

1 VGV 73 Billy Violet 01/26/2021

2 And then so, now we'll just go into the interview, and we don't have like a demographic survey  
3 for you to fill out, so we just have a few questions to learn a little bit about you, and just to  
4 understand your background. So how would you self-describe your race and your gender?

5 B: So, I prefer they and them.

6 K: Okay.

7 B: And then I am Black, White, and Indian, so I appear to be White passing a lot of the year, but  
8 I openly identify as a Black individual.

9 K: Okay, great thank you so much.

10 K: Great, that's helpful thank you. And then what is your age if you're comfortable sharing that?

11 B: I am 30.

12 K: Great and then what area of southeastern Wisconsin do you live and how long have you lived  
13 there, about?

14 B: Kenosha, Wisconsin, the majority of my life.

15 K: Okay, great thank you. So, the rest of the interview is really to capture your experiences with  
16 gun violence and some people have a specific incident like a family member that was killed in  
17 gun violence or a personal experience, so, this is really your chance to tell your story with gun  
18 violence, and I'll ask some questions along the way, but if you would like to share your overall  
19 experience with gun violence, or your work with gun violence prevention, that would be great.

20 B: Okay, so you just want me to kind of share what it is that I've experienced and what my  
21 experience has been?

22 K: Yeah, that would be great, and if there's one particular incident, that you want to focus on  
23 that, that's fine too.

24 B: Well, it's kind of a combination of just a few incidents. So, I'll just start with, I, after the  
25 killing of George Floyd, after he was murdered, I started participating in Black Lives Matter  
26 activism for the city of Kenosha, and this was long before the Jacob Blake incident here in town,  
27 and part of my venture was to, I was struggling to get individuals to participate with protests and  
28 to show up to board meetings and so forth, and an individual came to town who was embarking  
29 on a journey where they would march from Milwaukee all the way to Washington D.C. and their  
30 planned arrival date was going to be on the 57<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Martin Luther King's, "I Have A  
31 Dream" speech, for the March on Washington. And I joined about, I think it had to be like three  
32 weeks or so into their journey, I joined them in Ohio, and most of the time I caravanned because  
33 the individual leading the march walked very fast, there was a quote that we all said that his feet  
34 never actually hit the ground, and if you weren't walking seven or eight miles an hour, you were  
35 getting scooted along, and the portion where I joined was, it was very hilly so I would only last a  
36 few minutes, and then I would caravan in my car and when I joined I think we had like 15  
37 vehicles. And by the time of the incident, we had it feels like 20 vehicles, maybe more. There  
38 were probably 30 or 40 of us and it included all age ranges from a toddler to adult, and we also  
39 had a pregnant individual with us. So, this particular night was amidst the incident taken place in  
40 Kenosha as a result of the Jacob Blake shooting, and the leader of the march had been asked to  
41 return to Kenosha to try and deescalate some of the violence that was taking place at the hands of  
42 police officers, and during this time we had kind of had pulled on the side of the road because,

43 typically, what we do every day before starting to march and caravan, is you have like a little, I  
44 don't want to say Pow Wow, but we had just a meeting of the minds and share words of  
45 inspiration and determination, and then you start marching. But this particular night, we had been  
46 in a spot for longer than normal because we were discussing, you know, what to do about  
47 Kenosha, and I was really conflicted as to whether I should go back, whether I should finish the  
48 march, because I had been trying to deescalate by reaching out to different city officials that I  
49 had been rejected. They refused to answer my calls, or they'd hang up on me and so, you know,  
50 prior to this specific night I think we'd been out there, I had been out there for a couple of days,  
51 and most times during that time it was not uncommon to have a shotgun or a pistol aimed at my  
52 head while I was caravanning or marching—

53 K: Wow.

54 B: Just by people on the sidelines, they would just appear. There was this joke that I made  
55 because the first night that we hit Pennsylvania, somebody was commenting in live videos that  
56 said, "Welcome to Pennsylvania we have mountain lions and black bears and a specific type of  
57 spider", and then a little further up the road, there was a group of two middle-aged White men  
58 with shotguns halfway brandished at us as we approached them, and someone fired a warning  
59 shot in the air, and I remember thinking to myself, and I made this joke to help me try and cope,  
60 because they warn you about the mountain lions, they warn you about the bears, they don't really  
61 warn you about the White supremacists that fly out of the trees.

62 K: Wow.

63 B: So, I was already really on edge, I had never experienced this type of circumstance before,  
64 and this night we were in the street too long. We were parked apparently across the street from a

65 house and the property was like, it looked like a junk yard I guess like a tow yard. And all the  
66 sudden we heard like, noises and I had just been up front talking with the leaders of the march,  
67 offering to drive them back, because I really didn't feel safe going back by myself, and I didn't  
68 think that I would be able to help in Kenosha, it was very important to me to finish the march,  
69 and I was just kind of dancing because music was playing and we heard these noises again, and  
70 then you know it's a really terrifying experience to say, "Oh, are those fireworks or are those  
71 gunshots?", because we had seen a combination of both on our march. And there were people up  
72 front saying, "Oh, those are fireworks don't worry about it" and there was an individual that  
73 looked back at me and mouthed to me to, "Get the expletive in your car right this, you know,  
74 right now", and it was a very aggressive mouthing, and then we heard a lot more and they  
75 sounded much closer, and I said, "Those are gunshots". And it turns out that an elderly man had  
76 called his son. The son shot at us because he was concerned for his safety, and his friend had  
77 come over and come outside and open fired at us with a Birdseye pellet shotgun. And the first  
78 vehicle at the front of the line had a pregnant woman in it. And gratefully, they were okay, but  
79 they, there was one person, amongst many, that were not physically injured, but this individual  
80 was actually shot, and so we went to the hospital and they had to have emergency surgery on  
81 their liver and have it stented, and then they tried to detain him on a sealed search warrant. We  
82 were all sleeping in the parking lot because we were scared to leave him, because we were in  
83 racist country. And when we finally made it to the hotel, no sooner than ten minutes of being  
84 there, we started noticing the trucks rolling through and they would have shotguns on their laps  
85 pointed up out the window of their car, and they would have their flags, and they would, they  
86 were yelling at us, and eventually, a truck actually shot at us, and the state police came but they

87 did not really provide any type of security. They did not indicate whether or not they'd be  
88 surveying the hotel. That night—

89 K: Wow.

90 B: For whatever reason, I fell asleep with my phone not charging properly and I had, I woke up  
91 around 3:00 am, and I remember that my husband had to evacuate the kids the night prior  
92 because of the burnings, the fires, in Kenosha, and I was really worried about him, so I wondered  
93 if someone was up, with all of those trucks that had been driving through. I wondered if anyone's  
94 keeping an eye on the cars, and I went downstairs, and when I got outside there were a couple  
95 individuals, some from Pittsburgh, other national leaders that were super out of breath, they were  
96 hunched over trying to catch their breath and I said, "What happened? Are you okay?" and they  
97 said that men had just come from behind the trees and chased them on foot with guns, and the  
98 hotel doors, the front doors, actually had a clamp on them because they were sliding doors, they  
99 were clamped shut with like this machine, and the only way to get in was through the side doors  
100 with your keys. And while I was out there using the phone, another truck came through, and I  
101 was hiding behind a cement block, you know like the hotel has an awning.

102 K: Yeah.

103 B: And as the truck would move, I had to move, and they were screaming for me because they  
104 were hiding beneath and in between the cars. I couldn't answer them because I was afraid that if  
105 I answered them the truck would find me—

106 K: Oh my gosh.

107 B: And they would shoot me. And so eventually the truck left. I'm so sorry this is really, really  
108 difficult for me to talk about.

109 K: No, I this is, it's obviously very traumatic experience.

110 B: You know the kicker, I was okay, I made it back inside and then as soon as I got into the bed,  
111 I bolted the hotel door shut, and as soon as I got in the bed, I was laying there for five or ten  
112 minutes, and I heard six gunshots. And the reality is, is that, I was too scared to unbolt my hotel  
113 door to go check on the people that were protecting me. And so, I just kind of laid awake for the  
114 rest of the night until I could see some of the sun, so that I could go downstairs and make sure  
115 nothing had happened. And before I had gone to bed that night, before getting up in the middle  
116 of the night, there was the state police officer, by the police tape where there were picking up  
117 shell casings, and I just went over to him I said you know, "Are you guys going to be patrolling  
118 the hotel tonight?". And his response to me was, "Why are you asking me that?", and he's like,  
119 "I don't have that answer," and I said, "Well don't you have a radio?", and he told me that I  
120 needed to correct my tone because I was being disrespectful.

121 K: Oh my gosh.

122 B: And I explained to him that I have two small children under the age of three at home, and I  
123 was worried whether or not I was going to see them again, and he said to me, he said to me that,  
124 his only advice for me is, "To go up to my room and lock the door and to call and speak with my  
125 family just before I go to bed".

126 K: Oh my God.

127 B: And he said, I said, you know I was sobbing, and I said, "What the fuck does that mean?".

128 K: Right.

129 B: And I'm sorry for swearing but he said that, "If I was in your position I would call and make  
130 sure that my babies knew that I loved them before I went to sleep".

131 K: Oh my goodness.

132 B: So, that was that night, and then the next day we just kind of, I don't know how the leader did,  
133 I'm hesitant to say his name because he doesn't, you know, there's been some pushback on using  
134 his name so I don't want to say his name but—

135 K: Sure.

136 B: He actually got up before everyone else like he always did, and he actually went back to the  
137 house and he knocked on the door and he talked with the father of the man who shot at us.

138 K: Wow.

139 B: And he said, "We have a problem because they think that we're here to burn their city down  
140 but we're not going to do that, and I know you didn't order them, but we need to communicate  
141 that we're not violent". And so, you know we kind of went on our way. There was another  
142 incident towards the edge of Pennsylvania into Maryland, that, you know, we were caravanning,  
143 and this person was kind of trolling the people that were on the sidelines that were angry with us  
144 and they were like, "Look at all these houses for sale, we could buy the whole city, we could buy  
145 vacation houses". And he was saying things like, "I'm a Black republican, Trump 2020",  
146 y'know, "Vote for me I'm going to move here and run for mayor", and people were, you know,  
147 we were laughing, and then sometimes people on the street would start laughing too, and this  
148 woman was willing to shake his hand and then he tried to shake the husband's hand, and the  
149 husband got extremely mad and when the husband got mad and backed up, I saw a wall of like  
150 six or seven militia members, like, patriots with big guns sometimes multiple guns, like, knives.

151 K: Wow.

152 B: Move forward out of a parking lot of cars. And they were very slowly making their way  
153 towards the front of the march, where the people were marching, and behind them I could see  
154 officers walking towards them, and then what happened is that the militia members separated  
155 from the cars, and the police officers blended in with the cars. So, when the militia left the cars,  
156 the officers stayed there.

157 K: Oh wow.

158 B: And there was a single officer at the front, and they made it to a standoff with the marchers  
159 and we had different signals that we used in times of danger, and at the hospital the night like, a  
160 few nights prior, this individual had made a statement to the news and to the police and said,  
161 “The next time someone points a gun at us we’re not going to wait for them to shoot”—

162 K: Oh my gosh.

163 B: “We’re just, we’re just not”, and so when this happened, he started screaming at the officer  
164 and he said, “I want you to know that every single person you see that has formed a wall around  
165 me is armed in some capacity, and if you do not have this individual stop brandishing his  
166 weapons, this is the only warning I’m giving you before we all just start shooting”. And it wasn’t  
167 until that point that the officers emerged from the parked cars and came forward.

168 K: Wow.

169 B: There was another man that I, you know, we passed this house where, I’ll tell you, the first  
170 one we passed, this house, and there was this woman in the yard screaming all kinds of things.  
171 She’s like, “I have kids in this house what are you going do, you’re going burn my house



172 down?”, “What do you want from me? Do you want my jewels?”. And she was just saying like,  
173 this crazy stuff but I didn’t really understand why because nobody was speaking to her. The  
174 person in the car got really angry at her and started yelling at her, and as I got right in front of the  
175 house I looked up, and at the balcony there was a man that had a shotgun aimed at my head with  
176 a flashlight underneath of it, and I had to put my hand over her mouth and tell her to shut up  
177 because the reality was that if he shot, he would hit me first.

178 K: Right, oh my gosh.

179 B: So, she was instigating. And then a little further up, this was a separate night, I saw this old  
180 woman in like a southern style nightgown, like a real fancy, flowery, dainty nightgown, hurling  
181 herself down the shoulder, barefoot, an old larger woman, and she was screaming for someone  
182 named Earl. And I’m like, “Who is Earl?”, like—

183 K: Yeah.

184 B: What is going on? And I get a little further off, I see Earl hauling ass towards the front of the  
185 march with a shotgun on his side. And she was pleading for him to come back and he turns  
186 around and he said, “You don’t tell me how to live my life, woman”, and then she, like, tripped,  
187 she like stumbled, and when she stumbled, he must have snapped out of it and came back to help  
188 her back to the house and she was like, a wreck and then we didn’t have any more issues from  
189 him. So—

190 K: Wow.

191 B: That’s kind of the story of the march and while I was out there, I told myself I said, “I am  
192 never going back to Pennsylvania again”, you could not pay me enough. I said, “The people here  
193 are crazy, these people are, these people are fucking nuts”, okay? This is, this is insanity.

194 K: Yeah.

195 B: And I decided to leave the day after the march so, August 20, maybe it was two days but  
196 August 29<sup>th</sup> or August 30<sup>th</sup>, and I drove home by myself and I was scared because my car was  
197 still covered very much in “Black Lives Matter”, “I Can’t Breathe”, “No Justice No Peace”,  
198 “Meet Us in D.C.”, “Kenosha to D.C.”. And they actually shut the gas off on me in the middle of  
199 the night in Ohio, and had to go to three gas stations and then call the police department and  
200 threaten to bring the entire march back to the city if they didn’t allow me to get gas.

201 K: Wow.

202 B: And I came home, yep, I came home and two weeks later I was driving on the interstate, this  
203 isn’t gun violence, but I was driving on the interstate to a work site, and I had this car keep going  
204 around me and slamming on their brakes to the point where it almost caused an accident and  
205 when I did finally get away I was about 90 percent over in front of them and my windows were  
206 down and I heard them goose the gas, and they totaled my car. I had a concussion, a collapsed  
207 lung, a chest wall contusion, and a bruised hip bone, and to be completely honest this was  
208 September 11<sup>th</sup>, today, in almost February, my face still hurts.

209 K: Oh my gosh.

210 B: My cheekbone is still injured.

211 K: Wow.

212 B: So, what I, yeah, yeah, yeah, so that’s not gun violence.

213 K: Right, right.

214 B: But I think I’ve got a combination of a few very unique topics here.

215 K: Right.

216 B: So, when I got back to Kenosha, let's rewind a little bit, I realized that all the crazy people  
217 that I thought only lived in Pennsylvania actually lived in the city. They actually live here in  
218 Wisconsin too, because we had Kyle Rittenhouse.

219 K: Right.

220 B: We had Kyle Rittenhouse, we had the Kenosha Guard, we had Kevin Matthewson who  
221 arranged the Kenosha Guard to be out there, which led to Kyle Rittenhouse shooting and killing  
222 two people and injuring a third. And with the trauma of D.C., going to D.C., and the trauma of  
223 watching the racists unfold, watching them crawl out of their closets and into little cozy nests of  
224 cognitive dissonance here in Wisconsin, I actually became obsessed with the concept of  
225 destroying patriots, exposing them for their violence. I tabled the responsibility of letting  
226 authorities know every time there was a militia event planned here in town. Every time I saw a  
227 safety threat to the community, and it slowly but surely sent me into a state of psychosis. And I  
228 don't know if you know what psychosis is.

229 K: Yeah, well—

230 B: But, it's severe, it was severe, I wasn't, the last final straw was that I knew that Kyle  
231 Rittenhouse had a trial on the 5<sup>th</sup> of January, and on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December the militia was here.  
232 And I notified the district attorney, the chief of police, the deputy's chief, the sheriff, the sheriff's  
233 deputy, the city administrator, and the mayor, that there was an event planned here on the 5<sup>th</sup>.  
234 And I asked the district attorney to not release the decision because we knew it was coming, we  
235 just didn't know when, on or before the 5<sup>th</sup>. Do you know what day they chose?

236 K: Right, the 5<sup>th</sup>.

237 B: They chose the 5<sup>th</sup> and the start time of the decision was the second that the militia event was  
238 scheduled to end.

239 K: Oh wow.

240 B: They intentionally chose the 5<sup>th</sup>.

241 K: Oh my gosh.

242 B: And when I watched that decision, you know, let's just talk about watching the video of Jacob  
243 Blake being shot in the back seven times at point blank range.

244 K: Right, right.

245 B: Just point, point blank range.

246 K: Right.

247 B: And as I, the day of the decision, I had been trying to work, and I started to realize some  
248 things. I started to realize that I could stare at my computer and attempt to write an email for an  
249 hour and a half and fail to do so. I realized that I wasn't eating every day until seven o'clock at  
250 night, if I ate at all. I realized that I was staying up until three or four o'clock in the morning  
251 working, trying to expose the militia. I realized that I no longer enjoyed being around my  
252 children, I didn't want to spend time with them, I resented them for making me feel guilty  
253 because I was too busy to spend time with them. And with that, I went to bed only to wake up to  
254 watch the insurrection unfold in front of me.

255 K: Wow.

256 B: And I went on an emergency medical leave of absence, and I was pushed into severe suicidal  
257 ideation.

258 K: Wow.

259 B: Severe. To the point where my husband and I had to locate every bottle of medication in this  
260 house, and he had to put it in his car, lock the doors, and then put the keys under his pillow.

261 K: Oh my goodness.

262 B: So, that if I wanted to take any medication, pills—

263 K: Right.

264 B: I would have to wake him to get the keys. And I then went into a partial hospitalization  
265 program. I underwent 60 hours of intense therapy, and I received new mental health diagnosis  
266 that I somehow evaded for the duration of my entire life, all 30 years. And I am doing much  
267 better now. I will tell you, that I am doing much better now. I eat, I'm sleeping, I have a routine,  
268 I'm looking at going back to work next week, I've set boundaries, I no longer am tracking the  
269 militia, you know?

270 K: Right.

271 B: But, the events of D.C. led me to become obsessed. That gun violence almost destroyed my  
272 life. Do you know what it's like to decide to force yourself that you're going to give your  
273 children a bath, and then watching them play and actually feeling resentful that you can't work  
274 because you're watching them play, and then convincing yourself that you're a terrible human  
275 being, and that you don't deserve to live because your incapable of seeing joy in your children.

276 K: Oh my gosh, I'm, I mean I'm listening I'm sitting here—

277 B: Because you're only, because you're only mission is to undermine the patriots so that they  
278 don't shoot and kill anyone else?

279 K: Right.

280 B: That was my reality. And I'm doing so much better now, and I intentionally want to be around  
281 my kids, I miss my kids, I miss my husband, like, these are natural emotions that I wasn't  
282 capable of feeling. I was in a state of indifference where all I could feel was paranoia.

283 K: Right.

284 B: Because on top of all of it, a couple months ago, because of my work and tracking the militia  
285 and because of my Black Lives Matter activism, I had started receiving subliminal death threats.  
286 So, for instance I was getting robocalls on my cell phone trying to get me to purchase cremation  
287 plans, grave burials, how to increase my trust fund. And if that wasn't enough, I received a call  
288 from Lake Oconee Rentals in Georgia saying that they were, "Grateful that I had filled out a  
289 postcard with my name and address on it, asking about what the amenities are of this property",  
290 and the first thing that comes up when you Google, "Lake Oconee Rentals", maybe it's not the  
291 first thing, but because of the death threats I'm kind of like, hypervigilant, is the murder of  
292 Shirley and Russell Dermond.

293 K: Wow.

294 B: Shirley and Russell Dermond. Do you know them? Have you heard of them?

295 K: Yeah, wow.

296 B: Yeah, where the man was decapitated?

297 K: Oh my god.

298 B: Because mostly, because he was shot in the head and they never found the head or the  
299 murderer?

300 K: Geez.

301 B: And I actually had someone send me the postcard. I have the postcard that was filled out, and  
302 a week later I received from American Disabled Veterans a packet telling me how I could add  
303 thousands and thousands of dollars to my end-of-life expense fund.

304 K: Wow, oh my gosh.

305 B: I became, I became paranoid to the point that I couldn't run traditional errands. I have a  
306 saltwater tank; I love buying new fish, I love buying new corals. It took me a month to convince  
307 myself to leave my house because I was afraid that somebody was trying to kill me.

308 K: Right.

309 B: The very first time I went to the YMCA two weeks ago, the first thing I noticed after  
310 reactivating my membership so I could swim, because I thought swimming would help, was an  
311 individual exercising in a full Proud Boy ensemble. Every article of his clothing had a logo on it.

312 K: Oh.

313 B: and he had the "Don't Tread on Me" on his sleeve. And in the swimming pool, I had a  
314 massive panic attack and I lost track of time. I disassociated from the way that time actually  
315 passes, to the point that I saw a worker coming in to check the doors, and it felt like he was  
316 checking the doors every two minutes but when I actually left the pool, I realized it was actually  
317 every twenty minutes, that I had been in there over an hour and a half.

318 K: Wow.

319 B: And I had no idea. But I've since gone back to the YMCA, I just didn't—

320 K: Okay.

321 B: Face those fears. I'm able to get out. I'm able to give my children a bath and have fun. I've  
322 actually taken my children to go swim at the YMCA on a sole parent day with just mom. So, I'm  
323 doing much better, but the reality is, is that gun violence in Pennsylvania and the resulting gun  
324 violence that happened here in Kenosha, along with the gun violence that happened at the  
325 Capitol almost took my life from me.

326 K: Right.

327 B: I almost was not here because of it. And not just almost not here, but everything in my life  
328 that I had grown to love and appreciate and find joy in doing, was taken from me, very slowly,  
329 very steadily without me even realizing it. In fact, my brain convinced me that it was okay. It  
330 was okay to go a day without eating, it was okay to drink almost every day, it was okay to not  
331 want to spend time around my children, it was okay for my husband to be doing everything. That  
332 is what my brain did, that is what gun violence did to me.

333 K: All like, the word that keeps coming to my mind as you're sharing your story is just the  
334 repeated traumas that, you know, that you've experienced.

335 B: Uh-huh.

336 K: And just—

337 B: You know there's—

338 K: Yeah.

339 B: There's one more thing that I think needs, it absolutely needs to be mentioned, is that we have  
340 a very interesting scenario in Wauwatosa, with officer Joseph Mensa who is a Black man.

341 K: Right.



342 B: Are you familiar with that incident?

343 K: I actually live in Wauwatosa so yes, I'm very familiar with that and its, I just saw that—

344 B: So, he has murdered—

345 K: Sorry go ahead.

346 B: It gets better though, because he murdered, whether they were armed or not—

347 K: Right.

348 B: He has murdered three people.

349 K: Right.

350 B: And instead of being forced to quit or being charged, in any capacity, even with like a  
351 misdemeanor. He was paid 125,000 dollars to leave the Wauwatosa police department.

352 K: Right, I can't, I know I couldn't believe that.

353 B: Do you know where he's at today?

354 K: Yeah, I saw Waukesha, right?

355 B: He was, he just accepted and was sworn in as a deputy, not even just an officer, a deputy, its  
356 literally in the neighboring town.

357 K: Oh my god, right.

358 B: (pause) So, to me gun violence is, gun violence is, I cannot, I couldn't handle the fireworks on  
359 New Year's Eve. They sounded like gunshots, I laid awake all night. Gun violence is, it has  
360 robbed me of the experience of the Fourth of July.

361 K: Right.

362 B: Of the experience of fireworks in general. I took a trip to Minnesota for work, and I was in the  
363 free state of George Floyd, near the memorial near at My People's Way, and I had, I was there  
364 for the meeting in the evening and when it was time for me to go, I was freezing because in  
365 October, I don't know if you knew this but it's like already 21 degrees (laughs) like.

366 K: Right.

367 B: I was not prepared. Out here it was in the 50s or 40s.

368 K: Right.

369 B: And as I was walking to my car, there was a bus stop that had been decorated, that obstructed  
370 my view, and because I was parked around the corner from Cub Foods, and I got to the edge of  
371 the bus stop and was getting ready to cross the street from like the little square area, and all the  
372 sudden the gunshots started. And when, I quick ran back to People's Way, they had a bonfire  
373 going, and time slowed down. Time stilled, it literally stilled to a snail's pace, and I one by one  
374 watched everybody at People's Way whip their phone out and the first person said, "Start  
375 counting", and they counted to 19. And what they were doing, I think, is notifying safety intel.  
376 And I just kind of sat there in aghast and I was looking over there, and this woman grabbed me  
377 and she said, "Don't look over there". And I said, "Okay", and she says, "If you think that they  
378 don't know that you're here or that we're here you're sorely mistaken. They know we're here". I  
379 said, "Okay". She said, "But don't stare at them, you mind your business", I said, "Okay", and I  
380 waited like ten to 15 minutes because I'm like, I don't know what I'm supposed to do, because  
381 you heard all the cars with their screeching tires, they go through an alley because the barricades  
382 are still up.

383 K: Okay.

384 B: And eventually I realized, I realized that there were no police sirens.

385 K: Wow.

386 B: And I said, "Are the police coming?" and she kind of giggled and I'm like, I'm thinking to  
387 myself like, "This woman is crazy", okay? "This woman is nuts".

388 K: Right.

389 B: And she said, "Listen, we don't know what they were doing, they could have been cleaning  
390 their shells out for all we know, straight into the sky", and I said, "So like, the police aren't  
391 coming?", and she says, "No, the police don't come here. They're not welcome here". And I'm  
392 like, "Uh, so, okay?". And she said, "Let me put it to you like this, when the riots were really  
393 bad, Hell's Angels came through and they started robbing our pharmacies", she asked me a  
394 series of questions she said, "Why are they robbing our pharmacies?" and I said, "Well, for  
395 narcotics", she says, "And what did they do with those narcotics?", and I said, "Well they sell  
396 them to our at risk community, people of color". She said, "Exactly". She said one night there  
397 were so many gunshots I don't even, I, "Nobody even could count them then, there was just so, so  
398 much gunshots you couldn't even keep up with it". She said, "I tell you what, we never had a  
399 problem with the Hell's Angels coming back to rob our pharmacies again, not anywhere in the  
400 city". And it, you can imagine because the pharmacy she uses, Walgreen's, as you can imagine,  
401 I'm just imagining in my head like, them cleaning up, dumping them in the lake, and dragging  
402 bleach off the counters and taking care of business as they rip the cameras out (laughs).

403 K: Right, right (laughs).

404 B: This is horrifying!

405 K: Geez.

406 B: And I'm not saying that's what happened, but this is horrifying!

407 K: Right.

408 B: And eventually an individual escorted me to my car, and because I didn't know how to get  
409 back to my car, I was scared, I was terrified. And as I walked past, I noticed there was a barber  
410 shop directly across from where the incident happened, like literally right there and this barber  
411 shop was lit! There were so many people in this barber shop, they were having a grand old time  
412 COVID or not.

413 K: Huh.

414 B: And they were smiling and laughing and talking, and it was just extremely bizarre to me  
415 because I'm like, how like I'm in cahoots over here ready to shit myself, and the porta potty is  
416 closer to the gun violence than just sitting here, it's like I, you know? And he walked me to my  
417 car and then he actually, I could see him standing there until I was about like several blocks  
418 away, until he saw me literally turn out of the area, because he was watching to make sure I  
419 wasn't followed.

420 K: Wow.

421 B: So, you kind of gotten several instances of gun violence.

422 K: Right.

423 B: Some of the are in southeastern Wisconsin but there all very, very telling of trauma, for one,  
424 and also the state that our country is in.

425 K: Right. Through all of these experiences and all of your, when you were contacting local  
426 officials, what have you thought about in terms of what could actually be done to prevent this?  
427 Or I mean, there's so many issues going on right, in terms of like racism, trauma, community  
428 deprivation, there's so much going on, but has there been something that comes to mind that you  
429 feel is the way to go for gun violence prevention?

430 B: I'm getting there now, but before I thought that it was enough just to tell them this is  
431 happening. "This is coming to Kenosha", "This is happening on this day", "Please be advised of  
432 this".

433 K: Right.

434 B: But the reality is, is that they brought in the national guard, you know, because when the  
435 decision was coming, I worked with several activists in town to release non-violent messaging, it  
436 basically said, "Listen if you're considering coming to Kenosha to support, don't come here if  
437 you're going to commit violence and in return, we're asking for the same commitment for our  
438 city officials and police officers and the national guard, no violence". And we communicated  
439 that, I actually set up daily prayer services with members of the clergy.

440 K: Wow.

441 B: And I provided mental health resources. I took all of the Kenosha mental health resources and  
442 crisis lines and created flyers and we distributed those. So, I provided, I actually provided coping  
443 mechanisms.

444 K: Right.

445 B: I did that. Because I had been asking for it and asking for it and asking for it.

446 K: Yeah.

447 B: The city officials, and nobody did it!

448 K: Wow.

449 B: It was like a magnificent game of hot potato, and keep in mind that while I'm maintaining the  
450 prayer services because I have to facilitate those, I was in the middle of the worst crisis, I, it was  
451 a crisis worse than anything I've ever imagined being able to experience.

452 K: Right, wow.

453 B: So, now I'm in a position where I have stopped tracking the militia, I'm not going to do it  
454 anymore, I'm not going to track patriots, I'm not going to track Proud Boys, the 3 percenters,  
455 I'm not going to do it because what I'm going to do now is, I feel like I became a crutch. If  
456 something was going to happen well Billy will tell us.

457 K: Oh.

458 B: I'm not paid to do that.

459 K: Right.

460 B: Right? I'm not, I'm not the city's secretary, they have several of those, and I'm not getting  
461 paid to do it so, it just doesn't work that way I'm not some type of safety officer, I'm not an  
462 elected official, yet (laughs).

463 K: (laughs) Oh that's nice to hear!

464 B: I decided that the way that I'm going to handle that for my mental wellbeing, and also for the  
465 sake of accountability and transparency, is that I'm going to wait for something to happen, I'm

466 going to wait. I'm going to wait and I'm going to watch, and then if something does happen, I'm  
467 going to go back through all of my methods, and all the different platforms, all of my burner  
468 accounts and find a paper trail and be like, "Oh look this was shared 600 times".

469 K: Oh.

470 B: "Is that an alderperson that liked that, holy shit"! (laughs)

471 K: Yeah.

472 B: You know what I'm saying? And then that way I have more time to focus on legislative  
473 change. So, for example we have this advanced license plate recognition technology that the  
474 police department wants to put in place with a horrifying vendor, Vigilant Solutions—

475 K: Okay.

476 B: That I don't know if you, have you heard about them?

477 K: No, I haven't.

478 B: So, in 2015, we're getting a little off topic here but, in 2015, ICE, Immigration Customs  
479 Enforcement, tried to cite for a national database of advanced license plate scanning technology.

480 K: Okay.

481 B: And it was rejected on the grounds of civil liberties and civil rights and invasion of privacy,  
482 but at this time Vigilant Solutions was kind of, you know, rolling with it, and they had created a  
483 massive database that was not federal, it was just this company, and they actually advertised, to  
484 ICE, that they have several billion records on file, that could be made accessible to them, as long  
485 as they requested access from the entity. Then they contracted with Vigilant Solutions, ICE  
486 contracted with Vigilant Solutions. They pay several million dollars a year to have access to the

487 LEARN database, L-E-A-R-N, and it has led to terrorization and false imprisonment on multiple  
488 occasions.

489 K: Wow.

490 B: And so, we have, we run the risk of increasing an over policed city, right? And also, what  
491 about our immigrants? And other people of color who might appear to be immigrants? And then  
492 they also offer a service for facial scanning, facial recognition.

493 K: Wow.

494 B: And they store this data, and if ICE asks the right person and there isn't a policy in place,  
495 which there is not, then it could be catastrophic.

496 K: Right.

497 B: And so, we have people in the city that are kind of screaming at city officials and saying,  
498 "Call your alderperson", "Tell them to vote no", "They have to vote no", "There's no other  
499 way". And what I did is I actually had a conversation with the deputy chief that presented it. I  
500 had a conversation with several alderpersons, and I learned that no matter how much I scream,  
501 this is going to pass.

502 K: Wow.

503 B: And so, because I'm not, well because I'm not tracking the militia, I have all this extra time  
504 on my hands, and I wrote a three-and-a-half-page resolution, that basically restricts every part of  
505 this system in the city and call for an ordinance to be developed, and for presentations to be  
506 provided to council prior to enterprise service agreement acceptance. And that resolution I, the  
507 alderperson that I gave it to that is sponsoring it, he was so excited when he read it because he



508 had no idea I could do it, and when he read it, he called me, he was so excited, he called me four  
509 times in 15 minutes. Like, I was taking a shower, and I came out and there were all these calls,  
510 and it's being cleaned up by legal now and put into a formal versioning, and then hopefully it's  
511 on track to be presented to council at the next meeting.

512 K: Wow, that's wonderful! That's awesome!

513 B: Yeah, so when it comes to, when it comes to how I work to mitigate gun violence, what I was  
514 doing in the past isn't working. It didn't work.

515 K: Yeah.

516 B: Because I give them the info, and they still intentionally choose the 5<sup>th</sup>.

517 K: Right.

518 B: You know, they pushed protestors towards to militia, and told them, "Here, you handle it,"  
519 and the riots.

520 K: Right.

521 B: Yeah so, what I'm focused on now is legislative change at a local level and maybe someday at  
522 the state level, that puts restrictions on, I have a lot of really great ideas, that put restrictions on,  
523 like, the presence of patriots because we're very much a second amendment loving state.

524 K: Right, we are.

525 B: But at what point does it become a danger to the community, at what point does it become  
526 terrorism, because right now nothing actually defines that. At what point does it actually become  
527 inciting fear and violence? At what point are they to hold the blame for violence, looting, and  
528 burning?

529 K: Right.

530 B: Because of their presence. There's nothing that says that or that defines that. So that's my  
531 next goal is to create something that actually defines what is and is not acceptable as far as  
532 patriot and militia behavior goes.

533 K: Wow that's, I mean it's so timely and it's, for me, to listen to your stories of such recent  
534 trauma and all the work you're now doing and what you've overcome, it's very inspiring to  
535 listen to your work and what you've gone through, and how you're capitalizing on that  
536 experience to really move forward. That's I mean thank you so much for sharing—

537 B: Thank you so much!

538 K: Yeah no, I this I mean, it's these stories that only the people who experience them can share  
539 and just listen, having people listen to them, it's just astounding what we all as community  
540 members don't know if we haven't experienced it, you know? It's eye opening.

541 B: I've always thought about like, I would make a great topic for a documentary but like I don't  
542 have the willpower to go and find someone doing a documentary or to like pay someone to do a  
543 documentary for me, but I've always been interested in talking about it, because talking about it  
544 helps me come full circle.

545 K: Right.

546 B: You know? It's important not to lose sight of where I've come from and who I've become.

547 K: Absolutely.

548 B: But yeah.

549 K: Well thank you so much, you know, you've covered a lot, we have several questions that we  
550 ask our interviewees, but you've covered a lot through your stories. We do ask if there's any  
551 photos that you have of your, you know, of any of your experiences like along the march or, you  
552 know, as you were going to D.C., or anything that you find that is pertinent like, visually that  
553 you feel you would want to share, attach to your story?

554 B: Yeah so, there is a video. There is one particular video that was shared by another individual  
555 on the march, and seeing it, because what I did was, I repressed the trauma, I pretended like,  
556 which is part of the coping process I've since learned, is I pretended like it didn't impact me as  
557 much as it was impacting me, like I had blinders up. And in this video, you see a young man  
558 crouching on the ground from the passenger side of his car while he's being screamed at to, "Get  
559 in the fucking car and drive", and he's terrified and he like will stand up and go to crawl and  
560 he'll crouch back down again, and it almost looks like he's crying. So, that is a very raw telling  
561 of the experience from that night and then also, I think that I might have video of the militia  
562 members, but I have tons of pictures, they're not really necessarily violent, but I have tons of  
563 pictures from that march and of just kind of being involved here in the community, and then I  
564 have a ton of pictures of George Floyd Square.

565 K: Okay.

566 B: I really tried to capture the beauty of George Floyd Square.

567 K: Right.

568 B: And I would be willing to send links to those to you via email.

569 K: Okay great! Thank you, yeah because I think, you know, a lot of people who've been telling  
570 their stories have some kind of visual documentation because it's how we—

571 B: You know—

572 K: Memorialize—

573 B: One of the best—

574 K: Yeah. Go ahead.

575 B: One of the best videos that I have is of a couple weeks ago before I had the break. The militia  
576 was in, this was actually December 3<sup>rd</sup> so the militia was in the park because Kyle Rittenhouse  
577 was having a court date, and I went down there and instead of engaging with the militia I took  
578 pictures of all of their faces and then I canvassed on foot and took pictures of every vehicle in a  
579 half a mile radius, and when I found out they were leaving, I realized I missed their parking spot,  
580 and I actually went over there by myself on a live camera feed. And first I took pictures of all the  
581 cars that I could and then I went wide, and what ended up happening is that there was this one  
582 truck that was very particular about hiding its license plate.

583 K: Huh.

584 B: They covered it with a shirt in the back and then they covered it with a bookbag in the front  
585 because they didn't want me to have their license plate, because at the time I was working with a  
586 network of people that tracked militia all over the country, there's like this you know as you  
587 could imagine, a list.

588 K: Right.

589 B: And so I was parked there and I saw them scavenging in the bag and I'm like, "Oh they're  
590 probably looking for like a screwdriver so they can just take the plate off," and I have duct tape  
591 in my car because some of the protests that I've participated in 'Tosa and in Milwaukee,

592 depending on where we were going, like if we were going to obstruct traffic on the interstate,  
593 several of us will block our plates out.

594 K: Okay.

595 B: You know what I'm saying?

596 K: Right.

597 B: It's kind of like, habit, and I had this nice little duct tape, and I actually asked them, I said,  
598 "y'all want some duct tape?", and I give them the duct tape and they're like, "Are you serious  
599 right now?", and I said, "Yeah", I said, "Just be advised that the second you drive off that gang  
600 unit member two cars back is going to, should be pulling you over because it's illegal to conceal  
601 your license plate in the state of Wisconsin". And they looked really pissed at me and then what  
602 happened is the gang unit car pulled up and told them that they had to take the tape off, and then  
603 he basically blocked me in, so it was very difficult for my car to get out while this truck leaves.  
604 And I run the risk of hitting his car as I go around him, and I speed around the corner and I do all  
605 kinds of things I'm not supposed to and it's almost like they knew that I was coming because  
606 they backed into a gas station so close that they were almost touching their plates were almost  
607 touching.

608 K: Wow.

609 B: And I had a very terrible experience with an officer who basically came to my car and was  
610 like, "Why don't you step over to my car?" and I'm like, "I don't feel comfortable". I'm like,  
611 "This is a traffic stop so you're going to treat it as such and I'm going to get back in my car".  
612 And as I was getting back in my car, this gang unit member, not the one who blocked me in but a  
613 different one, actually pulled my jacket to try and keep me from getting in the car. And I told

614 him to get his hands off of me, and then when I got into the car, he would not allow me to close  
615 the door, he blocked the door with his body.

616 K: Oh God.

617 B: And at the same time, yep, at the same time he, I asked him what the hell he was doing  
618 because this was a traffic stop. You wouldn't do this on a normal traffic stop and he asked for my  
619 license and I told him, "You're going to take my license, you're going to run my information,  
620 and that's going to be the end of it". So, he takes my license, and he starts reciting my full  
621 address out loud. I'm like, "What?". And I told him I said, "You better stop that." I said, "why  
622 would you do that? You did that intentionally because they're literally standing right there".

623 K: Yeah.

624 B: And then he said, "What is your phone number?", and I said, "I don't feel comfortable saying  
625 out loud, you want to give me that note pad and pencil and I can write it down for you". And he  
626 says, "That won't be necessary", and meanwhile two members from the community who  
627 recognized me driving like a bat out of hell, had pulled up to supervise because they were  
628 concerned for my safety. And the officer who blocked me in started arguing with them and  
629 started telling them that they needed to leave and I'm like, "Whoa, whoa, whoa!" (laughs)  
630 "What?". And then, and I actually had to de-escalate by telling these people to just ignore the  
631 officer and pretend like he doesn't even exist, don't speak to him. So every time he would say  
632 something to him, they would like, they would look like they were going to talk, and I would  
633 say, "No don't talk to them, don't talk to him, he can't be trusted he's already proven on multiple  
634 occasions that he's incapable of de-escalation" (laughs).

635 K: (laughs)

636 B: Like—

637 K: Right.

638 B: Just calm your fan there, and about two weeks ago, that gang unit member that blocked me in  
639 and argued with pedestrians was promoted to Lieutenant via the police. What? Yes oh yes—

640 K: Wow.

641 B: He's a supervisor now via the police and fire commission. So that video, there's a lot of  
642 swearing so I would appreciate if you cut it.

643 K: Oh right.

644 B: But that video might be—

645 K: Right.

646 B: Because you can see me start to pull into this like parking lot, where they all were, and they  
647 all just kind of start moving forward with me and they all got guns and this one guy had like this  
648 giant baton stick that he was spinning, and just slowly like moving towards me with their guns. It  
649 was like a standoff.

650 K: Yeah.

651 B: A standoff for what?

652 K: Oh my God, that is—

653 B: So even though I wasn't injured, and even though like a lot of my encounters of gun violence  
654 haven't resulted in me being injured or someone that I love close to being injured, besides from

655 in Pennsylvania because that man saved my life. He saved my life! It's still, the concept of guns,  
656 it's just wild. The fact that it's so okay for people to just roam freely and terrorize, it's terrorism.

657 K: Right, right, absolutely

658 B: And I'm not okay with it.

659 K: Right. Wow, well again I want to thank you for taking the time and sharing so much of your  
660 experience and—

661 B: Hold on one second, would you?

662 K: Yep.

663 B: (pause) Sorry about that.

664 K: No, no problem, I don't want to take any more of your time, but I did want to say thank you  
665 and if yeah, feel free to email me anything like the pictures or videos. And I will email you the  
666 link and also for the website, and I will also let you know how long it will be until the transcript  
667 will be sent to you.

668 B: Have you spoken at all—