

1 VGV Prabhjot Singh

2 D: Thank you for agreeing to be a storyteller. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself. What is  
3 your age?

4 P: I am 37 years old.

5 D: You look good for 37.

6 P: Thank you.

7 D: What is your race?

8 P: I am Asian Indian and more particularly, I'm a Sikh from north part of India.

9 D: Okay. What gender are you?

10 P: I am a male.

11 D: What neighborhood or area do you approximately live in?

12 P: Right now, I live in Muskego where I moved last year but last ten years before that I lived in  
13 Oak Creek.

14 D: How long, you said how long you lived there, about a year?

15 P: Yeah.

16 D: Do you remember what happened? Please share your story.

17 P: Yes, definitely. You know being an advocate for youth, I always participated at any event at  
18 Sikh temple. Whether it is Oak Creek, or we have another Sikh temple at Brookfield. Just  
19 because I lived in Oak Creek, I started spending more time at Oak Creek Sikh temple. It was one  
20 day August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2012, when around 10:30 in the morning I received a call from one of my friends  
21 and he mentioned something happened at the Sikh temple so don't go. And the reason he said  
22 don't go because we always came at the Sikh temple around 11, 11:30 so he knew maybe I'm  
23 getting ready to go to Sikh temple and it just came in the news quickly something happened but

24 was not clear what happened. Right at the time I tried calling other people which I knew and  
25 tried calling couple of my friends, those who always went with me at the Sikh temple. Within a  
26 few minutes it was clear something happened and there is a gunman who walked into the Sikh  
27 temple and started killing people here. As it was 10:30 our main prayer time started at 11. We  
28 had around 25 to 30 people at the time at the Sikh temple. The gunman parked his car in the  
29 parking lot and there was a person out there. He started shooting people right from the parking  
30 lot, walked into the main lobby, and tried shooting some people there, too. He was trying to find  
31 more people, just because it was still early, and we had around 25 to 30 people only at the  
32 temple. He was looking for them. And right after that when he walked into the main door, he  
33 shot a few other people as well at the time. That day we lost 6 people on the same day. After that,  
34 a few people were injured with some bullet shots which got their treatment at different hospitals  
35 in the town. And you know after that they were feeling better, but there was another person. We  
36 lost him in 2020 after he was in coma for 8 years in the hospital because of those gun injuries.  
37 The person had a semi-automatic gun, which of course you can shoot and kill faster than a  
38 normal gun. That was one of the reasons we lost that many people that day.

39 D: Wow, what general area for our mapping purposes did these multiple shootings happen?

40 Where is the Sikh temple located approximately?

41 P: Sure, Sikh temple of Oak Creek is located in [Oak Creek].

42 D: Tell me a little bit about the people involved, their ages, races, genders.

43 P: Yes. Of course, at the time, all of the victims were Sikhs. Sikh as a part of their religion and  
44 culture. We wear turban. Probably that was kind of a misunderstanding by the gunman and  
45 mistaken identity as well I can see. But of course, it was a hate crime where that person did not  
46 like some other races. Of course, Sikhs are from a part of India which is not the capital city, and

47 the state is called Punjab, where most of the Sikhs come from. I would say total population of  
48 Sikhs at this moment is around 30 to 35 million, and most of the Sikhs live in Punjab. Around 17  
49 to 20 million population we have over there. And around 1 and a half million population in US  
50 we have right now. You can find a lot of Sikhs in California from where basically they first  
51 started immigrating from India and after that, they are all over the country now. Here for hard  
52 work to earn their bread, and also to have a better life. That's what brought them here.

53 D: So, the people who were shot and killed or who were shot and survived. Ages range from,  
54 what would you say?

55 P: Yes, I would say the youngest one is probably 34 or 35.

56 D: Okay.

57 P: And the oldest one was 84.

58 D: And their gender?

59 P: There were five males, one female, and another male who died in 2020. So, a total of seven  
60 victims.

61 D: How has this experience affected you?

62 P: So, that day was of course a very hard day for the whole community. We were standing out  
63 there, outside of the Sikh temple. There's a bowling alley where was our area for the media and  
64 we were right over their listening to each and everything what's going on because we were not  
65 allowed to come in here at the Sikh temple. And we never thought, no one in our community  
66 ever thought that can ever happen to us. At any temple or any church, we go there for peace and  
67 love. No one ever thought that someone can do some harm at the temple. But that was an  
68 unfortunate day where we lost our close family members and friends. But after that we learned  
69 so much from that. The whole community came even together, than ever. Everyone supported

70 each other. The hard part was we had fear in mind. We were scared. What's now? What's next?  
71 Can we go back to the temple with the same peace? Can we still go in the temple? The children,  
72 can they come into the temple without parents sometime? You know where in the past no one  
73 ever thought about. On every Sunday we have families with their children here. Children ages  
74 from just newborn to high school and college children. Every Sunday we have around 300 to 400  
75 people here who comes. So, everyone in the community had a fear they were scared, what's  
76 next? Parents did not feel comfortable sending their children. And then everyone sat down  
77 together. We had many, many, many meetings at the Sikh temple. The community members, the  
78 congregation members, everyone had many meetings. "What's next? How can we let our  
79 community know it is safe to come? We are even stronger, and we can do this together."

80 D: Wow, you said how it affected the community but how did it affect you?

81 P: Personally, this did not come out of my mind for many, many months. The reason, the victims  
82 who lost their lives, I had spent time with them. I personally knew them. One of the victims,  
83 Prakash Singh, he was one of the priests, and anything he needs help, always came to me just  
84 because I could help them in English. His English was not great. He was always looking for  
85 someone. I was in college at that time and Prakash Singh always came and said, "Hey Perry I  
86 need your help." And I spent many days, many hours with him helping him. Making sure he  
87 feels comfortable living here. Making sure he gets what he needs here, because his family was  
88 not here. His family was still in India, and they just migrated at that time, just a few weeks before  
89 this happened. Another one, Paramjit Kaur, I just want to mention for that female as well. She is  
90 one of my good friend Kamal Saini's and Harpreet Saini's mom. And she was very hardworking  
91 person I have ever seen. Monday through Saturday she would work hard at job, bring food to the  
92 table for her children to have a better life, send them to good school. Besides that, she would

93 come every Sunday for selfless service. That's why she was here earlier. Usually most of the  
94 members come around 11 o'clock, but there are people who want to make sure the temple is  
95 ready for the prayer time. It's clean, the food is ready. She was one of the people who always  
96 came early to help us.

97 D: Wow.

98 P: And all other people as well. I've spent time with that, whether it's president of Gurdwara,  
99 Mr. Kaleka. He was the one who helped to build this temple. He was the one who brought all the  
100 people together. He was such a down to earth person that he would go to everyone to ask for,  
101 "How's everything? What can we do? How can we make it better in our community?" He was  
102 that person. And he would always call us, "You are our son. If you ever need something, let us  
103 know." We felt like, "Oh my God, even though I am also immigrant, and my parents don't live  
104 here, he acts like our parents. He supported us with everything." "What do you need? We are  
105 there for you." So, those are some of the victims which I was very close to, and it hurt a lot at the  
106 time. We were finding answers, how it happened, why it happened. And after that we started  
107 working on some of the events. We were going out and spending time with other communities,  
108 which went through similar things and shared our stories, learned from their stories. How can we  
109 protect ourselves? How can we avoid these types of things? What can we do for our communities  
110 so that it doesn't happen again?

111 D: How do you think this situation could have been avoided?

112 P: That is a great question. We are still working on it to find the right answer. I think one of the  
113 biggest things was ignorance at the time. Whoever that person was, he did not know about us. He  
114 did not know about any other race I think I would say. The reason for that is when you do not  
115 know anything about others, it's easy to judge them. As Sikhs we wear turban. Sometimes it's an

116 identity thing where we get more bullies in school or hate comments in public than anyone else,  
117 because that is our identity. That's what our God gave us, the turban. I think one of the things,  
118 which the person who killed people, I think he was not very well educated. He did not know  
119 anything about Sikhism or any other culture I would say. Right after that we started doing more  
120 activities in the community for awareness. Who we are, why we are here, what we do, and at the  
121 end, we all are human beings. We are all the same. That's the message we started spreading after  
122 that.

123 D: What do you think we could do to eliminate or lower gun violence?

124 P: This is a great question again. I think there are many, many things we need to work on, and  
125 we are working on, where we can try to eliminate gun violence. One of them is I think, not  
126 having those automatic guns or automatic rifles out there. Which we do not need. Who needs  
127 that? That is one of the biggest things I think we need. We need to stop that. I think in last couple  
128 of years, a law has been passed, as well in the congress, which they're working on to ban those  
129 assault rifles. That is one of the biggest things I think, if you look at the last ten-year shooting  
130 history, most of the time the weapon used where they killed many people at the same time are  
131 the assault rifles. What do we need that for? I don't think we need to protect ourselves where we  
132 need an assault rifle at home. No. Yes, for protection we always think of other weapons, which  
133 we try to keep it for ourselves, but I think we don't need assault rifles. That is one of thing that I  
134 would say we need to work on. Another thing, education and awareness. That is one thing which  
135 I am working on in my community as well, where I have been teaching children how to spend  
136 time with families. Why it is important? Why would you come to a temple or church every  
137 Sunday? What can you learn from here? I think if we can keep them away from violent activities  
138 and if they spend good time with the community, they will always be away from there and then

139 they will get better education and awareness as well. If we all do that at the same time whether  
140 you are Asian or American or any other race or religion, doesn't matter what color you are from.  
141 I think we can make that change.

142 D: I like that. What would like to say to our elected officials?

143 P: I think, as I just recently mentioned, about changing gun laws. That is very important. To all  
144 of the elected I would say, for the citizens of the country, protection should be the most  
145 important thing on top of their head anytime. Making sure our children are safe, whether it's in  
146 school, church, movie theater, anywhere we go. To make them feel safe we have to do a lot of  
147 work and the first thing we could start is of course banning those assault weapons, educating  
148 people, and one thing which stands a lot in my mind now is the mental health too. I think if you  
149 look at the history of all these shooters, whether it's in the school, at the church, movie theater, I  
150 think they were not mentally stable. Maybe their family, they were missing a family. They did  
151 not have anyone to talk to, and that's what provoked them to do this. Or maybe no one talked to  
152 them about how they are doing. I think every parent when they go home first thing they do is talk  
153 to their children. How was their day? I think for those people, they did not have anyone to talk  
154 to.

155 D: You mentioned what you're doing after this mass shooting happened at the Sikh temple and  
156 you mentioned kids. What have you started doing after this?

157 P: So, a few activities. As I said our goal is, personally, I don't want anyone from my community  
158 and, why I say my community is because that's where I am growing up, I grew up and am  
159 spending most of my time, to go over this thing again or be a part of this ever again in their life.  
160 So just involving them with different activities, whether it's learning their mother tongue, mother  
161 language, because we are so busy nowadays with the world. And then with keeping up with the

162 social media stuff. They don't spend much time with parents. Spending time with parents. Or  
163 learning about basic etiquette. I help them with that. Making sure they are giving something back  
164 to the community. That's another thing I'm working on with my youth here at the Sikh  
165 community in Oak Creek.

166 D: Wow. What would you like to say to our community?

167 P: I think this is a beautiful world. And what I mean by is, if we go around this world everyone is  
168 beautiful. We should not judge someone, or we should not judge a community by one person or  
169 if someone did wrong it doesn't mean the whole community is bad. We should work together,  
170 live together, and spend quality time together. I would say, when we are together the world is  
171 beautiful. And we can eliminate the hate from the community, bring the peace, love and joy,  
172 what everyone wants in this community, when we are together.

173 D: That's beautiful, is there anything you would like to add?

174 P: I think as I spoke about victims and spoke about Sikh temple, one of the, another victim which  
175 became, how it affected me personally, how it affected the families of victims, but beside that we  
176 thought and we spent time how the Sikh temple was also a victim out of it. It changed so much  
177 after that. Things like, we never thought we need security at the temple. Now we do have that.  
178 We never thought we had to keep our doors locked ever. Temple or church means doors are open  
179 for everyone any time. That's a place where we go and talk to the God directly. If you are in  
180 trouble or if we need help, "Hey God, you are the one who gave me birth, who brought to this  
181 beautiful world, just make me stronger and let me pass through these hard times." Or even good  
182 times as well where we come in to thank them. I think when this thing happened, the Sikh temple  
183 itself became a victim. A lot of people stopped coming just because there was a fear and that  
184 scarcity in mind where, "Hey this could happen again." But slowly and steady, with local



185 community, with the help of, I would say it was beautiful to see not only Indians, not only any  
186 religion Muslims or Christians, everyone came together at that time to support us and we felt  
187 that. It was very heartfelt at the time, and we always thought, “How could we give back as well  
188 for this?” Oak creek community whether it was the major of the Oak Creek whether it was a  
189 chief of the Oak Creek, Milwaukee, everyone came together, and they said, “We are here for you  
190 anytime,” and they checked on us every time. Even recently we celebrated ten years of this  
191 shooting, and we had governor, we had mayor, we had everyone around the country to just let us  
192 know that, “We are still with you, and we are together. We will get through this, and we’ll be  
193 stronger from here.”

194 D: Yeah, I saw that announcement in the news. I meant to make it out there, I don’t know why I  
195 didn’t make it. Because you could just feel when the invitation came out that everyone was  
196 invited.

197 P: Yes, everyone was invited.

198 D: You felt that.

199 P: We had food for everyone. Everyone was welcome. As I said, looking at that day I didn’t see  
200 what race, religion, country are you from. It was all one. We were all human beings. We all  
201 looked beautiful. It’s just embracing that, and that was beautiful to see that.

202 D: And you added more than one day?

203 P: Yes, it was almost for three days.

204 D: Right.

205 P: You know, as I said, usually when we have any occasion, we have three-day prayer always,  
206 which we start Friday by reading start reading our scripture, which is Granth Sahib until Sunday  
207 morning. And then Sunday afternoon we finish everything with the free food as well.

208 D: Well, thank you. Unless you have something, you want to add.

209 P: Nope, I just want to say thank you for sharing my story and sharing the Sikh community's

210 story. I hope we can make some change together. That's our goal as well.

211 D: Amen.

212 P: Amen.