry and controlling men. One breaks free and thrives, the other is murdered by her boyfriend.

*Missing or Dead* spent time on the bestseller lists in New York, London and Toronto. It has been translated so far into six languages. The starred review in *Publisher's Weekly* ended, "Unforgettable, unsentimental and profoundly affecting, Latus's book resonates long after the final page is turned." *People* magazine said, "Latus's book unfolds like a gripping novel, getting at the brutal heart of darkness that underscores domestic violence. She writes gorgeous prose, but her real gift is bravery." The starred review in *Kirkus* read, "Latus writes here to save the lives of women like her sister and herself, so desperate for love that they'll pay any price for it. An honest, unsparing look at the deadly erosion of self-worth."

Recommended Reading: *If I Am Missing or Dead: a sister's story of love, murder and liberation* by Janine Latus. (Simon & Schuster 2007)

### **Domestic Violence: Myths and Realities**

**Myth: When a couple is having a domestic violence problem, it is just that they have a bad relationship. Often, it's poor communication that is the problem.**

Fact: Bad relationships do not result in or cause domestic violence. The idea that bad relationships cause violence in the home is one of the most common, and dangerous, wrong ideas about domestic violence. First, it encourages all parties involved - especially the victim- to minimize the seriousness of the problem and focus their energies on "improving the relationship" in the wrong hope that this will stop the violence. It also allows the abuser to blame the bad relationship and the violence on the victim, rather than accepting responsibility.

More importantly, improving the relationship is not likely by itself to end the violence. Violence is learned behavior. Many couples have had bad relationships yet never become violent. Many batterers are violent in every one of their relationships, whether they

consider them bad or good. The violent individual is the sole cause of the violence, and neither the partner nor their relationship should be held responsible.

**Myth: Most domestic violence incidents are caused by alcohol or drug abuse.**

Fact: Many people have alcohol and/or drug problems but are not violent, and many batterers are not substance abusers. How people behave when they use alcohol or drugs depends on a combination of personal, social, physical and emotional factors. And like many other types of behavior, alcohol or drug-affected behavior patterns are culturally learned.

It is often easier to blame alcohol or drugs than to admit that you or your partner is violent even when sober. Episodes of problem drinking and incidents of domestic violence often occur separately and must be treated as two distinct issues. Neither alcoholism nor drugs can explain or excuse domestic violence.

**Myth: Domestic violence is often triggered by stress, for example, the loss of a job or some financial or marital problem.**

Fact: Daily life is full of stress associated with money and work, our families and other personal relationships. Everyone experiences stress, and everyone responds to it differently.

Violence is a specific learned and chosen response to stress, whether real or imagined. Certainly, high general levels of domestic violence can be related to social problems such as unemployment, however, other reactions to such situations are equally possible.

**Myth: Most domestic violence occurs in lower class or minority communities.**

Fact: Domestic violence occurs at all levels of society, regardless of their social, economic, racial or cultural backgrounds.

Researchers and service providers have found, however, that economic and social factors can have a significant impact on how people respond to violent incidents and what kind of help they seek. People with money can usually afford private help — doctors, lawyers and counselors — while people with less money tend to call the police or other public agencies.

**Myth: The victim did something to provoke the violence.**

Fact: No one deserves to be beaten, battered, threatened or in any way victimized. Batterers will rarely admit that they are the cause of the problem. In fact, putting the blame for the violence on the victim is a way to control the victim and other people. Batterers will tell the victim, "You made me mad" or "You made me jealous" or will try to shift the burden by saying "Everyone acts like that." Most victims try to placate and

please their abusive partners in order to stop the violence. The batterer chooses to abuse, and bears full responsibility for the violence.

**Myth: Most batterers simply lose control during violent incidents and do not know what they're doing.**

Fact: If batterers were truly out of control, as many claim to be during violent incidents, there would be many more domestic violence murders. In fact, many batterers do "control" their violence, abusing their victims in less visible places on their bodies, such as under the hairline or on the torso. Furthermore, researchers have found that domestic violence often occurs in cycles, and every episode is preceded by a predictable, repeated pattern of behavior and decisions made by the batterer.

**Myth: Men are victims of domestic violence as often as women, even if they aren't reported.**

Fact: The bottom line is that domestic violence is a crime -- regardless of the gender of the abuser or the victim and regardless of whether it is a heterosexual or same-sex relationship. Studies show that 85% of victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) are women and 15% are men.

**Myth: Domestic violence is a less serious problem - less lethal - than "real" violence, like street crimes.**

Fact: It is a terrible and unrecognized fact that for many people, home is the least safe place. Domestic violence accounts for a significant proportion of all serious crimes - aggravated assault, rape and homicide. More women will be hurt in their home by someone they love than by a stranger.

*Excerpted from Jane Doe Inc., the Massachusetts Coalition Against Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence.*

Webpages:

<http://www.janinelatus.com/>

[www.stopnasili.cz](http://www.stopnasili.cz)

<http://nasili.unas.cz/>