

1 GVP30 Jenevia Blanks

2 D: Please state your name.

3 J: Jenevia Blanks.

4 D: And (pause) Jenevia, may I ask how old are you?

5 J: I am forty-seven.

6 D: You look good for forty-seven.

7 J: Thank you.

8 D: And you have experienced gun violence, would you mind sharing your story?

9 J: I have experienced gun violence and I don't mind sharing my story at all. Unfortunately,
10 several of my sons' friends died by gun violence. But, one of the ones that really stick with me,
11 and they're all very tragic and very sad, but there's the one where a shooting took place in the
12 Sherman [Villard] area. And it all stemmed from an argument. And that happened shortly after
13 the individual left a party. And rather than the situation being [...] de-escalated and handled in a
14 better manner, [it resulted in a fatal shooting.] The person takes out a gun and shoot (pause) my
15 loved one. I say loved one because this young man grew up in our [home] and spent [some
16 nights] with our son. It was tragic he died [the way he did.] And what's even more sad about it
17 is that I don't think there [was] enough evidence to really convict the person of doing this, I say,
18 very [...] senseless crime. [The individual really] walked away free. And the part that's really
19 sad and disturbing is that they took away a father because he had a [brand-new son who will
20 never know or remember his father.] And that's the part that really hurts. Hearing again, another
21 senseless crime, someone being brought to justice, but due to what they call by law, "un-
22 circumstantial evidence," walks away free. And regardless of where it happened, because of the
23 argument, that should've never happened. That's one of my stories. And then another story is

24 about another young man, also a friend of the family, who also died by gun violence, because he
25 witnessed something. That's sad. [Some one thought that he was going tell and took matters into
26 their own hands to make sure he would not tell. Because someone witnesses a crime,] it does not
27 justify them taking that person's life [if they feared being reported to the police. If you do the
28 crime, you do the time.] It's not for that person to take justice into their hands to say, "I'm going
29 to end this person's life because I want to get off free for something, [...] I'm really guilty of
30 doing. When you hear [...] situations [like these,] it's very sad. [As a mother] and hearing so
31 many young people dying by gun violence, [which is] more prevalent in the African American
32 community, [it is disheartening.] I am one of those individuals [who believes] it doesn't matter
33 what color [you] are- [...] every life matter and [has] value. [I am tired of constantly hearing] so
34 many young people dying by gun violence because people choose to take the situation in their
35 hands and resolve it their way [which often times] ends [...] in another fatality. [...] The fact [of
36 the matter is] that it [...] demoralizes [and] desensitizes [people and views it as 'just' another
37 shooting.] What else can we do?" [It seems like] the more we voice our opinion or advocate for
38 better gun sense legislation, it seems like there's [...] another shooting. [...] I don't know what
39 else to say [why fatal shootings continue to happen.] [This is my story] how gun violence has
40 impacted my life and [losing a loved to gun violence] is something you never forget. You never
41 forget that person. You never forget all the people that have been impacted. [...] [When someone
42 dies by Gun Violence,] it affects everyone around them. [...] I look at that young baby, [who is
43 now a little boy,] who will never see [his] father again. [Who will] never know who they are and
44 never get a chance to know them.

45 D: Wow. Since those two young men grew up visiting your household, spending the night, do
46 you forgive their murderers?

47 J: (pause) [...] I don't hate them. [...] [Because of my religious beliefs and who I am, I believe in
48 forgiveness and do forgive them. It's] the Christian thing to do. Does it make me angry that that
49 happened? Absolutely. Do I ever forget? No. Do I expect justice to [...] prevail? Absolutely. [...]
50 Just because I forgive a person [it] doesn't mean that if they're brought to justice, they shouldn't
51 do the time. They should do the time.

52 D: What would you say to someone who experienced losing a family member or a loved one to
53 gun violence recently?

54 J: What would I say to them and how would I encourage them?

55 D: Yes.

56 J: It's really hard. [...] [I] tell that person [I am here] for them [even if it's just to be a listening
57 ear and a shoulder to lean on.] [...] That is one thing I would do. I would encourage them and let
58 them know, as someone else who [has] been personally affected by gun violence, [...] how I was
59 able to move forward [...] and then share with that person how they [can] move forward as well,
60 [understanding people healing differently and take longer to move forward. Another way is to
61 make] sure they have people within their circle who support them [and are there as an] outlet for
62 them to talk to [...] no matter what time of day it is. [...] [Professionally and personally,] I [...]
63 [believe an individual should seek professional help because I believe] God works through the
64 doctors. He works through the Psychologist. [...] For me, [I] go to God in prayer. That's one
65 thing for sure I would share. Because that's actually what keeps me going and gives me the
66 strength to deal with all the sadness that's going on. Whether it affects me direct [...] [or
67 someone I know has lost someone to Gun Violence,] it's hard regardless. [...] It still hurts and I
68 still cry. [I always let a person] know it's okay to cry. It's okay to feel [angry]. [What's
69 important is how] you channel that anger. [That is the point, message I am trying to convey when

70 I say] God works through the doctors. Seek professional help. Talk to a counselor, anyone, about
71 what's going on. [...] Support groups [may be another alternative.] [...] [Even] talking to people
72 who have experienced gun violence just like they have. [Listen to their story.] [...] I think the
73 more you tell [your] story, in a sense, it [...] helps you [to] heal. It helps you to [...] know, [...]
74 unfortunately, you have people in [the same] circle as you, [and] that someone else fully
75 understands what you're going through. [...] When you create [...] support system for [others], it
76 let that person know [they] have a shoulder to lean on. [...] [They] are going to have nights
77 [they're] going to cry [and that they] are going to [miss their] love one. [I still do.] [This is]
78 what I would share with that individual [who has lost a loved one to Gun Violence.]
79 (pause)

80 D: Though they, you know who the murderers are, are you angry that they weren't prosecuted?

81 J: [...] Yes, I was angry at the time. Am I angry now? No. [...] Unfortunately our justice system
82 is not the best but it's all that we have. [...] I continue to believe justice, in certain cases, will
83 prevail. Do I want it to prevail in all cases? Absolutely. Was I upset initially when [...] the
84 [perpetrator in one of the cases] got off? Absolutely! [...] Because [...] an innocent life was
85 taken [because of] an argument. And for what? [...] [In this respect, I am angry.]

86 D: What would you say to our legislators in reference to how to lower gun violence, or what
87 laws you'd like to see enacted?

88 J: I would say to our legislators, [...] "pass more common-sense gun legislation." I understand
89 [...] HRA8 passed the House [of Representatives.] [...] [If this legislation is passed where]
90 universal [...] background checks [are done] on all gun sales, [...] [I think we will start to see a
91 decline in Gun Violence. We don't want to direct or limit background checks to a particular area
92 or individuals. What I am trying to say is universal] background checks on all gun sales [...]

93 [doesn't discriminate. Gun Violence today happens] across all nationalities and color [...] The
94 fact [we're taking action to have universal background checks on all gun sales puts us one step
95 closer in] closing the loophole in our gun laws. [...] [What will be even more effective is if we
96 have] more [...] legislators [...] [come and see] for themselves [...] how families are impacted
97 by gun violence. If they were to attend funerals of these individuals who died by gun violence
98 and see the harsh impact it has on family members, I think they would be more inclined to [...]
99 something about [our gun laws.] [...] Quoting the words, and you already know [whose words I
100 am quoting,] [...] from one of our legislators [I] just met with not too long ago, [who] I agree
101 whole-heartedly with, [...] if we can start having' legislators truly see how people are impacted
102 by gun violence, they will see that they need to do more. Until it happens to one of their family
103 members, I don't think they're really going to push forward to say, "Okay, now let's make a
104 stance, let's do something' about [the loopholes in our gun laws.]" [...] If there is some kind of
105 way, in agreement with the recent conversation I had with one of our legislators, [...] if [...]
106 [legislators] were made to attend [...] funerals [of those who died by Gun Violence,] I really do
107 believe [we see more action taken.] It's sad to say [Legislators] have to be in the shoes [of
108 someone who has lost a loved one to Gun Violence to understand the impact.] [...] At the same
109 token, [Gun Violence has] such a terrible effect on the economy as a whole. [...] People are
110 hurting and [no it] does not justify [retaliation which has happened in some situations.] [...] A lot
111 of these riots [are happening] where people are [...] hurting others, [...] because [the people] are
112 upset and don't have a place to channel their anger. [...] They are seeing [their] loved ones dying
113 by gun violence [...] [and not receiving any justice or closure.] If Legislators knew more [...]
114 ways to help heal our community, I think it would make a [...] world of difference.

115 D: You know, I think you touched on a really good topic there. What do you think would get to
116 within our community to lower gun violence?

117 J: [...] [Legislators/law makers today] are concerned about backlash. They're afraid if [they] do
118 something what [will happened to them.] There are so many examples of people [who] try to
119 help others [...] end up dying themselves. [...] In terms of the community, I think there is
120 something [...] we can do. [For] example, within my neighborhood, we have community
121 meetings. [...] Our Alderman is phenomenal. [...] Alderman Murphy [holds or have held
122 community meetings at one of our local elementary schools-] Sherman [Elementary.] He talked
123 about [the things] he can do [with what is all] happening within our community [and provided
124 ways we can help too.] [...] It was amazing to see how many people within our community came
125 and spoke up and said, "I'm tired of [...] seeing drug paraphernalia [...] [lying around in our
126 neighborhoods and streets with so many children in the neighborhood exposed to this danger.]"
127 If we had more community meetings [around gun violence,] [...] what we can do and how we
128 can [amplify] our voices, [I think we will see more positive change.]" And if people weren't
129 afraid to say, "I'm [part of] the Neighborhood Watch and I see activity going on. [...] Maybe
130 that would scare the people who are, for lack of better word, the perpetrators [to say], "I better
131 leave this community because these residents [...] [are serious and concerned about what's going
132 on in their community and that] they're watching me. [...] If we had more people [...] stand up
133 and not be afraid, I think that would make a world of difference.

134 D: Do you have anything you'd like to add?

135 J: Add in [...] respect of?

136 D: Gun violence or to someone who lost someone, or anything you'd like to add the recording.

137 J: At this point, I can't think of anything else to add. [...] I think we're stronger and better
138 together. [...] If we're not afraid to stand together and voice our opinion [and] say, "Enough is
139 enough," I think we will start seeing change. March for Our Lives was an example of action
140 taken as a result of so much Gun Violence. There were thousands of people marched, walked
141 together and said, "Enough is enough." [...] [One of our Wisconsin] Legislators that were
142 running [for another term] at the time [decided not to run] when [...] students marched to [their
143 house and protested.] [This tells] you that numbers count; [we're strong, and] there's
144 togetherness in [our] voices when everyone speaks up, [walks and fight together.] [...] I was
145 proud to be part of that march [...] -marching [downtown along with many.]

146 D: That's great!

147 J: Yes.

148 D: Thank you! That was good! (laughter)

149 J: Oh, thank you. (laughter)

150 D: I'm glad I always ask, "Do you have anything—"