

1 GVP38 Melody Villanueva

2 D: Please state your name.

3 M: Hi, my name is Melody Villanueva.

4 D: And Melody, how old are you?

5 M: I am forty-two years old.

6 D: (laughter) And Melody, I know that you've experienced gun violence, could you please share
7 your story?

8 M: Yes. It was August 18th, 2018. On that day, was a typical day for me, I was actually in
9 Virginia just watching my soap opera in the mid-day. And, you know, I got a call and I got a call
10 from my son's grandmother. My son, Jakari Darius Wright. His grandmother, Kathy Wright,
11 calls me and states, "Randell, Randell shot Jakari dead."

12 D: Was this here in Milwaukee?

13 M: This was here in Milwaukee. So, that was the first statement that came out that woman's
14 mouth, to tell me that my son was killed, was dead.

15 D: Was she your mother or?

16 M: No, that's [the murderer's mother]. His father's the one, Randell Wright, Jakari Wright's
17 father, was the one that shot him.

18 D: Oh my god.

19 M: In the back of the head. So, yeah. I was, got that message and she basically you know, didn't
20 have no type of remorse, didn't have no type of empathy. Because the following sentence was,
21 "Oh, I had a right mind to go over there, pack up his shit," (laughter) "And throw him in the
22 street."

23 D: Whose shit?

24 M: My son, referring to my son, Jakari. And then, following statement was, “Oh, you know
25 Randell. He don’t like to have—Kari hav-bringin’ his friends over to the house.” That for me, it
26 was just nothing but justification for what her son just did to my son. He blatantly shot him in the
27 back of the head, shot him, one bullet, shot dead. My son was walking away and try, he made it
28 to the front door and from what I hear, the next-door neighbors called the cops and they tried to
29 help my son. At this point, I really wish I could reach out to them and thank them for being there
30 because that gives me a sense of peace, knowing that my son was not alone.

31 D: Where in the vicinity was he shot and killed?

32 M: On [Layton Park] in their apartment. My son, I raised my son all his life until nineteen years
33 old, I put him into his own apartment. ‘Cause boys you know, they get in that age and they think
34 that they know everything and that they could do anything because they believe they’re over
35 eighteen. Well, you can’t do nothin’ in nobody’s house (laughter) that you wanna do. So, I made
36 sure rather than putting him out in the street, I put him into his own apartment, six months, rent-
37 free. And he was going to school and he had a part-time job. So, for me, I raised, I have two kids.
38 A son and a daughter and I just lost my son, Jakari. But for me, like I’ve mentioned before, I
39 raised them with dignity, with character, with compassion, and to be a leader. And you know, in
40 order to be a leader, you have to have a, you know, good rapport. You know, you have to have
41 self-respect. You have to have, you know, some type of selflessness, you know, to recognize
42 whether, you know, what you’re doin’ is wrong or right. You know? And you also have to be
43 able to listen. So, my son, anybody that’s came across my son is always left with a smile. His
44 smile alone will brighten the day. You know? Any rainy day, you know? And he was always one
45 that was, he protected the vulnerable. He stood up for the one who didn’t have a voice, he was
46 that person. And, you know, I’m just very proud to know that my son is who I raised him to be.

47 D: Oh wow, that's beautiful.

48 M: Thank you.

49 D: (pause) The person who shot your son, he was your son's father?

50 M: Yes, he was. A little background on Randell, because I don't wanna portray him as the
51 monster that he has become. When I first met Randell, basically it was like love at first sight. It
52 really was. I was workin' at Hotel Wisconsin and he walked in and we connected. Our eyes
53 connected and it was, it really felt like love at first sight. And from that day on, we was together.
54 Believe it was six years together. Anyway, he was a loving person. He was a caring person. He,
55 you know, in the beginning, what I thought. (laughter) But he taught me a lot in the sense of
56 myself and because I was young, I was only eighteen at the time. And he's seven years older
57 than me.

58 D: Okay.

59 M: So, you know, he was a lot older. And so, I thought that he was a family-oriented person.
60 And I put my hundred and fifty percent as a woman, to stand by his side and expecting the same
61 in return. Later to know that I was in a sense being manipulated, you know? And of believing
62 things that I care not to even think of in the sense of race. You know? He was hell-bent that the,
63 you know, white man was evil. You know? And I worked in a hotel with white people and I, me
64 personally, I have no prejudice. I'm not, I give everybody the benefit of the doubt. You know? I
65 give everybody respect and expect the same in return. But later, when our relationship started, I
66 felt like I was becoming a little more isolated. You know? He had a daughter. He was not a part
67 of her life and I was becoming a little frustrated because I had a daughter and he was helping me
68 raise my daughter. And it was kind of a weird feeling. I didn't expect him to be, play a father
69 role to my daughter. I didn't. I never expect that from no man. I just expect them to be a

70 guidance, if anything that ever, you know, was being done wrong you know, in front of him that
71 she's done, bring it to me.

72 D: Right.

73 M: You know, don't discipline, that's not your, that's not where your wheelhouse goes.

74 (laughter) That's mine. And, but at the end of the day, this man basically just took advantage of
75 me, of my love, took advantage of my earnings, took advantage of my work ethic, and took
76 advantage of me as a mom, as a single mom at that. So, at the end of the day I had to leave him.
77 It was one time he did put his hands on me and that, that was the one and only time that I had to
78 leave. Because I am not a woman that allows any man, let alone the father of my child, to put
79 their hands on me. It's only one man in this world that's ever put their hands on me other than
80 him that one time, was my dad. And that's the only man that, if he was still here today, I would
81 allow to put his hands on me (laughter).

82 D: And that's just the discipline.

83 M: And that's just the disciplinary exactly, you know, so, it's crazy. It's just still a surreal
84 moment though to know that I've put my emphasis and my strength and my drive into making
85 sure that I raise my kids the best way that I can. Because we don't have a handbook as mothers.
86 (laughter)

87 D: Right.

88 M: You know? As parents, we don't have a handbook, but we know what's right and wrong.
89 You know, we know what's good and bad. And all we could do is try to guide them in the best
90 way that we can. Recognize that they're gonna make mistakes, you know, along the way. But,
91 we have to recognize we always have to be there whether their mistakes are bad or good, we

92 need to let them know and remind them whether they're bad or good and what they can do to fix
93 it.

94 D: So, after you left him, after the six years, was he just totally out of your, you and your son's
95 life or?

96 M: Well, in the beginning he was a little erratic. He was trying to you know, force his way back
97 basically by being verbally abusive. And that, I just was not hearin' it. So, I stayed in Milwaukee
98 for a little bit and that's, you know, up until the point where I had to leave the state. And that's
99 what I did, I ended up leaving the state of Wisconsin and I moved to New York. Back to where I
100 actually was brought up and raised. So, and from then, didn't hear nothing from him. I reached
101 out to make sure, that's one thing I wanna say. I've never took my kids away from their fathers,
102 okay? I am not married, so therefore, I am mommy and daddy and if they wanna be the fathers
103 that they know that they should be, then they have the ability and the responsibility to climb
104 mountains to make sure that they're in their kids' lives.

105 D: Amen.

106 M: I do not have to be the one forced to change my life, or how I live, or where I live because I
107 have to have the father around my kid. No, it doesn't work that way. And I think that that's, I
108 think that that's something that, a discussion that we all have as a community, because I'm not
109 the only single mother in this world that more than likely has you know, dealings with fathers.
110 Whether they're abusive, whether they talk down on you, I'm not the only one that has to think
111 about my child's, you know, upbringing. But I'm not gonna be dictated, where I can and cannot
112 go or how I can and cannot raise my kids.

113 D: Right. So, you end up coming back to Milwaukee?

114 M: I ended up coming back to Milwaukee recently actually. Two and a half years ago because
115 my grandmother's 90 years-old, to help take care of her.

116 D: Oh, that's beautiful.

117 M: So, that, that's actually the only reason why I would, I'm back in Milwaukee, was to help
118 take care of my grandmother. And, you know, as I raised both my kids I've let them know, I've
119 always told them that their father's love them.

120 D: Mhmm.

121 M: You know, I'm not the mother that downplays their dad, you know? And regardless of their
122 flaws, that's not for me, that's for them to recognize and see for themselves. That's what I
123 believe. And sometimes I have to be blunt. I question, you know, at this point because of what
124 happened, did I basically lie to my son? Saying and emphasizing anytime and every time that he
125 did ask for his father, you know, whether it's, "Why does my dad not call for me? Why doesn't
126 my dad send for me?" You know? "Why doesn't my dad help me join the football team?" You
127 know, "Send me money." (pause) All I can say is, all I've told him was that, "Your dad loves
128 you very much and he's doing all he can do," you know "from a distance." I cannot say no more
129 than that. And it, for me, my son had an unconditional love for this man that he did not know, he
130 knew of, but he did not know intimately, personally, you know? My son was out of that man's
131 life when he was one-and-a-half. Okay? So, that's the most that that man has been a part of my
132 life up until when my son was, when I put him in his own apartment at nineteen. He turned
133 twenty, he got into his, he called him and asked for his help. Randell called my son, Jakari, asked
134 for his help. He wanted him to move in with him, to help him with his bills 'cause he was dealin'
135 with a woman that had a brain tumor.

136 D: Hmm.

137 M: You know? And she herself had a seven-year-old. So, I begged and I pleaded my son to not
138 make that move, I said, “You could help him from a distance. You have your own place.” You
139 know, I tried. I did everything I could, but my son was looking for that bond with his father. He
140 was, he was excited to move in with his dad, to help him. You know? So that he could learn a
141 little more about his dad and still share a love that he thought that he was gonna get back. But
142 unfortunately, that man, he proved that he did not love my son.

143 D: Oh no.

144 M: He proved that he did not love my son. And, and why I say that is because in March, I was in
145 Virginia and my dad, I recently lost my dad to pancreatic stage-four cancer.

146 D: I’m so sorry.

147 M: And in March his health was really declining. He was in hospice at that time. So, I was living
148 in Virginia helping my mom with my dad. And in March, my son gives me a call and we’re just
149 talking like normal, you know, seeing how each other’s day was. What’s he up to? How, how is
150 his GED program? And stuff like that. And, excuse me, he, I don’t know why, he just comes out
151 and he tells me, “Ma,” you know, “I wanna tell you something. My dad put a gun to me before.”
152 And I said, “What?! Hold up, what are you talkin’ about?” He’s like, “Yeah, but don’t get all in
153 your feelings mom.” you know, “He ain’t gonna do nothin’.” You know. I was like, “Wait, first
154 of all, why was that even a situation? You understand? What happened? Why, why is he—” I
155 said, “Where’s your father?” You know? And at that moment, he wasn’t there, he was at work.
156 He worked for MPS, Milwaukee Public Schools. And, you know, I told my son, I said, “Jakari,
157 get out the house. Get out that house. You don’t need to be there no more. Leave.” You know,
158 “Go by your sisters’.” My daughter [...], you know and they’re, they’re like, they’re not twins,
159 but they can be. You know? (laughter) So, it’s crazy because he was tryin’ so hard to convince

160 me that nothing was wrong. He was trying so hard to convince me that his father loved him, he
161 would never do nothing like that.

162 D: Did he tell you why he did it?

163 M: No, he didn't tell me why. But when I confronted, when I called Randell that evening, 'cause
164 I called him all through the day and he didn't pick up 'til the evening so, I called him and I said,
165 I'm sorry, I'm gonna probably curse, (laughter) but I said, "Yo, what the fuck is your problem
166 putting a gun to my son? Your son?" I was like, "What is that? What are, what are you doin'?"
167 What are you doin' that?" You know? And he says, "Aw, he wanna act like a nigga in the street,
168 I'ma treat him like a nigga in the street." So, from that statement alone, for me, just told me that
169 he has no care in the world for my son, to even have that thought cross his mind. Okay, that's
170 first and foremost. Secondly, him putting a, picking up a gun and putting it to my son's head is a
171 definite second reason and factor in his, that he did not care for my son.

172 D: Did he, he never said why?

173 M: He just said that, that he was "actin' like a, a nigga in the street" he gonna treat him like "a
174 nigga in the street". See, my kids, I have always had them be able to feel free to speak their
175 mind. Okay? I didn't want them to sugarcoat nothing, you know, because I feel that kids are a lot
176 smarter than us. (laughter) In a sense, you know. They just need to be guided, you know? But I
177 know that I've raised my son to give respect and get, expect the same respect.

178 D: Mhmm.

179 M: So, when my kids feel that they're being disrespected, they're gonna say something. Whether
180 his father liked it or not, still gave him no reason to pick up a gun to him.

181 D: Right, it's not like he, he, what you're saying, it's not like he cussed him out, he just voiced
182 his opinion?

183 M: Exactly. And you know, Randell's the type of man that, I don't even wanna refer him to a
184 man because no man, no real man would pick up a gun to their own flesh and blood, let alone to
185 a child, you know? Yes, my son was twenty-one years old, but statistically and scientifically
186 speakin', boys at that age are seven years younger than their actual age. So, with that math, he
187 was still a teenager.

188 D: He was still a very, he was a young man.

189 M: Yes.

190 D: And, oh my god.

191 M: You know? And, and, and, and what frustrates me is that I put in all this work, into my kids
192 so that they could be the better selves that they can be for our world. Tellin' you when, you
193 know, (pause) I'm not rich. I never, I never had money, you know, that I could just splurge. My
194 kids knew the value of a dollar. Okay? And I taught them that money should not make them or
195 break them, like it does not me. And so, when we see people in the street—

196 D: Here's some tissue.

197 M: Thank you. Whether it's a homeless person, and I believe I've always taught them, you
198 know, you always do one good deed a day. One good deed a day, you know? You can do more?
199 Hey, good for you! But at least do one good deed a day. That's what you owe your society, that's
200 what you owe your community and that's what you owe yourself, you know? Walkin' down the
201 street, he'll give his last fifty cents, you know? One time, I remember we was walkin' in Harlem,
202 'cause I, we was actually in a shelter and there was a young man, he couldn't have been no, no
203 older than my son. And he was, it was freezing outside and my son, he had a goosedown, he had
204 a sweater and he had the sweater with the wool inside. He literally took off his coat and gave the
205 young man his sweater. You know? And that, that just gives me excitement in my heart, to know

206 that my kids are selfless. At that age, he, he was fourteen, fourteen years old. How many
207 fourteen-year-old kids you know these days that would literally take off their shirt on their back,
208 let alone a sweater and it's freezing cold?

209 D: What would you say to someone who just lost a loved one to gun violence?

210 M: What I would say is realistically, that things happen because you know, it's out of our
211 control. Okay, we cannot control everything. And as a mom who, as a single mom and as a
212 militant mom, it's kind of hard for me, but I have to be real with myself. I can't control
213 everything. Like going through the process with the courts, I can't control, you know, the context
214 of my son and his father's relationship. Which I feel that is important for the courts to know
215 because they're only lookin' at what the scene you know, of what the crime scene was, what the
216 case is. And for me, I look at, I look at it like this. When I lost my son, yes, it's tragic. It's
217 heartbreaking. It's leaves you with a sense of emptiness. It leaves a part of you feeling like
218 you're literally dead. That's a part of me feels like. But I cannot and I will not let this tragedy
219 define me. I will not let it break me or bring me down. What I need to look at is turning this
220 tragedy into something positive to make sure that I continue the spirit of my son's life.
221 Celebrating it every day with a good deed, with those, a call to duty, a civic duty, emphasis on
222 what is missing in our society is love. (pause) So, love keeps me going. The love of people, the
223 respect of life, keeps me going. And I know for a fact my son would not want me to be broken.
224 (pause)

225 D: Do you forgive his father for shooting your son?

226 M: Wow, wow. That question right now, is hard for me to answer. I have been posed that
227 question by my daughter. My daughter and I both have a great connection to my boy, to Jakari,
228 to her brother, to my son. And the one thing that my daughter has taken from this is the golden

229 heart that my son has, in spirit and in life. The forgiving heart that he holds, in spirit and in life.
230 So, with that emphasis, she came to grips with forgiving Randell. I have yet, not, to this day. He
231 just pleaded guilty. He's out on bail. Yes. First time in Wisconsin history from what I've been
232 told, that a judge granted a property for bail on this type of charge, which the charge is first-
233 degree reckless homicide. And that for me, that charge for me is not justified for the action. I
234 really, truly believe in my heart it was intentional homicide. First off, a bullet to the back of the
235 head, there's no accident there. You actually goin' to leave the room to the next room, to get a
236 gun, is premeditated. So, I myself am trying to understand the justice system. As a believer in
237 We the People, as a believer in our Constitution, and as a believer in our justice system, I am still
238 trying to understand the justice system because it's really twisted that a man who admitted
239 shooting and killing my son, is out on bail.

240 D: Whoa.

241 M: Yeah, I just, I just cannot, it's flabbergasting. So, forgiveness is yet to come, but I can say
242 one thing, though. I have yet to be angry. I have yet to be angry.

243 D: Whoa, watch out. (laughter)

244 M: Yes, so, you know I, I'm, I'm dealin' with it on a daily basis. But I can say thank God I have
245 not been angry, anger has not touched my heart nor my soul.

246 D: Okay. What would you like to see changed in reference, as far as gun laws, what would you
247 like to see changed?

248 M: What I definitely would like to see changed, first and foremost, is that everybody actually
249 reads the second amendment. In order for you to understand the type of change that moms, like
250 Mom's Demand Action against gun, common sense gun laws or you know, even the grassroots
251 that are against gun violence, you know? Look at these kids from Parkland, you know? I am they

252 excite me, I love them all. I don't know them, but I love them all. Because they are our future,
253 they are our future. Read the second amendment, the one thing that we need to emphasize and
254 change is removing military style weapons in our society. First and foremost, that is not even in
255 the Constitution. Nowhere says, "Militant-style weapons are allowed." Okay? (laughter)
256 Nowhere. (laughter) So, that's number one thing that we need to change, you know? But for me,
257 gun violence is, it's like a, not a pyramid, but if you do one of those, you know, graphs where
258 you put guns in the middle, right? That's the main thing, right?

259 D: Mhmm.

260 M: Well, what spouts out, off of guns for me, is what boils down to the problem that we have in
261 our society right now when it comes to race, lack of education, okay, mental health, okay, and
262 money. (pause) You know? So, if, if we understand the three entities that go into a person's
263 ideology of believing that, "We need to hold onto our guns," okay? We understand why they're
264 so hell-bent on wanting to hold onto their guns, referring to the NRA and referring to white
265 extremism. Because let's not get it twisted, they're the main ones. Not only with tiki-torches,
266 they got their rifles on the other arm, okay? So, we need to, we need to be blunt and be forthright
267 of what is actually goin' on. Because the gun is not the problem, it's the people that want those
268 guns in our society, that makes it a problem.

269 D: What would you say to lawmakers?

270 M: I would say, lawmakers, it's time for you to understand exactly what your oath is and what
271 you took your oath for and who you accountable to, because at the end of the day We the People
272 are the ones you answer to. And We the People over, I believe it's eighty to ninety percent now,
273 want common sense gun laws. So, it's time for you guys to stop putting NRA's money in your
274 pockets to keep you relevant and get back to your constitutional duties.

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

276 M: I would, I would like to, I would like to add to all survivor's and all citizens alike, that it's

277 our time. 2019, this is our time to set the agenda, not have the agenda set for us or dictated to us.

278 We need to come together. If we want to stop gun violence, we can stop gun violence. And that

279 means we cannot be silent, 'cause silence is violence.

280 D: Thank you!

281 M: You're welcome.

282 D: That was good.

283 M: Thank—

284 PART II: 3:25

285 D: You, so, during the shooting or what did you hear happened that night, when your son was

286 murdered?

287 M: I heard that, my son had friends with him and I heard that his father I guess, had a issue with

288 that. But all I know is that, I guess he had a argument with my son and he pulled out the gun. He

289 ended up shooting my son as he was walkin' away to tell, and he ended up, after getting shot, he

290 told his friends that were downstairs to leave. So, they ran out and my son made it to the front

291 door, outside the doorway, where the next-door neighbors came out. And they were two sisters

292 and tried to hold the blood from seepin' out my sons back, the, in the back of his head to the

293 front. So, they were tryna help him and from what I heard is Randell tried to state, "Okay, it's

294 time to take my, take him to the hospital." Like, Randell didn't call the cops nor did he call the

295 ambulance. Yeah. I did my own investigation, in the sense of timeline. That morning my son got

296 up, went to go get his hair did (laughter), he went to get it cut and after that, eleven o'clock, he

297 used his EBT card. He went to purchase something. Then, I guess he was with his friends, 'bout

298 three thirty to four thirty, he went to his job that he worked on the east side, I spoke to his boss,
299 he attempted to pick up his check. He thought his check was available, this was 3:30, 4:30, his
300 check wasn't available. He went back to the house with one of his friends, he went back to the
301 house and that's when, not even an hour, within an hour he was shot and killed. So, for me, I
302 really believe the motive was money. But this case is still in, in, in the courts and sentencing is
303 June 21st, so, we'll know hopefully you know, anyway, what transpired, you know? But for me, I
304 can't ask, "Why?" I have not even asked, "Why?" I, for me, there is no why. There is no why.
305 This is a man that is, has the label of a biological father. There is no "Why?" That is the ultimate
306 sin in the Bible. That is the ultimate sin here on Earth. So, the why is not even a factor in my
307 eyes. It's more like, "How could you?"

308 D: Yeah.

309 (pause)