NAR Podcast Episode 9 Final Transcript
Guests: Kitty Wallace and Jen Stanbrough

*Intro: You're listening to “Dive with NAR” powered by REALTOR® Magazine. Listen in as two real estate pros talk must have tools of the trade and share stories of inspiration. Get ready to step up your business. This episode is sponsored by NA RS realtor safety program.*

**Janelle Brevard**: Hi, everyone. I'm Janelle Brevard, NAR’s chief storyteller. Thanks for joining us today on “Drive with NAR.” On this show, you'll hear firsthand from REALTORS® about some of the most pressing issues facing the profession. Today, we're going to talk about the important issue of REALTOR® safety. I'm joined by Jen Stanbrough, managing broker of Iowa Realty Company out of Des Moines. Thanks, Jen for joining. And rounding out today's platform is none other than Kitty Wallace, managing broker with RE/MAX Integrity out of Cle Elum, Washington. Hi, Kitty. I want to dive right in. I know REALTOR® safety is something that's very personal to both of you. And I'd like to start there. Both of you've had some really harrowing encounters and I want you to just share that a little bit with our listeners. So Jen, I'd like to start with you, your friend and fellow REALTOR®, Ashley, was killed on the job in 2011. As I understand, I know it's been a long journey for you to cope with this loss, this tragic loss. Are you comfortable telling us a little bit about what happened to Ashley?

**Jen**: I can. I met Ashley Okland numerous years ago now through a good friend of my husband and Ashley and he started dating. And I met Ashley at what I would call one of my husband's work events that maybe I wasn't as looking forward to attending as I should have been. But I still remember the minute Ashley walked into that room, and Ashley was beautiful on both the outside and the inside. She had a smile that lit up a room. And if you were blessed to know Ashley, you were blessed to know a real friend. When you talk, you had conversations with Ashley she would remember what you talked with her about. Ashley was younger than I, she did not have children but she loved on my children, she would call and make sure that I was bringing my son over for Halloween trick-or-treat because she wanted to see him in his costume. She would deliver little pumpkins to not only my son but other kids that she knew. I had mentioned to Ashley once that my dad had passed away years before I met Ashley and that Father's Day I received a call from her just letting me know that she was thinking about me that day as she realized it would be a difficult day. Those are just a couple of the examples of the true friend that Ashley Okland was to so many. Ashley was also a real estate agent. And at that time, she had a new construction townhome project that was not far from my real estate office. And one Friday in April 2011 I was out showing houses I remember that I had three houses to show that day to a set of clients that I had been showing for quite some time because we could not find the house. And I remember when we went to enter the third house, the daughter of my client that was with us mentioned that she had just heard on the radio that there had been a shooting over by Jordan Creek Mall. And I remember dismissing it and immediately saying that's a weird area. Nothing ever happens over there. And immediately I went on to open the door to go into the house because it never would have crossed my mind that it would have included or that someone I knew and cared about and loved would have been involved let alone somebody that was in the same industry. But as I continued showing the house that day, my phone continued to ring and I received text after text message and I continued to decline those trying to stay present in the showing. And finally I noticed that my manager had called for the third time but I remember when I answered, she immediately asked me where I was and I asked if everything was okay and I remember her pausing and said the words Ashley's been shot. Ashley was hosting the open house that she or her business partner held every afternoon at this new construction townhome in West Des Moines, Iowa area. While she was hosting the open house someone came in and shot her twice. A worker for the builder came in a couple hours later or what they think was a few hours later and found her she was transported to the hospital where she was later pronounced dead. Nearly 11 years later, we still don't have answers as to who shot and killed Ashley, while she was hosting her open house, it is still an open investigation. But that was the first moment that it struck me that the job that we do in meeting people and showing them houses and sitting and hosting open houses and vacant homes is dangerous. That was the moment that I was really faced with pure evil and realized that while I do still believe the majority of our clients and those people that contact us are out for good there is there are those people out there that may have ill intentions and real estate does allow for opportunities where we often are alone in a home with our clients. And that was the first time that I really took a look at my industry and realized I had never thought about safety. I had not been trained about safety. And it really became a passion through my loss and the grief and the devastation of losing Ashley and losing her to such a such a tragic event such an unnecessary, pure evil. It became a passion of mine to educate others and not only myself but others in the industry to hopefully prevent something like this from ever happening to someone else in the future.

**Janelle**: Wow, Jen, I am so so very sorry for your loss of Ashley and the fact that you've been able to pick up the pieces to carry on the cause for REALTOR® safety is really something, thank you for that. Kitty, I wanted to hear from you next because you also have had some harrowing experiences. I know you've been in an NAR training video even about safety called “Predators: The True Nature of Crimes Against REALTORS®”, and that can be found on [nar.realtor/safety](https://www.nar.realtor/safety). Can you tell us a little bit about what's happened with you?

**Kitty**: Yes, Janelle. I really didn't take REALTOR® safety very seriously until 2020. That was the first year that the National Association of REALTORS® created a REALTOR® safety committee. And the leadership team at the National Association of REALTORS® placed every state president on that committee the first year. So I happened to be the Washington REALTORS® state president in 2020. So I sat on that committee. And it was eye-opening and ear-opening to listen to stories like Jen's, stories like Beverly Carter's. And it really hit home on how much we are how vulnerable we are as REALTORS® out in our industry doing what we do every single day. We meet with total strangers, we take them into vacant homes. And I'm in a small rural community in Washington State. And I often don't have cell phone reception. I thought that after sitting on that committee on how many times I had an intuition that I wasn't in a safe environment, doing my job, right fresh in my year, I've been a REALTOR® for almost 20 years. And about probably year three, I had an experience with a total stranger, not even one of my clients. But back in the day, we advertised in real estate guides, which was the great old real estate magazine that you would pick up at, you know, the gas station or at the local coffee shop. And you know, you had your picture in it, you had all your listings. And I advertised religiously in that magazine called “The Daily Record Real Estate Guide.” And every month I put in my listings, I put in my sold if I didn't have any properties, I would just take a one page out about myself in that magazine. And all of a sudden I would be places throughout my community or showing homes. And when I would come back to my car, there was a note left on my car. You look beautiful today, or I love those high heels, or your red hair is flaming today. And this went on honestly for about three months. And I really just kind of shrugged it off. I really didn't take how seriously those notes being left on my car could be and it honestly it wasn't until I came out of the grocery store with my husband and my husband found the note that he said what the you-know-what is this? And I told him what was happening. And I said, you know, I just kind of shrugged it off. I said I don't know who it is it's not that big of a deal. Well, needless to say, he was very upset. And he made me go to our local police station, which again, I'm in a small rural community. We know everybody here so our local police chief said, Uh, oh, I think I actually know who that is. He's been harassing other REALTORS®. And, you know, he made me file a restraining order. And the restraining order was delivered to the gentleman. And you know, he was a young gentleman in his mid 20s. And, you know, for a while the notes had stopped. And then, the gentleman was pulled over in the state of Idaho, which the border of Idaho is about three hours from where I live. And he was pulled over for a traffic violation. And when they had probable cause to search his car in his trunk, they found boxes of “The Daily Record Real Estate Guide.” For three consecutive years, they dated back and each page was folded over where my ad was. Now, as creepy as that is, that's actually not a criminal act. It's a publication, it's public record, anybody can have it, but clearly cause a concern, right? So I got a phone call from the Idaho State Police and said, Do you know, this gentleman? And I said, actually, I have a restraining order against him? And they said, well, we've pulled him over. And we found, you know, the magazines. Well, as it turns out, he was later arrested for several sexual crimes. So I think back at my lack of taking that seriously when those notes were being left on my car, and how tragic that could have turned. And I think back at why I didn't report it, why I was hesitant. And I think part of it was, I kind of felt somewhat responsible because I placed the ad. I have, you know, advertisements all over town. Now with social media, I'm on every social media channel there is. And that's really how I build my brand and how I built my business successful for 20 years. It wasn't until I sat on the REALTOR® safety committee, that I really realized how important it is for me to speak up for as heartbreaking it is for Jen to tell her story about Ashley, how important it is for us to speak up and start sharing the stories.

**Jen**: Kitty, when you were talking about that, it made me think you said that you'd had several stories to share. And I think that is telling because I myself have had several scenarios that I have brushed off as not a big deal. There are these and there are so many things that happen on a, sadly a regular basis that go unreported because we do brush them off. I know me myself, I don't I don't want to cause anyone hassle. I don't feel that an experience, such as I remember someone coming in and would not leave an open house. And he stayed around and stayed around. And I just got that creepy feeling. But I did not want to come across as rude. So I did not address it. I just let him stay there. And who knows it turned out okay. But by not saying something. Who knows what could have happened?

**Kitty**: Exactly. When does that hesitation become a fatal mistake? And you know, that's why I was compelled to share my story with the REALTOR® safety video because that was a recent incident that had happened. I had implemented safety requirements in my office that you have the client meet you at the office. First time, no exceptions. And again, I'm in a small rural community and most of our clientele comes from outside of the area. So often people will call and say, oh, I'll be at the house on 123 Fourth Street. And it's like, oh, I don't want to hassle them to come to the office first. But again, I've instilled in my brokers how important it is that they take that moment, not only for their own safety, but they also can build a rapport with the client, I mean, who just shows up to a total stranger and opens the door and goes into the house with them. We do, REALTORS® do, right? So it's so important that we really get this message out to stop for a moment and take the time to put your safety first.

**Janelle**: We'll be right back with the word from our sponsor.

***Mid-reel ad spot***

***Janelle****: September is REALTOR® Safety Month and I'm excited to be joined today by Janet Judd, 2022 Chair of the REALTOR® Safety Advisory Committee. Janet is a former police officer and a recent graduate of the FBI Citizens Academy in St. Louis. Welcome, Janet. So I'm wondering what's the number one thing you'd like REALTORS® to know about safety.*

***Janet****: I want them to know that we are in a high-risk occupation. And we've been declared that by the Department of Labor. So it's official. Whenever I tell agents that it always catches them by surprise and it takes their breath away, they're shocked to hear that 60,000 REALTORS® have been victims of rape, crime of assault and murder. So raising that awareness is our first big step.*

***Janelle****: That is just so shocking and eye opening to hear one of your strategies Janet for helping REALTORS® avoid becoming a victim?*

***Janet****: Well, we have to tell them first, they need to understand that the risks are real, and that almost all the crimes against REALTORS®, they're predatory, they're not random acts of violence. Our research shows us that fewer than half of the REALTORS® understand that they are targeted by predators, because those predators look for signs of vulnerability. But the good news is there's lots of ways that REALTORS® can protect themselves and each other. And that's where NAR’s resources come in, and the REALTOR® safety program. There are dozens of resources and a wealth of information for other REALTORS® for their brokerages or the association's at* [*nar.realtor/safety*](https://www.nar.realtor/safety)*. And they can look at webinars, they can look at training videos, articles, etc.*

***Janelle****: That’s really so helpful to know really good information. Janet, can you give us an update on what the Safety Advisory Committee is working on?*

***Janet****: A key initiative right now is to modify all of the MLS standards to increase REALTOR® safety. And we're doing that by trying to add fields, like cell phone strength, whether or not a property is vacant or isolated, etc. So we're also starting to work on a trauma response team. And that's to help victims of crimes and their families.*

***Janelle****: Thank you, Janet. This is really useful information. Any final thoughts?*

***Janet****: I just want to remind everybody that our primary goal is to get every realtor home safe every single night. September is realtor Safety Month. But safety should be important every single day. And just another reminder to visit* [*nar.realtor/safety*](https://www.nar.realtor/safety) *for all the resources you might need. I'm on a couple of those webinars, so you might be able to see me.*

**Janelle**: OK, everyone, we're back. And let's hop back into our REALTOR® safety discussion with Jen and Kitty. Kitty, you mentioned something about having people come to the office first. And I wanted to ask you both, Kitty and then Jen, how have the experiences that you've had these, you know, harrowing experiences? How have they changed the way you interact with customers?

**Kitty**: It's time that we put protocols in place in our business that says, oh, wait a minute, I had an incident that I shared on the REALTOR® safety video where the exact same scenario and had happened to gentleman had called and wanted to see some vacant land, he was very insistent that I meet him at the vacant lot. And vacant land in my air areas rural and usually it's 20 plus acres. And so I was very adamant that I would only meet him after he came to the office, he was very persistent that that wasn't convenient for him, and that I needed to meet him. And I kept saying, I'm more than happy to meet you. I can meet you this time this time. You know, none of the times work for him. He's like this, you know, you need to meet me at the property. And I just stuck to my instinct and my own training and did not do that. He ultimately ended up calling into our brokerage and wanted to file a complaint that I wasn't taking care of clients and that he's sure the seller of the land would want to know that I was resisting showing him the property. As it turned out, I'm the broker. So he was really only complaining to me but he did not know that. But again, I share that story with my REALTORS® that I managed and run and to really help them understand that his intent was not to buy land, you know, I diverted that. Who knows what would have happened if I would have given in on it. I just had a situation with another one of my female agents. And I referred her a buyer it was a call into the office. And I said yes, I can set you up with an agent, no problem. And same thing you know, I put the phone on hold. I said I do not know him. You make sure that he comes to meet you at the office. And she had him on speakerphone and he was again put off that he had to come to the office. And she goes well you know our office policy is because I haven't met you for safety reasons. We have to meet in the office first. As it turned out, the guy was perfectly fine. My REALTOR® and her client actually ended up knowing in common people, it was perfectly safe, but had it not been. We don't want to go there.

**Jen**: So I think as professionals, we do owe it to ourselves to kind of set our standards and, and educate our not only ourselves as professionals, but also our clients as to how we are going to run our business. And part of that is our safety protocols. And Janelle, you made a comment that, you know, it was great that I kind of turned Ashley's tragedy into this passion and purpose. But I do want to make sure that everyone out there hears that that was not an easy path. It was not waking up the day after and immediately having this passion and moving forward through the pain. There were months and months and years and even still talking about and experiencing the loss of Ashley and it's such a such a tragic way. It's still bothersome, and it's still one of those things that I struggle with, I struggle with hard and so I want people to understand that it is OK to feel and it is OK to have to take a step back and to pause. One thing that in Iowa we did create, and I'm excited that it's been picked up by the National Association of REALTORS®. But in Iowa we gathered and we created a safety pledge. It says that because we owe it to ourselves, our colleagues, our family and our clients, we will implement safe showing practices and safety protocols into our business. And that has been something that has given me a tool to use when I'm talking to not only my buyers or sellers. But here is how we do our business, we asked you to come in show us identification. I do this with every single client, I use a safety system called FOREWARN® where I'm putting people through running their quotes, their phone number or their background on there. It's another tool that I feel comfortable with using and kind of a nice screening process we have in there's an example on again, the National Association of REALTORS® website of a [listing safety form](https://www.nar.realtor/safety/realtor-safety-forms-more-than-just-space-filler) where it makes it real easy to talk with my sellers about Mr. And Mrs. Seller, you are listing your home. And as a part of that we are inviting people into your home, they will be in your personal space, please make sure you take down your personal photos, make sure you lock up anything that has that's a value to you and make sure that you don't have anything laying around with your personal information, weapons, medication. It makes that tool, it provides us with a tool that we can educate and protect not only ourselves, but our clients because we are inviting people into face of our sellers.

**Kitty**: Yeah, that's right, Jen, we are professionals. It takes constant training. And you know, I think it starts with the broker, the broker owner to really say, OK, I can provide all the tools possible. And there are so many amazing tools out there. But the agent, the REALTOR® has to use those tools, they have to be aware of their surroundings. I train and mentor agents all the time I tell them, open the door, let your clients in first, you never want to be in front of your clients. So it's little simple things like that. And the more we can constantly speak up about it, and constantly share stories, the more I hope it resonates with every REALTOR® out there.

**Jen**: And kitty, I think it's important just like you said, to have that conversation over and over and over. Because we really have to make these practices habits. I used to, when I was going out to show it was kind of a joke. But if my husband would ask me where I was going and what time I would be home, when I was going to show, it would be like I'm going to show I don't know what time I'll be home. And I was almost annoyed because you know, I'm a professional, independent female, and I'm going to go out and I'm going to do my job. And I'm going to come home, well now I look at it very differently that when I go out to show it's in my calendar very much. Here's who I'm showing. And here are the addresses. And here are the approximate times that I am planning to be at each of those. And both my husband and my assistant and my team members have access to that calendar as well as I, I share my location with a couple of friends and my family and my assistant. So again, those tools are in place and I'm doing them every single day over and over. So I'm trying to protect as much as possible.

**Kitty**: So I love how technology has evolved and really helped us give more options for REALTOR® safety. We talked about our phone and like Jen said, I've set up location. So my son, my colleagues, everybody can find me by my location, and people will let some of my REALTORS® will say, well, that's too invasive. I'm like, well find one person. Let one person know where your location is and let them know to track you. And again, I often think that resources out there are great and they're abundant. But if we don't use them, they're worthless. So I've kind of thought outside the box and thought, OK, what else can we do? I love the location service. I always text somebody, if I am going by myself, even, even if it's a client I've already established, I still text somebody an itinerary and let them know where I'm at, especially when I show late in the evening, which isn't too often. But if I do, I will text or I'll say, hey, there's nobody else in the office. I've, you know, vetted the client. However, what does vetting really mean? So I vetted the client, but here's the address we're going to. So at least somebody knows my last known location. I also love the AirTags. So I purchased AirTags for my agents, and the AirTtag is an Apple device. And a couple of my agents are Androids. And I said, Hey, no problem. You just put this in your pocket when you show, I can track it on my end. And I'm not if you're uncomfortable with me tracking you then give it to somebody else who you know, has an Apple device and has the ability to do that, because it's really about finding your location.

**Jen**: One thing that we talk about often is holding each other accountable. Because I myself find if I'm busy one day, or maybe I'm tired, or I'm just not on the game, my game, I will find myself slipping and not being as safe. And my agents will call me out on it just as I call them out, you know, you're going to meet someone, do you know this person? Have you met with them before? Do you need me to go with you? And I think doing that in a loving way it holds each of us accountable. And it keeps that conversation going because we do owe it to ourselves and our clients.

**Kitty**: Exactly. And I tell my agents, I literally live five minutes from my office, call me text me, I'll make sure I can be there and I'll go with you. Right and I've got like I said, I've got an office full of females. And again, I always tell Miles, my one male agent, to not be thinking he's foolproof either to make sure that he's doing the same kind of practices everybody else.

**Janelle**: I think those are powerful words to end on, Kitty, thank you so much for joining today.

**Jen**: Thank you for having us.

**Kitty**: Thank you it's a pleasure to share.

***Outro****: Thanks for joining us on this episode of “Drive With NAR.” Tune in every month on* [*Magazine.realtor/drive*](https://magazine.realtor/drive) *or subscribe wherever you get your podcasts. Get more tips to boost your business at* [*Magazine.Realtor*](https://magazine.realtor/)*.*