

1 GVP 62, Wanda Welch

2 D: Tell me your name.

3 W: My name is Wanda Welch.

4 D: Okay.

5 W: I am a public figure in multiple ways.

6 D: Wow.

7 W: I'm the secretary for the Southwest Regional Democratic Organization. It's a group that
8 meets once a month, and [we represent West Milwaukee, West Allis, Hales Corners, Greenfield,
9 Greendale, and Franklin.]

10 D: Okay.

11 W: [I'm also an educator as well as an entrepreneur.]

12 D: Okay.

13 W: I wear many hats, but the hat I love wearing the most is my Christian hat.

14 D: Okay.

15 W: I am a Christian; I am a believer and I praise God for bringing me to this point. I know when
16 I first found out about the loss of my son, it was very difficult for me to even talk about it.
17 However, God has brought me a mighty long way. Now I can sit and have a conversation about
18 him and what happened without crying.

19 D: Totally understand that. Are you a native Milwaukeean?

- 20 W: I am not a native of Milwaukee.
- 21 D: Okay.
- 22 W: I was born in St. Louis, Missouri, however, I was raised here. We moved here when I was
23 around 11 or 12 years old.
- 24 D: Okay. [...] And so, do you live in the city of Milwaukee?
- 25 W: No, I don't live in the city of Milwaukee.
- 26 D: Okay.
- 27 W: [However, I do live in Milwaukee County.]
- 28 D: Can you give me a general idea of where you live?
- 29 W: [I live in a suburban area].
- 30 D: Okay, do you know the, the, the name of the area, like is it the Harambee area, is it a Bay
31 View area, do you know the name of the area?
- 32 W: I don't.
- 33 D: Okay.
- 34 W: [I don't live in any of those areas.]
- 35 D: Okay, I try to be as descriptive as I can for the, the story.
- 36 W: [Great]
- 37 D: And how old are you? Do you mind? You don't have to answer.
- 38 W: Okay, we're going to skip that question (laughs).

- 39 D: Okay we'll skip that question. And you, are you a female?
- 40 W: I am most definitely a female.
- 41 D: And your nat- ethni- ethnicity?
- 42 W: I am a African American woman.
- 43 D: Okay.
- 44 W: Yes.
- 45 D: Alright.
- 46 W: I do have some Indian in me though.
- 47 D: Okay.
- 48 W: Yeah.
- 49 D: Okay.
- 50 W: Yeah.
- 51 D: Do you know which, what tribe?
- 52 W: I think Redhawk? It's either Redhawk or Cherokee. [My grandfather was part Indian.]
- 53 D: Okay. [...] I never heard of Redhawk before. Where do they, where is they, they originate
- 54 from?
- 55 W: [I'm not sure about that.]
- 56 D: Okay.

57 W: I only know that I am Indian because my grandfather had Indian in him, and many members
58 of my family told me this.

59 D: Okay, wow.

60 W: So.

61 D: Now you made me curious I want to look that up later (laughs).

62 W: (laughs)

63 D: Redhawk, okay. And please tell me your, your story what, what happened and who did you
64 lose?

65 W [...] I lost my son, and I will never forget the day.

66 D: What is his name?

67 W: My son's name is Stephan Syrees Cannaday Jr., so he is a junior. He's his father's first son,
68 [and] first child. [...]

69 D: How old was he?

70 W: He was 30 years old.

71 D: Okay.

72 W: [He was murdered April 12th 2019. He had just had a birthday on December 25th, 2018. He
73 was born on Christmas Day.]

74 D: Wow.

75 W: [...] I will never forget the day I [...] found out he was deceased. I actually got the news
76 from his brother, and I said to his brother, "This has to be some hoax or something. This can't be
77 true," you know. I thought, "Psh, whatever." So, I [called] my daughter in law [...]. I was not
78 able to reach her. So, I called the coroner's office. And sure, enough they broke the news to me.
79 [...] I want to pause for a minute and say [...], one thing that concerned me is the way my son
80 was left. He was left [naked...]. The only thing he had on was a pair of white socks. I am
81 concerned the district he was killed in. [...] He was found dead on 67th and Lancaster. I have not
82 heard from none of the politicians responsible for that area. It [...] concerns me [...] because
83 [...] where I live, if a murder happens like that, you're most definitely going to hear from people.
84 [...] Moreover, you're going to hear some politicians speaking publicly about changes they're
85 going to try to make to better the area. [...] It really disturbs me that these kinds of things can
86 happen in the city of Milwaukee, and it's almost as if it's acceptable. In fact, [...] one of the
87 neighbors said she didn't call the police because [...] she said she has gotten used to the gun
88 violence. [That] really disturbs me. [...] In the suburban area where I live [...], people [...] will
89 call the police if they see a stranger. [...] It shouldn't be that way. Both of these cities are in
90 Wisconsin. We really need to make a change, some serious, serious, changes, because the people
91 who live in the city of Milwaukee, in particularly, the area where my son was found dead, should
92 not feel that this is normal. One other person said to me, "Well, I heard the gunshots too, but I
93 didn't call the police cause every time you call the police they take forever to come." [...] That
94 really touched me in a mighty way, and although I don't live in the city, I really have a vested
95 interest in trying to do something to change that attitude, to change that lens that these two
96 women are looking through. [In my neighborhood people call the police for little stuff.]

97 D: I think it just depends on the neighborhood. Where I live, they call the police for everything.

98 (laughs)

99 W: [That's good they should].

100 D: Yeah, we have a strong block club. (laughs)

101 W: [...] I'm glad you brought that up. The area where my son was, [they used to have a
102 neighborhood block club.] Their former alderman was very involved in the neighborhood, I
103 know this because I canvased the area to talk to people and see if they knew anything about my
104 son's homicide. I asked them multiple questions. "Did you hear any gunshots?" [If so, what
105 time?] "What did you see?" [... I did this] because the police didn't have any tips. [...] I
106 want[ed] to do what I [could] to help find out who killed my son. [I'm friends with a former
107 neighborhood block watch member, who lives in that area. She knows all the neighbors. I asked
108 her to find out what she could. She was able to find out some details that the police didn't know.
109 I shared what she told me with the police. Those details helped the police a lot. She and I talked
110 about getting a neighborhood block watch.] Additionally, I'm hoping that the current alderman
111 will also be a part of making some change in that area. I did put in a call to his office yesterday.

112 D: Okay.

113 W: His assistant called me back and told me he would give him my message. I have no doubt
114 that this alderman is going to call me back. I'm hoping that [...] I could work with him, and we
115 [can] work with his constituents to really do something to better [the neighborhood.]

116 D: Yeah because 67th and Lancaster that's by Washington High School, isn't it?

117 W: No.

118 D: What high school is over there?

119 W: I'm [...] not sure. I do know that Lancaster School [k-8 school] is [...] in that area.

120 D: Okay.

121 W: Lancaster is right up the street from there.

122 D: I think I did-

123 W: Not certain about-

124 D: -an interview over there not too long ago. I was surprised I think it's transitional over there.

125 W: Oh okay, that could be.

126 D: Did you go over there? You went over there?

127 W: I did, I canvassed the area, and I also found out that there has been a lot of murderers over in
128 that area.

129 D: Is there a hotel over there, a mini hotel over there? Something like that?

130 W: [I think there is one that's not too far away.]

131 D: Is there a strip club over there?

132 W: That I'm not certain about.

133 D: I, if I, if I remember this area correctly, I think it is.

134 W: [Another disturbing thing happen. I heard that one of the suspects said they killed my son in
135 the neighborhood because no one cares about it. I don't know if it was the person that pulled the

136 trigger or one of the other three suspects. It doesn't matter which one of them made the
137 statement, it's disturbing.]

138 D: Wow.

139 W: That's really disturbing to me. [I want to be used, to really help make some positive change
140 in the neighborhood to help the gun violence that exists. Change must happen somewhere, right?
141 I can't change the whole city at one time, but I must start somewhere. We must start one
142 neighborhood at a time, and eventually before you know it, Milwaukee will be a good city to live
143 in again. The city of Milwaukee I once knew. The Milwaukee I moved to years ago.]

144 D: And what we want it to become.

145 W: That's right, and what we want it to become, absolutely.

146 D: (pause) So what were you t- what were you told happened when your son was murdered?

147 W: So, at the time I got the call, [I called both of my sisters. I was not able to reach them, but
148 they both got back in touch with me. My sister Shauntay went downtown with me to talk to the
149 detectives. At the time, they did not have a lot of information or leads regarding the case.]

150 D: So, what did they say?

151 W: So, what they're saying today-

152 D: Oh no that day when you went down there.

153 W: [The detectives were careful not to tell us the details they did have. They told us he was
154 found dead, clothe-less.] They did tell us that they have some footage, but the footage wasn't
155 very clear. [A neighbor in that area had a camera right where Stephan was killed]. The footage
156 was not very clear. [They did tell us they had some other information. They said they knew who

157 killed my son. However, they needed to wait for some phone records and some other things to
158 come back before they could be certain. They felt confident about the proof that this group of
159 people was involved with the murder of my son. There were four suspects being accused.]

160 D: Wow.

161 W: [From what I hear, my son met some guy when he was in prison at one time]. He helped this
162 guy out. None of us are perfect, and-

163 D: Right.

164 W: He made some mistakes, one of which landed him in prison, and he met a guy there who he
165 befriended. He stayed friends with this guy, and this is the person who set my son up to be
166 robbed by three other gentlemen, and those gentlemen stripped my son in his own car. [They
167 carjacked and kidnapped him. My son was driving, they hit his car from the back. He got out of
168 his car, when he got out of his car the three gentlemen bum rushed him and started beating him
169 with guns. They stripped him and ultimately shot him. They did this in his car. Then they started
170 set his car on fire and tried to destroy it. According to one of the detectives, my son was able to
171 get out of his car and he ran down the alley.] When he ran down the alley the driver of the car
172 got out and shot him six times.

173 D: Oh my God.

174 W: They tortured my son before they murdered him. I he wasn't just shot and killed. First
175 stripped naked, beaten, and put in the truck of his car. They drove around with him in the truck
176 of his car for hours. Then they shot him after he was out of the car.]

177 D: Oh My. When you arrived at the police station, how were you received?

178 W: [The detectives very nice and compassionate. They were just protective of the information
179 they had in the case. I feel like they were very cautious in how they delivered this news to me
180 and my sister. I praise God for that my sister was with me.]

181 D: Yes.

182 W: [They took their time talking to me. I was crying as they told me the details.]

183 D: Of course.

184 W: [They gave me that moment, there were pauses in their voice as they explained what happen.]
185 They promised they'd work very hard to find out who did this to my son. They did worked hours
186 on this homicide. [I called them often and they always called me back and answered my
187 questions. I know we hear a lot of bad things about the police, my encounter with them, through
188 this situation with my son, was very positive. They were very helpful. Again, every time I called,
189 and I was initially calling a lot, if the detective who was on his case was not available, another
190 detective would talk to me and explain what was going on. So, this has been a very positive
191 police encounter and experience for me, I have to say shout out to the detectives who worked on
192 my son's case. I hope that's okay.]

193 D: That's okay.

194 W: Shout out to Milwaukee MPD and Milwaukee Detectives for working very, [very hard to
195 solve my son's murder case. They were very diligent in this case. They worked long hours, on
196 solving my son's case. I want to thank them.]

197 D: Wow. (pause) Do you think, do you know the age, race, or gender of the people who
198 murdered your son?

199 W: Yes, all of them were around his age, like I think like 25 and they were all around his age. I
200 think one was maybe 27, they're all around his age though.

201 D: What do you think? Do you think there's a way this could have been prevented?

202 W: I do. I think that my son was out very late, first of all. [He was with a friend. This friend is
203 the one who set him up.] [They were at Potawatomi gambling, according to his wife. My son
204 dropped his friend off, and that's when these guys trailed him.] That's when all the stuff got
205 started. [I feel like another way this kind of stuff can be prevented is to get illegal guns off the
206 streets. The gun laws need to be more rigid. I would venture to say these guys probably had an
207 illegal gun. I bet this was not a gun they bought from a gun store. In my opinion, we need better
208 background checks done and some other things in place, so we don't have guns in the hands of
209 people who should not have them. I am, not a person who is against people purchasing or
210 carrying.]

211 I, myself, have my CCW. [I did not believe in carrying a gun until my son was murdered.] After
212 my son was killed, I said, "I'm getting my CCW. I'm getting my CCW." [I hate to say this, but I
213 (laughs) if my son would have had a gun, maybe he could have protected himself better.
214 However, he didn't, and three men took advantage of that.]

215 D: Was your son's offense when he was released from jail, 'because you said jail, so I don't
216 know, was he a felon or not?

217 W: [He was a felon, which is why he didn't have a gun.]

218 D: So, would you have advocate for felons being able to carry?

219 W: In lieu of what happened to my child, [I believe, that all people have a right to protect
220 themselves. Simply because a person is a felon, does not mean that they don't have the right to
221 protect themselves]. [I do believe that people should follow the law. I am a law-abiding citizen
222 myself, so I am not saying that a felon who's not allowed to carry a gun should carry one.]
223 However, the mother in me, so if you asked (laughs) you know, like, the activist in me, "Should
224 he have had a gun?" I would say "No, absolutely not" because he was a felon and he should not
225 have had a gun. However, the mother in me says, [if he did have a gun that could have made a
226 difference between life or death. So, I'm not advocating for people to break laws or anything but
227 him having a gun my have saved his life.]

228 D: I get that.

229 W: Yeah.

230 D: Was the perpetrators caught?

231 W: Yes. So, actually, can I talk about that a little bit? Okay.

232 D: Sure.

233 W: Yesterday, my daughter-in-law and I went to court because one of them has agreed to plead
234 guilty. I am very thankful for that. Obviously, I really feel like God has used somebody in his life
235 to touch him [and convince him to help the detectives solve the case. I know every single person
236 on this Earth is a sinner. With that said it's always important for us to do the right thing. I'm a
237 firm believer in righting my wrong.] When you've done something wrong it is very imperative
238 that you try to right that wrong. I'm proud of this young man for trying to right his wrong. It's
239 not going to bring my son back, but it says a lot about him and why change [must start from
240 somewhere. This man's court date was rescheduled. There are three other gentlemen. One has

241 been identified as the shooter and charges have been brought against him]. The other two men
242 have not been charged yet, but charges are forthcoming. [One suspect was pulled over for an
243 unrelated crime. He had a lot of guns in the car, and he was facing a lot of time. As a result of
244 that, to try to cut his time he gave the police my son's case. He told the police he knew this
245 information about my son's homicide.]

246 D: Wow.

247 W: [Currently, there are only two people being charged.] One has plead guilty, and the shooter
248 has not plead guilty. [I'm a Christian and I know that God will bring good out of this violent act.
249 He is also going to make sure that each of these people get the prison time they deserve]. I know
250 He is, because He's fair and He's just, and I've been praying daily. I pray very hard over this
251 situation, and my trust is in God.

252 D: So, of the four, two are in custody?

253 W: [All four men are in custody. Only two have been charged so far.]

254 D: Okay.

255 W: Based on this statement given by the man who plead guilty, I foresee more charges coming.

256 D: Okay.

257 W: So.

258 D: Do you have a photo of your son you can share with me?

259 W: I do! I have multiple photos.

260 D: You can forward it to me if you want to then.

261 W: I do.

262 D: Okay.

263 W: Yeah, I have lots of photos-

264 D: Okay great.

265 W: Of my son, I sure do.

266 D: What would you like to say to our elected officials?

267 W: I would like to say to our elected officials, you are not alone. I don't expect for you to do it
268 alone. We as a community have to work together to save this city. No politician or person can do
269 this alone. Just as it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a village to turn this city around. [But
270 you must be willing to help do something to make a positive change]. [You must be willing to
271 work with the people to come up with ideas and strategies to get this city where it can be.] I
272 mean when we first moved here, my mom moved here because [it was a safe place to raise a
273 family. At that time, you literally could sleep with your doors open without even thinking about
274 any violence taking place. You wouldn't dare do that now. I don't live in the community where
275 my son was murdered, but I have a vested interest in the neighborhood because he was killed
276 there.] And not only that, one of the women who was on TV, who said she didn't call the police,
277 her daughter was murdered over in that area. Her daughter was killed right in front of her house.
278 People heard gun shots, and they did not call the police]. We cannot give up on our
279 neighborhoods. We cannot give up on this city, but we must do something.] We absolutely have
280 to do something. We cannot keep just talking the talk and not walking the walk. We need to
281 seriously strategize [about what how to make the city and state better]. Right outside of here, this
282 building, there are cameras. There are cameras. There's a light. There is a light right outside of

283 this building, and that building has a camera. [One of the things I'm working on is advocacy for
284 cameras to be put specifically in the area where my son was killed.]

285 D: Right.

286 W: I spoke with a politician who told me, "Oh that can't happen in the city of Milwaukee," and I
287 said to her, "That's not true." I did my research and there's actually some areas in the city of
288 Milwaukee that already have cameras.

289 D: The Mayor's area.

290 W: Absolutely, so don't tell me what can't be. It can be. You just need to be that voice. [We
291 must be that voice to make change. We must do what it takes to make change. I'm going to be
292 the voice for Stephan Cannaday Jr.] He is not alone. He has people here who love him, and [I am
293 not going to let him be gone in vain.] [I can't bring him back, but I can be a part of this gun
294 violence movement and project that you are doing Debra. Hopefully we will have less moms or
295 and other family members mourning because of the loss of their loved one. My son has two
296 young siblings that he can't see grow up. He has a young sister and a young brother, who
297 probably won't remember him when they get older. I mean my daughter is nine and my son is
298 11.]

299 D: What would you say to a mom who just lost a child to gun violence?

300 W: I would say to that mom, "Mourn as much as you need to and don't apologize.
301 Don't apologize for breaking down. [Don't apologize for feeling sad, mad, or angry. Don't
302 blame yourself. Don't ask questions that make you feel bad. 'What could I have done
303 differently?' Don't apologize for none of that because you may go through things like this. I will
304 say to any mom in that condition,] "If you know the Lord, turn to Him, because I could not sit

305 and do this interview today if I did not know Christ. [If you don't know Christ, get to know him,
306 he will help you get through this. Get to know Him], because with Christ you can do all things. I
307 have prayed daily for the Lord to give me the strength to get up and I pray all the time, 'Lord use
308 me.' I don't serve a God that would take my son away from me if He did not have a greater
309 cause." [I would also tell the mom that to trust God. "There is something greater that God wants
310 to do, and it's going to take time to get where I am, but through Christ all things are possible. I
311 will say mourn when you need to. Keep your head up, and just know that there is a greater cause
312 that is going to come out of your loss."] And I feel that our greater cause for the loss of my son is
313 to be against gun violence [and to support projects like Mother's Against Gun Violence. My son
314 used to say to me, "Mama I want to be a counselor when I grow up."] He would say, "I want to
315 be a counselor because I want to teach these young boys not to make the mistakes that I've
316 made." Although he did not live to be able to go to college and become a counselor, he was a
317 counselor in his own right. He always talked to the boys in our family, about staying out of
318 trouble, and doing the right thing. [Even though, he had made some mistakes, he wanted to still
319 be used by God to make a positive change. He didn't get to do that, but I live today to do that on
320 his behalf.]

321 [I want say to any mother that has lost their child, "It's going to be okay. You will still rise from
322 the ashes of losing a child to gun violence. It will be okay."]

323 D: I felt that.

324 W: Yeah.

325 D: (laughs)

326 W: (laughs)

327 D: Had me crying over here. (laughs)

328 W: (laughs)

329 D: Is there anything you'd like to add?

330 W: [I want to thank you for this opportunity to be the voice for my son and thank you for
331 allowing me to be a part of this project against gun violence. I'm blessed that my voice is going
332 to be a part of a group that is focused on ending gun violence (Mother's Against Gun Violence.)
333 My voice is also helping make change in the district where my son was found dead. May you be
334 blessed for giving mother's a platform and opportunity to share how gun violence has impacted
335 their lives.] Debra, I thank you very much for this opportunity.

336 D: You are so welcome, thank UWM for supporting this. (laughs)

337 W: Yes, shout out to UWM. Thank you UWM.

338 D: Oh, and [Carroll University] too they came (inaudible)

339 W: And [Carroll University], thank you [Carroll University]. (laughs)

340 D: Oh, why thank you!

341 W: You're welcome.

342 D: Okay I'm going to end it.

343 W: Alright.

344 Part Two:

345 (Laughter)

346 D: Do you forgive the men who murdered your son?

347 (pause)

348 W: Well Debra, I did say I am a Christian. [Initially, I had a hard time forgiving them. Today I
349 have fully forgiven them for killing my son. I hope they never killed anyone again. This has been
350 very difficult for me.

351 There is no loss like the loss of a child. I've lost my mom, grandmother, cousins, nothing
352 compares to this loss. The Lord has helped me forgive these men without my savior I could not
353 have forgiven them. All thanks and praises due to God for bringing me to the point of
354 forgiveness.]

355 D: Okay, thank you.