

Episode 5: Madman in the Woods with Jamie Gehring

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What a timely conversation! Really loved talking to Jamie about her fascinating life and story.

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Nathan: OK, I have a question that might seem a little bit let's just say inconsiderate of in some sort, but did you ever like play 2 truths and a lie and use the fact that you knew Ted Kaczynski? Or was that ever like a, you know, like a game that you play in college when you're, like, meeting people? Did you ever be like, yeah, I grew up beside the Unabomber.

Jamie: So the answer to that is yes and. Was, you know, pretty early on like in my 20s when I would be at corporate events and there's always those weird Ice Breakers where people are like, exactly what you just said, like tell 2 truths and one lie. And I would play the game and then of course I would say, and I lived next. To the Unabomber. And nobody ever believed me. Not one time.

Nathan: Yeah, no, I figured that's how I figured that's how.

Jamie: It would go it was. It was the. Ultimate Ice breaker, though I do have. To say.

Nathan: Ohh yeah, no I think it would work every time you would you would win the game every single time and then you just have to answer about 50. Questions after that I'm sure it.

Jamie: Always derailed what the presenter was trying to do.

Nathan: All right, everyone. Thank you so much for tuning in. Again, this is get to frantic reads the podcast. It's a non fiction podcast hosted by me, Nathan Schurick this week. I have Jamie Gehring on the podcast to talk about her book Mad Man in the woods. Jamie Gehring is a Montana native who grew up sharing a backyard with Ted Kaczynski, the Manly, widely known as the. The bomber she is featured in Netflix's Unabomber. In his own words, where she discusses her family's role in Ted's capture, her native nonfiction debut, Madman in the woods, life next door to the Unabomber, has been covered in publications such as L New York, Post, Slate, A&E, True crime, Oxygen, True Crime, 528-O is that like a local? Cool. That's really cool.

Jamie: 5280 yeah, it's. It's actually a very cool publication.

Nathan: Nice and was even featured on last podcast on the left, which is one of my favorite podcast that I've ever listened to. So that is so cool. She recently shortlisted for True Crimes, Crime Crons True Crime Award for Best New True crime author. Other accolades include the 2022 Penn Craft Book Award. For literary excellence in

nonfiction slash memoir. And you now live in Colorado just a little bit away from your home in Lincoln, Mt. Just welcome to the show. This is so exciting. You reached out to me a little while ago to talk about the book, and I got to be honest. I just finished it this morning. I was I kind of just saved it for last minute. Because it's one of those books that you just get, like, very, very, like, obsessed with in some way. So I was just like, I was like, I had, like, 150 pages left this morning, and I was like, I woke up, went and grabbed some coffee. And I was like, I'm just gonna, like, sit for like, 2 hours and just, like, consume myself with the book. So thank you so much for coming on.

Jamie: Nathan, thank you so much for having me. And you know I've said this before, but you read so many books and so for you to choose mine, to sit down and read, especially almost in one sitting it is. Pretty incredible and very grateful.

Nathan: No, I'm so glad that I did. The book I'm going to read us a little introduction to the book and then we're going to kind of get talking with. Some of the questions that I have, we'll be talking about the book, but the writing process, the research, I kind of want to just cover all the bases that we can. So yeah, let me let me let people know exactly what this book is about. It's a haunting account of the 16 years when Jamie and her family live closer than anyone to Ted Kaczynski, the Unabomber. As a child in Lincoln, Mt and Jamie. And her family shared their land at their home and their dinner table with a hermit with a penchant for murder. This is so haunting, but they had no idea that the odd recluse living adjacent in an adjacent cabin with anything more than a disheveled. Man brought young Jamie painted rocks as a gift, coffee and a little mug. We'll get into that. Ted was simply Ted, and erratic behavior, surprised visits, chilling events while riding horses and helping her dad at the sawmill. Ted was Ted for decades, eluded the FBI in 17 years. While mailing explosives to strangers and earning him infamous title of the Unabomber. The book is an investigation of 25 years later, reclaiming the pieces of childhood and answering the questions. Why, how, and recalling how once innocent memories and odd circumstances became the less puzzling. In hindsight, Jamie, this is this was a wild ride of a book. This there were so many, so many conflicting things that I had as this book goes on. And I think one of the things that I really wanted to start this podcast with is talking about kind of Ted was your neighbor, which is a really, like, interesting perspective and one that is not often like. Talked about when we talk about true crime, it's often family members that write about, you know, the person that they knew beforehand. But when it comes to a neighbor, a neighbor is supposed to be, I think, like in. It's very essence, someone that's just like, oh, they're just, like, present in your life. They're not like super close, but they're just there and you were neighbors with one of the most famous. You know, figures not even a person, but just like a figure that was overlooking, like the Seventies, 80s and 90s of America. But you write with a lot of empathy towards him while also a very rigid sense of. Morality, I mean, there's a right and wrong to this issue, but there's also a you're trying to view him as someone complex and truly he is. I mean, that's been one of the key factors in. All the writing about him is Ted is a very. Conflicting person. I want to know kind of how was approaching this story with, like, an

empathetic lens. You know, because I have to think there was parts of it where you didn't want to do that. You know, like that you wouldn't wanted to write with fury and anger, but you bring a lot of human elements to this story. And I'm just curious what that writing process was like for you.

Jamie: First of all, thank you for recognizing that as someone who has read the book and it wasn't my initial intent, honestly to write the book in the way that it is as a braided memoir where. You're really as a reader. My hope is that you're along the journey with me in trying to understand this person and uncover not only you know my story, Ted story, how they intersect, but really the complete narrative and. That was. Really important to me to do the research and probably no, not probably why this book took me so long to write because you know, I wanted to tell the story from a very honest place and in order to do that, I had to talk, you know, to the people that surrounded. This person and try as much as you can to kind of crawl in his mind through his writings and again just really understand the full narrative and in order to do that, I had to be completely honest. About my own feelings towards him as a child and what his experience was like with his brother, for instance, and bits of kindness that he did show through his life, even in in the town of Lincoln. And obviously there were moments where I was like full of rage and anger. And that's part of it. That's in the book. But I just needed. To tell the whole story.

Nathan: Well, and part of telling that whole story, your book comes across as like a series of relationships that you have. With not only Ted kind of he's in, he's almost in the background of some parts of the story because it's a lot of a family memoir and even Ted's family. When you bring in your relationship with David and the correspondence that you guys have had over the years, but there's a large focus on your father too, which I have to imagine and you alluded to it in the book. But I have to imagine was just a probably one of the most difficult parts of writing this book was writing about your family. How was that kind of a different, you know, how did you approach that process differently from writing? Obviously, Ted is kind of the. Uh, the villain of the story. But telling your father's story and the research that you did into your own family, there's a lot of similar elements to the research process in that, but obviously completely emotionally different for you. What was, what did that feel like?

Jamie: Well, I have to be honest, I. Mean when? Even when. Writing about Ted's his If you read the book or if you know a bit about the story. He was hospitalized as an infant. and telling that story of his mother and finding her journal entries. And then, you know, feeling those emotions. As a mother myself, now, that was, like, surprisingly emotional for me. And then writing about my own family and I think. I was definitely very close to the story, obviously. But my father had passed away and I was experiencing grief from that. I lost my sister. And so the time that I spent writing, which you'll probably find as as a listener, as a reader, memoirs especially, who, you know, do explore. It's an incredibly difficult process. For the writer, but I think it adds to the beauty of the writing and really just like the true human raw emotion that has to be conveyed when you're writing a book. And so it was very difficult. To

research, to interview Max Knoll, FBI Agent Max Knoll, and hear about my. Father. But it was. Also really healing, and I think that also comes through, I mean there's so many different. Layers of this book, it's not just a story about the longest running domestic terrorist in United States history, although that's. A very important part. It also touches on our humanity and you know, our connection as humans. And I think that was all very important to the.

Nathan: Well, so much so much of true crime is either a completely like the author is completely vacant from a story where it's just kind of a biography, typically of a serial killer or something like that, or there's a lot of complaints that true crime authors can get too involved in the story where, you know, they're just an investigative journalist. And they get sucked up into the politics of the town or the histories and those types of things. You I think do it. You are. You get involved in the story, but it's because you were involved in the story. It's not just you are placing yourself in the midst of. You know, a phenomenon you were. You were there. You were present. And it the circumstances just evolved around you. And I found that just a really fascinating element of this story. I am curious if there was at any point that would. Did anyone warn you away from telling this story? I mean it's the one you've had to live with and one. Obviously that you've shared in a lot of different capacities, but was there any point where you weren't sure if this was the story for? You to tell absolutely.

Jamie: And I actually wrestled with that quite often while writing this story. It was always. Well, since Kaczynski's harassed when I was 16. It was a story that I wanted to tell it. It was I. I knew, and my high school friends will joke when they talk about it. Like you always said you were going to write this book and it took me a very long time to decide to write it. And honestly, it started as. A book of. Short stories. And then I had finished it and I felt it wasn't personal enough. It wasn't. It wasn't enough of the story for me to be happy with it, so I rewrote it. But anyways, during that process I definitely struggled. With the book being out in the world, it's so personal. It's so close to my heart. And when you release any. Piece of art into the world, there's always. Going to be. You know criticism of it. And books are interesting in that way. You know, one book is a perfect fit for one person and the other person just, you know, doesn't get it. That's the beauty of art. And when you put something like that. Into the world that's so close. It's a very vulnerable position to be in. And so that was my #1 struggle in releasing this. And then two, there's you know, there's critics from, you know, from the entire the entire span of this. Sorry and I was actually listening to your first podcast episode and your guest was saying like she gets criticized and basically from everyone. And I can totally relate to that because I do as well. I get I get criticism from people who think I was too sympathetic to Ted and his story and trying to like discover what created him and his humanity. And then I get, you know, criticism from. The people that are like. Really ***** in the protest camp and you know, find fault with my. Book and so. It's a difficult position to be in to. Put your art out there and then also to already like have preconceived groups. Of people who are ready to criticize actively?

Nathan: What I think that's a really interesting like part of this story is there are. Are supporters of Ted where we, you know, you talk about other kind of serial killers throughout American history. You know, there's, there's not that many defenders of bunday. You know, there's not that many defenders of John Wayne Gacy, but when it comes to Ted, because there is the underlying political motivations of it. But there's something I am. Absolutely 100% sure that you have experienced. It's something that I have experienced just broadly talking about him online and stuff is just the comment sections where people are like Ted was right, you know like that's just like an interaction that you have online. And I'm just curious what your like what your experience with that has been like? Because I'm sure you've run across those types of commenters or reviewers, even to your book or whatever. But it's just something that I've seen over and over again, and I'm curious how it's felt for you being, you know, part of the story.

Jamie: In some way, it's a really difficult question to answer because it it's just a really hard position to be in. This is my story this. Happened, you know, on a national level. This these things. That I write about happened to me and my family and I needed to tell that story. And then for. For outsiders to come in and kind of attack. That story just because they. Believe that Ted was right and everybody you know is entitled to their own opinions, even even as me, as I was writing this book, and I already had these struggles with with how I felt about this person. And I think readers can sense that too. You know, as I'm writing about the time that Ted took off from his bombing campaign, he actually took two breaks to perfect his his bombing devices and to perfect his killing. You know, I'm still in my head. Like, I wonder if he was searching for additional meaning. I wonder if there really was this like altruistic. Force mission behind, you know, just the hatred. And it was disappointing. I guess I would say to find over and over again that his words were kind of contradicting his mission. And you know again that this person's very complex and. People, people can think. Whatever they want, but it's the comments are tough still and I try to just ignore it. I know you're very familiar with, you know, just having to like, not acknowledge ***** comments on the Internet. It's like just a venue where you can say people think they can just say anything. But sometimes it. Does still bother me? I'll be honest.

Nathan: No, I'll talk about something relating to like, schizophrenia and society. And I will get some of the like, wildest, most harassing comments imaginable. And there's always this instant where I'm like, oh, I need to, like defend myself, or I need to say something. And then it's like, I think there's just that realization you're shouting on the Internet. And the Internet as much it is made for shouting. It is not made for shouting back in some way that, like you can respond to comments all you want. But I think a lot of us who have spent time on the Internet and. And time with this. Is that are, you know, I'll put it firmly in the air quote category of controversial it just that nothing comes of these Internet fights over other than just kind of an emotional exhaustion for at least you know on the personal level and so yeah I absolutely understand that withdraw from some of those. Some of those arguments, because it is, it can be a really difficult thing.

Jamie: You're spot on.

Nathan: I do want to ask about the representation that Ted has had in different media, cause I have to assume whether it was part of simply the research process of this book or whether it was just something you've lived with your whole life is we've had TV shows and documentaries and you have been. A part of at least one of them that I'm familiar with the Netflix 1 broadly. Before we get into like specifics about your role in the Netflix documentary, I'm curious how you felt about those publications that have gone on throughout your life and did you watch them or did you? You know, wait to watch them or what? What what? What was that like for you?

Jamie: It's a really strange thing to watch parts of your life on a screen when you have no like 0 creative input or control in what's being portrayed. And yes, I have watched the different specials through the years. And that was a driving factor in me deciding to participate in the Netflix documentary Unabomber. In his own words, because. You know, in addition to writing my book and finally having a voice throughout the years, I wasn't able to have a voice in this and I felt like it was really important to me to finally be able to tell my story the way I wanted it told. But that still. I mean on, you know, once it comes to editing and you know the other content that's included, you still don't have any control in what the take away is from this special or from the show. And so it's a strange place to be the very last one that was made was a an indie film called Ted OK, and parts of that movie were actually filmed at my childhood home and on the surrounding property. And I wasn't part of that process. However, when I went to the Montana Book Festival this last. Well, I was able to kind of host the movie and then have a Q&A afterwards. And just like that little moment of being able to interject my own truth into this movie that was made was really a pretty powerful moment and I really appreciated it. And there's still, like, there's scenes that there's one scene in particular where it's supposed to be. My dad and stepmother are in the home, and you can see him through the windows. And Ted is outside watching. And I like. I can't watch that scene without just being, like very triggered.

Nathan: No, I have to. I have to imagine. Well, and it's like one of those stories that it can, I I'm sure, references to Ted can come up and almost any circumstances, regardless of whether you're like, you're actually talking about it or not, but like. Just references to him as a person or that time period that kind of that specifically. Questions. I mean, I hear those in, like daily conversations. There's always kind of this thing they talked about. It is like you cannot a conversation cannot go longer than I think it's like 48 hours without like a reference to Hitler or something. But I think that's true of like a lot of cultural figures. And Ted is one of those. Like you talked to someone long enough and eventually. You know, these figures come up in, like regular conversations, and I can't imagine probably what it's been like for you over the years being an unknowing, you know, participant in those conversations. Because I am curious, this is definitely putting you on the spot, but have you ever had a conversation

where it's been brought up and it wasn't you bringing it up and it was like, oh, this is this is weird, like, this is a really jarring point to be talking to someone.

Jamie: You know, I think there. Has been numerous times in my life where it has been brought up and I'm like, Oh yeah, you know. Who lived next to Ted Kaczynski and the person is just, like, so taken aback by that, and then then bringing in a conversation that it's like shocking for. Both of us. Yeah, because you're right. He was again the longest running domestic terrorist in the United States history. I mean, especially for people growing up in the 80s in the 90s, like that infamous sketch of the Unabomber, with his hoodie and his aviator glasses, is just like burned into our minds. Like you mentioned, the last podcast on the left, and I think it was Henry that as a kid had like that cut out picture in his binder. You know, like I mean.

Nathan: I've seen T-shirts with it like just like people at like a State Fair or something. Someone will have a T-shirt with that sketch on it and it's like this is wild.

Jamie: No, it's wild and being part of the story, I. Just like it's still. It's still like it's still so. Strange for me, at anytime I see it or hear the references.

Nathan: We're talking about like the Seventies, 80s and 90s as kind of this, you know, Ted was kind of this backdrop to like the American psyche that was happening at this time. But this book, I mean, it's because it, you know, this is real life. This is how it happened, but it it's set in Western United States and throughout that time period of especially the 80s and early 90s. The Western United States had a long history of extremely. Many culture defining moments from the Oklahoma City bombing to Ruby Ridge to, you know, right afterwards with Columbine. The West has kind of this frontier, ISM that was happening growing up around that. And obviously surrounding this particular story, like how have you perceived that the West? Because it's, it's these. Stories that kind of captured the American imagination in some way, but also told a very, very difficult story. Was that part of? Was that something that you've confronted? And I know you still live in Colorado, so, you know, still living in that environment. You know, what was what was thinking about just like the West, and how this story. It not only just, it doesn't directly intersect, but it it does in so many ways. You know, like the political climate of the day was very much focused on like these types of stories. What was that? Considering the West, what was that like for?

Jamie: Yeah, I mean, I know even in my book I referenced Ruby Ridge and the Freeman, which that happened in Montana as well in 1996 and. You know, there's there's. All of these extremist stories and. And in my mind, I know this is going to sound really odd, but. Even growing up around that around the Unabomber. They still feel so distant. Because I think I had such an. Insulated childhood in so many ways. And so my vision, my experience of the West was being able to ride my horse wherever I wanted to and looking. On these expanses of land, and not seeing one person, one structure you know and just being able to fully immerse myself in. Nature and you know, I tell the story about my grandfather and just kind of he ended up shooting a neighbor and telling that story and just kind of the lawlessness, I suppose, of the

West and that cowboy mentality. And that's something that is still, like, very ingrained into me. And when I think of the West, that is what I think about instead of. These extremist but I mean, I understand where you're coming from. Looking down on it, you would think I have a different perception, but I think I've probably done that to, like, protect my my own mental health.

Nathan: No, no, I think that I think that totally makes sense. I mean it's, it's this wild kind of I have always kind of loved like the myth of the West, like in a historical framework. It's just something I've really enjoyed reading about through, you know, the decades and. Of how things changed and stuff and now I think the change is you know, this isn't not exactly the book, but the change from like the mythical West to the frontier W to, you know, all of these types of things and then the extremist W that we kind of had in the 1890s that we're referencing and now we are in like the real estate W like it's the West is only being tamed. By billionaires buying up ski resorts, and it's kind of sanitized. The which I know is a is a particular word and that's why I used it. The West has been drastically change and not so much in like the physical landscape, but in like the IT is now just the playground of like the ultra wealthy. And I think that's a really, I don't know when I was reading your book, but also thinking about Ted's manifesto and then the relationship with how the West has changed. As you know, Frontier. But now it's like frontier with a trademark logo on it that it's like it's literally a business model. Is that something that's kind? Of I don't know, played into your concepts of how you've looked at this story over time. Specifically like knowing living in Colorado is that. Any perceptions of that for you? Just overlaying the story or anything like that?

Jamie: Yeah, I think it's definitely troublesome and you know it's sad to me because it's like when you grow up in that certain environment, it's almost like you're connected to the place and to see to see those places. And. And I would say where I grew up, it's still about 1000 residents. It's still like a blinking stoplight you have about, you know, you probably have 9 bars and eight churches and one grocery store. I mean, it's very. Such a rural environment still, and there are still places that you can find that are that way, and that's why the locals call it the last best place, because there is still that feeling of that Western lawlessness and you know that. Really like you've stepped into the past, but those places are definitely starting to transition to a much a much different look, a much different feel, and that is a tragedy.

Nathan: Yeah, I mean probably a little bit of. That involving Lincoln, where the story takes place, is the dark tourism that has happened, and you allude to it kind of in the conclusion of the book and your role. I wonder if you could just kind of talk to us about the story that you tell in the book, but also just, you know, whether it's become in like the decades since then of. People coming out to look at the cabin or where the cabin was.

Jamie: So right after Ted Kaczynski's arrest in 96, I was visiting, you know, my father. For the summer after after the arrest, because that previous school year I spent in California with my mom and there was still a swarm of media trying to get pictures

of people that were obsessed with this case. And where the Unabomber lived. And it is a very interesting part of this, of this case, of this investigation, you. Try to imagine the longest running domestic terrorist in U.S. history and what he was able to, you know, achieve from his own mindset in that tiny little cabin. It's 10 by 12. It is. There's no running water, no heat, no electricity in the middle of rural Montana. I mean, he's 4 miles from town. He either walks or rides this very rickety little bicycle into town. He's riding buses to go deliver his bomb. I mean, just the fact that he lived that way and, you know, was one of the most infamous criminals to date in history is shocking to say the least. And so I think that was a huge, like a draw, I suppose. To seeing what that really looked like. And so there. Were so many people that wanted to see his cabin and you know, my dad was like, absolutely not he too. He took a few of the family members that were affected by the violence. Somebody with that was on the hit list that the FBI had found to the cabin just foreclosure. And you know, there were. He was, like, do not take anybody out there. And of course, I was 16 and I was like. I'll do the opposite. Of whatever you tell me because I'm. 16 and so.

Nathan: Is charging charging ticket prices?

Jamie: So yeah, I took a few people out there and sold his trash. I'm not especially proud of, but I did find out, though, that one of the one of the people that I did charge he had told me that he like had a connection and was on the list. And then I found out later that he wasn't. And so I was like, I'm so. Glad I should have charged him more.

Nathan: Double ticket price for that one. Part of the. The I guess just the Ted Kaczynski story is that it's a story that, I mean, he's been captured, he's written a lot of stuff. He wrote a whole manifesto explaining his ideas and why he did it, and all of those types of things. But at the very same time there is a lot of like mystery to him as a character. Which you definitely get into. In the book, and I think based on and you followed me for a little while. So you do know some of my reading tastes, but one of the things that I found most fascinating was Ted's interaction with the IT it's kind of like the precursor to the MK ultra program with the OSS, the CIA. How was researching that part of the book for you? I mean, that's just a it's such a wild. Kind of tendrils of just like I could see how you could probably get to that point in the book and be like I'm going to now read 150 books on this subject and really just like spiral out. Your book does a really good job at like staying true to like just telling the story and not. Going in 1000, different directions, but I have to imagine there was a little part of you that was like keep pulling the threads. Keep pulling the threads, so I'm just curious what researching that was.

Jamie: Like for you, I was really tempted to completely spiral out on that, to be honest. You know, there's a there's a part in my book that I actually like write about the process, and I locked myself in a hotel room. And was reading, you know, so many different books about. Quote you know the MKUltra project and Murray and what really transpired with Ted in those Harvard experiments. And I mean, there's there has been just like entire books written about just that and so. It was, you know. Ohh

and then I had to of course, e-mail David Kaczynski. And get his take on. And what he felt about it and the changes he may have seen in Ted. And so it was definitely multifaceted for me. But I really had to just keep it to and believe me, that chapter was edited down very heavily when I'm talking about this whole process. But you know what then I. The FBI agents that I spoke to about it, they were like, don't you know, don't focus on that too much. But she get it.

Nathan: I wonder why they would say anything like.

Jamie: That then, but I then I did find the letter from Ted basically saying, you know, it was a thing, but it wasn't like the IT wasn't. I wasn't being tortured. And who knows, because he does downplay so many different things. Obviously that have happened to him in his life because I believe he doesn't want his thoughts, his opinions, his, the beliefs he writes about in his manifesto to be looked at in any different way. OK.

Nathan: Yeah, which is why I mean by, I mean the legal theory surrounding his conviction when he decided to testify or when he decided to represent himself in court is on this whole kind of genre of Ted wanting to be perceived, not as like an insane person or a byproduct of experimentation. But he just wants to be. A sane person with a sane idea, and that sane idea is let's mail bombs to people and it's like there's obviously there's just this conflicting part of Ted Kaczynski, not only through your book, which is very obvious as as he is just this very weird hermit neighbor. And then also. People's famous serial killer. But the story of Ted Kaczynski is that constant back and forth of this same guy. That's, you know, has some interesting theories and thoughts and wants to endorse himself as a sane person. And then it's also the confrontation with like, Oh no, it is the madman in the woods, which you're. Weirdly enough, your book, that is the title of the book. However, that's not exactly the only like representation. Ohh, that's not the only view that you have of him. So curious why Mad Men in the. Woods why you went with that title and I'm not saying it's a bad title, but you represent him in so many different ways that it's just a really interesting way to, I don't know, frame the conversation or frame the idea of Ted.

Jamie: So my title was actually life with Ted K and my publisher definitely wanted to appeal to more of a true crime audience.

Nathan: OK.

Jamie: And so which I understand. And so. They changed it. Two Mad Men in the. But I was very, very insistent that it had to be life next door to the Unabomber because it is truly a story about life.

Nathan: I really, I really like that the subtitle really just gives a such a cementing view on what the book is, because like, we've kind of alluded to, it is the story of Ted Kaczynski is in. There, however, it's also your life. This is when you talked earlier about it being a braided memoir. It is a braided memoir because it is your life and your interpretations of these events, but it's also a history of, obviously, Ted. But it's also a look at your family life in Montana, which was a really fascinating part to interweave all of these. Narratives so cohesively into one story, and I think what's what comes

across really. Well, as like a reader to the story is for you. Those are all interwoven into your just your life. That is just how you've lived. But when you write a book, you are telling a story, you're telling a version of the events, or you are editing it in some way. And it was really a fascinating way to view that time period. And the location and this famous person. And then also I really have to say I really look forward to it if you choose to write future works because. I love just like the really mundane parts of your storytelling, and I don't mean that in a bad way, just like, you know, not everything can be like the explosive truth, bombs, horrible turn of phrase there, but the but just like the parts where you write about your family life and the connections that you had with your sister and your father were really beautiful and poignant, and I think. Like, that's when you talk about life being the main spirit of this book. I think that's it comes across so well.

Jamie: Thank you for saying that. And I mean, I will say to that is definitely another reason that this book did take me so long. It took me a good five years to write it. And it was. The act of braiding in all of these different storylines together. You know to I not not lose my reader, but. Also to to tell. The story that I was intending to express. Is it was definitely a challenge. And I wanted it to read more like. You know, I wanted it to be narrative nonfiction. I wanted it to be intimate, through crime. And so these things that I was trying to do were were very difficult and challenging. And it really like forced me kind of outside of my own comfort zone and definitely made it challenging. But if I write only one book in my life. I I'm happy with the book that I've written.

Nathan: No, that's good. That's good. I wanted to talk broadly about like the true crime genre because we are obviously in the. It's like the Golden Age kind of of true crime. And you have you have been involved in all of it. A book documentary you were on last podcast on the left. So you've got the podcasting going too. I mean, true crime as a genre is a phenomenon right now. Do you? I'm just curious and I know you are up for a war. On the true crime genre, so try not to take this. Take this question too seriously, but do you like true crime genre? Do you like? Is that something you seek out on your own time, or is this you're just like, no, I'm too close to the stories and.

Jamie: I I'm you know.

Nathan: Just you've got a part of.

Jamie: I I'm conflicted about it because. When I set out to write my book, I had no idea what the true crime market looked like. I mean, part of the process of writing a nonfiction book is writing a really great book proposal. It's so important. And so you're researching your market, you're researching. Pump title. And that was it. It was that time where I was like, Oh my gosh, this is this market and true crime is massive. And I did read the stranger beside me and the babysitter, my summers with a serial killer and shot a man. And if you tell by Greg Olsen? One, just as like inspiration for my own writing, cause a couple of those are. Intimate true crime, meaning the author is involved with with the actual crime. That they're writing. About and, I felt it was important to my craft. However, I have a really hard time reading it because

you know I've experienced it and seen as many people have. Also, unfortunately, seeing the ripple effect of violence and how many people it really affects and for generations and so that part is difficult for me when it's put into like a commercial lens. But then on the other on. The other side of it. It was important for. Me to understand or try to understand the mind of a serial killer, and it was important for my own closure and my own healing to do that. And so I get it. I understand why people are drawn to learning about these people. It's just a really interesting phenomena, honestly.

Nathan: Well, we talked about earlier with the interactions with like the Ted is right, you know anonymous posters online. But there's also just like the genre of true crime has been plagued. With kind of, you would call it the fantasies you know of. Some sense it's people that talk very lovingly towards true crime figures. It's people that are like in some way in love with the serial killers and those types of things that it goes beyond research. It goes beyond a critique of society. Or critique of a person it. It's like weird obsessions, and I want to let people know this is not what that book does, but I think also it's just a really fascinating thing because one of the people that you have talked to about this book and I want to just give a shout out so people can go find it is you've talked to the last podcast on the left. Guys about this and one of their things that they make as like a forefront of their interpretations of true crime is like they, I think I'm going to, like paraphrase it a little bit, but they talk about these people as they're pieces of ****, like the people that. At these crimes, they're the bad guys like it. It's actually pretty cut and dry, like we don't need to, like chalk them up as being super villains or whatever. Like, no, they're just weird dudes, and when they talked about Ted and their main podcast, it's. Yeah, that's the story they're telling. It's a guy that has a lot of really complicated things in his life and he's just he's a very. A strange dude, but he's also. Yeah, he he did some horrifying things. I'm just curious, what was it like talking to the last podcast guys? Because they're, you know, they're such big, big figures in this. You know this genre of media cause I think it extends well beyond books and stuff. It is a whole. Form of media.

Jamie: So I had really no expectations going into it. I was, I was so nervous. It was my first podcast, and the book hadn't even come out yet. OK.

Jamie: So it was crazy because. My first interview was with Elle Magazine and then my first podcast was with the last podcast on the. And so I just got like thrown into the fire right with with trying to market my book. But it was so funny because since then, like most of the time, people will like send a list of questions or like a guide. What we're going to be talking about. It was just like, whatever the. Hell, they wanted to talk.

Nathan: As like impromptu comedians or performers, comedians.

Jamie: So we we started our conversation. It was just. Henry and I to begin with. So we're just sitting there and I'm like. Do you I'm. I'm like a little. Bit nervous. Do you mind if I? Have a shot of whiskey. I'm like. Do you do you want a shot of whiskey? Should we do a shot of whiskey together? And he's like, I'm a comedian. I can't start. Drinking this early? Really funny, but no, they aren't the. The thing I do appreciate.

About their show is they do incredible research and you know, I know they have a huge. Team, but they. They really they really put in the time to understand. And you're right. Like the one of the things that kind of. Threw me off as. Many of the things actually threw me off as we're talking because they're just hilarious. It's hard to kind of get back on track when you're talking about such serious things, which is why people find they're so appealing, obviously. But he was said something like. You know, Ted was just an ***** like. All of them are right. Like it was just funny, you know. It's like, thanks for being real, yeah.

Nathan: No, I think that I mean that's such a like a needed voice in that Community cause I think things often just get. Gross in some way. I am curious if and you don't have to share any work in progress or anything, but have you? You are now. The book has been out. Now the book came out last year, last fall, right?

Jamie: Yes, last spring I've lost track of time.

Nathan: Last spring, yeah. You've now done a series of interviews. You're headed off for the true crime awards. Crime con, is that correct?

Jamie: Yes, in London.

Nathan: And so you've been through a year of this book being out in the public, how do you feel about it now? How has how has your relationship to this work changed? Obviously, beforehand it was just this deeply personal thing, but now so many people have read your book and you've talked to so many people about it, you know, how are how have things. Changed over time for you.

Jamie: You know, I don't think that much has changed. In light of like how I look at the book or how I. Want it to touch people and touch hearts and touch readers and. Make you maybe feel. A little. Comfortable and, you know, throw you into some thoughts you're maybe not used to having. I mean, that was the point of me writing this book, and I feel. Like there are times when I struggle with this industry as a whole with publishing and, you know, writers are kind of taking advantage of in this industry, as I mean, we're seeing that we're seeing the strikes now and it's was like a bit of. Some disillusion there, I suppose, with the industry, but. I think it's.

Jamie: So important when I'm having those moments to just remind myself. Of the why in this book and why I wrote this book and it really was to you know, to touch the hearts and minds of people to try to understand what creates a killer, what makes them different from us. What does it look like? What does it feel like to live next to? A domestic terrorist? A serial. Killer and just infuse the human element of understanding the story and when I'm able to do that and remind myself of my purpose and my why I am like, I'm so grateful and so appreciative of all that have been involved with it and everyone who helps me like. Spread the word about this book because I did go with. A small press. And so All in all, it's been really incredible. And I, I love book clubs. I love talking to my readers like truly people who, like, hang out and read books and talk about books together. And I bring a photo album and we geek out on FBI evidence and. That has been incredible and it's been, I think, very healing for me as well to write this story that has always kind of been inside of. To me, so those are all

wonderful parts and then, you know, again, I think with any writer, we just have to remember the why of why of why we do this.

Nathan: And that makes no sense. You now you've now done a ton of interviews and press and all of that type of stuff. I am just curious. I said this would be an optional question though. Do you have any questions for me as a reader of your book? Because you I'm you've been asked hundreds of questions about writing this book about the receptions of this book, all of that. But do you have any questions for me? As a reader.

Jamie: Yes, I do. So to completely put you on the. Spot I would. Love to know while. You're reading it. Were there any other books that you were reminded of or like any anything that you've read in the past that you're like, Oh my gosh, this is so much. Like this book or not?

Nathan: Yeah, I think there is. Absolutely the There's the draw I think and kind of it's just like base genre with stranger beside me by Anne rule is that the right that's the right title, right? And that is her life kind. Of living as a friend to Ted Bundy, which is a book that I read like, you know, as a disenchanted like 16 year old, as happened. So yeah, that was a. That was a really fascinating, like kind of call back to a book that I loved from like an early age. But I also I think it's I think maybe it's because. Of just like the settings of the story and the rule nature of the writing and stuff, there was a lot of parts in it where I had a lot of, I don't know, like emotional confliction that I did while reading, educated by Tara Westover, where it's kind of this historical look back at family, but. Obviously your family, in this broad sense also includes Ted, and that's where, like the conflict comes in of growing up in this local place that was hiding. And I don't mean that in like a active sense, but in in the passive sense of just like the very nature itself being the cover for that type of a thing, I think. You have, like we talked about earlier, the western United States is this very odd figure in a lot of these stories. And Tara Westover's book kind of does the same way. With like the. Relationship to extremism, but also the relationship to rule means like being kind of departed from culture in some sense. And I grew up in like rural. Midwest, which is a very, I think also unique thing and I was on a walk with my partner yesterday and we were just talking about like growing up in like the 2000s. And I was like yeah, but for us growing up in the 2000s, man. Like you know, I'm a 92 baby. It meant that I was in the 90s until I was like 14 or 15. You know, even though that's not true, but it's just because we're culturally behind, you know, just by the nature of being in a small town in the Midwest and. I think there's elements of that in your story too, which I find a really fascinating thing. It's just a as someone really. In love with the idea of these hinterlands of these just places where there's these really unique and interesting stories happening, but not much else. Outside of those stories, you know what I mean? So, yeah, I think that was. I think that was probably the two books that most made me think of it, which is, I think, high praise, because those two books, those have been standout books for me over the years, those are really phenomenal reads. And I really enjoyed this true crime. I got to be honest, I might not have been the perfect interviewer or the perfect person to reach out for to an interview because. True crime

is typically not a genre that I step in too often. But I really enjoyed your story. The family element is just what kept me absolutely obsessed with it this morning, and something that I'll be thinking a long time about. So thank you so much for getting in touch with me because I might not have ever seen your book and I think that's one of the cool things that the Internet or like what? Book, talk and books to Graham has done has given people access to. Reviewers and I know you kind of found me on there and I'm really thankful that you did because I really thoroughly enjoyed your story as.

Jamie: Ohh my gosh.

Nathan: As difficult as it was.

Jamie: Thank you so much. I mean, did you see the Jazz hands when you said educated, I couldn't help myself as one of my all time favorite books? Stranger beside me was one of the books that I read while I was writing this and doing my proposal. And I'm like, Oh my gosh. If I can at least like pull off a percentage of what annual. Has done here. In telling the story so, the fact that you just said both of those books, I mean I could, I literally physically couldn't contain myself.

Nathan: No, I think I think I think like the genre that you're going for fits in really well with those two. It'd be a great like three-part book series. I've always I always love doing those. I kind of keep it secret, but I really need to post about it more when I tend to read a book, I often pair it with other things that are like, not directly related. What kind of related in some broad sense, and if anyone's looking to kind of mimic what I do so? Times. I would definitely check out Mad Men in the woods, stranger beside me and educated as like a three-part series, cause you'll get a lot of the West. You'll get a lot of really interesting looks at family and relationships, and I think it would be just a really. Good Trinity or trilogy of reeds for people. So Jamie, thank you so much for coming on the podcast. Where can people find you online?

Jamie: I think I'm most active on Instagram, at Jamie Gearing author. You can also. Subscribe to my website at jamiegehring.com where I very occasionally send you a newsletter. I should actually be better about it, but I'm really trying not to spam people about, you know, like different awards of the book is up for or just exciting. Things that have to do with this. Book being out in the world.

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A critique of his ideas & actions.



Episode 5: Madman in the Woods with Jamie Gehring
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