

AT: Welcome to the Infinite Women podcast. I'm your host, Allison Tyra, and today I'm joined by Lorissa Rhinehart, author of the new book, *First to the Front: The Untold Story of Dickey Chapelle, Trailblazing Female War Correspondent*. So can we start with a general introduction to Dickey and her career?

LR: So Dickey Chapelle was a war correspondent from the end of World War II through the beginning of the Vietnam War. And this is an incredibly pivotal period in world history, right? This encompasses the very beginning and the early era of the Cold War. And so much of what we are experiencing today and so many of the events that we see unfolding are a result of or reverberations of these conflicts that Dickey Chapelle covered. And the thing that I love about Dickey's story is not just that she was there and not that she was just documenting what was happening, but she had an incredibly unique perspective that very much came out of her being a woman and the experiences she had as a woman because of her gender. And not only did she report on stories that were unfolding, but she had a particularly brilliant capacity to see where news was going to happen before anyone else did because of her unique understanding of both the military and diplomatic peacekeeping efforts of the United States. So a lot of these stories that I'm talking about that she covered in my book are quite new in the historical record and shed a new light on events that we think we know everything about. So yeah, she's an incredible figure.

AT: One of the things that struck me when I was reading the book was the fact that every time she seemed to be making a little bit of progress, something would happen. And so for example, the work that she did in Okinawa during World War II, she wasn't allowed to publish most of the incredible photos and writing when she actually got back to the US. So can you tell us about that?

LR: Yeah. So there were so many boundaries and borders and obstacles put up in Dickey's way because she was a woman, right? And today women experience that. I've experienced that. I'm sure you have experienced that. And so in Okinawa, right, this was her first big reporting assignment. And she really came up against the strictures imposed upon her because of her gender. So deal was, in World War II, women were not actually allowed to be combat correspondents. They weren't allowed to cover combat. They had to be where there were nurses, which were generally in the rear areas. And Dickey wasn't particularly interested in following this rule. She always wanted to make sure everyone was safe. She didn't want to, you know, be a burden to any of the Marines that she was covering or soldiers there on out. But she always carried her equipment, got to wherever they were going under her own steam. She never asked for help. And she never got in the "way" in a lot of the sense that many journalists do, right? That was never her. She was always able to seamlessly integrate herself into whatever unit she was covering. And we can talk about that later. But what happened in World War II, was she got permission from the press officer in the Pacific Fleet to go on to Okinawa, because there wasn't really a lot of fighting to begin with. The Japanese army had embedded themselves in the caves of Okinawa. We didn't know the full extent of their forces. And it seemed like they had completely abandoned it. So she was permitted to go ashore. But despite

this, once the press admiral back in DC got whiff of her being on the island, he had her arrested, revoked her military credentials, and actually slandered her in the press. He gave an anonymous quote, basically saying that she wanted to be there because there were hundreds of men running around with their shirts off, right? So I mean, yeah, he quite frankly, like, slut shamed her in the press and really did a lot of damage to her name. And for what? For doing her job and doing it well. And all of the Marines that she was there with really admired her. And in fact, didn't want to follow the order to have her arrested and send her back to Guam and then eventually the United States. And just again and again in her career, she came up against these obstacles. But like so many women, right, she found a way to pivot and to find these little loopholes that she could squeeze through. And because she was forced to be agile to do her job, she was actually often able to do her job better than her male colleagues.

AT: She definitely seems to have had a very activist spirit in the sense that she wanted to help people with the stories that she was sharing.

LR: Absolutely. This is a real point of contention in her biography and her sort of legacy as a journalist, right? Because as a journalist, you're supposed to be "objective" and not get involved with the people you are reporting on. Dickey definitely crossed that line - period, end of discussion - in several cases. You know, she was covering the Hungarian Revolution and she risked her life and her safety and her freedom to go out into the frozen tundra and retrieve refugees that had gotten lost in the dark or scared by automatic fire from machine guns or from star shells that were exploding over them. And she ended up bringing hundreds of refugees from Hungary into Austria. Later on, she was embedded with the anti-Castro militias in Miami and actively aided them in building arms and also polishing bullets, which was probably exceptionally problematic, but that's who she is.

On the other hand, in the era that she was reporting, objective journalism really meant a white male's point of view and no other. And while we had really just incredible reporting in World War II from the likes of Ernie Pyle and so on and so forth, once we go to the Cold War, once we leave that World War II era, we see this real regression in journalism, where you have the boys club of reporters talking to the boys club of politicians and the politicians or the press secretaries or the officials or what have you, tell the reporters what is happening in their view and their reporters write it down and then they print it without any follow-up, without any questions, without any interest in actually discovering what's going on. And that wasn't what Dickey wanted to do. She wanted to see what was happening for herself.

Now, the other thing that happened to her was, again, during the Hungarian Revolution, she also crossed the border to go into Hungary and all the way to be embedded with the unit of freedom fighters there. And on her way, she was arrested by the secret police. She was imprisoned in a Communist jail for six weeks, most of which time she was held in solitary confinement. She was threatened with torture, rape, execution by hanging and interminable imprisonment. And the result of this was that she came to believe that she would never be released and that she would live the rest of her life and die in prison. And so she really came to understand what it was to live under tyranny in a way that most white Americans cannot. And she forms a real sense of empathy and solidarity with the people who were fighting for freedom,

whether that was against Western imperialism, as was the case in her coverage of the Algerian war of independence against French colonialism, or against Communism as in her coverage of the early Vietnam War era. And so because of this, she had a reason and the instinct to believe the people that she was reporting on and to believe that their stories had validity and they were important. And she wrote in this manner, she wrote giving credence to the people regardless of color, creed or geography. And in this way, I think she was actually more objective than the majority of her peers, because once she went there, she was the first to Algeria. She was one of the first in Vietnam. She was one of the first in Cuba. She was one of the first in the Dominican Republic and on and on and on. And she also believed the people who are doing the fighting or doing the dying, if they were civilians caught in the crossfire. So, and this was taken to be an activist point of view. But in my judgment, this is actually an objective point of view that she had.

AT: As someone with a journalism degree, we were taught that, you know, it is all about objectivity. And this book really raises the question for me of, is objectivity actually desirable when we're telling people's story? Because you mentioned empathy. I'm wondering if there's also a connection to calling women "emotional" to undermine what they're saying. So for me, it was really raising that question of what is the actual value of extreme objectivity where we have gotten to the point where we are excluding empathy? And frankly, common sense, because I feel like you do see that as well with even today with the just blind acceptance of whatever this person or that person tells you or the false equivalencies that you see where it's like, well, "we've got a climate change scientist. And we're also going to have some rando conspiracy theorist climate denier" because there is this idea of that is balance, is presenting both sides, even when one side is clearly stronger, the more logical and reasonable and supported.

LR: So absolutely. And I think you have in our present world, with the constant sort of bifurcation of points of view, right, you can think you're being objective because in the logical matrix, which you have created in your Facebook algorithm, this is objective. There is no sign to the signified. It's just sound and fury. And in order to be an objective journalist, in order to tell the truth, right, this is the point of objectivity is to tell the truth. You have to have a sense of what the truth is. And balance is not telling one truth and then giving a platform to someone telling a lie simply because it contradicts the truth. Telling the truth is telling the truth, that is based in reality. Now, of course, there are, and I think this is where empathy comes in, right? We do have different realities. We do have different points of view. We do have different experiences that color how we approach the world. And it's important to take those things into consideration as a journalist and understand that, not in regard to climate change per se, but in regard to economic theory, right, what works in the United States, doesn't work in Scandinavia, doesn't work in Australia where you are, or maybe it doesn't work in the United States either, but we won't get into that.

AT: I mean, I wasn't going to say it.

LR: but in any case, there is a balance of objectivity, but it has to be rooted in at least something that has not only an internal logic, but a logic that applies universally.

AT: I think what we're getting into is that obviously you can't go too far in either direction because if you are too emotional, whatever that may mean, then you have lost sight and you've gone from instead of just trusting, you know, whatever this government official is telling you to just believing whatever this other person is telling you, even if you haven't seen evidence of that yourself. So what I think we're getting at here is the need for nuance and context and seeing the picture regardless of what different factors may be pushing you towards in either direction.

LR: Absolutely. And that's another thing that I find so fascinating and so inspiring about Dickey Chapelle's story. One of the things that I don't talk about very often, I do talk about in my book to a great extent, is that she spent, because her military credentials were revoked, she spent the post-war years covering Europe as it rebuilt. And what was happening there at the time, right? You have this initial push and pull between the United States and Communist Russia, and she sees people who are living in Warsaw in, you know, previous bomb shelters or buildings that are about to fall down. Or houses that were once in an affluent suburb, but are now home to 12 families and one of whom lives in the root cellar and there's no door because it was machine gunned off, right? So she understands the deprivation that these people are experiencing and the draw of Communist promises of freedom and plenty and equality.

So when we come into the Cold War, when we have, you know, this McCarthyist attitude in the United States and elsewhere, she hates Communism, right? There's no doubt about that. She was imprisoned in a Communist jail. She was the victim of psychological torture, and she knows that they are despots, but what she also understands very clearly is that just because someone lives under a Communist regime does not make them a bad person. It is the government who is waging war against their people and people around the world. And so she never painted, right, all the citizens of these Communist countries, of the Soviet bloc with the same brush. And she always tried to extol their humanity. Even when she immediately got out of prison, her first article was called "Nobody owes me a Christmas," published in Reader's Digest magazine. Basically, the point of the story was that even while she was in this Communist, this hell, this frozen hell, that on Christmas, this jailer gave her an extra piece of bacon, which was a big deal, right? Because she's on a starvation diet. So you get an extra piece of fat and it is Christmas morning. And she saw in that this seed of compassion that exists everywhere. And that's what she wrote about. That is the message she took from her ordeal was that we are all human beings. We all have the capacity for compassion and that we are all deserving of compassion. So again, nuance, as you said, is so important to objective journalism. And so needed in our world right now, which is ever more complicated and ever more in need of a nuanced and frankly compassionate understanding and telling of these stories.

AT: When we're talking about that particular story, she also had trouble getting other sort of darker, more serious pieces about it published, whereas the more compassionate, uplifting one was the one that was considered more palatable rather than her talking about more the horrors of her experience.

LR: Yeah, she wrote, I mean, part of her therapy, right, was just writing pages and pages and pages. I mean, I think there's hundreds of pages in her archives about her experience and none

of them are redundant. And she tried to publish more of that specifically in her autobiography that came out in 1961. And they really redacted a lot of that. And she could not get a piece published that was about the horrors that she experienced. I don't really think people wanted to hear that. People didn't want to believe her either. There was this very strange and I'll just be frank with you, rape culture reaction to her imprisonment. They literally said she deserved it and her fellow journalists said she deserved it or that she really actually wanted it, that she was trying to get arrested, to get the story, or that she should have known better. And the echoes of, of course, how rape culture, people who are okay with rape, talk about women who experience rape, were just so palpable and just like a voice coming right back at me. That really, really hit home with me because so often, women are blamed for the obstacles that they encounter and are not given credit for when they overcome them. Whether that's trauma or career or personal, it is this really just mace, right? That it's your fault and you didn't do it, you didn't overcome it by yourself either.

AT: So let's talk about PTSD because I don't know that we've explicitly said that clearly she did have PTSD from that experience. It's not actually uncommon for a lot of journalists in war zones to develop this condition, but what's interesting is that she was one of the early advocates for how to identify it, publicizing that "this is a real issue. Here are the symptoms" and this was, you know, earlier in her career when there were still a lot of myths around PTSD.

LR: Yeah, absolutely. And again, as I said at the beginning, you know, her sense of empathy and her knowledge was developed because she was a woman. So because she was a woman in World War II, she had to be stationed with nurses. And though she did get to the front, she began her career at Alameda Hospital in Oakland. And from there, she went onto the USS Samaritan, which was a hospital ship that took wounded from Iwo Jima onto Saipan. And so she saw them being loaded right off of Iwo Jima in the middle of the campaign. And then during their nine-day trip to Saipan, she spent all of her time talking to those Marines who had been wounded. And she saw, right, that they didn't stop. The battle didn't stop once they were out of it. They continued to relive it in their mind. They continued to relive it while they slept and it woke them up with nightmares, that it continued to plague them in their fears of what would come next if they had lost a limb or their hearing or their sight or all of the above. Or even if they hadn't, right, how could they possibly relate to family members who had no context to understand what they had gone through? And they were left on this sort of island of loneliness. And she wrote extensively about this epidemic that was plaguing millions of veterans coming home, not just the United States, but around the world. And then she also actually experienced PTSD coming home from that campaign. She developed an incredible stutter. She didn't want to leave the house. She wept constantly. And it was just sort of by her own grit and the desire to continue telling these types of stories that she was able to overcome it. And then, of course, she again fell into serious PTSD after her experience in Fő Street Prison in Hungary. And then I believe she didn't really recover. So many people do not recover from PTSD. And that was a real driving factor in her career. People with PTSD often try to relive the trauma in order to make it come out somehow differently this time. They instinctually or unconsciously feel that if they can do it differently, then the trauma will be reversed. And I feel like this is really something

that drove her in addition to so many other motivations. But this was part of her continued campaign to cover combat.

AT: I think we're getting back into the activist versus objectivity and the idea of not necessarily that she was putting herself in the story, but you're writing about things that matter to you, that you are driven to care about through your own personal experiences. And I mean, I think that's incredibly valuable in journalism.

LR: Yeah, absolutely. And I mean, she also ascribed personal value to things that were universally valuable that many of her colleagues did not recognize. I mean, she, for instance, recognized Southeast Asia as a real turning point in the Cold War before many other people. And she, because of this, was, I want to say, one of the first to march with the South Vietnamese Marines along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. She was the first journalist to jump with the South Vietnamese Airborne, the first to be embedded with the Sea Swallows, who were an anti-communist guerrilla army in the Mekong Delta, one of the first to be with the South Vietnamese Navy on the Mekong Delta, and on and on and on. And this was 1961 to 1965. Before combat, Marines were sent in. In fact, she was the first person to publish a photograph of a Marine in combat in 1963, two years before they were supposed to be in combat. So because she ascribed personal importance to these stories, to these fights for freedom, she was able to understand that they were universally important before so many of her other colleagues.

AT: The anti-Communism has come up a couple times.

LR: Yeah.

AT: But I believe she was also embedded with Castro's forces in the lead up to him coming to power. And then, however many years later, she's covering the people trying to overthrow him. Is that correct?

LR: That's right. So what happened was Castro was not, okay, now we're going to get into the weeds. We're going to get really deep in the weeds. So Castro was not Communist to begin with. He might have been socialist, but Dickey believed that all peoples and all nations had the right to self-determination. And if they wanted to be socialist, so be it, she didn't care. Socialism is not the same thing as, you know, Soviet Communism. And again, this is nuance that lacked in so much other journalism of the day. And she talked a lot, you know, there was sort of this propaganda machine in the United States about trying to sort of paint Castro and his troops with a red brush before this was true. And she was very adamant in her original articles that, you know, in fact, he was not communist. Now, what she said very clearly and in published articles was that if America ceases to subsidize Cuban sugar imports, which were their largest export, that Castro would not be able to rebuild the country that the previous dictatorship of Batista had plundered and ruined and exploited and terrorized and that he would turn to the Soviets for help. Well, lo and behold, the United States Congress did not renew the sugar subsidies and sugar imports. He had no money. He was holding together the nation with scotch

tape and he turned to the people who would fund him. Now, she also identified Castro as a burgeoning despot to begin with. She said he is best when he has an enemy. And this is true of so many despots. And she identified this while she was there in whatever it was, 1959, 1958. So she had her misgivings. But she had faith in the Cuban people. And she felt that the United States didn't betray Castro. They betrayed the Cuban people who had a legitimate claim to self-determination. And so when he did go to the Soviets, when he did turn Communist, her want, her desire, her largest concern was to tell the story of the Cuban people who were suffering under this regime. Not how it affected America. Yes, she was concerned with that. But her most immediate concern was the people who were suffering under a Communist regime. And that's who she wrote about. And that's who she really spoke to.

AT: If we could get into her personal relationships a bit because obviously that is a big part of her life. And as we're talking about the barriers that were put in her path, I would argue that her husband was the biggest one.

LR: Yeah, so she married Tony Chapelle, Anthony Chapelle when she was 19 years old. He was over 40 at the time. And according to his son by another marriage, he never told Dickey about them when he married her or for many years later. And he had several children from these marriages, none of whom he was supporting. And one of his sons who became a really big part of Dickey's life and who Dickey really supported and loved, and he ended up joining the Air Force because of the patriotism that she imbued him with. He said of his father, he was the greatest swindler on the face of the earth. And he had no idea why a woman like Dickey would be with a man like him.

AT: Well, I just have to point out when you mentioned that, you know, he didn't tell her that he had been married, he was still married.

LR: Yeah, that's right. Yeah, he was still married.

AT: It was years before she found out that they weren't legally married because he was a secret bigamist.

LR: Right, that's right. I forgot about that. Oh my gosh.

AT: It just gets worse.

LR: It just gets worse. You forget how bad it is that he like got a "divorce" in Mexico. Like you can't get your can't get a divorce in Mexico when you got married in the United States - like, basic. So anyway, that wife, Camilla, came back suing him for abandonment so that she could take care of her son. So in any case, he was, I believe from Dickey's own writing, emotionally abusive, incredibly controlling and manipulative. And he was her photography teacher. He was this man in a position of authority. He was a gatekeeper to the world she wanted to enter. And he started really grooming her when she was still a teenager. And she was in New York City by

herself. It was 1939, Great Depression still. World is on the brink of war, it's very uncertain times. And he really wrapped this distorted sense of reality around her. And whenever she tried to get out, he would move the goalposts. He would move the logic to keep her in this ever sort of evolving cage. And it wasn't until 14 years later that she finally freed herself from him. And she had to get the relationship like legally annulled because he started to become violent. He showed up at her door, her apartment door with a gun. At the time, you could as a woman receive legal protection if you were married. You get a restraining order from your husband. But because as you so rightfully pointed out, they weren't ever actually married. She didn't have that same legal protection. So she had to somehow go through a divorce attorney to find this. So it was an incredibly difficult obstacle to overcome. But it was one that I think was very proud of herself for overcoming and that she took as much as she could from it. I'm not trying to say that people who are victimized shouldn't process their trauma and we shouldn't be respectful of their trauma. But one of the ways that she dealt with her abuse was to rise above it and to not let it define the rest of her life. And so once she divorced him or once she freed herself of him, that's when her career really started to flourish. So she took her freedom and she just started to fly. And you know, I think it's extraordinary that she was able to get out after so many years of emotional and psychological abuse. And again, like I didn't want to write about him, but I wanted to show women, and men, my readers in general, that this kind of abuse happens to everyone or it can happen to anyone, regardless of how strong you are, regardless of how smart you are or accomplished you are, this can happen to anyone.

AT: I think it is very powerful how she reclaimed her life and her power over that life because he used his position as her teacher, as you were saying, to really push this narrative throughout their relationship that he knows more than she does, she will always be the student, she will always be inferior and therefore has to listen to what he was saying. And he's expecting her to act as his assistant, his caregiver, as well as being the primary breadwinner, while still somehow keeping her tethered with that false illusion.

LR: And one of the things that drives me absolutely crazy is that people like who wrote about her later, right, like her biographers took what he said as true. They said she wasn't a good photographer. They said she wasn't a good writer. And I'm like, National Geographic does not publish bad writing or bad photographs, okay, let alone all the other publications that she was in. Also, you could just look at her photographs. Also, you could just read her writing and see what an extraordinary writer and photographer she is. You know, one of the things that is so great about her photographs that again, like was ahead of her time, she had this real sense of the snapshot, of capturing the moment as it unfolded. There was no staging to her photographs. And this became, you know, the practice of journalists and photojournalism in the Vietnam War, right, but she predated this. She was a trailblazer in this regard. And again, the same for her journalism, you know, her style of investigative journalism that was sympathetic to the subject of the story became the norm in the Vietnam War. Again, she predated this by not a year, but by a decade. Two decades actually. So, you know, just these narratives that are espoused and by even abusive men continue to be retold as if they were true. And just on a larger point, I am just so excited about this age of women's history. I'm not the only one looking back at women's



history and saying, “oh, they said she was sexually promiscuous. I'm guessing that meant that she had control of her body.” “Oh, she was pushy. I'm guessing that meant she was brilliant” and rewriting those narratives to be accurate, to not the men's interpretation of the woman's life, but the woman's life. So thank you for bringing that up.

AT: Well, especially when we have so much documentation from Dickey herself that you mentioned. And what's interesting is he wasn't just undermining her psychologically. He was actively sabotaging her with things like, “oh, you can't go on this assignment because I need you here to take care of me.” And she would. And then there was their, I'm going to call it their European tour, which was a massive disaster, I believe largely because of him.

LR: When she was covering the post-war reconstruction efforts before the Marshall Plan, right? So, this is real misery and terror for the people of Europe, whether you're in Germany or Poland or France. You don't know where your next meal is coming from. And it was hard conditions to be sure. But Dickey was there to work, to do this documentation. She was not just reporting for magazines and journals. She was also working for Save the Children and for the Quakers and other aid organizations. And so while she's doing this incredibly important work that helped Americans understand the necessity for rebuilding. And ultimately, I believe, helped push through the Marshall Plan, which was invaluable to rebuilding Europe. He really didn't do anything except for make her be his nurse, and lover, and psychologist, and cook, and maid and, and, and. So again, you know, how far could she have gone, were it not for this load on her back? But how strong was she when she got it off? And I think that's the real end to the story, of his story and to end to their relationship was that, yeah, it was deplorable and awful. And maybe she would have gone further if it had never happened. But I know in my life, we all have obstacles and difficulties. And we can only ever reclaim what has happened to us if we are to transcend it. And she did, even under the most difficult of circumstances, better than most. And then once she was able to function on her own as an independent human being, she was able to just, I think, be a game-changer on so many different levels.

AT: Now, in the book, you don't get into her relationship with her mother too much. But my impression was that her mother wanted her to settle down and have a family. She encouraged her to stay with Tony even knowing that he was -

LR: He cheated on her.

AT: Oh, yeah, the, oh, God, we haven't even gotten into the cheating. But, you know, it seems like it was very much that mindset of an awful husband is better than no husband at all.

LR: Well, you know, I think it's this, boys will be boys, locker room talk, where have we heard that before? And at the time it was 1955 that she was separating herself from Tony. But even before that, you know, Dickey was born in 1919. You know, she was a teenager in the Great Depression. And I think her parents were pretty liberal for the day, right? Like, she went to school. She was valedictorian. She went to MIT. You don't achieve these things - well, some

people do, but most people don't achieve these things without a supportive home. Likewise, her brother, Robert Meyer, was a very successful person. He was a geologist at Wisconsin University at Madison. And as far as I know, a wonderful human being. But she was, I think, Edna was a woman of her time. And there was an expectation, and still to a degree is an expectation, that a woman's goals and dreams and voice and independence and humanity comes second to that of her husband. Now, and the other thing was like, Tony was a charmer, right? He could charm anyone into anything. He was a great salesman. This was his skill. This was his gift. And so he really charmed her family. But to all of their credit and Edna's credit, once Dickey really laid on the table, everything that was happening, they did support her. And just like so many other victims of abuse, whether that's emotional, psychological or physical, so often the impulse is to hide what is happening to you. Because your abuser tells you it is your fault and that you should be ashamed for being the victim of abuse. And again, like that Dickey was able to say, "no, I'm not going to be ashamed. No, this is not my fault. And I will be my best self. And if you're not willing to support me in that journey, go with me on that journey, then then you can just stay where you are. But I'm not staying there anymore."

Although I do think what's really funny about Edna, who I just kind of relate to, just from my own mom, who, you know, it's a bit of a worrywort herself with all my sort of teenage exploits. But anyway, Edna didn't want Dickey ever to fly in a plane. And all Dickey ever wanted to do was fly in planes and Edna made her promise that she wouldn't. And then so Dickey goes off to MIT and she spends all this time at the Boston Airfield. She breaks her promise, talks her way onto a plane, and never wants to land. And she flunks out of MIT because of this, comes home. And, you know, to this poor woman's like nerves, Dickey gets a job at a flying circus and takes part of her salary in flying lessons. So, you know, it's like Edna really like tried to meet her daughter where she was. But Dickey was so far ahead of her time. So yes, like, Edna was like, "how can you leave your husband? This is what marriage this is what life is." But once Dickey laid it on the table, Edna, as she always did, came to her side. So she always had her family's, her family support.

AT: I think it's important to note that, as you noted, the support of that family is not something that's guaranteed by any means. And when we're talking about an abusive partner pushing this narrative that, you know, "this is your fault. No one will believe you." That's not just this controlling person who has a lot of influence saying that. This is something that as you noted, she was blamed and basically, you know, rape cultured for being imprisoned and tortured under a despotic regime. So the fact is that any woman or any person who is experiencing intimate abuse is told, not just by their partner, but often by society, that you will not be taken seriously. And that does extend to men. I mean, obviously, a lot of times on this podcast, I talk about "it's because she was a woman." And certainly there is an issue around believing women, but when it comes to men being abused as well, there is a definite pushback of, "well, what do you mean your wife hits you? Like, aren't you the man?" And so, yeah, I think we just need to acknowledge that it wasn't just Tony telling her. It was everything.

LR: Yeah, that's right. Yeah, that it's this whole societal support, right, of this abuse. And I think

that goes back to this extension of this narrative that she wasn't good enough, which is why I actually believe that more of us don't know about Dickey Chapelle about this incredible figure. Because the narrative of the abuser was the narrative that was believed into 2023, whenever my book came out. Hopefully I'm changing this narrative about the key. And my life's goal is to change that narrative about so many other women, whether it's women, you know, living their life today. I hope they understand that they are the writers of their own narrative, or women in, you know, in the historical record that we need to rewrite their narratives that's in a way that is more accurate as to who they were and what they did and give them the credit they deserve for their accomplishments. I mean, you look at the victims of Kevin Spacey, right? Like those were all men. And one of the things, right, I think about #Metoo a lot, right? Like a lot of women, I was a victim of sexual harassment and sexual assault. I don't know any woman who wasn't a victim of that on varying degrees. And actually, one of the most meaningful narratives to come out of the #Metoo movement was of Brendan Fraser. When he was groped, I think the Golden Globes. And my reaction was like, "Oh my God, wait a minute, I was groped when I was a waitress. And that's not okay." Like, I never got that before. I was like, "that's just part of being a waitress." So yeah, it's across all genders, this kind of abuse and this kind of saddling the victim with the blame for that abuse. But that is the ultimate defense of the abuser. That's how they get away with it, whether that's on an interpersonal level or on a societal level where one group is oppressing an entirely other group, right? It's their fault. They're not smart enough. They're not civilized. They don't speak the same language" and on and on and on. "It's their fault." No, that's not our narrative anymore. It's not their fault. It's the fault of the abuser.

AT: And I think a big part of the pushback when men say that they've been abused or harassed is men don't want to think of themselves as potentially vulnerable. And if you see someone like Terry Crews, who's this huge muscular guy and other men see that, even Terry Crews can be victimized.

LR: Or Matthew McConaughey also, you know?

AT: Yeah. And it really throws into stark relief that anyone is vulnerable to this and that makes people understandably very uncomfortable. But your discomfort doesn't mean you get to invalidate someone else's story.

LR: Yeah. Also, just side note, I think now that I'm thinking about this and talking about it out loud, like one messed up thing is, as soon as men started talking about their abuse, it legitimized women not taking responsibility for their abuse. "It can happen to men too. So it must be not their fault because they're men." But when it was just women speaking up, it's like, "well, you know, she probably was wearing a short skirt" or whatever, you know?

AT: I think we're getting back into the 100% of the blame is yours, but 0% of the credit. I think it really comes down to people want to believe that we are in control of our own lives. Therefore, yeah, it makes us feel unsafe. It makes us feel like things are out of control. And rather than processing those difficult emotions, people just lash out at the person who is making

them uncomfortable just by telling their own truth.

LR: Yeah. Well, and I think also, when we are cut off from each other, there can be no sense of empathy. There can be no sense of exchange or communion because we are just alone. We're alone in all this. And as Hannah Arendt says, loneliness is the seed of totalitarianism, right? If you can isolate everyone, then you can have no sense of togetherness, no sense of communion, no sense of strength or security. And yeah, again, it all feeds back into this idea of an abuser, of controlling women's narratives, of rewriting who we are as individuals and rewriting our history collectively as women to be accurate and to reflect the strength we have and the solidarity we have and quite frankly, the numbers we have. But one of the things that I'm encountering, which is so inspiring and so encouraging to me is that there are a lot of women archivists who are going through these piles of paper that have never been organized, never been taken seriously, and are just sort of thrown together, going through them, digitizing them, keywording them, and making them available for study. And I'm writing my second book now about Jeannette Rankin. You know, the reason I'm able to, her archives are so dispersed - they're in Montana, they're in Georgia, they're in Pennsylvania, they're in New York. I don't have the money to go to all of those places, stay at all those places, and I'm a mother of two. You know, I can't do it, but because these archivists have digitized them and keyworded them, I'm able to access them from anywhere, which has been absolutely incredible and instrumental in writing this book. And I truly believe, I mean, this is a kind of a hyperbolic statement, but this kind of democratization of archival resources will revolutionize our capacity to write women's histories. And I get the chills at thinking about the possibilities therein.

AT: Join us next time on the Infinite Women podcast, and remember - well-behaved women rarely make history.